

# EUROPE RE-IMAGINED

## 1975 - 2025 - 2075

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**AUTUMN 2025**

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**Cavan Public Participation Network**  
with the support of  
**The Department of Foreign Affairs**  
Authored by: Daniel Downey



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# Thanks & Acknowledgements

## The People Who Supported

The Department of Foreign Affairs for inspiring a project such as this, as a listening exercise with a panel of community spokespersons from a random Northwestern Irish rural county. To trust in our communities to capture a snapshot of the feelings these people have for the European project and its future.

***“We want to feel like we truly BELONG without losing ourselves, to share in the benefits and beautiful patchwork quilt that Europe can be.”***

The panelists themselves, who volunteered from among the 525 member community groups of Cavan Public Participation Network and gave their time to contributing to this project; Jet Calders, Sido Manzambi, Tommy McMahon, Rachael Cullivan, Amro Hamid, Rafaela Radulescu, Billy Gallagher, Ciaran Walsh, Sridevi Aravind, Deirdre Meagher and Brid ni Dholain.

To Cavan County Local Development for providing the space needed to host the consultation workshops and the tea and coffee; fuel for true work to be undertaken in a community setting. To Cavan Public Participation Network’s Secretariat and staff who supported the application and roll out of the project as a glimpse into the community perspective of Europe at a crucial moment in its history.

And finally to the staff (pictured here, L-R Finian McNamara, Aisling Carolan and Daniel Downey) without whom this project would not have come to fruition.



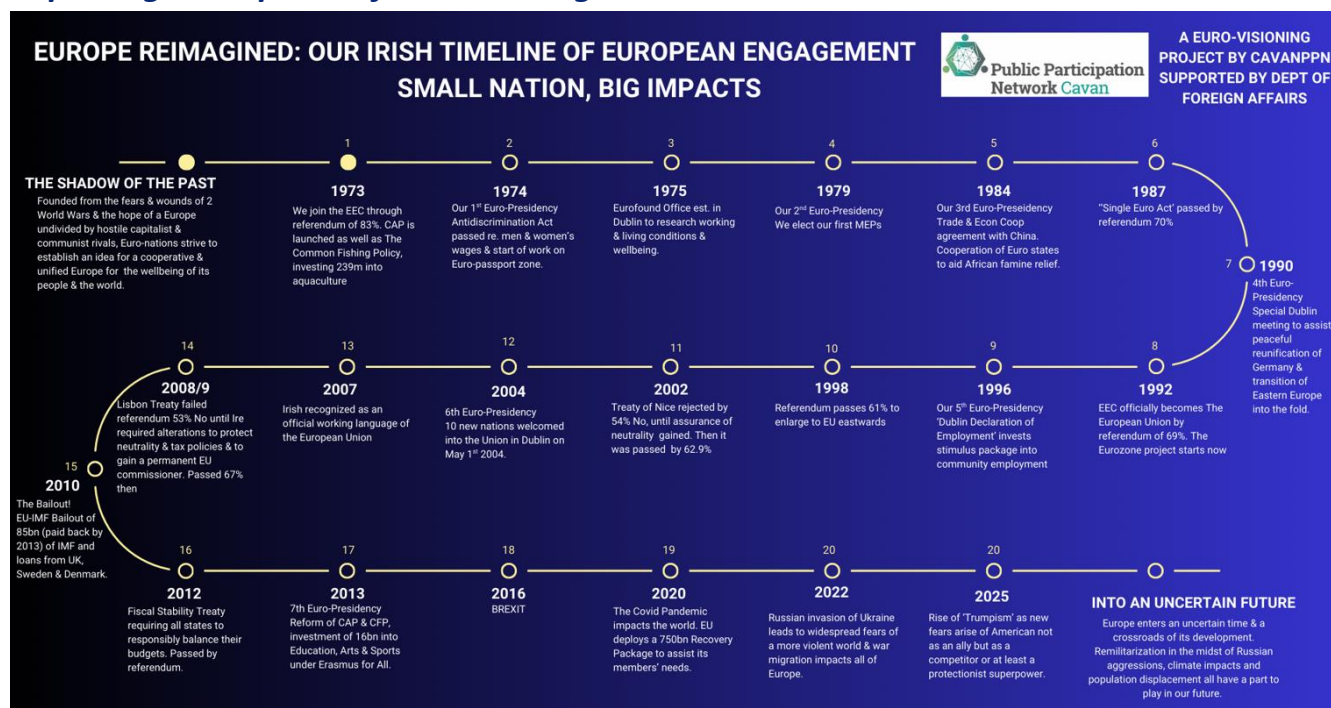
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**Left:** The 1<sup>st</sup> Panel met in September 2025 to workshop their European Vision from 1975 to 2025 from among the communities of County Cavan in Northwest Ireland.



