



 KONRAD  
ADENAUER  
STIFTUNG

 **European  
Movement**  
Ireland

# **Assessing Ireland's Global Future and Key International Relationships in 2021**

## **Publishers**

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
5 Fitzwilliam Street Upper  
Dublin 2, D02YH95 Ireland  
[www.kas.de/uk-irl](http://www.kas.de/uk-irl)

European Movement Ireland  
8 Lower Fitzwilliam Street  
Dublin 2, D02 W426  
[www.europeanmovement.ie](http://www.europeanmovement.ie)

## **Authors**

Stephen O'Shea  
Nathalie De Hertog  
Richard Cunningham  
Caoimhe McCarthy

## **Editors**

Stephen O'Shea  
Ciaran Murray

## **Design & Photography**

Ryan Levis  
Muireann O'Shea

## Contents

<b>Foreword Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung</b>	3
<b>Foreword European Movement Ireland</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	5
<b>Event Reports</b>	
1. Ireland & Germany's Priorities in post-Brexit Europe	6
2. Two Islands - One Future Ireland, the UK and the EU	8
3. A Multilateral Future: Ireland, the European Union and the United Nation	10
4. A Secure Future: Cybersecurity and the EU	12
<b>Learnings &amp; Conclusions</b>	
Ireland and the European Union	15
Ireland and the United Kingdom	16
Ireland's Multilateral Role	17
New Challenges: Cybersecurity	18

## Forewords

### Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung



The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is delighted to partner with European Movement Ireland to examine and promote discussion on a range of different perspectives, issues and opportunities that impact Ireland and its global relationships. We focus on the priorities and areas for potential cooperation, the mutual challenges and practical solutions for Europe, Ireland and Germany in the context of Europe's changing landscape.

As a German Political Foundation we are firmly committed to promoting liberal democracy, a social market economy, peace and freedom, transatlantic relations and European values. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has a worldwide institutional presence through its foreign offices as well as a broad network of local partners and experts.

With our activities in Ireland we aim to strengthen the friendship and close relationship between our two countries. Ireland and Germany share many common values and goals. German-Irish relations are more important now than ever.

I am very thankful to the authors and contributors of this publication for their informative analysis and valued opinion on Ireland and Germany's priorities in post-Brexit Europe, Ireland-UK relations, multilateralism and the growing importance of Cybersecurity.

We look forward to continuing our close working relationship with European Movement Ireland on aspects of German-Irish cooperation and Ireland's influence in the European and Global context.

**Matthias Barner**

**Director**

**Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, United Kingdom & Ireland**

## **European Movement Ireland**



European Movement Ireland's mission has remained the same since 1954 - to develop the connection between Ireland and Europe, and to achieve greater public understanding of and engagement with the European Union and with our European partners.

We do this by providing objective information and by stimulating debate. Our aim is to reach a wide range of audiences throughout Ireland and to inform our European colleagues, through international networks about the role Ireland plays in Europe and the EU, and the role that the EU plays in Ireland.

We believe that Ireland is best served by a population who understand the EU and the broader community of European states and engage constructively in its future development. While we support European integration and Ireland's membership of the European Union, we are independent and act with integrity.

In uncertain times, we are working to frame Ireland's place in Europe in accessible, understandable and engaging ways, with communities at home and abroad.

Our partnership with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung allows us to frame and explore issues relevant to Ireland from a broad European perspective. It enables us to reach new audiences and explore issues that inform our members, promote public engagement and, hopefully, provide informative and diverse perspectives to policy makers.

**Noelle O Connell**

**CEO**

**European Movement Ireland**



## Introduction

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and European Movement Ireland are working together to facilitate discussion, dialogue and fresh thinking on Ireland's European, international and multilateral relationships in a European and global context.

In late 2020 and during 2021 our work focussed on exploring Ireland's key international relationships from a number of perspectives through facilitated, high-level, public events.

Firstly, we looked at the relationship between Ireland and Germany in the context of the Future of the European Union. This discussion coincided with the German Presidency of the Council.

Secondly, we explored Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom, its implications regarding Northern Ireland and how it impacts on Ireland's relationship with the European Union. We also analysed how the emerging EU - UK relationship post-Brexit will impact on the EU and Ireland's place within it.

Thirdly, we examined Ireland's broader multilateral engagement and foreign policy priorities. From the perspective of Ireland's seat on the UN Security Council, we explored Ireland's commitment to multilateralism and how that commitment is complimented and informed by the European Union.

