



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Referendum result may bring North and South closer

BYLINE: Diarmaid Ferriter

During the week, the Merriman Summer School in Ennis was timely in examining the theme of "our gallant allies in Europe". It offered a chance to reflect on how the wheel has turned over the decades in relation to Anglo-Irish relations and how joint involvement in the EU transformed perspectives.

In the 1960s, Europhile Garret FitzGerald was adamant that joining the EEC, far from being a betrayal of the "ideals" of 1916, was the logical culmination of the Irish struggle for independence, as it was about "rejoining once again the Europe from which for so many centuries she was cut off by the imposition of British rule. We shall negotiate our entry as a sovereign state . . . but for the sacrifices of those who won our freedom, none of this could have been."

According to British politician Roy Jenkins, FitzGerald handled Ireland's first presidency of the EEC in 1975 with aplomb, to the extent FitzGerald "succeeded in making London look peripheral to Europe, while Dublin was metropolitan".

This appetite for psychological liberation was reflected in other ways. In 1978, Dermot Nally, assistant secretary in the Department of An Taoiseach, was fed up about Irish exclusion from briefings about EEC monetary stability proposals and wrote to the taoiseach, Jack Lynch: "It would be no harm, if a suitable opportunity arises, to bring out once more again the fact that we are not an appendage of the British in the European communities."

Ultimately, however, it was Irish and British governments that became "gallant allies in Europe", not just because of Ireland's small size and its need for a powerful ally, but due to their extensive trade and political alliances and, more recently, the determination of both to campaign against Brexit. Now, in the aftermath of the British referendum, the Irish Government will be back in the business of emphasising Irish distinctiveness from Britain but at the same time their common needs, a significant foreign policy challenge.

'Anachronism'

What now for the Irish Border? Taoiseach Seán Lemass was adamant in 1962 that with membership of a common market "partition will become so obviously an anachronism that all sensible people will want to bring it to an end".

Seán Kennan, the Irish ambassador to Europe, was optimistic a decade later that "membership would obviously contribute significantly towards the ending of partition", while Patrick Hillery, as minister for foreign affairs, said: "Northern Ireland will become a European problem." In truth, the EU stayed aloof from the Troubles.

With the peace process, however, EU money was poured into reconciliation ventures. Europe was also the platform from which a "shared history" for the different communities in Ireland could be remembered and commemorated, one of most obvious examples being the nationalists and unionists 100 years ago that fought with the British army at the Somme.

Cathartic

Such attention to inclusive commemoration, alongside the peace process and the sense of an "invisible" Irish Border, has greatly improved relations between **North and South**. There was even, with the European soccer championships in France, a cathartic sense of peaceful and supportive co-existence between **North and South**, summed up in the French sports newspaper *L'Equipe's* "for atmosphere, Ireland is united".

Brexit could be analysed as a move that will harden the Irish Border. Alternatively, given the tension and disunity in the UK and the desire of most in the North to remain in the EU, it may be the case that the historic and seemingly misplaced predictions about the impact of the EU on Irish partition might come true.

Younger unionists who want to stay in the EU may feel less trenchant than their parent's generation about their unionism, and the desire of some to possess Irish passports may reflect something more than opportunism.

The soft Border, over which 30,000 travel each day, is convenient and valuable for both **North and South**, even more so now as both economies are exposed to the consequences of Brexit, perhaps one of the reasons why some unionists on the Leave side seemed half-hearted in their campaigning. The DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson was quick to spin a post-referendum unionist narrative, erroneously insisting his party "will be in a very strong position to influence what happens next". What the DUP will demand is "a strong package" for Northern Ireland's agricultural sector, and new, "favourable trading terms". He dismissed the idea Northern Ireland would take a financial hit: "We're going to have a lot more money within our own exchequer."

What Donaldson wants is what the North has now within the EU: free trade, a package of payments to assist agriculture and extensive subvention from the British exchequer.

The desire is for Brexit to change nothing. It is difficult to see this as anything other than arrogant delusion, with the potential to do damage to unionism and, arguably, in the long-term, make the prospects of Irish unity more likely.

Source: The Irish Times

July 4, 2016

Republic won't be negotiating for us, warns Donaldson

A SENIOR DUP MP has warned the Republic that it will not be negotiating on Northern Ireland's behalf with the EU.

Jeffrey Donaldson spoke out as speculation mounts that Taoiseach Enda Kenny is giving serious consideration to setting up an **all-island** forum to plot the way forward following the UK referendum vote to leave the EU.

Mr Kenny's plans have been welcomed by the SDLP and Sinn Fein - but the DUP said the Irish Government cannot speak for Northern Ireland in any forthcoming negotiations. The contentious EU referendum result is expected to top the agenda at a **North South** Ministerial Council in Dublin today. Mr Donaldson said there is no need for such a forum, adding that the DUP will make it clear at today's meeting that the main negotiations with the EU on behalf of Northern Ireland will be undertaken by the UK Government.

