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LYMEC Digital Assembly Outcomes Report

(Hybrid - Online and Belfast, Northern Ireland)

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Charting a Liberal Path to tackle the far-right and far-left

On Saturday 1 February, guests in Stormont, the parliamentary assembly in Northern Ireland, gathered with online participants from across the European Liberal family to discuss the Role of Youth in post-conflict spaces. Along with our moderator, **Sorcha Ní Chonghaile** (Policy Officer), we had three esteemed guests from a cross political and non-political backgrounds. The guests were: **Sorcha McAnespy**, Fianna Fáil National Executive member, **Eoin Tennyson**, MLA Alliance Party NI and **Tara Grace Connolly**, Human Rights Activist. The event lasted 2h30 minutes, with the first portion dedicated to this rights-led discussion.

The themes which arose from the initial inputs of each speaker largely shaped the beginning portion of the discussion with integrated education, civil society movements and trauma acknowledgement at the fore.

All speakers agreed that integrated education provides huge benefits to young people, with **Sorcha McAnespy** sharing the experience she had as a parent of girls who attended integrated schooling. Integrated schooling in Northern Ireland involves educating children from both Protestant and Catholic communities together in the same schools. The movement has grown over the years, with increasing numbers of parents opting for integrated education to support a more peaceful and cohesive future for Northern Ireland despite setbacks being encountered by politicians who are 'stuck in the past'. **Tara Grace** echoed this concern of the Peace Generation being expected to pick up the pieces of the past when politicians are in a position to do so immediately by seeking steps to improve cross-community programmes, implementing a Bill of Rights and keeping in step with EU directives post Brexit. **Eoin** shared the experience of being a politician of the Peace Generation and the efforts that he makes to create a future-forward approach to the issues being encountered post-Good Friday Agreement in the region. He highlighted the gap between some politicians who are largely unaware of the gap between communities and he shared insights of young people who did not have experience to get to know the other

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community growing up, and how that can impact perspective on the other. **Sorcha Ní Chonghaile** echoed this, citing the research work undertaken between Ulster University and Dublin City University on the 'Knowing Your Neighbour' project which aimed to improve multi-faith and integrated education in North and South of Ireland.

Concerning understanding trauma and the generational impact it can pose, all agreed that the current state of play with the UK has been lacking. Given that the GFA was merely 27 years ago this year, many families are only one generation removed from or are still surviving with lived traumatic experiences which shape experiences of growing up in NI. The Troubles (1969-1998) led to the loss of around 3,500 lives and many further survivors of violence with long-term impacts such as physical and mental disability. **Sorcha McAnespy** shared her experience of the borders before '98, especially of her parents' car being searched on drives to see her family in Co. Meath and she shared her experience of being a student in Omagh during the bombing which claimed the lives of 29 and injured 220 others. **Tara Grace** shared the experiences of families who were involved in the conflict and **Eoin** shared his experience as a young person growing up post-conflict. All speakers agreed that the Legacy Bill in the UK from the last government was harmful to families across the spectrum and this needs to be repealed as suggested by the current Prime Minister.

Civil society played a huge role in the discussion of what life for youth post-conflict looks like, especially in terms of youth opportunities and the experience of growing up in a time of relative peace. Concerns of lost opportunities internationally as a consequence of Brexit were echoed by all and the importance of having community spaces for shared activities and goals was highlighted. **Tara Grace** shared her experience of being involved in a youth group which sparked her love for human rights, **Eoin** as a young politician from that perspective and **Sorcha McAnespy** from her experience of growing up with civil rights supporters as family.

The key message of the assembly was clear - peace is a journey which is imperfect but it is the motivation for our actions. From a broader European perspective, Northern Ireland shows what can be done, and also the values of the European identity play a huge part in the future of peace for young people in the region.

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