Finally, we turned our attention to new threats. Cybersecurity is increasingly becoming a priority in both foreign and domestic policy and we analysed how states can build resilience at all levels, supported the increasing role of the European Union in this area.

These rich discussions featured serving and former deputy prime ministers, cabinet ministers, Members of the European Parliament, senior diplomats, officials and academics who provided fresh, cutting-edge and diverse thinking on the issues.

This report presents the outcomes of these discussions and suggests some learnings and conclusions that arise.

## Event Reports



### 1. Ireland & Germany's Priorities in post-Brexit Europe

*Caoimhe McCarthy*

*11 November 2020:* This event discussed the priorities and the strong relationship between Ireland and Germany in the context of a post-Brexit EU.

Moderator, Noelle O Connell, CEO of European Movement Ireland introduced the event before passing over to Matthias Barner, Director of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung UK & Ireland. The current status of Brexit negotiations was examined as the deadline loomed. With multilateralism and cooperation valued by both Germany and Ireland, they expressed their commitment to working with the UK, building relationships with other EU Member States and there was a renewed enthusiasm to refocus efforts on the transatlantic relationship, given the recent US presidential election results. The panel consisted of Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence and H.E. Ambassador Deike Potzel, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Ireland.

In his opening remarks, Minister Simon Coveney TD outlined the Irish priorities and views, before speaking about Ireland's relationship with Germany and other EU countries and addressing questions around the Future of Europe. Taking into context the recent US Presidential election results, Mr Coveney stated that it is an important time to recommit to the transatlantic relationship and work together with our US partners on pressing global issues. COVID-19 was referenced as one of these issues where urgent and global cooperation is needed is to allow our economies and our people recover. The EU has shown great solidarity on this issue according to the Minister and he welcomed the EU Vaccines Strategy. Turning to Brexit, Minister Coveney stated that the Protocol remains the best and only way to address the unique circumstances of this shared island and that it needs to be implemented in good faith.

Speaking on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Minister Coveney referred to the Conference as an opportunity to consider the challenges we face and to take real action. The project needs to engage with ordinary people in simple language on topics that influence people's lives in very direct ways.

When discussing the rule of law, Minister Coveney welcomed the European Commission's first annual Rule of Law Report and noted how the EU must face up to this politically awkward issue in order to remain credible at home and abroad. He then outlined the close relationship between Ireland and Germany, citing the 2018 review of relations between the two countries and announcing that almost all of the strategy has already been implemented. The genuine relationship is aided by shared common values and commitment to the UN and Human Rights issues. This is important as Ireland takes up the seat on the Security Council, receiving the baton that is being handed over by Germany.

"Together for Europe's Recovery" was the model for the German presidency, stated H.E. Ambassador Deike Potzel, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Ireland at the beginning of her remarks. This six-month term focused on nine priorities, including overcoming the consequences of the pandemic and managing economic recovery. Ambassador Potzel pointed to the task of concluding Brexit negotiations as a top priority. The Ambassador echoed Chancellor Merkel's words, stating "We won't let Ireland down" and pointed to the strengthened ties between Ireland and Germany as a positive post-Brexit development. Ambassador Potzel finished by echoing the importance of strengthening the transatlantic relationship so that we can tackle global problems, such as climate change side by side. She concluded that in a global context, they are working to take on more responsibility as Germans and as Europeans.

Following the discussion, questions were raised about the potential threat to food supply into Northern Ireland and the possible disruption to the flow of goods to and from the republic.

When asked about the future relationship between Ireland and Germany, Ambassador Potzel noted that passing the baton to Ireland on the UN Security Council is an important opportunity to deepen the relationship between the two countries as it promotes close cooperation. She stated that Germany is the fourth biggest trading power to Ireland but there is still potential to tap into. In future, she would like to see closer political exchange between parliamentarians and the full implementation of the Joint Action Plan.

Following questions concerning the EU's future relationship with the UK, both Ambassador Potzel and Minister Coveney noted that it was important for their countries and the EU to maintain a close relationship with the UK. Minister Coveney admits that Ireland was significantly helped by the UK in the past, but now Ireland needs to focus on building relationships with other Member States to figure out where it fits in geographically. He continued to say that he has much respect for German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, as he reinforces the view that a small country like Ireland has the power to influence the EU, just like a large country like Germany does. It is not the prosperity of the economy or the power of the military of a country that should matter, but the strength of the argument.





