CHAPTER

9   Ireland and European Governance 🔓

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Abstract

Irish membership of the European Communities in 1973 represented the most significant development in the life of the independent state, and it helped to refashion the economic, political, and social landscape. Membership of the EU brought considerable change to domestic politics, and also to the executive and administration. Adjusting to a dynamic rules-based supranational order required adaptability and pragmatism. This chapter evaluates the impact of 'Europe' on Ireland, and the extent to which there are patterns of 'Europeanization' in politics and public life as a result of almost five decades of EU membership. It argues that, domestically, Ireland used EU membership as a vehicle for modernization, while externally, the EU provided an increasingly important 'geopolitical anchor'. And although this Europeanization has been far from uniform, the effect has been a move towards a more self-conscious 'choice for Europe'. Brexit has confirmed this renewed commitment to European integration.

Introduction

THE EU constitutes both a unique *sui generis* form of political community and a historically significant experiment in cross-national governance. A Community born out of the ashes of devastating conflict in 1945 has endured through an unprecedented structure of shared sovereignty, mutual reciprocity, and ever-deepening interdependence. This is operationalized through a complex web of supranational institutions and agencies. Despite almost permanent tensions and seemingly endless crises, the EU endures as *the* great laboratory for reconstituting contemporary international relations.

The attainment of Irish membership of the European Communities in 1973 represented the most critical development in the life of the independent Irish state, and it helped to refashion Ireland in myriad ways. Membership of the EU brought considerable change to the domestic political order in Ireland, and, in particular, to the executive and bureaucratic functions of government. Adjusting to a dynamic and evolving rule system required a great degree of adaptability; compliance with EU directives and regulations on everything from environmental measures to medicines, financial passporting to phytosanitary standards, often challenged the capacity of the state to honour its commitments. The state's adjustment thereto ultimately led to Ireland moving from the periphery to the mainstream stratum of member states of the EU (Murphy and O'Brennan, 2014).

This chapter evaluates the impact of 'Europe' on Ireland and the extent to which we can evince patterns of 'Europeanization' in Irish politics and public life as a result of more than four decades of EU membership. The chapter first presents a brief overview of the academic literature on Europeanization and proceeds to examine Irish institutions and politics for evidence of EU-influenced change. The 'European' strand of governance in Ireland has, over time, become a domestic layer as the boundaries of what were ↳ previously discrete national and supranational areas of policy have gradually dissolved. Europeanization, in different forms, has played a decisive part in shaping Irish economic, political and social life over almost five decades of membership (O'Brennan, 2012). Indeed, this chapter will argue that Ireland used EU membership as a vehicle for development, modernization, and Europeanization. Externally, EU membership provided Ireland with a significant voice and influence within European politics.

The difficulties experienced by the UK in seeking to detach itself from the EU after the Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016 provide a striking reminder of the depth of interpenetration of economies and legal systems set in train by EU membership. Arguably, Ireland's commitment to European integration deepened significantly because of Brexit: with every unanticipated crisis experienced by the UK, the Irish choice to commit to European integration became clearer, despite the potentially significant collateral damage wrought on the island of Ireland by Brexit. This commitment is reflected in both elite and mass views of the value of EU membership, and has solidified over time. Indeed, even deep periodic crises such as those generated by the failure of the Nice and Lisbon treaty referendums in 2001 and 2008 or the profound austerity inflicted after the 'Celtic Tiger's' financial implosion in 2008–9 did not negatively impact on the Irish relationship with the EU in the longer term. In fact, a 2019 poll conducted by European Movement Ireland showed support for EU membership at a record high level of 93 per cent (EMI, 2019). This chapter will argue that Ireland's experience within the EU has been cumulatively transformative, marked by rational and pragmatic adaptation to EU rules and a move away from mainly functional and utilitarian understandings of Irish membership to a determination to move to the mainstream of European integration.