## Capturing A Snapshot of Local Feeling



**Above:** The Information Board designed by the panel to outline the major events impacting Ireland in regard to its European Union membership. Members felt that 1974, the first Irish EU Presidency, hails the start of Ireland's journey as a co-creator of The European Union.

### The Rationale

When the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) advertised the potential to invest in a project in regard to communicating the European Union, Cavan Public Participation's (CavanPPN) staff approached their elected Secretariat members with a proposal to draw down funding to conduct a series of workshops whereby the communities of CavanPPN could offer their views on The European Union at such a pivotal moment in its history.

The motivation was to provide a snapshot of what the 'everyday person' perceives as The European Union from the point of view of local community volunteers in the northwest corner of a country in the northwest corner of the continent of Europe.

It was also a thought experiment to encourage the participants to imagine what Ireland would have looked like today had we never joined the European Union. With this in mind, they developed the above timeline map to demonstrate the major milestones and benefits of Union. The participants' inputs on this 'alternate history' was a valuable piece of work to encourage a realization of why the European Union has been of benefit to our lives in the spirit that, as one participant put it 'we sometimes only miss something when it is gone.'

This was not only useful, but fun and encouraged the participants to engage more in the process.



## The Process

As a participative democracy vehicle, CavanPPN wanted to expand the reach of the inputs to as many community members as possible, while still narrowing the focus down to a manageable workshop number of participants.

Seeking A Panel: The first process was to seek a panel of participants to engage in a trio of in-person and remote workshops to develop the inputs to this document. The staff of CavanPPN advertised this over a 2 week window to their member groups with 12 people coming forward to undertake the workshops.

The Work Itself: The Workshops sought to encourage participants over a 90 minute period to engage on the following discussion points; (i) Journey through the history of Ireland's engagement as a European member (ii) Outline the positives and negatives of a Europeanless Ireland (iii) Discuss the values and concerns they had with the present day European Union as local people and (iv) Imagine your best version of the EU in 2075, describe its presence in your life.

The workshops were facilitated by CavanPPN Coordinator Daniel Downey.

Widening the Net: To ensure a fuller harvest of voices, the same questions were put out to the wider membership of CavanPPN's 525 member community groups for input and adding to the document over a 2 week period after the workshops.

Compilation & Launch: The CavanPPN Coordinator compiled these findings into a draft report which was introduced to the CavanPPN Plenary of Member Groups on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025 (pictured below) at which the document was mandated by the Plenary members as part of their annual order of business.

Finalising the Report and Distribution: The final report was designed as you now see it over the Christmas period and is to be distributed prior to the end of January 2026 to all local libraries, political offices, community halls and other strategic areas in County Cavan with a copy published to our website. We will also be filing copies to our MEPs to help support their work as our European Representatives in Brussels.



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## **A EUROPEANLESS IRELAND, Part One of The Workshops**

As mentioned, one of the key aspects of the work was to communicate The European Union by imagining its absence for community participants. After outlining what DID happen as a positive result of having had the European Union, members of the panel were then tasked to envision an Ireland without any EU. Here are some of their inputs.

**“AN ISLAND OF ISOLATION AND IMPOVERISHED BY OUR CULTURAL PROTECTIONISM & LARGER NEIGHBOURS WHIMS. AN ISLAND NOT PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER, SOMETHING BETTER”**

**“A PLACE OF GREATER CONTROL BUT LESS OPPORTUNITY, WHERE WE WOULD HAVE LESS GUIDANCE BUT MORE AUTONOMY. AN ISLAND WHERE WE WOULD BE THE POOR MAN OF WESTERN EUROPE, AS WE HAD BEEN BEFORE THE 1970’S.”**

**“A LAND WHERE THE COUNTRYSIDE LACKED THE DEVELOPMENT THE EU BROUGHT TO IT, WHERE MORE YOUNG FARMERS WOULD LEAVE THE LAND AND SWELL THE CITIES. A LAND WHERE IRELAND, A RURAL PLACE, WOULD LOSE ITS IDENTITY AS A PLACE OF VILLAGE, PARISH AND TOWNLAND.”**

**“A CULTURE OF INSULARITY DUE TO LACK OF TRAVEL. NEEDING VISAS AND VARIOUS CURRENCIES WOULD BLOCK NOT ONLY OUR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BUT OUR SHARING OF CULTURE. OUR YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE BENEFITTED SO MUCH FROM DIVERSE SHARING AND LEARNING AS A RESULT OF EUROPE.”**

**“WITHOUT OUR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, SHARED ECONOMIES & EXTERNAL GUIDANCE IRELAND WOULD BE STUNTED IN ITS GROWTH AND POWER, TO BE A PLAYER ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE. A EUROPEANLESS IRELAND WOULD BE AN IRELAND LESS IN EVERY WAY.”**

