

## Introduction

Europe is changing dramatically. The coming months will see the most intense period of change in the EU since its foundation in 1957. From May 1st, 2004 the EU will consist of 25 countries, including the 10 new entrants, with a population of 450 million people. This means the Union's population will increase by 28 per cent while its average income will be reduced by 18 per cent. Many of the structures and procedures currently in place in the EU are being adjusted and a new constitution proposed by the Convention on the Future of Europe sets out a blueprint for change. The establishment of an Inter-Governmental Conference takes this constitutional process a stage further. Ireland is likely to hold a referendum in the coming year to decide whether or not a new treaty, incorporating a new European Constitution, is to be approved and implemented.

What sort of future Europe do Irish people want?

What contribution can Ireland make to this momentous development?

What priorities should guide us in making decisions on these issues?

This book addresses these and many related questions. Key aspects of the present situation and of future possibilities are analysed and critiqued. The implications for Ireland and Irish people are discussed and evaluated. The chapters contained here were originally presented in summary form to the CORI Justice Commission's 15th annual social policy conference on October 3rd, 2003.

In the opening chapter Pat Cox MEP, President of the European Parliament, addresses the topic of Ireland and the future of Europe from a European perspective and articulates, from a European

perspective, the key values that underpin the European project. In chapter 2 David Begg, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions outlines a vision to guide the development of Europe's future. In particular he addresses the question of whether or not we can afford to have a just society and outlines what needs to be done if such a reality is to emerge in the foreseeable future. This is followed by Brendan Keenan's chapter on business and the future of Europe. Brendan, who is Group Business Editor of Independent Newspapers, outlines the challenges and the new questions emerging for Ireland in the changing business context of the new Europe. He contrasts Europe and the USA and identifies questions that must be addressed by Europe in the new context in which it finds itself.

In chapter 4, Patricia O'Hara of the Western Development Commission and independent consultant Patrick Commins address the question of regional development and the impact EU regional and cohesion policies have had on this issue in Ireland. They go on in their comprehensive chapter to identify the issues facing EU cohesion policy in the post-2006 period. They conclude by identifying the key issues facing Ireland in this developing context. Finally, in chapter 5, Sean Healy and Brigid Reynolds of the CORI Justice Commission, address the social aspects of European development and their impact on Ireland. They challenge the imbalance between the economic and the social dimensions of EU development since its inception and outline four initiatives to be taken at European level that would produce a more balanced Europe with substantially reduced levels of poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

This is a special moment in the development of the European Union. It provides Ireland with major challenges and opportunities. Ireland takes over the Presidency of the European Council in January 2004. The EU is set to expand to 25 countries during 2004. An Inter-Governmental Conference is considering the new draft EU Constitution and preparing a new Treaty to be voted on in the coming year. We are at a moment of major change. Ireland could and, we

believe, should lead the way in building a genuinely inclusive Europe.

In presenting this volume on *Ireland and the Future of Europe: Leading the way towards inclusion?* we do not attempt to cover all the questions that arise around this topic. This volume is offered as a contribution to the ongoing public debate around these and related issues.

The CORI Justice Commission expresses its deep gratitude to the authors of the various chapters that follow. They contributed long hours and their obvious talent to preparing these chapters. A special word of thanks also to the AIB Investment Managers whose financial assistance made this publication possible.

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October 3rd, 2003