Europeanization

Ireland's adaptation to European integration is best understood with reference to the academic literature on Europeanization, which was defined originally by Robert Ladrech (1994: 32) as 'an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC [European Community] political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making'. Europeanization is hence primarily a top-down concept, employed for analysing the impact of European integration on developments at the national level. The EU creates new exit, veto, exchange, and informational opportunities for domestic actors, and therefore changes the domestic opportunity structure for exerting meaningful political influence. The idea is thus simple: states are not homogeneous, monolithic entities, and the process of European integration may empower certain groups or institutions while reducing the power of others as integration proceeds (O'Brennan and Raunio, 2007). This view is also adopted by Radaelli and Pasquier (2007), who emphasize a downward causation or 'the way domestic structures adapt to EU pressures'. Such an approach has been widely embraced by scholars as 'the post-

ontological focus of European integration' (Radaelli, ↳ 2000: 6), where the emphasis is not on formations of the institutions at EU level, but on examining the impact of the EU on member states (Sedelmeier, 2011). Featherstone and Kazamias (2001) further stress that Europeanization is a dynamic process unfolding over time and through complex interactive variables, producing sometimes contradictory, divergent, and contingent effects.

Europeanization research also highlights the important ways in which the domestic implementation of EU policies (compliance with EU directives and regulations) acts as a catalyst for domestic change. The 'EU directive transposition' research agenda (Börzel, 2001; Mastenbroek and Kaeding, 2006) has added significantly to the body of knowledge on how the EU impacts on domestic matters. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeir (2005) distinguish between formal change (the legal transposition of rules) and behavioural change (the practical application and enforcement of those rules). Here, domestic changes are seen as developments emanating from the policymaking output and/or decision-making of the EU in the form of directives and regulations (or, more broadly, EU rules). Europeanization is then understood as the change within a member state whose motivating logic is tied to EU policy or decision-making processes (Ladrech, 2010). This approach highlights the extent to which domestic 'pushback' against EU rules can matter.

Where adaptation to EU rules presents significant domestic costs for governments, whether financial or electoral, pushback can occur. Veto players may zealously protect their privileges and place obstacles in the way of domestic enactment of EU measures. However, the cumulative effect of European integration is inevitable.

This chapter evaluates the degree to which these EU dynamics have spilled over into and become part of the organizational logic of Irish politics and policymaking since 1973. In this context, the outcomes for Ireland are not inevitable or given. Rather, they depend on the interaction between the Irish level and EU level but with a more decisive flow from the European downwards to the national level. The Irish story is not, however, a linear one. It demonstrates 'pushback' and 'veto playing' on important domestic issues by powerful coalitions and groups, especially the agricultural lobby. But ultimately the Irish experience of EU membership conforms to the image of Europeanization presented by Bulmer (2007: 47) as a pattern of 'transfers' from the EU to Ireland of ideas, norms, institutional arrangements, and systems of best practice, which helped to transform domestic modes of governance and bring Ireland into the mainstream of European integration.

Europeanization comes in 'thin' and 'thick' forms. A thin form of Europeanization is limited to changes in elite behaviour and rhetoric (Schimmelfennig, 2001), whereas thick forms of Europeanization involve substantive internalization of EU norms, and thus real and profound changes in the structures of consciousness of the actors participating in these processes (Flockhart, 2010: 791).

For Ireland, the initial set of impulses for joining the European Communities were almost exclusively economic. Thus, the early Irish embrace of European integration was functional, transactional, and utilitarian; it revolved almost exclusively around what material gains could be derived from participating in the integration process. To that extent, the Irish enthusiasm for membership is more easily understood with

p. 148   reference ↳ to thin forms of Europeanization rather than thick ones. The justification for Irish membership was understood by Irish elites—and thus sold to Irish citizens—as overwhelmingly economic; and that hardly seems surprising given that Ireland's net receipts from the EU since 1973 have exceeded €46 billion. The narrative emphasized, in particular, gains from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and, later, regional, social, and structural funds. Rhetorical support for European integration was accompanied by a strong attachment to nationalism (especially during 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland), and the 'transposition–implementation' gap (adoption of EU legislation) left Ireland a laggard in many areas of integration. But over time, that pattern of thin engagement with EU integration gave way to somewhat thicker forms of Europeanization, which will be explored throughout the rest of this chapter. This change took place over a long period of time, was often contested and far from uniform, and endured through periods of extreme volatility in domestic and European politics (the aftermath of the failed Nice and Lisbon referendums and the economic depression that hit Ireland in 2008). The crisis engendered by Brexit cemented the Irish 'choice for Europe' and has set in train a further deepening of commitment to collective EU decision-making.