**“A PLACE WITH A WIDER SCOPE FOR RUNAWAY POLICIES BY POLITICAL OPPORTUNISTS, RATHER THAN THE SENSIBLE POLICIES NEEDED FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT OR OTHER SUCH PROTECTIONS. WHAT ONE PERSON’S NARROWNESS IS, IS ANOTHER’S GUIDANCE TO A BETTER IRELAND FOR THE FUTURE, DUE TO EU DIRECTIVES.”**

## Views Of An Alternative Ireland, A Discussion

If the European Union had never existed, the Republic of Ireland today would likely be a markedly different country economically, politically, and socially. Without EU membership from 1973 onward, Ireland would have remained far more dependent on the United Kingdom for trade, investment, and political alignment. This dependence would have limited Ireland's ability to diversify its economy and assert an independent role on the global stage.

Economically, Ireland would probably be less prosperous. EU structural and cohesion funds played a major role in modernising infrastructure, agriculture, and education, particularly in the late 20th century. Without access to the single market, Ireland would have struggled to attract the same scale of foreign direct investment from multinational companies, especially in technology and pharmaceuticals. Employment opportunities and wage growth would likely be lower, with higher emigration continuing well into the 21st century.

Without the EU, Ireland's environment would likely face weaker protections. EU directives drove improvements in water quality, waste management, and habitat conservation. Without them, industrial pollution, agricultural runoff, and biodiversity loss would probably be worse, with slower adoption of climate policy and environmental regulation.

Politically, Ireland's international influence would be smaller. EU membership amplified Ireland's voice in global diplomacy and allowed it to balance its relationship with the UK. Socially and culturally, the country might be more insular, with less inward migration and slower convergence with broader European norms on issues such as workers' rights and consumer protections.

Overall, a non-EU Ireland would likely be more economically vulnerable, less globally connected, and more regionally constrained than it is today. These were the general feelings of the participants in the workshop on A Europeanless Ireland.

*Below: Jet Calders, remembering pre-EU Ireland*



## A EUROPEAN IRELAND, Part 2 of The Workshops

Participants were asked to identify what they most value and what is of most concern to them about being a member of the European Union. The following are broken down into these 2 categories with a report on the general discussion after the breakout groups brainstormed the categories.

Value	Concern
<p>“The EU brings some common sense ideals to some local issues, especially to protect our environment.”</p> <p>“A stronger EU gives collective strength, especially when considering we have Trumpist America on one side and Putin Russia on the other.”</p> <p>“The freedom to travel and live in other EU states has been hugely beneficial to our people’s cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity.”</p> <p>“The equality I feel as a European to other Europeans is great.”</p> <p>“A sense of democratic process to the EU when seen in context to outside Europe is a value I find something to be proud of.”</p> <p>“Great continental health, education and economic shared services and an inclusive sense of peace for the sake of the continent.”</p> <p>“The accommodation of varying viewpoints in a patchwork quilt of democratic inclusion toward peace.”</p>	<p>“The flow of uncontrolled migration concerns me. I understand people need to flee war but it needs to be done in a managed way.”</p> <p>“A lack of understanding or awareness of the moral compass or direction Europe is going as a single Union by we, its members.”</p> <p>“The rise of right wing extremism worries me and I find it echoes some of our continent’s worst history.”</p> <p>“The threat of Russia and negative influence of America are of concern to me. I would like to see Ireland as part of a stronger Europe but which doesn’t trample our identity either.”</p> <p>“Local voices get lost in the wider net of collective voice at EU level.”</p> <p>“Avoid being an autocratic Russia or a plutocratic America. I fear the EU placing fear ahead of its brave stand for the wellbeing of its citizens and people.”</p> <p>“Appears too beaurocratic.”</p>



The participants' attitudes toward membership of the European Union were generally positive, pragmatic, and shaped by lived experience rather than ideology. Among the panel included those born into an Irish EU, those who recall Ireland before its membership, those who came to Ireland from outside Europe and those born under The USSR. This variety of voices demonstrated, in a lived way, the very fabric of the EU and how it has encouraged and supported diversity, even in its most rural of corners.

For the participants, the EU is closely associated with peace, prosperity, and independence. Membership helps Ireland diversify away from overreliance on any one partner, modernise its economy through collaboration, and gain a respected voice in global affairs. This has fostered a broad sense that the EU has been good for Ireland, even if imperfect.



***Above: Sridevi Balan, Participant from outside Europe, shares views***

Support, however, is not uncritical. The participants were often wary of excessive bureaucracy, democratic distance, and economic policies perceived as favouring corporate interests over citizens. There is also a strong sensitivity around sovereignty, neutrality, and the protection of social welfare and public services. These concerns reflect Ireland's historical experience of colonialism and economic vulnerability.