"There will be discussions in the **North South** Ministerial Council, including at Monday's meeting," he said.

"These will include how we continue to work together post-Brexit and deal with issues such as **north-south** trade and the common travel area.

"There will no doubt be similar discussions in the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly also meeting this week at Malahide.

"These bodies were set up to deal with such issues and we don't need another one.

"We are clear that the main negotiations will be undertaken by the UK negotiating team and we will be part of that through the NI Executive and our presence in Parliament.

"Using these channels we will seek to ensure Northern Ireland gets a good deal."

But SDLP leader Colum Eastwood claimed that the proposed new forum was essential.

"We believe that it is necessary to consider the issues and implications, not least in terms of helping to develop optimum coherence and consensus on how to minimise the adverse economic fallout and ensure growth on the island," he said.

"We must ensure that any border which is erected is only operational around the island of Ireland, not across it.

"This week we have had confirmation that neither the British Government nor the Northern Ireland Executive have put in place contingency plans to deal with the fallout of the referendum result.

"Here on the island of Ireland, we must map the challenges, purposes and priorities that could most affect us, **north and south**, rather than following the impulses and bad decisions of the British Government."

Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams also welcomed news of the proposed forum.

"Subject to seeing the details of the Taoiseach's proposals, I welcome the commitment to establish such a forum," said the Louth TD.

"Any such forum must have island-wide participation and involve the Assembly parties, the Oireachtas, the European Parliament and civic society.

"The vote of the clear majority of citizens in the north who want to remain in the EU must be respected and defended.

"The Remain vote brought together unionists, nationalists, republicans and others in common cause on the same platform. Those who campaigned for a Leave vote should also be invited."

Some 56% of voters in Northern Ireland wanted to stay in the EU while 44% opted to leave.

Overall, the UK voted to leave the UK by a slim majority of 52% to 48%.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

July 5, 2016

Enda Kenny slammed for handling of proposal for **all-island** Brexit forum

Irish premier Enda Kenny is coming under parliamentary pressure to set up an **all-island** forum to deal with Brexit despite a "humiliating" rejection from Northern Ireland's First Minister.

Mr Kenny said his invitation for an "island conversation" remains open to political parties and other organisations **north and south** but warned it would be divisive without cross-party agreement.

Arlene Foster, Stormont First Minister whose Democratic Unionists campaigned for a Leave vote, publicly dismissed the suggestion after a meeting of the **North South** Ministerial Council on Monday.

In the Irish parliament, the Dail, Mr Kenny was accused of having botched the idea by floating it over the weekend without consulting Ms Foster.

Labour leader Brendan Howlin said the Taoiseach's approach had "damaged" the authority of his office and "more importantly the interests of Ireland".

"At yesterday's press conference it became clear that the Taoiseach had failed to prepare the ground with the Northern Ireland First Minister and the result was that the proposal was rejected by her publicly in a very humiliating way," he said.

Micheal Martin, leader of the chief Opposition party Fianna Fail, said he found it incredible that the proposed forum was trumpeted by government ministers over the airwaves without consultations with Stormont.

The approach resembled a "shambles", he told the Dail.

"Very clearly now the will of the people of Northern Ireland is going to be subverted by the English nationalistic approach in terms of its future within the EU," he said.

"Brexiters have very little time for Northern Ireland, to be frank, and Northern Ireland will not be central to their engagement with Europe.

"We do need an **all-island** response here. But we need to work in advance before people start floating ideas just for the sake of spin over substance."

Some 56% of voters in Northern Ireland backed remaining within the EU.

The DUP was the only major party on the island to campaign for a Brexit.

In Dublin, Mr Kenny's minority Fine Gael-led government needs the support of Mr Martin's Fianna Fail - its age-old rival - to survive in power.

Mr Martin said a majority of people in Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU and that "additional capacity" is needed in government departments on both sides of the border to work towards that.

Mr Kenny said it was no time for political point-scoring and called on everybody to work together.

"It was a good idea and still remains a good idea," he said of the proposed **all-island** forum.

"And I keep open an invitation to everybody if they want to follow through on it."

Mr Kenny said the forum would not be a statutory authority and could not work if other parties did not buy into it.

But Gerry Adams, who said he first proposed the idea in a letter to all leaders last week, insisted a DUP rejection "should not be allowed to stand in the way of such a body".

The Sinn Fein leader said the DUP had previously opposed the Good Friday Agreement.

"There is actually an opportunity in all of these difficulties to redesign the future of the island of Ireland and of the EU," he said.

"But let's redesign the future of the island of Ireland first and the way to do that is to put together the forum."

Mr Adams claimed "civic unionism and civic society in general" would attend the proposed talks.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph