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While Irish voters watch with bemusement the rollercoaster progress of our government's attempt to pin down Angela Merkel on the use of ESM monies to re-capitalise our banks and to take some of the strain of Ireland's debt mountain, the tectonic plates in the architecture of the European union are beginning to shift.

It is, sadly, a fact that in general terms our media seem to have a very myopic view of what is happening in Europe and what options are opening and closing for Ireland.

In particular, there is growing evidence that the United Kingdom our nearest neighbour, the sovereign power in Northern Ireland, is progressively becoming more and more semi detached in its relationship with the EU.

Although the Liberal Democrats are committed to the European Union, their Conservative coalition partners seem to be becoming less and less committed to Europe with each passing month. David Cameron now appears to be intent on opting out of the European criminal justice regime in its entirety.

Likewise, the UK seems intent on staying well clear of the Eurozone. In this regard, Sweden and Denmark seem less and less likely to want to join the Euro as well.

Recently, a highly placed German official likened the UK stance to that of Statler and Waldorf in the Muppets show a grumpy old pair who watch and comment on the antics on stage from a lofty theatre box. While the comparison may be apt and amusing, the unintended irony may be that it is the antics of the other Muppets which engage Statler and Waldorf.

There is no doubt that the UK seems to be falling out of love with the EU. If the UK and, perhaps, Sweden and Denmark are setting a course which will find them somewhere between full-blooded membership of an EU that has become further integrated and membership of the EEA, there are very serious issues in the offing for Ireland.

Apart from the relatively small coterie of convinced Euro-federalists in Ireland, there is very little popular appetite here for a further pooling of sovereignty over and above a European system of banking.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt have recently published a book "For Europe" calling for a quantum leap towards integration and federalisation of the European Union. Their "vision" echoes the ambitions of up of Joschka Fischer's famous Humboldt University's speech conjuring up the notion of a United States of Europe with a president, legislature, constitution and army modelled on the American federal state.

While it is by no means clear that even the voters of Germany hanker after such a federal Europe, it seems to me that Angela Merkel has greater ambitions of German domination in Europe through further integration of the union. The banking union now on offer is of little interest to Germany which is very fond of its own central bank.

There is a danger that "understandings" between Ireland and Germany will be reached concerning German ambitions in the direction of further integration as the quid pro quo or German support for a second bailout (or work out regime) for Ireland.

While we cannot handcuff ourselves to the UK in its future dealings with the European Union, and while we must pursue our own national interests, there is a very real difficulty in allowing the land border between Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle to become the boundary between an integrated federalist inner core of Europe and a semi-detached outer fringe consisting of the UK, Sweden, Denmark and the member states of the European Economic Area.

While our media and our politicians concerned themselves (and rightly so) with the minutiae of their dealings about debt, there is a danger that the Irish people and their democratic debate will lose their perspective on the bigger picture which is rapidly developing before our eyes.

While the Institute for International and European Affairs in North Great Georges Street is a worthy body, its tone and body language is far more federalist than mainstream Irish opinion. We need other, different people and bodies to articulate different options and choices for Ireland in its dealings with the European Union. We cannot abandon the vital democratic debate on Europe to a Punch and Judy show between federalists and iconoclastic Little Irelanders.

We need our media to inform the public on the options they have and on the implications of what is happening in the European Union. That is not happening at all.

Alas, our Parliament is, as Stephen Donnelly pointed out this week, a “joke” in many respects, and definitely as far as European and International affairs are concerned.

With a Dail the elected on the basis of multi-seat PR, the only hope of having a serious means of considering EU affairs in the heart of our democracy lies with reforming the Senate, not abolishing it.

One would imagine that the news that the UK government’s opting out of very significant areas of EU cooperation in the crime and justice sphere, would have sparked some debate somewhere in our media and in our democratic institutions.

Instead of that, we content ourselves to devoting our public discourse to a consideration of Jimmy Savile’s repugnant sex life and titillating ourselves with the possibility that his crimes may find some echo in the Irish showband scene of forty years ago.

Our democracy deserves better than this; it was not for this that Ireland’s freedom was won.