Within this context, there was a growing sentiment that the EU must define its own cultural and political path. In the discussions, some argued that Europe should resist becoming American in character—plutocratic, hyper-individualist, and dominated by corporate power. Equally, there is little appetite for an EU that resembles Russian-style autocracy or Chinese state-driven systems, both of which are seen as fundamentally incompatible with Irish democratic values.

Instead, there is sympathy in Ireland for a vision of the EU as a driver of democratic socialism: one that prioritises social justice, workers' rights, public goods, environmental protection, and human dignity. In this view, the EU's legitimacy rests on putting the wellbeing of its citizens at the centre of policy, ensuring that economic success serves society rather than the other way around.

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## Global Context

Participants felt that the European Union currently operates in a complex and unsettled global context shaped by geopolitical rivalry, economic fragmentation, climate pressure, and democratic strain. The post–Cold War assumption of an increasingly liberal, rules-based international order has weakened, replaced by a more multipolar and confrontational landscape. In this environment, the EU is under pressure to act not just as a market or regulatory power, but as a coherent geopolitical actor. Relations with the United States remain central but more conditional. While shared values and security interests persist, divergences have emerged around trade, industrial policy, technology regulation, and strategic autonomy.

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### **“I HAVE A WISH FOR THE EU TO REFLECT THE DEMOCRATIC IDEALS AT THE HEART OF EUROPEAN CULTURE FROM ANCIENT GREECE RIGHT THROUGH TO THE IRISH REPUBLIC”**

Members were critical of the EU increasingly seeking to cooperate with the US and emphasized a need to avoid overdependence, particularly in critical supply chains and digital infrastructure. They felt that Russia’s war in Ukraine has profoundly reshaped Europe’s security outlook. It has accelerated EU integration in defence, energy policy, and sanctions coordination, while reinforcing the EU’s self-image as a defender of sovereignty and international law. At the same time, it has exposed internal differences over military capacity, neutrality, and long-term strategic posture.

China presents a different challenge: an indispensable economic partner and a systemic rival. The members felt that the EU is attempting to balance trade and investment with concerns over human rights, state subsidies, and strategic dependence. This nuanced position, participants felt, reflected Europe’s desire to avoid binary Cold War–style alignments.

Beyond great-power politics, the participants were highly critical of EU decisions on items such as The Mercosur Deal and its potential impact on Ireland’s agriculture. They also mentioned issues arising from the Global South, where perceptions of European protectionism, migration policy, and climate responsibility are mixed.

Internally, the workshop discussion explored how democratic resilience is tested by populism, economic inequality, and the social costs of green and digital transitions.

Overall, participants felt that the EU’s global context demands greater unity, credibility, and clarity of purpose. Its challenge is to project stability, uphold democratic values, and protect citizens’ wellbeing in a world that is more volatile, competitive, and fragmented than at any point since the EU’s founding.

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## Local Context

From the perspective of Northwest Ireland and County Cavan, the European Union's global challenges were experienced by the workshop's participants in tangible, local ways rather than abstract geopolitics. In counties such as Cavan, Donegal, Sligo, and Leitrim, the EU is less a distant institution and more a quiet but constant presence shaping daily life, opportunity, and security in a historically peripheral region.

The war in Ukraine and wider geopolitical instability were felt locally through perceived rising energy costs, inflation, and uncertainty for households and small businesses. Participants also worried that the Ukrainian refugee relocations unveiled a deeper worry at the heart of Irish society where anti-immigrant feelings surfaced, which did not reflect the broader views of community.

The members commented that EU-level coordination on energy security, price stabilisation, and sanctions mattered deeply in this region where fuel poverty and commuting with low public transport supports magnify global shocks in people's pockets. Similarly, supply-chain disruptions translate into higher costs for agriculture, construction, and local manufacturing, sectors central to the northwest economy.

The participants also raised the reality of the border and being a border county, not only of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but Northern Ireland and the European Union. Relations between the EU, the UK, and Ireland are particularly salient here. Brexit transformed the northwest into a frontline of Europe's external border, with a rising worry about the future of the North in a Brexit context. The members hoped that EU protections of the Single Market and the Good Friday Agreement could help preserve cross-border mobility, trade, and peace, which are essential for social cohesion, healthcare access, and employment in the region.