## 2. Two Islands - One Future Ireland, the UK and the EU

*Nathalie De Hertog*

Thursday, 15 April 2021: The discussion, introduced by Matthias Barner, Director Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung UK & Ireland, and moderated by Noelle O Connell, CEO of European Movement Ireland, focused on potential areas of cooperation for future relations between the EU and the UK, Ireland's role in facilitating a mutually beneficial partnership, the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement, and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The panel consisted of Leo Varadkar TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Dr Katja Leikert, CDU Member of the German Bundestag; and The Right Honourable Sir David Lidington, Former Cabinet Office Minister.

In his address, An Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar TD, underlined that the Irish people have consistently remained pro-European, although Irish-EU relations have not always been entirely positive. He also spoke about a changing dynamic in Brussels in terms of leaning towards protectionism and the impact of Brexit on the whole of Ireland. However, Brexit has shown Ireland, and other smaller EU Member States, that sharing national sovereignty makes us stronger and that our interests are at the heart of the EU. As a result of Brexit, Ireland will also have to look for other alliances and partners. For example, on the issue of trade it aligns with Germany to uphold a multilateral based and working to strengthen transatlantic relations. Ireland sees Europe's future as a collective one, which should be policy-focused and citizen driven. On the future EU-UK relationship, Mr Varadkar argued that there is a responsibility to repair the relationship and to remain allies as challenges become increasingly global in nature.

Likewise, in terms of Ireland-UK relations we must ensure closer cooperation and increase engagement between government counterparts, as those discussions no longer take place on the margins of meetings at the EU institutions. They must become more institutionalised, especially with regard to Northern Ireland and on the Northern Ireland Protocol, which was carefully constructed and designed to ensure minimal disruption in the North whilst upholding the Good Friday Agreement and protecting citizens' rights.

There are significant economic opportunities for investment for Northern Ireland – as it has access to both the UK’s and EU’s single market – that need to be promoted. Ireland will continue to advocate for flexibility around the Protocol and be solution-oriented at EU level. However, Mr Varadkar stated that they will not support anything that undermines the EU’s single market integrity and called for more cooperation and a halt to unilateral action.

The UK, EU and Ireland find themselves at a critical juncture for several reasons explained Dr Katja Leikert MdB during her opening remarks. Firstly, the situation in Northern Ireland calls on both the EU and the UK to look at ways the Protocol can be tweaked, and the voices of Northern Ireland can be taken into consideration. Secondly, Dr Leikert argued that EU-UK relations will normalise with time as both need each other to tackle issues of a global nature, such as defence, China, and cybersecurity. Finally, the Conference on the Future of Europe presents an opportunity for the EU to listen to what changes the public wants. Some of the topics Dr Leikert would like to see discussed are a bigger role for the European Parliament in keeping the European Commission to account, cleavage between growing economy and inequality, legitimacy of the EU institutions and rethinking the way decisions are made in areas as foreign affairs and defence.

The world today is a less friendly place for liberal democracies than it has been for the past 30 years because of growing threats from Russia, increased technological dependence on China, climate change, terrorism and organised crime, and millions of people in the developed world questioning whether the democratic order is delivering anything for them. Sir David Lidington, argued in his opening remarks that Brexit has further divided the democratic world, weakened the EU and the UK as global players, and that neither side has given thought to what a long-term strategic relationship might look like. These common threats should increasingly drive both sides to work together and lay the basis for improving the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in their mutual interest. As regard to Ireland-UK relations, there is an interest in keeping peace in Northern Ireland and to institutionalise this relationship. The recent unrest in Northern Ireland is in part due to the tensions over the Protocol, which will require compromises to be made from both the EU and UK sides. The former needs to focus on upholding peace and proportionality, and the latter needs to show it stands by the Protocol and publicly accept it entails a different treatment of Northern Ireland on certain occasions.

During the discussion, various questions were raised on the impact of an all-Island border poll and economic prospects in Northern Ireland. Mr Varadkar said that there are different ideas on what reunification might look like and we must ensure Ireland is a home to all, which will require challenging people to alter their mindset. Sir David replied that a border poll is not inevitable and therefore unionists will be required to deeply reflect on a strategy on how they want to make the case for unionism against the backdrop of shifting demographics. Sir David further highlighted that the root of the conflict is identity, which is not capable of having a sole economic solution.