Institutional Arrangements: Strong Executive, Weak Legislature, Effective Bureaucracy

As discussed in other chapters in this volume (notably MacCarthaigh, Chapter 19, and Martin, Chapter 21) the most important features of the Irish model of institutional governance are a strong executive, a weak parliament, and a highly professional and effective civil service. All three institutions have engaged with the EU, but to different degrees and with significantly differentiated outcomes. The Europeanization of Irish public policy has been managed from the centre, by what has been termed the 'Holy Trinity' of Irish government: the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Finance, and the Department of the Taoiseach (Laffan and O'Mahony, 2008: 64). Supporting the executive, the Irish civil service has also played an important role, especially in managing 'Team Ireland' in Brussels. The least significant role has been played by parliamentarians, who have had little input into EU decision-making and demonstrate a much shallower engagement with 'Europe'.

Ireland represents a puzzle for scholars of institutionalism and comparative politics. For much of the period since independence in 1921, the unique historical legacies rendered it difficult to place its party system on the traditional 'left–right' spectrum (as discussed by Little and Farrell, Chapter 30). In a comparative European context, the Irish governance landscape developed in a highly centralized direction that owed

much to the British Westminster traditions of the early twentieth century. The executive sets the agenda for the Oireachtas and exerts close control over the timing and passage of ↳ bills within the legislature. Indeed, such is the exceptional level of control by the government that the Taoiseach is viewed as one of the most powerful heads of government in Europe (Coakley, 2005: 113)

From the earliest days of EU membership, the day-to-day business of managing Ireland's relations with Brussels initially fell to the Department of Foreign Affairs, coordinated through the Irish Permanent Representation in Brussels. Subsequently, we have seen phases of periodic rebalancing of responsibilities between Foreign Affairs and Finance, the latter of which, from the beginning of statehood in 1922, had been the pre-eminent government department. The twin processes of deepening and widening of the EU triggered a significant change within the relationship between the two departments, with Foreign Affairs taking on more responsibility (and status) over time. A new post of Minister of State for European Affairs (a non-cabinet level junior ministerial post) was established in 1994 and located within Foreign Affairs.

The Department of Finance, however, began to take on more responsibility for Ireland's EU decision-making from the mid-1980s onwards. There were two principal reasons for this. First, the deepening of European integration through the Single European Act and, later, Economic and Monetary Union, brought to national finance ministries much more influence over collective EU decision-making; the importance of the Council of Finance Ministers was also greatly enhanced as the Euro became established as a global reserve currency. The Eurozone crisis after 2008 further enhanced the role of finance ministries as a cycle of intense intergovernmental diplomacy underpinned the search for a way out of the existential sovereign debt imbroglio. Second, management of the accelerated programme of structural funding after the vast increase in EU regional supports under the 1988 Delors Plan also enhanced the power of finance within the domestic policymaking structure. The responsibility for planning and execution of major infrastructure investments resulted in significant oversight by the Department of Finance. This was especially important as Ireland quickly became one of the biggest recipients of EU subvention in the 1990s.

The third main arm of the executive to matter in Ireland's European governance is the Department of the Taoiseach, which has assumed greatly enhanced responsibilities over time, though its role is more of strategic coordination of government departments and the civil service than hands-on management of EU business. The office of the Taoiseach is especially important in the context of European Council (intergovernmental) summitry, which has taken on a significance not envisaged in the original institutional structure of the EU. In the Irish case, the Department of the Taoiseach has been especially important during Ireland's periods (six in total) as President of the rotating Council of the EU. Irish presidencies of the EU have generally been viewed as successful and undoubtedly enhanced Ireland's reputation in EU fora (Murphy and O'Brennan, 2019).

The Irish Permanent Representation in Brussels is the pivotal site among the constellation of entities involved in EU policymaking. It is the key location for gathering intelligence on the policy process, managing Irish EU presidencies, and, more generally, monitoring the broad thrust of political developments in European integration. The importance of the Permanent Representation is reflected in its budget, which

is one of ↳ the largest enjoyed by any Irish diplomatic representation abroad, and by the calibre of officials posted to Brussels as Permanent Representative ('Perm Rep' for short). The Perm Rep took on a crucial role during the Brexit negotiations in placing Irish issues on the agenda of the Article 50 talks and liaising closely with the European Commission Brexit unit headed by Michel Barnier and with Ireland's EU partners in the Council (Murphy and O'Brennan, 2019; Rees and O'Brennan, 2019). Within Foreign Affairs, the Political Division is responsible for international political issues and has responsibility for managing Ireland's participation in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. This separation of responsibilities reflects the fact that security, defence, and foreign affairs remain policy areas where member states retain a veto and an intergovernmental approach to policy prevails within the EU.

A number of important features of the Irish parliamentary engagement with EU affairs therefore deserve attention (Barrett, 2018). The most obvious marker of parliamentary weakness lies in the committee system (O'Brennan, 2012). The Oireachtas first established a system for scrutinizing EU legislation in 1973, but it was only in March 1995 that the parliament set up a Joint Committee on European Affairs, separate from the Foreign Affairs Committee. The most important subsequent changes occurred after the Nice Treaty Referendum failed to pass in 2001. The European Union (Scrutiny) Act of 2002 laid down the legislative basis for parliamentary scrutiny of EU legislative proposals in the Houses of the Oireachtas. The intention behind

this innovation was for the Committee to take on a more serious role in carrying out detailed scrutiny of EU legislative proposals.

While these innovations suggested the Oireachtas was moving in the direction of greater input into EU affairs after 2001, its effectiveness in securing executive accountability remains seriously open to doubt. There is a vast difference between 'making recommendations' to ministers and having the power to change or at least to influence government policy substantially. The scrutiny committee and successive iterations of the EU Affairs committee struggled to make any kind of impact, partly because of the meagre institutional resources allocated to them and partly because there was no real will on the part of the political parties and political leaders to engage in substantive as opposed to light-touch or pro forma appraisal of EU measures that were being processed through the Oireachtas. The failure of the centralized committee scrutiny approach was acknowledged in 2011 when the European Scrutiny committee was disbanded and the scrutiny function passed back to sectoral Oireachtas Committees.

Ireland thus ranks far behind Denmark, widely considered the most influential parliament among national EU parliamentary bodies engaged in oversight and scrutiny of their government's participation in EU decision-making. The Danish government is constitutionally obliged to take instruction from the European affairs committee of its national parliament, the Folketing, when it negotiates with EU partners. Thus, Danish MPs have an input into EU policy of which their Irish counterparts in the Oireachtas can only dream (Murphy and O' Brennan, 2019). The low status of the European Affairs Committee is reflected in the limited contribution of members to broader debates about the EU in Ireland. With one or two exceptions, they

p. 151   exhibit little interest in EU affairs ↳ and rarely comment on European integration in the media, and even when they do, these contributions have little impact on the policy process.

Ireland's membership of the EU thus seems to confirm patterns of a particular kind of Europeanization, leading to a strengthening of the executive and a reduced role for the Oireachtas in EU affairs. Irish membership has reinforced existing domestic tendencies toward governmental control, and EU policymaking has been overseen by a combination of the departments of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and the Taoiseach, assisted by a highly effective civil service (O'Brennan, 2012).

Irish Party Politics and Europeanization

Well before 1973, Ireland's two main political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, were persuaded that Ireland could gain substantially from joining the nascent European communities. Ireland's comparatively small political parties of the Left were generally more sceptical about European integration and remained so until well into the 1980s. Despite this evident embrace of 'Europe', the Irish party-political landscape remains focused on local and national issues and attached to primarily national modes of activity and engagement. Direct elections to the European Parliament, formally instituted in 1979 as a vehicle for enhancing the legitimacy of the EU, have made little difference to this pattern of apathy and disengagement, despite the fact that the European Parliament has accrued more and more formal powers since the Single European Act. Political scientists refer to European Parliament elections in Ireland as second order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), meaning that they are electoral contests dominated by local and national issues. EU issues, to the extent that they feature at all, still tend to be of a secondary nature. Campaign literature and rhetoric pays little attention to Brussels and Strasbourg, and where candidates incorporate Europe in their campaigns, it tends to be in a materialist/utilitarian framework where the candidate promises to 'deliver for the constituency' by bringing back financial and material rewards. The 2014 elections to the European Parliament in Ireland, for example, were dominated by controversy surrounding the government's plan to introduce water charges. The 2019 elections demonstrated somewhat more engagement with the EU, but still fell significantly short of placing the EU at the heart of policy platforms and debate (Murphy and O'Brennan, 2019).

For all the apparent attachment to exclusively local modes of politics, there is some evidence of Irish political parties being socialized into more 'European' modes of activity and behaviour. All the main political parties belong to specific 'Euro-groups' within the European Parliament. Fine Gael has been a long-time member of the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) and Labour resides within the

p. 152   Socialists and Democrats. For its part, Sinn Féin is part of the European United left/Nordic Green Left ↳ grouping. Fianna Fáil, however, has had a more difficult time finding a natural home for itself within the ideologically framed European Parliament political groupings. Because Fine Gael was first to claim a place

within the EPP, Fianna Fáil was forced to seek a place within an alternative grouping. After an earlier alliance with French Gaullists, it ultimately moved in 2010 to the Alliance of European Democratic Liberals (now renamed Renew Europe).

All these parties participate in people exchange, network activities, and policy debates within their European Parliament party groups. Many of the ministers and leaders of Fine Gael after 2011 established good relations with their peers within the EPP at a relatively young age, participating in party congresses and policy debates, and building contacts that have been enhanced through parliamentary visits and ministers' meetings in EU spaces, especially in the Council of Ministers. Ministers attest that such a level of sometimes intense contact and exchange has not just been mutually beneficial but can lead to a real internalization of partner state interests, perspectives, and policy positions. They partly attribute Ireland's success in garnering the solidarity of the other twenty-six member states on Brexit to the web of relationships forged within the party-political context at European level. Brexit was also responsible for reconstituting the Irish party-political landscape on European integration because it brought the hitherto 'Euro-critical' (its own term) Sinn Féin into the mainstream for the first time, supporting both the Irish government's position and that of the EU on the Irish border, after opposing every EU treaty put to referendum in Ireland since 1972 (and leading campaigns against both the Nice Treaty and Lisbon Treaty.) Whether this represents a more long-term recalibration of Sinn Féin's approach to European integration is open to question, but its tack toward the mainstream meant there was almost complete unity among the Irish political parties in how best to defend Ireland's interest in the Brexit negotiations.

Elites versus Masses?

Throughout nearly fifty years of membership of the EU, Irish elites have demonstrated a strong commitment to European integration. Irish public opinion has also been strongly supportive of membership, although on occasion this has been nuanced and even volatile. On two occasions, Irish referendums on EU treaty change have failed and in the process damaged Ireland's reputation in Brussels (Rees and O'Brennan, 2019). The arrival of the Troika (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) to oversee Ireland's adherence to the terms of the EU 'bailout' in 2010 also challenged both the elite and citizen consensus on EU membership, but ultimately changed little in fundamental attitudes to the EU. Indeed, the depth of Europeanization was clearly visible through the Troika period itself, as the Irish civil service—reshaped through its own European engagement (MacCarthaigh, 2017)—was seen in Brussels as having performed in an exemplary fashion in delivering on its Troika commitments.

p. 153   When evaluating elite attitudes to the EU in Ireland, it is worth noting that the move from thin to thicker Europeanization was slow, sometimes incoherent, and often contested. For at least the first three decades of membership, the Irish approach can perhaps best be characterized as obsessively utilitarian. 'Europe' was embraced at the rhetorical level, but transposition of EU rules was often slow, delayed, or problematic. Governments were reluctant to embrace EU measures that potentially brought significant financial costs or were opposed by powerful domestic veto players, such as in agriculture. Implementation of environmental measures was, in particular, patchy and ineffective, frequently provoked conflict with the European Commission, and in some cases resulted in sanctions being imposed by the European Court of Justice (Torney and O'Gorman, 2019; also Laffan, Chapter 8). The transposition–implementation gap was suggestive of a member state that embraced European integration in a functional and rhetorical sense rather than substantively.

This functional approach was even more evident in the Irish approach to securing subvention from the EU. In the early days of membership, this focused on having the Community replace the Irish Exchequer as the primary funding agent for agriculture. After the expansion of Community spending via the Delors Plan of 1988, the Irish approach focused on the dual objective of maximizing funding receipts from both the CAP and Regional and Structural Funds. A good portion of Ireland's diplomatic activity, energy, and personnel were deployed to achieving these funding objectives. Indeed, a characteristic disposition appeared to be aptly if mischievously summed up in the phrase 'while you're over there in Brussels, get us a grant' (Laffan, 1989). This disposition reached its zenith when then Taoiseach Albert Reynolds returned from the Edinburgh European Council summit in December 1992 claiming to have 'secured 8 billion [pounds] for

Ireland' (in the next EU budgetary Multi-Annual Financial Framework. It turned out to be approximately £5.6 billion).

