[Manx English Then and Now]

PhD placement student, Andrew Booth, writes: The Library's sound archives contain voices from all over the world and up and down the British Isles. The Isle of Man was included in the Survey of English Dialects in the 1950s and 60s and the Sounds website features a fantastic recording of…

[New European Investment Bank loans under Juncker Plan set to mobilise €1 billion in investment for agriculture and bio-economy sectors]

The European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU bank, today announced the launch of a new financing initiative that aims to unlock close to €1 billion of investment in the agriculture and bio-economy sector. The bio-economy sector encompasses the value chains of production and the processing of food, material and energy using renewable biological resources from land and sea. This large EIB lending programme for agriculture and bio-economy outlines the Bank's broader support for this sector. The operation will be guaranteed by the EU budget under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which forms a central part of the [Investment Plan for Europe] of the European Commission under the Juncker administration. In a new Regulation applicable from early 2018, the scope of EFSI was [extended] to include a specific sectorial focus on sustainable agriculture and the wider bio-economy.

European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development **Phil Hogan** said: "*Facilitating access to finance to unlock investment in the agriculture sector is crucial to maintaining Europe's position as the global leader of high-quality, safe food products. This is where the Juncker Plan can play an important role. I am delighted to welcome this initiative which will, with the support of the Juncker Plan, provide a €1 billion boost to jobs and growth in Europe's rural economy*."

"*The agriculture and bio-economy value chains are key drivers of Europe's economy*," said EIB President **Werner Hoyer**. "*With this new initiative, the EIB is seeking to strengthen its support for the sector. I believe that this dedicated programme loan will enhance competitiveness and that it has the potential to create a multitude of future-oriented jobs in predominantly rural areas and smaller towns all over the continent. In this way it will contribute to mitigating rural-urban migration and, together with other measures and projects, will address the issue of rural depopulation through* *the promotion of rural and regional economic development*."

"*This programme loan will address the market weaknesses that currently constrain many of the companies active in the agriculture and bio-economy sector by accelerating and further mobilising private investment. It will enable the EU bank to expand and diversify its financing offer and reach out to new project promoters. With this single programme loan of €400 million we can expect to support more than €850 million worth of investments in the sector across Europe. The promotion of bio-economy value chains – for example in food and forestry-based industries – is key to achieving EU and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) objectives on the environment and the low-carbon/green economy*," added the EIB Vice-President responsible for bio-economy, **Andrew McDowell**.

In spite of its size and importance in the overall European economy, the agriculture and bio-economy sector is mainly made up of companies and cooperatives with relatively small investments, which are difficult to target with direct lending. The EIB is already active with Multi Beneficiary Intermediated Loans to support the implementation of smaller projects by farmers and small and medium-sized enterprises active in bio-economy value chains through commercial banks across Europe. The lending programme constitutes an initial, replicable EIB pilot that will enable direct lending for private sector investments (from €15m to €200m) with a loan amount ranging from €7.5m to €50m. The programme loan is expected to further increase the Bank's impact within this sector by strengthening the competitiveness of European companies active in bio-economy and agriculture. This will improve their long-term ability to invest in innovation and therefore to develop and market higher added-value products and services.

Projects allocated under the programme loan will be implemented in the period 2018-2022. Targeted investments will seek to promote the efficient and sustainable use of resources and the re-use of by-products, and to develop intellectual property through the support of private sector research, development and innovation.

Background information:

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the long-term lending institution of the European Union and is owned by the EU Member States. It makes long-term finance available for sound investment in order to contribute towards EU policy goals. In 2017, the EIB issued 11 000 loans worth €1.3bn to agriculture and fisheries. More information on EIB activities in the Agriculture sector.

The Investment Plan for Europe focuses on strengthening European investments to create jobs and growth. It does so by making smarter use of new and existing financial resources, removing obstacles to investment, providing visibility and technical assistance to investment projects. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is the central pillar of the Juncker Plan. It provides a first loss guarantee, allowing the EIB to invest in more, often riskier, projects. So far, the projects and agreements approved for financing under the EFSI are expected to mobilise more than €274 billion in investments and support around 600 000 SMEs across all 28 Member States. Find the latest EFSI figures here.

G7 Leaders’ Statement on Syria

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We, the G7 Leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European Union, are united in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, the use of chemical weapons in the April 7 attack in Eastern Ghouta, Syria.