Further, the audience raised issues such as diverging food and veterinary standards between the EU and the UK, and the impact of Germany’s parliamentary elections on the future of Europe. Sir David argued that it would be beneficial for the UK to align on food and veterinary standards with the EU to help ease frictions over the protocol. Yet the government’s reluctance stems from the interpretation they gave to Brexit, which is to break away from EU rules, and to keep their options open to negotiate a trade deal with other third countries, which may be incompatible with EU food standards. On the impact of upcoming German parliamentary elections, Dr Leikert told the audience that Germany is set on cooperating and reviving relationships between the EU and the UK.



### 3. A Multilateral Future: Ireland, the European Union and the United Nations

*Stephen O'Shea & Richard Cunningham*

16 June 2021: This event, introduced by Matthias Barner, Director Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung UK & Ireland, and moderated by Noelle O Connell, CEO European Movement Ireland, examined the importance of multilateralism and the rules-based international order, from the perspectives of the EU and the UN. Ireland's seat on the UN Security Council presents major opportunity for it to shape multilateral developments. The EU and its Member States, including Germany, continue to defend and advance principles of global cooperation while the Biden Presidency has renewed the US's commitment.

The panel consisted of HE, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations; Frances Fitzgerald, MEP, Vice Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and Former Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) of Ireland; Ben Tonra, Full Professor of International Relations at the University College of Dublin School of Politics and International Relations

Speaking at the event, HE, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN referred to the challenges facing the UN Security Council such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and cyber security among others as the Council develops its overall approach to encounter such challenges. She contended that answers do not arise without multilateral solutions. Collective multilateral engagement enhances rather than diminishes Ireland's sovereignty, as is true for all nations. As a member of the European Union and as a member of the UN Security Council, Ambassador Byrne Nason highlighted Ireland's role in relentlessly promoting multilateralism and its commitment to shared solutions. Ireland's EU membership and engagement ensures it has the necessary capabilities at the UN Security Council and shared EU priorities are Ireland's "north star" in this regard. For example, as a facilitator on UN Security Council Resolution 2231, on the Iran Nuclear Agreement or the JCPOA, Ireland directly and indirectly supports the work of the EU. Ambassador Byrne Nason also highlighted the current US administration under President Biden has created a more enabling environment to pursue shared priorities at the UN.

Frances Fitzgerald, MEP for Dublin and Vice Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament pointed to the evolving nature of multilateralism which depends on the socio-political context, evident today in relation to the role of EU, China and the US. The COVID-19 pandemic has added a new dimension and complexity to global politics, highlighting the extent to which nations are interconnected as many common problems must be tackled through global cooperation. Ms Fitzgerald added that multilateralism has been viewed through the lens of economic progress, which should now be reoriented towards a resilient, equal, more sustainable and caring society that takes into account social concerns.

Ireland has always been a bridge-builder and staunch supporter of the multilateral rules-based international order that citizens have enjoyed over the last number of decades. However, many do not enjoy these values of liberal democracies that we sometimes take for granted. In the midst of a turbulent geo-political period, the renewed transatlantic relationship under President Biden gives Europe and Ireland the opportunity to further exert their influence on global fundamental values. Ms Fitzgerald also outlined the important role that gender equality plays in multilateralism, an issue that has been placed on the peripheral of high-level foreign affairs discussions to date.

Professor Ben Tonra stated that Ireland stands at a turning point in its foreign policy. Ireland has been driven by a tradition of commitment to the rule of law, collective security and multilateral institutions, working with its many international partners. It is time for Ireland to redouble its efforts in their defence not only based on principle but also because multilateralism in Ireland's self-interest. Therefore, Ireland must defend these values within the EU as well as defending them beyond its borders. Professor Tonra spoke of the gap that sometimes exists between the rhetoric Ireland deploys versus the resources it applies and of the necessity to match a mandate of principle with a practical mandate underpinned by sufficient resources. Therefore, the ongoing extension of Ireland's diplomatic network and the review of the role of the Defence Forces are important in that regard. Mr Tonra added that Ireland potentially has both the will and capacity to raise its game in the pursuit of advancing global peace, security and justice.

Following the discussion, various questions were raised on the EU's position within the UN. Ms Fitzgerald mentioned that the EU has been a leader in the area of climate action but stated that Europe could be a stronger player at UN level as the possibility of structural change of the UN arose. Ambassador Byrne Nason acknowledged that the UN has features of an anachronistic structure, particularly at the Security Council and discussed the important role that elected members play in pushing boundaries. Also, the Ambassador outlined the complexity of reaching agreements on foreign policy matters, adding that Ireland is open to greater discussion about reform of the Security Council. Professor Tonra emphasised the significance for the credibility of the multilateral system to respond and preferably prevent crises including in relation to climate change and pandemics, among others.