We can gauge the marked change in the approach of Ireland's political leadership in the more than quarter-century since that Edinburgh summit by examining Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's speech to the European Parliament in January 2018. This was the first speech delivered in a series of debates with Heads of Government about 'the Future of Europe'. In a wide-ranging analysis of Ireland's position within the EU, Varadkar made it clear that Ireland, already a net contributor since 2014, was prepared to pay more into the EU budget if necessary, including, for example, providing 'Structural Funds for Central and Eastern Europe to enable them to unlock their potential'. This was the first time a Taoiseach made such a commitment on EU financing. The fact that Ireland's long-term development and modernization had been so intimately bound up with and aided by its access to EU largesse undoubtedly influenced this view that Ireland now needed to be similarly supportive of poorer, more economically challenged states.

Varadkar also surprised many (including in his own party and officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) by coming out in support of the controversial *Spitzenkandidaten* process, in which each of the party groupings in the European Parliament put up 'lead candidates' for the European Parliament elections in 2019. He also expressed support for President Emmanuel Macron's idea of a EU-wide list (to ↳ be carved out of the distribution of the UK's existing seventy-three seats) for the 2019 elections, which would be open to voters across the EU: 'Let's get people in cafés in Naples and restaurants in Galway talking about the same election choices' (Varadkar, 2018).

The Taoiseach also consciously linked the EU as a peace project with the peace process on the island of Ireland, emphasizing the indivisibility of the two, and referencing former Member of the European Parliament John Hume in asserting 'it is hard to imagine the Good Friday Agreement being made without our shared membership of the European Union and the Single Market'. Mr Varadkar then went on:

> Mr President, I was born European, and am part of a new generation of political leaders born after our countries joined the Union … For us, Europe enabled our transformation from being a country on the periphery, to an island at the centre of the word, at the heart of the common European home that we helped to build. The promise of Europe unlocked the potential of Ireland. It allowed us to take our pace among the nations of the earth. (Varadkar, 2018)

Varadkar's speech was just one of a number by senior figures in the Irish government to acknowledge Ireland's significantly changed position within the EU. The Tánaiste, Simon Coveney (2017), in a speech in November 2017, strove to outline that Ireland, despite being a small state, was a rule-maker rather than rule-taker in Brussels. His speech was also noteworthy in arguing that the EU should go further and faster in pooling sovereignty. Among his suggestions was that the EU set itself a new goal: 'to have a common foreign policy that is as effective and ambitious as its international trade policy. The EU needs to find its voice and become the diplomatic super-power it should be.' Notwithstanding the contradictions inherent in the Minister for Foreign Affairs of a militarily neutral state arguing that the EU should become a 'diplomatic super-state', Coveney's remarks point to a step-change in Irish elite attitudes to the EU and a decisive move away from the old utilitarian conception of Irish membership.

The Brexit referendum and the ensuing difficulties experienced by Ireland as a result of British indifference to the existential impact on the island of Ireland was the catalyst for a hugely significant diplomatic effort on the part of the Permanent Representation in Brussels, Ireland's bilateral missions in EU member states, and the Irish government as a whole to educate EU partners about the dangers presented by Brexit for Ireland. It has also led to a very important reconfiguration of Ireland's geopolitical relationships within the EU (Rees and O'Brennan, 2019).

The question of alliances within the Council of Ministers is not straightforward. There is no 'Eurovision' pattern of voting clusters. Member states tend to converge around specific issues rather than geographic, political, or cultural blocs. The UK was an important ally of Ireland in the Council because both countries favoured economic policies that tended to be more open and liberal. There was little to divide Ireland and the UK on trade and competition policy, or on taxation. A pragmatic attitude to globalization allied to a suspicion of the protectionist instincts of some member states made for a constructive alliance on economic policy. Analysis of voting patterns in the Council of ↳ Ministers reveals that Ireland and the UK cooperated

closely on some issues, though their positions were far apart on others (O Ceallaigh and Gillespie, 2015). In

the agricultural sphere, for example, Ireland allied most strongly with France in defence of the CAP, of which the UK was generally unsupportive.