China–EU trade tensions, global tech competition, and US–EU industrial policy debates may seem distant, but they shape whether EU investment reaches rural broadband, renewable energy, and regional innovation hubs—critical lifelines for reversing emigration and ageing demographics. Likewise, EU climate policy was experienced not as ideology but as real change on farms, fisheries, and coastal communities facing environmental decline alongside regulatory transition. In the northwest, the EU's global role is judged pragmatically: does it protect fragile regions, amplify small voices, and translate geopolitical stability into local resilience? For many, Europe's relevance ultimately rests on its ability to ensure that global uncertainty does not once again relegate Ireland's periphery to economic and political margins.

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## EUROPE IN 2075, Part Three of the Workshops

The following quotes came from the Workshop asking participants to break into working groups to brainstorm what they imagine Europe will be like in 2075 should it develop to meet what they hope are its best aims possible. The outline after these quotes follows the general discussion of participants afterwards. Once more, this imagination-driven brainstorming was hugely beneficial to help encourage participants to develop a sense of long term vision and investment into their EU.

**“A PLACE OF FREE MOVEMENT  
WHERE INDIVIDUALITY RUNS IN  
HARMONY WITH COLLECTIVE NEED.”**

**“A CONTINENT THAT VALUES A FAIRER SOCIETY,  
CHERISHING EQUALITY & WELLBEING OF ALL. A  
CONTINENT OF SANITY, RATIONALITY AND  
EQUITY SOMEWHERE BETWEEN AMERICAN  
HYPER-INDIVIDUALISM AND CHINESE  
AUTHORITARIAN COLLECTIVISM”**

**“A LAND WHERE PEACE IS NOT ONLY GROWN BUT  
EXPORTED AND WE LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF THE  
PAST. I WANT EUROPE’S FUTURE TO BALANCE INCLUSION  
AND INDIVIDUALITY AND WHERE TECHNOLOGY ASSISTS  
CITIZENS TO ENGAGE IN A FULLER FORM OF DEMOCRACY  
THAT INCLUDES US ALL IN HELPING TO SHAPE OUR  
SOCIETY GOING FORWARD.”**

**“A FAST PACED  
TECHNOLOGICAL  
CONTINENT WHOSE  
POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES  
REFLECT THE PEOPLE AND  
CITIZENS OF THE UNION.”**

**“A MORE INVOLVED POLITICAL UNION  
WHERE LOCAL PEOPLE FEEL MORE IN TOUCH  
WITH THEIR CONTINENTAL REPRESENTATIVES  
AND WHERE WE HAVE BETTER LOCAL  
COMMUNITY EXCHANGES BETWEEN  
COMMUNITIES IN OUR STATES FOR PEER  
LEARNING AND GROWING.**

**“A CONTINENTAL PLACE OF FREEDOM OF  
MOVEMENT, WORKING FOR THE COLLECTIVE  
GOOD OF ALL. WHERE APPRECIATION OF  
DIVERSITY MEANS OUR CULTURES THRIVE AND  
SHARE WITHOUT LOSING THEIR COHERENCE  
AND STRENGTH. A PATCHWORK UNION OF ALL.”**



## A Europe Fifty Years Hence

By 2075, the workshop members felt a positive future for the European Union can be imagined as one where individuality and collective responsibility are no longer in tension, but mutually reinforcing. From the local perspective of Northwest Ireland, this balance could be felt in the freedom to sustain distinct cultural identities—language, community traditions, rural ways of life—while benefiting from shared European commitments to wellbeing, equality, and security. Europe’s strength would lie precisely in protecting difference through cooperation, ensuring that small regions are not erased by global forces but empowered within them. This is what it means to be European!



*Above: Rafaela Radulescu, one of the workshop participants, was born into a USSR state and moved to Ireland when Covid hit. She has since become a community leader in the local area.*

Participants hoped that technology would play a transformative role in this future EU. Digital platforms, secure civic networks, and AI-assisted deliberation could enable more inclusive and participatory democracy, allowing citizens in remote places like Cavan, Donegal, Sligo, and Leitrim to meaningfully shape policy at local, national, and European levels. Rather than centralising power, technology would decentralise voice, making democratic engagement continuous, transparent, and accessible beyond urban centres.

The members reflected on the EU’s voice globally too. On the world stage, the EU of 2075 could emerge as a rational, trusted, and sane diplomatic actor—valued not for military dominance but for mediation, conflict prevention, and long-term thinking. In a world still marked by volatility, Europe’s credibility would stem from consistency: upholding human rights, international law, and cooperative solutions while resisting the extremes of authoritarianism, plutocracy, and ideological confrontation.

For the little region of Cavan, European leadership in environmentalism would be especially tangible. Ambitious climate policy would support regenerative agriculture, restore biodiversity, clean rural economies, and resilient rural infrastructure. Technological innovation—renewable energy, digital health, remote education—could anchor people locally while connecting them globally.