Further questions arose on peacekeeping, threats to the multilateral system and reaching agreement at UN level. Ambassador Byrne Nason said that fellow Member States look to Ireland's peacekeeping capacities to help build up peacekeeping capacities in Africa. Ms Fitzgerald spoke of the importance for multilateral actors to address the threat of cybersecurity, an area through which authoritarian powers interfere with European democracies, calling for cooperation by European democracies on this matter. Ambassador Byrne Nason spoke of the importance of building alliances with fellow UN states and emphasised Ireland's commitment to human rights underpins all its work on the Security Council.



Professor Tonra reflected on the similarities between the EU and UN regarding the difficulty of finding agreement on foreign policy matters and the possibility of further conversations on how decisions can be made at EU level, particularly the requirement of unanimity in many foreign policy decisions. On EU-US relations, Professor Tonra sees the relationship at the heart of the UN multilateral system which nevertheless must adapt to geo-political realities.



#### 4. A Secure Future: Cybersecurity and the EU

*Caoimhe McCarthy*

25 November 2021: The event was introduced by Matthias Barner, Director of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung UK and Ireland and moderated by Noelle O Connell, CEO of European Movement Ireland. The role of the EU Cybersecurity Strategy in promoting cyber-resilience, safeguarding data and keeping the online economy secure was analysed. The panel discussed issues concerning prevention, securing critical infrastructure and protecting intellectual property, while also developing capabilities to respond and equipping organisations and citizens. The event also looked at the experiences of EU Member States and the recent attack on the Irish Health Service.

Jo De Mynck, Head of Operational Cooperation Unit in the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) began his opening remarks by highlighting ENISA's a recent report which draws attention to the increased impact and frequency of cybersecurity incidences, with ransomware being one of the primary security threats. He stated that there has been a recent flood of misinformation and disinformation and urged policymakers to put these issues at the core of their agenda. The EU Cybersecurity Strategy contains concrete proposals for employing regulatory and policy initiatives across three areas: resilience; operational capacity and cooperation. Mr De Mynck stressed the importance of keeping pace so that emerging technologies are not misused by cyber-criminals. The EU Joint Cyber Unit is an important step towards completing the European cybersecurity crisis management framework.



The second speaker, John Reyels, Head of the Cyber Policy Coordination Staff with the German Federal Foreign Office noted that this past year has seen many premieres in the cyberworld including several significant attacks on critical infrastructure such as the attack on the German Parliament, the Bundestag, and the cyberattack on the Irish health sector. Mr Reyels expressed the concern that exists among diplomats over the destabilising nature of these cyber-attacks. While international human rights laws apply in the cyber world, Mr Reyels admitted that more work needs to be done to improve the application of these laws in the cyber-world. As they were conceived at a time when the cyber-world was unimaginable. Mr Reyels stressed the need for EU countries to engage with the processes at the United Nations such as the Open-Ended Working Group, that strive to build a framework for safe and responsible behaviour in cyberspace. Mr Reyels praised the cooperation that exists at an EU level, such as through the EU Toolbox mechanism that allows EU partners to respond to a crisis in unison, whether that is by releasing a joint statement or putting in place sanctions against perpetrators. The EU should work towards having standard policies when it comes to trustworthy suppliers, particularly when dealing with critical infrastructure.

Brian Honan, CEO and Principal Consultant for BH Consulting Cybersecurity and Data Protection discussed the knock-on effects that cyberattacks can have on society, pointing to the HSE cyberattack and the Colonial Pipeline that disrupted access to health care and fuel prices respectively. Mr Honan pointed to the work being done at an EU level but stated that policy alone will not solve this issue. We need the wider international community to engage in cyber diplomacy, as many attacks come from groups based in countries outside of the EU. Mr Honan echoed the point made by Mr Reyels about the need to have trustworthy suppliers. Some technology will come from others who may not share the same democratic values or respect for human rights as we hold. According to Mr Honan, we need to assist citizens and businesses to become more aware of how to improve their cybersecurity and prevent attacks. Laws and regulations, together with cyber diplomacy and education for citizens, can help prevent and mitigate against cyberattacks. Mr Honan concluded by saying that in order to build a European Union that is based on the individual freedoms and rights and one that has a thriving and resilient economy, we need to focus on not only technology, but also policy, diplomacy and people.

