



EVENT REPORT

DIASPORA: THE CASE FOR AN EU POLICY

Hosted by Emer Costello MEP

September 25, 2012

Room ASP3E2, European Parliament, Brussels

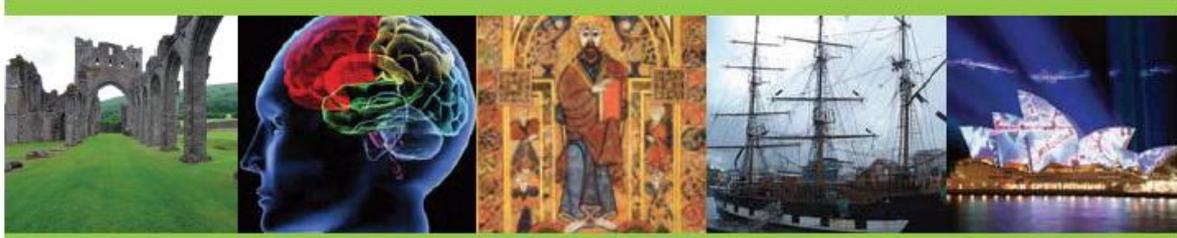
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The Irish International Diaspora Centre Trust



Harbour Lodge, Crofton Road, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.

“DIASPORA: THE CASE FOR AN EU POLICY”, SEPTEMBER 25, EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On September 25, 2012, **Emer Costello MEP** hosted a seminar at the European Parliament to discuss the impact of Diaspora and Diaspora Networks on EU policy priorities. The seminar was organised in partnership with the **Irish International Diaspora Centre Trust**, an initiative which is dedicated to the development of a Diaspora “centre of excellence” which could be replicated across EU member states.

The aim of the seminar was to raise awareness of the impact that Diasporas have on EU policy priorities and examine options for making Diaspora a theme of EU policy. 2012 has seen the **first Global African Diaspora Summit** in South Africa bring together 64 Heads of State, followed by the **second annual Global Diaspora Forum** at the US Department of State, convened by US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. This represents an unprecedented level of attention on Diaspora as a policymaking resource. The European Parliament seminar on September 25th sought to ensure that sufficient attention is received from EU policymakers and, to this end, brought together more than 60 participants from academia, industry, NGOs, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Speakers at the seminar included:

- **Mr Romi Bhatia, Senior Advisor for Diaspora Partnerships, USAID, Washington D.C.**
- **Mr Yevgeny Kuznetsov, Senior research Fellow, Migration Policy Institute and Consultant, World Bank**
- **Baroness Detta O’Cathain, House of Lords, United Kingdom**
- **Professor Jean-Baptiste Meyer, Institut de recherche pour le développement, Montpellier**
- **Professor Liam Kennedy, Director, Clinton Institute for American Studies, UCD**
- **Dr Brian Lambkin, Director of the Centre for Migration Studies, Omagh, Northern Ireland**
- **Professor Lizbeth Goodman, SMARTlab Founder and Director, Ireland**

Mr Romi Bhatia of USAID highlighted the scale of the contribution that Diasporas make to societies around the world and outlined the policy basis for diaspora engagement in the United States. The focus of this has been the International Diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA) initiative at the US State Department, the goal of which is to harness the global connections of diaspora communities to promote sustainable development in their countries of origin or heritage. This is to be achieved by supporting capacity building through partnerships around trade and investment, volunteerism, philanthropy, and innovation. A central feature of the USAID initiative has been its collaboration with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s “Global Diaspora Forum” which was founded this year.

Mr Yevgeny Kuznetsov of the World Bank underlined the ability of skilled diaspora networks to act as a powerful source of innovation by enabling knowledge transfer and collaboration between skilled individuals. A particularly important point was that of enabling Brain Circulation through creation of joint projects with the skilled diaspora abroad. This enables governments to reverse Brain Drain without immediate return of skilled diasporas.

Baroness Detta O’Cathain drew on her combined role as a member of the Irish diaspora and as a UK policymaker with responsibility for EU policy. Reflecting on the history of the Irish Diaspora and her own history, she emphasised the importance of understanding what the Diaspora needs and raising awareness of the pride taken in them by their countries of origin. On this note, Baroness O’Cathain praised the Irish International Diaspora Centre Trust as a worthy and timely initiative and one which could serve as a basis for EU-wide learning. The Baroness also emphasised the need for an EU framework to help Europe’s Diasporas contribute to EU policy goals, particularly job creation and growth. This could include specific measures such as tax regimes for diaspora gift giving.

Dr Brian Lambkin offered three key recommendations for an EU policy on Diaspora. Firstly, greater levels of research are needed into the EU’s self-understanding of Diaspora to enable Europe to move towards a shared understanding of Diaspora and its role in policy. Secondly, Diaspora should be enabled to contribute to a deeper understanding of Europe’s role in the world – this could be described as replacing the “fortress Europe” concept with that of “The World in Europe”. Third, he emphasised the importance of investing in migration-related cultural institutions to promote public understanding of ‘diaspora’

Professor Jean-Baptiste Meyer outlined the existing academic literature on Diaspora Knowledge Networks and introduced details on the “CIDESAL” project, the goal of which is to map skilled Latin American diasporas across Europe and North America. Professor Meyer underlined the potential value in enabling skilled diasporas to collaborate with each other and argued that the evolution of web technology is transforming the scope for diaspora links with their home countries.

Professor Liam Kennedy proposed that in a globalised world, Diaspora is now recognised as an important new force that can be included in the policymaking process and argued that not enough is known about the dynamics and activities of Diasporas. Similarly, not enough is known about who is conducting research on Diaspora and where this research is taking place. For recommendations as to how Diaspora can be included in EU policymaking, Professor Kennedy cited the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership as an example from which we can learn.

Professor Lizbeth Goodman presented a video about digital diaspora and her work to establish innovative platforms for the future of education in a context of global change. Professor Goodman demonstrated the significant and valuable contribution which Diasporas make and can make to the arts and cultural creativity and technological innovation.

Following speaker presentations, contributions from the audience highlighted the growing momentum of diaspora as an area of focus for policymakers. Mr Kingsley Aikins of Diaspora Matters drew attention to diaspora initiatives around the world, from Africa to Vietnam and Indonesia. Mr Terry Clune spoke of his Connect Ireland initiative which incentivises people to use their contacts to help find expanding companies that might locate and create jobs in Ireland – this initiative has already led to job creation in Ireland in 2012.

Emer Costello MEP said Diasporas help spread ideas and promote innovation. Diasporas contribute enormously to their receiving countries. She concluded the seminar with a declaration of her support for an EU policy on Diaspora generally and specifically for the creation of a Diaspora Centre of Excellence in Dun Laoghaire, Ireland, which could be replicated across Europe.

Following the success of the event, next steps will include

- circulation of a report on the seminar and a Diaspora white paper to MEPs and EU foreign affairs ministers
- exploration of the feasibility of a European Parliament Written Declaration on Diaspora
- provision of the seminar report to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
- further engagement with other EU institutions on Diaspora as a theme of policy, particularly the European Commission.