Brexit prompted serious thinking within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and across government about Ireland's future in the EU without the UK. The move to join the so-called Hansa Group in 2017 was indicative of this new strategic thinking among Irish officials and political leaders (see also Laffan, Chapter 8). This informal alliance (the other members being Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, and Sweden) includes like-minded states open to globalization and liberal economic policy and consciously modelled as a counter to the Franco-German integration tandem. At the same time, Ireland began to gear up individual bilateral relationships with partner states. The most important development here was the new partnership with Germany announced in early 2018 after a significant strategic review by officials within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including enhanced cultural links, a new Irish consulate in Frankfurt (to raise the profile of Ireland in Germany's south), and, most importantly, an Irish–German economic council to deliberate on issues of importance to both member states. Germany's new foreign minister, Heiko Mass, made Dublin one of his first diplomatic visits and was present for the launch of the report (for more see Rees and O'Brennan, 2019; Laffan, Chapter 8).

The ideas contained within these speeches and diplomatic outreach efforts are not entirely new, but they are indicative of a new generation of leaders emerging in Ireland who view the EU and Ireland's membership of it in normative as well as functional/utilitarian terms. On taking office in 2017, Leo Varadkar was aged thirty-eight, Simon Coveney forty-five, and Helen McEntee, Minister of State for European Affairs, only thirty-one. Their rhetoric and approach to European integration reflects substantial generational attitudinal change about Ireland's position in the world and the cumulative move from thin to thick, or at least thicker, forms of Europeanization of Ireland's political leadership. Instead of thinking of and describing Ireland as a peripheral member state, on the margins of Europe and in need of permanent financial support from the Union, the new approach situates Ireland within a more expansive cognitive world of open, pluralist, globalized EU member states. In this perspective, the EU is both an expression of growing material interdependence and a normative force that underpins both domestic politics and the forms of international engagement that Ireland undertakes. This approach is now also definitively shared by the leadership of the Fianna Fáil and Labour parties. Both parties supported the government's position on Brexit when they might easily have made political capital from the difficulties the government experienced at critical points in the process.

Irish citizens' attitudes to EU membership have long been supportive, if shallow. In total, 83 per cent of voters supported accession to the EEC in 1972. While pro-EU sentiment had dropped in the aftermath of the crisis in the early 2010s, 93 per cent of respondents agreed by 2011 that 'Ireland should remain a part of the EU'. 58 per cent of respondents agreed that 'Ireland should contribute more to the EU budget' (35 per cent disagreed), and similar proportions agreed that 'Ireland should be part of increased EU defence and security cooperation', and reported that Brexit had improved their opinion of the EU (EMI, 2019).

However, the outcome of Irish referendums may seem paradoxical to some in that while the decisive 'Yes' votes in the second Lisbon referendum in October 2009 and the Fiscal Treaty in 2012 seemed to herald a return to 'normal' pro-EU voting patterns in Ireland, one cannot ignore the fact that two of the three EU referendums prior to 2009 were rejected by the Irish people.

Comparative research on identity in Europe demonstrates that Ireland is something of an outlier for a state with a population that is strongly supportive of EU membership. It shows that Irish people are much more likely to exhibit attachment to an exclusively national identity rather than a more open and fluid (including 'European') identity (Coakley, 2005). At the same time, however, we should consider that Irish nationalism has undergone a metamorphosis such that it can increasingly be considered thin rather than thick. Nothing better demonstrates this point than the more open, inclusive, non-sectarian approach to the centenary of the 1916 rebellion. The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998 was both an expression of that change and further catalysed changed understandings of what it is to be Irish. This new identity, in formation over some fifty years, is more cosmopolitan, fluid, and plural than previous iterations of Irish nationalism, and its relative elasticity allows for a multiplicity of identities. Thus, the paradox thrown up by opinion polls is more readily explicable: Ireland's move to a more accommodating form of nationalism has facilitated a gradual incorporation of 'Europe' into Irish identities. Brexit has rendered the Irish 'choice for Europe' that much clearer again (Murphy and O'Brennan, 2019).

