

Forward in Europe

Cumbria and North Lancashire
affiliated to the European Movement

Newsletter

Autumn 2011

IS THE EU EXCEEDING ITS MANDATE?

**Professor Aristotle Kallis:
Windermere School, 15 June 2011**

The third in our series of meetings organised in collaboration with local schools was a great success. The venue was Windermere School (formerly St Anne's), in its fine location overlooking the lake and the mountains, the weather was kind, the cold buffet excellent, and, above all, the talk was outstandingly rewarding. The only disappointment was that fewer members than usual came to enjoy the evening, but their absence was more than made up for by the presence of many of the school's students, who listened attentively and provided three perceptive questions afterwards.

Professor Kallis, who is professor of Contemporary History at Lancaster University, is a specialist on the history of Fascism in Europe, but on this occasion he gallantly agreed to talk at short notice on a subject suggested by the school, whether the EU is spreading itself too widely (through enlargement) and/or too deeply – i.e. taking unto itself powers which more properly might be thought to belong to national governments.

The talk was wide-ranging and enhanced by many cleverly chosen illustrations – maps, charts and statistics. As his name indicates, Professor Kallis is Greek. He told us that he was 10 when his country entered the EU, with the hope of joining a new, modern, dynamic world. The word "Europe" then conjured up positive images for the young boy, fired with enthusiasm. Since then Europe has been "growing, growing, growing": the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, for example, two countries not widely conceived as democracies, aroused some derision, and now there is a new dimension, the "Neighbouring Countries" of North Africa – linked for centuries with those only a short way across the Mediterranean. The map shown to illustrate this point aroused for some of us memories of the old Roman Empire.

This outward spread may eventually lead, in Professor Kallis' judgment, to a form of "differentiated integration". He cited the current talk, in discussing the Eurozone crisis, of a split between the prosperous North and the poorer countries of the South. There is already a sign of this in what is happening with the Schengen Agreements.

Turning to the problem of whether individual Member States are losing some of their sovereignty, Professor Kallis described the contribution of Jacques Delors, who in his view was the most successful President the EC has ever had – though he conceded that opinions are divided about whether his influence was wholly good or bad. (In the discussion afterwards Sir Christopher Audland said that two other Presidents, François Ortoli and Roy Jenkins, also deserved praise for their contribution to the EU's success.) Delors had guided Europe step by step towards the creation of an integrated European Union.

Professor Kallis pointed out that the concept of sovereignty went back to the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Nowadays those who use the term "pooled" sovereignty tend to be pro-EU; the Eurosceptics prefer to describe it as "giving up sovereignty". But in any case, whichever view is adopted, the whole concept of sovereignty must change: in the era of increasing globalisation, and growing interdependence, nation states will have to concede more and more. There will be a "zero-sum dilemma": what one element gains, another has to lose. Globalisation kills the idea of the European super-state to which the sceptics so vehemently object. Those who think the EU is exceeding its mandate are asking the wrong question; they should instead ensure that communities, representing the people of the nations, maintain and strengthen their voice and influence in the globalising world.

With this challenging statement Professor Kallis opened the meeting to questions. One concerned Greece: would it survive its financial crisis as a member of the EU, and would it revert to a state similar to that under the régime of the Colonels. The answer to the second was "No": the Greek people's belief in democracy was strong enough to prevent this. As to the first, Professor Kallis thought that Greece (and possibly other Eurozone defaulters) would be "gently" placed in a new category of membership, not just thrown out.

Alluding to an earlier remark by Professor Kallis, about when the term "Union" replaced "Community", Sir Christopher Audland told us that he himself, as a young diplomat, had in his own hand drafted the UK's application to join the European Communities. The Treaty of Rome to which we were to accede in 1973 expressly mentioned the aim of Member States to lay the foundation of an ever closer *union* among the peoples of Europe. He also pointed out, referring to what sceptics call the "democratic deficit", that the democratically-elected European Parliament possesses wide democratic powers, and drew attention to the concept of subsidiarity, enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, which the professor had not mentioned in his discussion of sovereignty.

Replying to a question about the Schengen Agreements, Professor Kallis said that they were a great achievement, of real significance to the Union. It was a great pity that because of immigration problems they were now being partly breached.

The questions (including three from the younger members of the audience) could have gone on much longer, but we reluctantly let Professor Kallis – who had been marking university exam. papers all day - go, with a resounding expression of thanks for his illuminating lecture.

Mary Wane

Informal lunch-time discussion meeting on European issues **24th August 2011**

Our experimental lunch-time discussion meeting on August 24 in Staveley turned out to be a great success. 24 members came and enjoyed a good lunch, chosen from a long menu, which was remarkably good value. The manager of the Eagle and Child provided a quiet, comfortable room with chairs set out around a large table, which helped the discussion to flow easily. We shall certainly want to meet there again.

Various topics had been proposed, and three were eventually discussed. Michael Welsh had suggested in advance that the most pressing was the debt crisis, and he opened the batting on this one. Mary Wane then introduced the subject of the rise of right-wing nationalistic xenophobia in several countries, particularly Hungary, with its new and very restrictive Media Act. Finally Sir Christopher Audland stimulated a short discussion about whether Turkey should join the European Union.

We have not attempted to write a coherent article about all of this. What follows is a summary based on notes taken by Monica Baynes and Mary Wane at the time, when they weren't joining in the discussion!

The Debt Crisis

introduced by Michael Welsh

The imbalance between production and consumption is a problem for all western capitalist countries and indeed globally. If there were no euro zone, there would still have been a financial crisis and the sort of chaos that the euro was designed to prevent.