Following the discussion, questions were posed about the potential threat of cybercrime to the integrity of electorate processes and what EU institutions and governments can do to prevent and deal with attacks. Jo De Mynck said that while ENISA can offer advice to Member States, these issues can be dealt with on a national level and he encouraged countries to share best practices and lessons learned. John Reyels replied by saying that governments need to build sensitivity among the public about these threats and need to make the citizens aware of any active campaigns of disinformation surrounding elections. Brian Honan added that awareness campaigns should encourage people to get news from trusted sources. He would also like to see more pressure being put on social media platforms to monitor and regulate rogue accounts that are used to amplify and spread this disinformation.

A questioner asked Mr Honan how policy makers and citizens could be supported in relation to areas like technology in smart cities, GDPR and autonomous vehicles. He highlighted how society has generally viewed cybersecurity exclusively as an IT problem. However, recent cyberattacks have alerted people that cybercrime can affect all corners of society and that IT experts alone cannot solve these issues.

He urged people to start raising cybersecurity and privacy issues with politicians and policy makers so that these topics are prioritised.

John Reyels was asked how EU initiatives such as PESCO can be used to help Member States meet challenges posed by cyber-attacks. He admitted that it can be complicated, but we need to find ways to pool together our resources to counter the threats we face and used NATO as an example of how this can be done. He recommended that at a national level, countries should build on their individual cyber defence forces, while the EU has the responsibility of creating a platform for States to share best practices and create capacity for a joint cyber response when necessary. Jo De Muynck outlined the ENISA projects that currently exist to facilitate the pooling of expertise and encouraged further cooperation between states to ensure an adequate response should a large-scale cyber crisis happen.

Following a question about what the EU can do to reassure the Irish people that their data is safe after the recent cyberattack on the Irish Health Service, Mr De Muynck outlined that many lessons were learned and that this case demonstrated how communication and rapid common situational awareness is critical.

Answering a question based on whether militaries can learn from the cooperation seen by policing services in the cyber domain, Mr Reyels drew attention to the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention which provides a mechanism allowing for the exchange of information across borders. This should be used as an important blueprint for international cooperation in the cybercrime field.

## Learnings & Conclusions

*Stephen O'Shea*

The events in this series explored the challenges, opportunities and risks that affect and impact Ireland's international relationships in European and multilateral contexts.

Themes ranged from Ireland's bilateral relations with Germany and the United Kingdom and how those relations affect Ireland's place in Europe. European cooperation more broadly was analysed from an Irish perspective, alongside questions regarding the current state of multilateralism in the context of Ireland's seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Finally, new and emerging threats, particularly cyber security, were also considered.

The rich discussion during the four events provided crucial insights into current and future thinking on these issues.

### **Ireland and the European Union**

Ireland benefits from the solidarity and unity of purpose which gives the EU its strength. This was most evident after Brexit when Ireland's interests aligned with the EU's during the negotiations on the Withdrawal Agreement and the subsequent Trade and Cooperation Agreement. The benefits have also been evident in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the implementation of the EU Vaccine Strategy and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

However, while the EU has acted with intent and effectiveness in many areas, progress has been slower in others. From an Irish perspective, backsliding on the rule of law is concerning and its defence is important in terms of maintaining the EU's credibility. Ireland is a supporter of a strong EU position on the rule of law and particularly the conditionality mechanism to protect the EU budget.

Throughout the series, broad support was expressed for strengthening the EU's influence and proactivity on the global stage. Positions and opinions regarding how to best achieve this remain diverse, reflecting the diversity of opinion on these matters at EU level and the situation regarding Ireland's military neutrality. As a state, Ireland also faces challenges mobilising the resources to support its global ambitions. The ongoing and significant expansion of its diplomatic presence, the provision of extra resources to the Department of Foreign Affairs and the review of the role of the Defence Forces are important potential drivers of Ireland strengthening its global role.

Ireland's relationship with the European Union is changing, particularly because of Brexit but also because of developments at EU level. Its relatively new position as a net contributor has altered the dynamic and creates the potential for the relationship to be viewed through a more transactional lens. Issues related to trade, corporate taxation and the digital economy create tension points and, while it would be an overstatement to categorise these as a divergence of interests, they do highlight areas where work and effort is required to ensure interests continue to align.

