



ANNUAL REPORT IRISH SECTION – LINZ 2008

Following the hosting of the General Assembly in Dublin in November 07, and the publicity and goodwill it brought to the Irish section, we continued to advance the association during the year.

Our top priority was the establishment of a website, and with Tim Ryan as the driving force behind it, it was up and running by the end of 2007- check us out at www.aej.ie. We've even got a sponsor for it – OSK, a leading auditing and accounting firm in Dublin. As we had to form a company limited by guarantee to get sponsorship for the General assembly, we now have to file returns and OSK have also undertaken to do this for us.

As we still had a 'few bob' in the kitty we hosted Christmas drinks for our members and many of those who helped with the conference preparations. 2007 ended with the Commissioner's lunch – traditionally the Irish Commissioner hosts the AEJ's Christmas lunch - in this case Charlie Mc Creevey - and all the talk was of the impending Lisbon referendum.

We also continued with our (almost monthly) lunches. 2008 kicked off with John O'Donoghue TD, Speaker of the House (Ceann Comhairle in Irish) who had some interesting things to say about media coverage of parliamentary proceedings.

Because of problems with the definition of statutory rape in a number of court cases here last year, there is talk of a children's referendum, and many felt that it should be run the same day as the Lisbon treaty referendum – in the event it wasn't, but our guest in February was Jillian Van Turnhout, head of the Children's rights Alliance here and also a member of the European and Economic Social Committee. She was well placed to speak about both referenda and was adamant they should not be run together.

By March we were in Lisbon mode and over the next two months the AEJ held two referendum debates – both of which made headlines in our national papers. In the first, MEPs Mairéad McGuinness (Fine Gael – for) and Mary Lou McDonald (Sinn Féin – against) debated the issues, while in the second, Libertas Chairman Declan Ganley (against) and Brendan Butler of the business organisation IBEC (for) argued the toss from an economic point of view. Both debates were lively with the speakers also taking questions from the floor, and they set us up for the referendum on June 12th.

We all know the result, but weeks before the vote, our Taoiseach Bertie Ahern stepped down and his successor Brian Cowen appointed a new Cabinet, which now has to deal with the fall-out! The new Deputy Prime-Minister (Tánaiste) is Mary Coughlan, TD, Minister Trade and Enterprise and a former Minister for agriculture. She was our most recent guest and among the topics she dealt with were the breakdown of the WTO talks and the steps needed to deal with the referendum result.

Now our poor little country is in free-fall and we needed an economist to tell us what happened to the Celtic Tiger, so our final guest speaker was Professor John FitzGerald of the ESRI.

For further reports see www.aej.ie

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