In this future, the EU succeeds not by abstract ambition, but by improving everyday life in places long considered peripheral. From the northwest, Europe would be understood as a collective project that enables people to live well, participate fully, and pass on a healthier, fairer world to the next generation.

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## THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The CavanPPN is a local initiative of a national expression of participative democracy laid down in The 2014 Local Government Act. The heart of this is to encourage communities to directly voice their issues and solutions at a local level. Members were asked to briefly speak on how this might fit with a future European or Irish democracy.

They felt that political democracy in Ireland and across Europe can be significantly strengthened by expanding participative democracy alongside representative institutions. While elections remain essential, they are periodic and often distant from everyday concerns. They felt that real participative democracy allows citizens to shape decisions continuously, grounding political systems in lived experience and rebuilding trust in public life.

In Ireland, Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were seen to offer a strong potential model the rest of Europe can follow for how this can work in practice. PPNs connect community and voluntary groups, social inclusion organisations, and environmental interests directly with local authorities. They create structured spaces where local knowledge informs policy on housing, transport, climate action, health, and planning. By formalising and supporting community voices, PPNs move participation beyond ad hoc consultation and into ongoing democratic engagement.

However, members felt that youth engagement is critical to the future legitimacy of democracy. Many young people feel alienated from traditional political processes that appear slow, opaque, or unresponsive they said, citing low youth turnout. Participative structures—citizens' assemblies, youth councils, participatory budgeting, and digital forums— they suggested can give young people real influence rather than symbolic inclusion. Embedding civic education with hands-on participation can help transform political awareness into agency.

The participants also suggested that across Ireland and Europe, technology and AI have the potential to deepen participative democracy if deployed properly. AI platforms can help synthesise large volumes of public input, identify shared priorities, and present policy options in accessible language. Secure digital tools can widen participation to rural areas supporting wider demographic voices, and those constrained by time or mobility, while safeguarding privacy and accountability. Crucially, participative democracy must remain rooted in local relevance. Consultative vehicles should focus on issues people experience directly: housing, transport, environmental change, digital access, cultural life, and public services. When local communities see their perspectives reflected in decision-making, democracy becomes tangible rather than abstract. In this way, participative democracy does not weaken political democracy—it renews it by making governance more inclusive, responsive, and resilient across Ireland and Europe.

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The future of democracy in Europe in 2075 will likely be defined less by institutional survival and more by democratic renewal. Faced with the pressures of climate change, technological disruption, demographic shifts, and geopolitical instability, European democracy will need to evolve beyond 20th-century models while preserving its core commitment to human dignity, freedom, and equality.

By 2075, democracy in Europe was


hoped by participants to be more participatory, continuous, and locally grounded.

Representative systems should remain central, but they could be complemented by permanent deliberative structures such as citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, and community forums embedded at local, national, and European levels. These mechanisms can allow citizens to influence policy between elections, reducing democratic fatigue and alienation. This will also align closely to recent EU policy shifts such as the forthcoming Democracy Shield Program.

Technology will play a decisive role in any Democracy Shield. Secure digital identities, transparent voting systems, and AI-assisted deliberation platforms could enable millions to contribute meaningfully to policymaking.

On the global stage, Europe's democratic model can stand out for its balance: resisting authoritarian efficiency on one side and hollow, money-dominated politics on the other. By embedding participation, solidarity, and rational governance, Europe can offer a credible alternative. This was at the heart of a number of the participants in the workshops' discussions.

Ultimately, they explained, the success of European democracy in 2075 will rest on whether citizens feel heard, respected, and empowered. Democracy's future will not be guaranteed by constitutions alone, but by everyday democratic practice woven into European life.



**"I KNOW THAT THE PPN HAS THE POWER AND THE ABILITY TO BE A GREAT FORCE AT CIVIL SOCIETY LEVEL, ONE THAT MOVES THINGS FORWARD, THAT BECOMES A POWERFUL INFLUENCE AND SUPPORT FOR ALL THE BEST FORCES THAT WILL BE AT WORK ABOVE IT"**

**- SABINA HIGGINS, IRELAND'S 1<sup>ST</sup> LADY.**

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## THE DEMOCRACY SHIELD

The **European Democracy Shield** is a major initiative unveiled by the European Commission in late 2025 to strengthen democratic resilience across the EU. It aims to protect democratic processes, bolster civic engagement, and safeguard the integrity of information and elections in an age of hybrid threats and digital disruption.

The Shield is built around three core pillars:

- (i) protecting the information space from disinformation and foreign interference;***
- (ii) strengthening democratic institutions, free and fair elections, and independent media;***
- (iii) boosting societal resilience and citizens' engagement in democratic life.***

At its centre will be a **European Centre for Democratic Resilience**, coordinating expertise across Member States to detect evolving challenges and support rapid, informed responses. Networks of fact-checkers, digital literacy initiatives, and guidance on AI's role in electoral processes are among the tools envisioned.