In this regard, following the departure of the UK, Ireland is seeking new European allies in areas where the views of it and the UK previously aligned. Protecting and defending free and open trade is a key priority for Ireland and it is seeking new partners to defend these values. The successful deployment of diplomacy throughout the Brexit process and more recently during the OECD negotiations on global tax reform point to Ireland's ability to positively influence to maintain and advance its interests at an EU level.

Germany's importance as a key bilateral partner and ally for Ireland in the European Union has increased since Brexit. The historic, mutually warm relationship has evolved into a strong, well-resourced partnership. In recent years Ireland has increased the size of its embassy in Berlin and opened a consulate in Frankfurt. The two countries have a Second Joint Plan of Action for Enhanced Cooperation.

However, there is more scope to increase cultural and political exchanges. Both countries hold many shared priorities at EU level, particularly related to Rule of Law, Climate and Digital Policy and the EU's global role.

Strong support for the EU position and Irish situation in post-Brexit developments continue to be recognised and appreciated by Ireland. Indeed, the understanding of the Irish position and evident support from Berlin after the referendum and throughout the subsequent years has ensured the EU position remained strong throughout the negotiations and machinations that followed. The stability of this position is aligned with Germany's ultimate desire for the EU and UK to have a beneficial and productive future relationship. Brexit has strengthened the ties between Ireland and Germany, a positive development recognised by both sides.

Ireland has a strong interest in a close and productive transatlantic relationship between the European Union and the United States. Its traditional close ties to Washington, combined with strong business and trade links, ensures an enduring Atlanticist outlook. While it may no longer be the case that Ireland is metaphorically closer to Boston than Berlin, Ireland remains a strong supporter of and advocate for closer EU - US ties in many areas. The role of the US in supporting the Northern Ireland peace process, and the strong personal support of the Good Friday Agreement from President Biden and his administration, underlines the importance of the Irish - US relationship in informing its EU perspective.

## **Ireland and the United Kingdom**

A positive, mutually beneficial and constructive relationship between the EU and the UK is in Ireland's interest and the opposite is a key strategic risk on many levels. Mistrust and acrimony between the EU and UK weaken the ability of both to influence issues a global level and damage the bilateral relationship between Ireland the UK.

Throughout the Brexit process there was resignation to the fact that the final outcome would ultimately be disruptive. However, the level of political disruption, mostly due to the ongoing negotiating positions and tactics of the UK government was not anticipated.

Ireland and the EU remain aligned to view that the way forward is through dialogue and normal democratic politics. However, advancing that position is dependent on goodwill and mutual trust. The absence of both at the EU - UK level and increasingly at the Ireland - UK level is problematic from an Irish perspective.

Since the Good Friday Agreement, successive Irish governments could rely on a good relationship with their British counterparts underpinned by a mutual interest in maintaining political stability in Northern Ireland and advancing the peace process. Common membership of the European Union complemented these objectives.

However, in the evolution of the EU - UK relationship, Northern Ireland has become the central point of contestation with the unintended consequence of making the EU a third actor in the ongoing deliberations relating to Northern Ireland. The Ireland - UK relationship concerning Northern Ireland has changed from a bilateral one involving two EU member states to a multilateral one mired in acrimony.

This situation is undermining trust between Ireland and the UK and impacting the bilateral relationships at all levels. The absence of contact at political and official level which previously took place within EU structures is an added problem. A renewed effort is required to institutionalise the relationship through regular meetings at political and official level and through the secondment of personnel.

The departure of the UK from the EU has left it weaker and a more challenging place from an Irish perspective. Ireland sees the UK ultimately as an ally of the EU and its Member States, with a similar world view and similar positions on the major challenges affecting geopolitics.

An optimistic scenario presented is that Brexit was an earthquake with the aftershocks still present. Once these ultimately subside, the EU and UK will converge on areas of mutual cooperation, potentially in the areas of defence and security, climate and data and digital. However, this increasingly looks like a long-term prospect, clouded by the possibility of an enduring Brexit cleavage in UK politics which would tie the health of the future relationship to make-up of the government in London.

From an Irish perspective, a functioning EU - UK relationship is a vital national interest, crucial if it is to avoid becoming stuck in the middle of long-term acrimony between the two sides with the difficult choices and limited room for manoeuvre that would present.