The governments of member states have proved inadequate at dealing with the problems facing them, and they have been unable to get the support of the people they represent. Individual countries are wanting the benefits of a common currency without facing up to the disadvantages.

There are inadequate central structures to manage major problems of finance.

The Lisbon Treaty was a compromise, and we may not be prepared to give a central institution the powers to deal with a major financial crisis.

Discussion:

Will there be a collective solution, or will individual members need to find their own solutions? The main countries in the EU haven't abided by the growth and stability rules when there is a conflict with their national interest. Should each member of the EU have a stronger constitution?

There is a failure of political leadership across Europe, and heads of states are paying a heavy price for failing to 'sell' the benefits of membership of the EU. However the lack of respect for politicians and the short attention spans of their listeners make it difficult for politicians to be heard.

Germany will have to make a huge financial sacrifice to bail out the EU.

We could in theory go back to individual currencies, but this would be a very painful process. Having chosen to be outside the euro zone, the UK is not in a position to be listened to on this issue though it will inevitably be affected in a significant way.

The Rise of Xenophobia

introduced by Mary Wane

This is happening in several European countries, e.g. Hungary, which has recently introduced legislation to control the media and freedom of speech. Is this a recurrence of Fascism, and could this lead to the break up of the EU? Could the countries which failed to live up to the democratic principles on which the Union is based be forced to withdraw?

Discussion:

If the EU were to censor or even try to expel countries who were seen to be moving away from democracy, would it then be accused of adopting the methods of those countries criticised?

Would it help if it was compulsory for immigrants to learn the language of their adopted country, as e.g. in the Netherlands? This is surely right in principle, but this is one of the countries where the xenophobic, especially anti-Muslim, right has made substantial gains.

Right wing attitudes are closely linked with the freedom of movement between countries of the EU, and what is perceived as the increasing threat of competition by immigrants for jobs and housing. Are the recent riots in the UK linked with this?

The USA has been the most successful country in absorbing immigrants. There, however, the situation is changing, because of the great increase in illegal immigration from neighbouring countries.

Should Turkey join the EU ?

introduced by Sir Christopher Audland

Joining was a possibility for Greece and Turkey in the 60s, but only Greece went on to membership. Perhaps the entry conditions were then too lax. The boundaries of Europe have not been clearly defined, but countries have to show that they are in some

sense European, e.g. with common values. At the last election, Turkey started to drift away from being a secular state.

Discussion:

Turkey has a population of about 87 million, and it would be the biggest single economy in the EU. It has recently been a significant ally of Western countries, and it is now developing extensive links with its Middle Eastern neighbours. There may be new directions and different political alignments in the future.

Since Ottoman times Turkey has not been traditionally European, and some countries, such as what is now Austria, suffered greatly from its power in earlier centuries.

The EU has expanded too fast and it may be too difficult for it to absorb Turkey..

In the long run, we need to grasp the Islamist issue.

Does Turkey conform to the Copenhagen conditions on the environment? This would be the best ground for discussing membership.

Extracts from Cumbria County Council E.U. Website

"The European Commission adopted a draft legislative package launched on 6th October which will frame cohesion policy for 2014-2020. The new proposals are designed to reinforce the strategic dimension of the policy and to ensure that EU investment is targeted on Europe's long-term goals for growth and jobs ("Europe 2020") focusing on fewer investment priorities in line with these objectives and harmonises the rules related to different funds, including rural development and maritime and fisheries, to increase the coherence of EU action"

The Port of Workington is Cumbria's logistics gateway to the rest of Europe. Some parts of Cumbria's transport infrastructure are part of the EU-wide transport infrastructure and has thus had EU investment.

Over more than 20 years, EU funding has contributed to a vast range of projects in Cumbria including economic development regeneration; port and marina development and bridge building; education, learning and exchanges in schools, colleges and universities and with training providers as well as student placements in the EU and students coming to Cumbria to study – bringing investment to the education sector; there are EU projects on health, energy, food security and significant payments to the rural economy and rural development under the common agricultural policy.

It has contributed to schemes to help unemployed people get back into work; university and private sector research and development and collaboration; nuclear-related knowledge. Cumbria has also just been approved to receive funding under the European Fisheries Fund. What we have gained is not just funding but greater knowledge and networks – leading to further opportunities.

Trade and Investment

The EU has brought business into Cumbria, including relocation of EU companies into Cumbria and the development of new markets in the EU for marketing Cumbrian products, services and supply-chains.

Websites: www.europedirectcumbria.org.uk
www.rstcumbria.org.uk
www.cumbria.gov.uk

Future events

Friday 9th December

11.30am talk

1pm lunch

(Place to be confirmed)

Brian Simpson, one of our NW MEPs, whom we had invited to talk to us about the rise of right-wing nationalism in Europe, can no longer manage the date proposed, Friday 9 December at lunch-time.

Fortunately we have another speaker in his stead, Allyson Fiddler, who is professor of German and Austrian Studies at Lancaster University. She is an authority on contemporary Austria, where the rise of the Right first became prominent with the election of Joerg Haider, a neo-Nazi, as governor of Carinthia. She has agreed to speak on "Protest culture & the rise of the far Right", with special reference to Austria.

January 2012

We are hoping to arrange a talk in January, in collaboration with Lancaster University, by the eminent journalist and economist Will Hutton, on the subject of China and the EU, made even more topical by Nicholas Sarkozy's reported request to China to help to bail out the eurozone.

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