For Ireland — a strong supporter of participative democracy — the *Democracy Shield* aligns with existing democratic innovations rather than replacing them. Ireland's **Public Participation Networks** already provide a vibrant model of grassroots civic engagement, ensuring local voices feed into county policy and planning decisions. PPNs show how bottom-up input can inform public policy on housing, environment, and community wellbeing, if embraced. Extending this ethos to the EU level means *Democracy Shield* measures could be paired with participatory mechanisms like citizens' assemblies, youth councils, deliberative forums, and interactive digital platforms to deepen democratic agency across all levels of governance.

Moreover, as Europe confronts digital disinformation and declining trust in institutions, Ireland could serve as a laboratory for **inclusive, community-driven participation**, helping shape EU guidance on civic tech, media literacy, critical thinking and democratic innovation. Linking local participative vehicles with EU-wide engagement efforts would help ensure that citizens — especially youth and marginalised voices — are not just protected from threats to democracy but are active shapers of its future



## GOING BEYOND THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

As we enter into “the second quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” as one Workshop participant put it, it is worth beginning to cast our visioning forward even further into deep time. Short term planning and visioning only ever beyond a single generation is a way of thinking that The European Union will need to abandon going forward in the context of long-term impacts as a result of environmental change.

The items mentioned as long-term worries in discussions are included in the following table but participants were tasked with locating this worry and suggest a positive solution to each:

Location	Worry	Solution
Northwest Europe	The movement of climate refugees as a result of growing inhospitable zones in equatorial regions from increased global temperatures and conflict.	Long term investment in habitation and strategic placement of climate refugees was seen as essential.
Eastern Europe	The Russian Threat: The Ukraine War showed the very real complacency which developed after the Cold War and how some states can still be aggressors.	Maintain diplomatic relations and sustainable trade and economic practices within the EU. The idea of an EU army was met with challenge to participants who recognized the need to stand up to a bully but who valued their neutrality.
Rural Ireland	The disintegration of rural Irish identity through changing culture and societal values.	Establishment of Culture Hubs for Irish people to practice their culture and to share it with and between new communities for cross pollination of cultural diversity on the island.
America	Participants felt that trust in allies was fragile, given the rapid change of policies by what they regarded as a close friend to Ireland.	Ireland has to choose now to grow closer to Europe or maintain its connections with USA and, in the tightrope between the growing gap caused by Trump, not fall.
Online	The growing power of AI, Internet Influence on young people and problems around responsible and controlled online practices.	The members felt generally that, in the long-term, they preferred a good governance guided approach rather than a free-for-all policy in regard to the growth of technology.
Trade	Reliance on any one item is unwise.	Diversity Ireland’s economic foundations as much as possible for resilience.

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## CONCLUSION

At its core, this report has argued that the future of Europe will be decided not only in Brussels or Strasbourg, but in towns, villages, and communities across Ireland and other EU states. When European policy is meaningfully connected to local experience, the EU ceases to be an abstract institution and becomes a shared civic project rooted in everyday life. For Irish communities, this connection offers both reassurance and possibility in a rapidly changing world.



**Above: Daniel Downey is the facilitator of the project and Coordinator of CavanPPN**

The evidence points toward a Europe that is increasingly aware of the need to balance collective strength with local identity. From rural development and environmental protection to digital access and democratic participation, the EU has the capacity to act as an enabling framework—one that amplifies local voices rather than replacing them. Initiatives such as participative democracy, community-led development, and democratic resilience show that Europe’s future need not be distant or technocratic, but grounded and human-centred.

Ireland’s experience demonstrates the value of this approach. Community structures, Local Development Companies, LEADER investments, civic engagement, and cross-border cooperation highlight how European values can be translated into tangible local benefit. As Europe navigates global uncertainty—geopolitical tension, climate change, technological disruption—its credibility will increasingly rest on its ability to protect wellbeing, inclusion, and dignity at community level.

Looking ahead, there is reason for optimism. A Europe that listens, invests, and collaborates can empower Irish communities to remain vibrant, resilient, and confident in their place within a wider democratic union. If the EU continues to align its ambitions with the realities and aspirations of local people, it can help build a future that is fairer, more sustainable, and more connected—proving that Europe’s greatest strength lies in the everyday lives of its citizens.

