

Evening Echo

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Cowen is right - EU let us down

GREECE this week sold €3 billion of five year bonds.

After years of grinding austerity which have seen the Greek people suffering terribly, the bond sale is, at last, a sign of hope.

The hope is that Greece can follow the example of Ireland and Portugal and make a clean exit from its Troika bailout programme.

Experts, including the IMF, say the country will still need debt forgiveness from the EU, but that big countries like Germany are against this.

It makes you wonder if, even now with Brexit underway, the big players in the EU have any appreciation of the concept of solidarity.

They left Ireland swinging in the breeze and our poor taxpayers had to pick up the entire bill for the European banking crash - a bill which resulted from the irresponsibility of bankers from Germany, France and other big powers, and, of course, borrowers here.

The extend of the responsibility of our own government is disputed, and certainly the Brian Cowen-led government was seen to be, at best, asleep at the wheel when the crisis hit.

But the former Taoiseach's remarks this week when he received an honorary doctorate from the National University of Ireland, deserve to be reflected on by the EU leadership structure.

He accused the EU of a lack of solidarity with small countries who were in difficulty during the financial crisis.

Those of us who lived through it know this to be true.

We had to re-capitalise our banks and pick up all the banking debts, and promises that the EU would compensate us for doing so were simply reneged upon.

Ireland saved the Euro, but the EU gave the Irish people little respect and less support.

Mr Cowen said Europe forced certain countries such as Ireland to implement inappropriate decisions such as protecting international bondholders.

Many of us feel this was a betrayal buy countries we regarded as our friends.

They cared more about money than they cared about EU solidarity. We have learned a lesson.

We agree with Mr. Cowen that Ireland is still better off as an EU member, but as the Union faces a massive crisis with the exit of the UK, its leaders should understand that they need to treat small countries like Ireland — and Greece — a lot better. Otherwise there may be further weakening of the EU ahead.

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Cork Pride, which celebrates the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities, gets underway this weekend. Orla Egan outlines why the event is still relevant in 2017



IN 1981, Cork Pride celebrations took the form of the distribution of leaflets on Patrick's Street. These bright pink leaflets sought to highlight the existence of gay people in Cork and to assert that Gay Rights are Human Rights. Cork Pride has developed and changed since then!

In 2017, Cork Pride is a weeklong celebration of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities, with a variety of events, culminating in the Pride parade on Sunday August 6. The Pride flag will wind its way through the streets of Cork with the Cork LGBT community out in all our colours and diversity.

Do we still need Pride? Sure haven't we got Marriage Equality, Gender Recognition legislation and a gay Taoiseach? We have! But we do not have full equality, respect and safety for the LGBT community.

It is worth remembering that Pride marches were a response to violence and suppression of the LGBT community. The first Pride marches in the USA were organised on the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York, when the LGBT community fought back against police violence and raids on LGBT bars and venues.

One of the first Pride marches in Dublin followed the murder of gay man Declan Flynn in Fairview Park and the release of his murders on suspended sentences. Pride is about our very right to exist and to do so with respect and safety.

Throughout the world LGBT people are being killed just for being who we are. We have seen this in Orlando with LGBT people and their friends and family members gunned down in the Pulse nightclub. The US Vice-President Mike Pence allegedly supports 'conversion therapy' to 'cure' LGBT people and change our sexual orientation or gender identity. Elsewhere 'corrective rape' is advocated as a 'cure' for lesbians. Bisexual people often encounter disrespect and lack of recognition, and are frequently defined by the sex of their partner rather by their own sexual orientation (i.e. seen as lesbian or gay if they are with a same-sex partner, seen as straight if with an opposite sex partner).

Transgender people face prejudice and violence; in 2016 at least 22 transgender people were murdered in the US, with another 15 this year.

This year in Chechnya gay men have been rounded up, held in concentration camps, tortured and killed. Families are being urged to kill any family member who is gay; we have seen photographs of gay men being pushed off buildings by family members. The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has stated that gay people are not people, they are devils.

In Ireland young LGBT people still face ignorance and bullying in schools. 'That's so gay' is still used liberally amongst young people to refer to anything that is stupid or uncool. Faggot and queer are still used as insults against anyone who does not conform to limited stereotypes of appropriate gender behaviour and presentation. Homophobic bullying impacts on the mental health and well-being of our young people. Too many Irish young LGBT people end up homeless and vulnerable after being rejected by their families after they come out. The recent LGBT Ireland Report found alarmingly high rates of self-harm, suicide ideation and attempted suicide amongst young LGBT people in Ireland, directly related to bullying and negative attitudes to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Yes — we do still need Cork Pride in 2017!



SHOWING SUPPORT: A scene from Cork Pride 2016. Picture: John Allen

Very limited services and supports are provided for the Transgender community in Ireland, with long waiting times for the few services that exist.

While there are thriving LGBT communities in cities throughout Ireland, LGBT people living in rural environments can still experience isolation and prejudice.

We still live in a society that assumes and promotes heterosexuality and gender conformity. We see it in love songs, films, books, TV programmes. Sometimes it is the little things that irritate — like when I phone my insurance company and ask to add my partner on my car insurance and am asked what HIS name is!

Coming out isn't a one-off event — we have to keep coming out and affirming our very existence all the time.

For some LGBT people it is about the ability to be able to do simple things, like go to the toilet in peace, without fear of harassment or of being told you are in the wrong place. It is about our right to exist and to be seen, without fear of harassment, discrimination and violence.

Cork has a long history of LGBT activism; for decades the LGBT community has fought against prejudice and discrimination and has demanded equality and respect. Many gains

have been made but we still have a long way to go before we live in a society where we are all equally cherished and respected, whatever our sexual orientation or gender identity.

We still need Pride. We need an opportunity to celebrate who we are, without fear or inhibitions, to turn the streets of Cork ablaze with rainbows, to show young LGBT to be proud of who they are and that they are part of a vibrant and proud community. It is also an opportunity for our allies to show their support for LGBT rights.

Pride is an opportunity for the various parts of the LGBT community to come together in all our diversity — gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender — and to bring our friends, families and allies with us. So don your rainbow colours and stride, swish or strut through the streets of Cork with Pride.

Be loud, be proud and shine!

■ Orla Egan is the creator and curator of the Cork LGBT Archive, <http://corklgbtarchive.com/> and the author of Queer Republic of Cork <http://corklgbtarchive.com/queer-republicofcorkbuynow>

■ The 2017 Cork LGBT Pride Festival runs from July 30 to August 6, launching at the Cork Pride Family Fun Day in Fitzgerald's Park this Sunday, July 30, followed by a week long programme of events which concludes spectacularly with The Cork Pride Parade and Afterparty on Grand Parade on Sunday August 6 August; keep an eye on the Cork Pride Facebook page for further updates.