We fully support all efforts made by the United States, the United Kingdom and France to degrade the Assad regime’s ability to use chemical weapons and to deter any future use, demonstrated by their action taken on April 13. This response was limited, proportionate and necessary – and taken only after exhausting every possible diplomatic option to uphold the international norm against the use of chemical weapons.

Use of chemical weapons is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention and constitutes a threat to international peace and security. The repeated and morally reprehensible use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in the past has been confirmed by independent international investigators. We condemn this deliberate strategy of terrorizing local populations and forcing them into submission. Syria’s possession of chemical weapons and their means of delivery are illegal under UN Security Council Resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention. We stand together against impunity for those who develop or use these weapons, anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances.

We remain committed to a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Syria. We commend and support UN Special Envoy de Mistura’s efforts towards an inclusive and credible political transition in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2254 and the Geneva Communiqué.

Visit the meeting page Download as pdf

The relentless drive to political union

The EU rests on the four freedoms – the free movement of goods, people, capital and ideas. It central political driver is now the Euro. The UK has never been willing to join the Euro, with around 80% of the public opposed and both major political parties against in practice. Many UK voters also have reservations about freedom of movement, which has meant successive UK governments have kept us out of the Schengen common border arrangements and have sought derogations or opt outs on other features like access to benefits.

The UK is therefore being a good European by withdrawing from the EU, because it is unable and unwilling to join two of the crucial founding policies of this Union. Our position has become extremely difficult, seeking to hold up or dilute policies designed to promote greater union. We have also been consistently unwilling to pay more into the budget to help the development of the Euro area.

A single currency needs a sovereign state with its taxpayers to support it. It needs large transfer payments from the richer parts of the zone to the poorer parts. It usually needs a common benefits system, large transfers through such a system, and further large transfers through local and regional government financing from the centre. The Eurozone has not yet been able to develop all of these mechanisms or to route sufficient cash through the mechanisms it does have to transfer money from rich to poor. The UK leaving will allow the Eurozone members to have a better debate over how far they need to go and have a wish to go to buttress their currency with proper arrangements to transfer cash and to even out minimum income levels around the zone.

Currently the Eurozone manages to live with a huge surplus run up by Germany, and large deficits incurred by Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal through financings via the European central Bank. This Bank accepts an interest free deposit from Germany and lends it on to the countries and their banks that need the extra money. It would be wise for the zone to consider longer term and more usual ways to handle the need for large transfers within a currency zone. Free of UK membership there can now be a much closer identity between the EU and the single currency it sponsors.

Negotiations begin on a mandatory

Transparency Register for the three EU Institutions

At their first interinstitutional negotiation, European Parliament negotiators Sylvie Guillaume and Danuta Hübner, together with Monika Panayotova, Deputy Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency, and Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** held an in-depth exchange of views on making certain types of interactions with their respective institutions conditional on registration by the interest representatives concerned in the Transparency Register.

Application of meaningful conditionality would make it mandatory for interest representatives to sign up to the Register and abide by its Code of Conduct if they wish to seek to influence the EU institutions. This principle would ensure for example that meetings and access to EU institutions' premises are subject to interest representatives fulfilling that condition.

Achieving a mandatory Register would represent the most significant improvement to the Transparency Register since its launch in 2011. Applying the principles of the Register to all three institutions would send a strong message to European citizens about the high levels of accountability of shared institutions ahead of the elections to the European Parliament in spring 2019.

The three institutions agreed on the next steps for the negotiations, including a commitment to ensure that the process is highly transparent. Notably, they agreed to host information sessions for stakeholders on the state of play, with a first session to possibly be held before the summer. Details of the information session will be published on the Joint Transparency Register Website in due course.

First Vice-President **Timmermans** said: *"Citizens expect to know who is influencing decision-makers in Brussels. We need a major step forward towards more transparency on who lobbies the EU institutions. Tonight we had a useful exchange of views, but there is still quite some way to go. We agreed to continue our work."*

Background

The European Commission presented its proposal for a new interinstitutional agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register for lobbyists covering the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission on 28 September 2016. The proposal aims to strengthen the framework for a transparent and ethical interaction between interest representatives and the three institutions participating in the new scheme. Since 2011, the Parliament and the Commission have jointly operated a public register for interest representatives aiming to increase the transparency and accountability of the EU decision-making process. The Council has been an observer to the current scheme since 2014.

On 15 June 2017, the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament, bringing together the Parliament's President and political group leaders, approved the Parliament's negotiating mandate and made it public.

The Council adopted its negotiating mandate on 6 December 2017 and also decided to make it public.