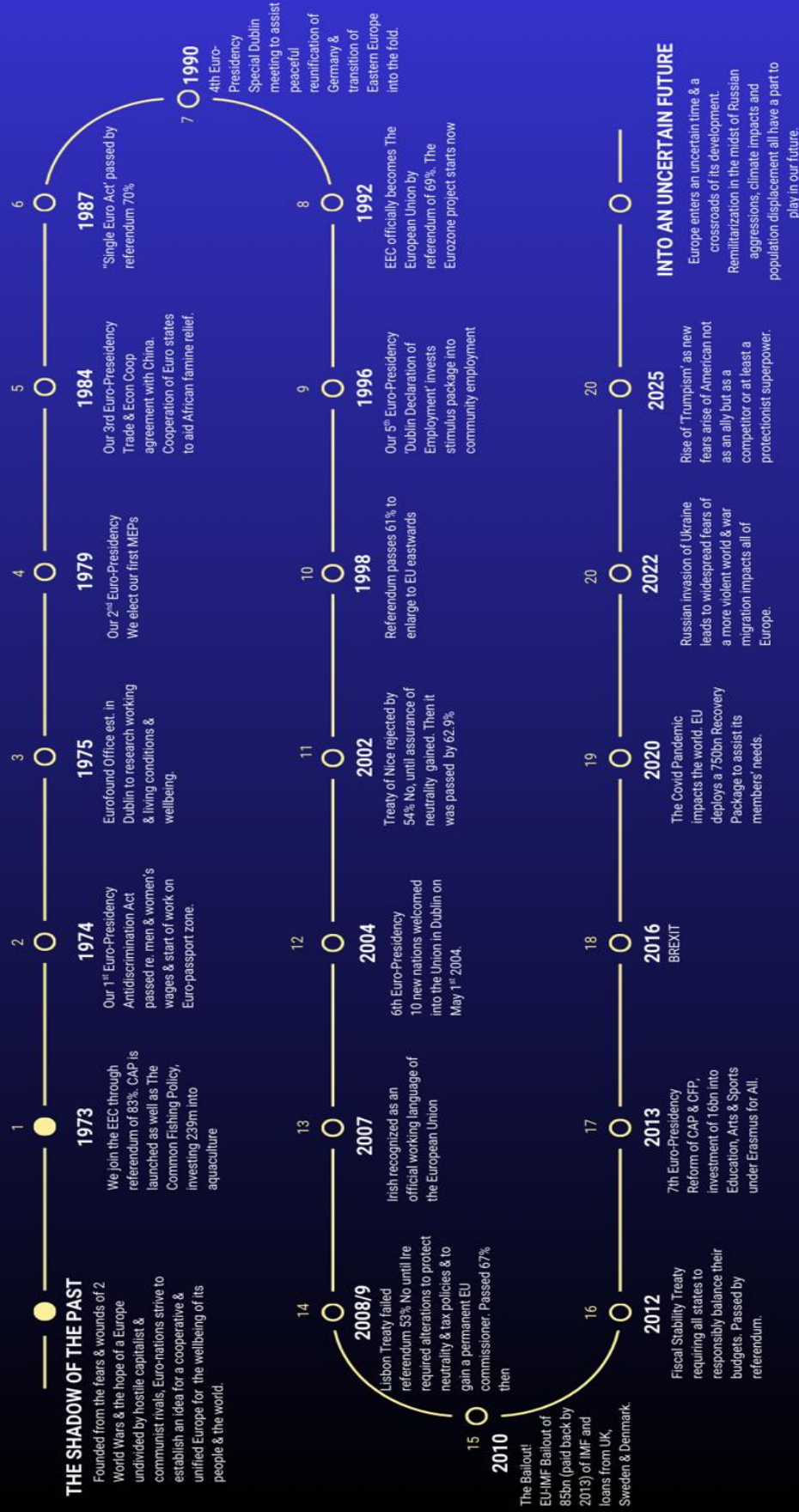
- D. Downey.

# EUROPE REIMAGINED: OUR IRISH TIMELINE OF EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT

## SMALL NATION, BIG IMPACTS



A EURO-VISIONING  
PROJECT BY CAVANPPN  
SUPPORTED BY DEPT OF  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS





# EUROPE RE-IMAGINED

## 1975 - 2025 - 2075

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This report was prepared by Cavan Public Participation Network thanks to funded investment by The Department of Foreign Affairs to assemble a panel of community participants to discuss the European Union at a local level.

It is also a visioning exercise about how local people see the European Union developing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the values and worries local communities have in regard to their future and the future of their continent in an Irish context.

It is hoped that this 'snapshot' of Europe from the grass roots community perspective of rural Ireland can help inform, shape and communicate the European Union to its members and shapers in the coming years.

### AUTUMN 2025

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Cavan Public Participation Network  
with the support of  
The Department of Foreign Affairs  
Authored by: Daniel Downey



An Roinn Gnóthaí  
Eachtracha agus Trádála  
Department of  
Foreign Affairs and Trade



Public  
Participation  
Network  
Cavan