On the UK relationship, Germany believes the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland is binding and must be implemented pragmatically and in line with the agreed text. Germany shares a common interest in improving the EU - UK relationship including structural inclusion of UK in important debates and strengthening cultural, economic and political links. There is a determination to normalise the relationship as we move into the future aligned to common geopolitical challenges.

## **Ireland's Multilateral Role**

Ireland holds a seat on the UN Security Council for 2021 and 2022. It is the fourth time the country has served on the UNSC. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason, Ireland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations suggested that Ireland had grown up at the United Nations and, as such, the UN and multilateralism are at the heart of its international relationships.

As a small state with limited resources and capacity, multilateralism is in Ireland's interest. In fact, it could be suggested there is no alternative. This reality, combined with the skill and experience amassed at the UN, has enhanced Ireland's credibility and capability.



The relationship between Ireland and the UN receives less attention than the EU. However, the UN provides Ireland with additional global opportunities, for example the long track-record of participation in peace-keeping missions. Its position on the Security Council provides an opportunity to engage with new and emerging threats and different geopolitical regions. For example, considering 60 percent of the UNSC's work concerns Africa, this gives Ireland a perspective that would otherwise be absent. A similar argument can be made regarding its facilitator role on progress towards implementing Iran's nuclear agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Key to Ireland's success at the UN, particularly on the UNSC, is EU membership which provides scale, resources and guidance to draw on and enhances Ireland's ability to act.

If multilateralism is core to Ireland's interests, then the future of multilateralism is a concern. The concept and operation of multilateralism is evolutionarily and increasingly includes multiple actors outside of states, for example civil society and the private sector. Yet much of its architecture, particularly the UNSC, has remained static.

This static architecture has contributed to barriers to diversity demonstrated by the lack of representation from some parts of the world among the five permanent members of the Security Council, in the voting bodies of other institutions or the absence of gender equality across international politics and diplomacy.

Structural change at the UN is clearly required and in the best interests of collective multilateralism. However, with little prospect of UNSC reform, elected members such as Ireland play an important role in terms of representation, legitimacy and the progressivity of that body.

The multilateral order is increasingly contested. The credibility of the system rests on its ability to prevent and respond to crises. Regional organisations, particularly the EU, must be a champion, supporter and defender of multilateralism in this regard and, in so doing, establish its own relevance as a key multilateral actor. However, to be legitimate and effective it must get its own house in order and that means defending rule of law at home.

The transatlantic relationship has underpinned the modern multilateral order and therefore the United States' commitment to multilateralism is also a key interest for Ireland.

### **New Challenges: Cybersecurity**

Ireland was on the front lines of cybersecurity in 2021 as national health service systems sustained severe damage during a cyber-attack. The resulting disruption during a pandemic and the substantial resolution costs demonstrated the real and serious nature of the cyber threat faced by states. In Ireland, this was the year when cybersecurity transitioned from being a theoretical risk to a grave danger. The attack on the health service exposed vulnerabilities in the Irish state's resilience and ability to respond. However, the broader system recovered, mounting a comprehensive response in terms technical resolutions and criminal investigations.

As a small state with very limited military capacity, Ireland could quickly slip into a cycle of disadvantage in terms of its cyber-capability. However, the lessons arising from the attack on the health service, coupled with the tools and resources available to it at EU level, provide an opportunity to get ahead of the threat.

Ireland is fortunate on two fronts. First and most importantly, the EU is attaching real importance to cybersecurity priorities. The development of the Joint Cyber Unit builds on the experience and capability of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and is a welcome addition to the cybersecurity space. The technological capabilities of malicious actors combined with the geographical reality of Russian cyber capability has forced the EU to up its game on many levels ranging across, policy, defence, diplomacy and technical capabilities. Ireland should seize the opportunity to involve itself in the progressing initiatives across all these levels to build its capability and resilience, while also contributing to the broader European effort. Increasing cooperation with Member States with developed capabilities and experience should become tenets of pre-existing strong bilateral relationships, Germany being the obvious example.

Secondly, Ireland is also fortunate to have well established relationships with the United Kingdom, particularly in the area of police cooperation but also at the defence and diplomatic levels. Maintaining and advancing these channels provide an additional opportunity for Ireland to develop its capability and resilience.

Finally, considering the destabilising effect of cyber-attacks on international relations and on international stability, it is in Ireland's interest to support and enhance cyber-diplomacy efforts. With significant diplomatic capabilities at EU and UN levels, Ireland is well placed to be an active and effective participant in this sphere and in so doing can enhance its European and global alliances.