Communicating Europe and Citizens' Dialogue

Contemporary democracies appear to be witnessing a growing divide between elites and citizens (Mair, 2013; Krastev and Holmes, 2019). The EU emerges as an important proxy for that divide, with elites generally much more supportive of European integration than citizens. An earlier era of so-called 'permissive consensus' has given way to a deep questioning of the EU among many publics, bordering on outright hostility in some constituencies. Ireland has been no exception as regards recurring failures by elites to 'communicate Europe' effectively to citizens; that is, to communicate the nature and significance of membership and why European integration matters. Irish elites have traditionally preferred the 'management' of EU affairs by a relatively narrow stratum of actors with minimal public engagement— reflecting a dominant political approach to public policy generally. The absence of any effort by government to provide and promote a civic education programme or sufficient information channels that explained how

p. 157 and ↳ why Ireland's EU membership matters meant that EU 'debates' within Irish political culture have sometimes been characterized by apathy, confusion, and lack of information, with an increasingly wide chasm in elite–popular opinion evident in the decade after 2000. Thus, 'lack of knowledge and information' emerged as key variables is explaining voting behaviour in the Nice and Lisbon referendums (O'Brennan, 2009: 276–7).

The extraordinary shock engendered by the defeat of the Nice Treaty in 2001 encouraged the setting up of the National Forum on Europe, a vehicle for reflecting on the nature and significance of Ireland's membership of the EU, and including all the Irish political parties, civil society groups, and platforms both in favour of and opposed to European integration. The Forum met in both Dublin and around Ireland and certainly helped socialize the Irish political parties and civil society groups into the main dimensions of EU activity and policy. But its impact on wider Irish society seems negligible. Over time it faded in significance, before being shuttered in 2009.

The crisis thrown up by Brexit, however, was truly existential and led to many public meetings being staged around Ireland, by the political parties, local chambers of commerce, and civil society groups, especially in counties around the border with Northern Ireland. A government-sponsored 'All-Island Civic Dialogue' on Brexit was instituted, modelled on the National Forum in Europe, allowing interest groups with vital 'skin in the Brexit game' to channel their concerns into evolving government policy. A smaller 'Brexit Stakeholder Group' regularly met the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade and his officials as the talks intensified in 2018 and 2019.

Using the same kind of model, in 2017 the government decided to introduce a 'Citizens' Dialogue' on the Future of Europe, the first member state to do so. A new course on Politics and Society, introduced in the Irish secondary school curriculum in 2017, included for the first time a substantial focus on the EU. All this citizen-focused activity suggests that lessons were learned from the Nice and Lisbon failures and that 'Europe' now constitutes a tangible part of Ireland's civic life. Here, too, Brexit may have encouraged Irish elites to drop any complacency that may have existed about Ireland's relationship with the EU and the need to communicate more consistently and effectively on European integration. The end of the 'permissive consensus' era has thrown up considerable challenges for Ireland's relationship with Europe, but the evidence suggests a move from thin to thicker forms of Europeanization, reflected in stronger elite commitment to the EU and improved efforts to communicate the value of Irish membership of the Union to citizens.

Conclusion

The central argument put forward in this chapter is that Ireland has used EU membership as a vehicle for both modernization and Europeanization. The Irish engagement with European integration has been one of pragmatic adaptation and incremental embrace of EU rules and norms. In academic terms, this process can

p. 158 be termed a move ↳ from thin to thicker modes of Europeanization. This process has unfolded in non-linear fashion and has survived periods of great stress and volatility. But it has produced a cumulative dynamic that has been genuinely transformative: the Irish economic, social, and political landscape is unrecognizable from that of 1973.

Irish elites grasped early on that the EU presented significant functional opportunities for modernizing Ireland, and that European integration could compensate for a lack of domestic capacity to drive innovation. This early phase of purely utilitarian approaches to membership changed over time to a more complex and nuanced understanding of Ireland's global position, with the EU at the centre of Ireland's foreign policy. This in turn encouraged a broader understanding of the integration process as one encompassing normative as well as functional underpinnings, obligations as well as rights. Thus, over time Ireland made a determined move from the periphery to the mainstream of the EU. That Irish commitment to 'Europe' deepened significantly after the UK decision to leave the EU was made in 2016, and was reciprocated by member states and EU institutions evincing an unprecedented level of solidarity with Ireland right up to the signing of the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) on 30 December 2020.

Irish elites viewed European integration as an open-ended process, a practical and dynamic mechanism for tackling collective action problems, and one that could particularly benefit small states in an international context that remained essentially Hobbesian. For Ireland, Europeanization is broadly viewed as a non-ideological matter that allows for both 'uploading' of policy preferences as well as significant 'downloading' from the EU: Europeanization and European integration are continually in flux and subject to both endogenous and exogenous influences. The outcome of such interactions has sometimes provided Ireland with difficulties, but has nonetheless contributed to a long-term transformation of governance, politics and society.

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