

# Stuck in the Middle with EU (and the UK)?

## *How Ireland navigates its relationships with the EU and UK post-Brexit*

**John O' Brennan**

*John O' Brennan holds the Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration at Maynooth University and is Director of the Maynooth Centre for European and Eurasian Studies. He is widely published in academic journals, including recent articles on Ireland, Brexit and the European Union in Capital and Class, the Journal of European Integration, Irish Political Studies and Parliamentary Affairs. He is the co-editor (with Mary C. Murphy, UCC) of a special issue of Irish Political Studies in 2019 on 'Ireland and EU Crisis Governance' and a member of the Irish government's Brexit Stakeholder Group since 2017. He appears regularly on Irish and international radio and television programmes to discuss European Union issues.*



### **Introduction**

The vote by the United Kingdom on 23 June 2016 to leave the European Union presented Ireland with some very difficult choices, in particular between its commitment to protecting the Good Friday Agreement and its membership of the EU's Customs Union and Single Market. Immediately on 24 June 2016, the sense in Dublin was one that the exit of the UK from the EU constituted an existential threat to Ireland, and in particular to peace on the island. While entirely accepting of the legitimacy of the decision, the Irish government led by Taoiseach Enda Kenny, set about limiting the potential damage caused to Ireland.

Ireland had hardly featured in the referendum debate, despite warnings from John Major, Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern and others, that Brexit represented a potential threat to a hard won peace. Both prior to and after the Brexit referendum, it seemed little understood in London how the attainment of Irish membership of the (then) European Communities in 1973 represented the most crucial development in the life of the independent Irish state, and thereafter how much EU membership helped to re-fashion Ireland in decisive ways. “Europeanisation”, in different forms, has played a critical role in shaping Irish economic, political and social life over almost five decades of membership.<sup>1</sup> Ireland, in effect, used EU membership as a vehicle for development and modernisation. So there was no question of Ireland following the UK out of the EU, as some excitable Brexiteers suggested as the most obvious route to solving the potential problems cause by the rupture.

This article examines the challenge posed for Ireland by Brexit and assesses how Ireland responded to developments in the UK since 2016. It evaluates, in particular, the balancing act performed by successive Irish governments, in seeking to protect the peace process on the island, maintain a good relationship with the United Kingdom and simultaneously deepen its commitment to membership of the European Union. Irish governments operated from four main principles after 2016, as the multiple challenges posed by Brexit became an everyday part of government activity:

- Protection of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement;
- Maintaining an open border on the island of Ireland;
- Maintaining as good a relationship as possible with the UK;
- Cementing Ireland’s position within the EU and the Single Market.

These principles derived both from the Good Friday Agreement and the European integration process, and the Irish experience of participating in both models of shared governance. At the heart of these complex, multi-nation, multi-faith, highly institutionalised models of collective governance lies the notion of interdependence – the idea that different entities can come together in a spirit of solidarity and shared sovereignty to the mutual benefit of participating entities. Interdependence is a self-reinforcing mechanism and can deepen inter-communal relationships significantly over time. The problem which Irish governments encountered after 2016 was that the Brexit referendum was won on the basis of a monolithic notion of both identity and governance. Shared governance was jettisoned in favour of a rhetorically

insistent but ideologically vague British notion of ‘sovereignty’. Taoiseach Micheál Martin summed up the difference in a January 2021 speech: “One of the striking things about the debate within the UK about Europe in the decades before the Brexit referendum was the constant repetition of the idea that sovereignty is a zero-sum issue. We reject that idea and, just as importantly, we know that we must never let up in confronting those who spread it”.<sup>2</sup>

The Northern Ireland Protocol has increasingly been identified within Brexiteer circles and by key figures in the Johnson administration as an obstruction to their goal of achieving full ‘sovereignty’, despite the vagueness of the concept. Thus Dublin has found it increasingly difficult to square the circle of supporting the Protocol, which it sees as a proxy for the Good Friday Agreement, with maintaining good relations with the United Kingdom and getting on with normal business in the European Union. This article goes on to examine the challenges Ireland has faced in its engagement with the United Kingdom since the Brexit vote and then evaluates how it has pursued the most significant deepening of its engagement with the European Union since joining the then European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. Arguably, in fact, Ireland’s commitment to European integration deepened significantly because of Brexit: with every unanticipated crisis experienced by the UK after 2016, the Irish choice to commit to European integration became clearer.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the annual poll conducted by Red C for the European Movement Ireland showed public support for EU membership at a very high level of 84 per cent in the spring of 2021.<sup>4</sup> This constitutes one of the highest levels of support across the 27 member states.

## **Irish-UK relations post-Brexit**

One of the most striking features of the shared Irish-UK membership of the EEC/EU is how Ireland used its membership to increasingly diverge away from the UK in respect of trade, but despite this, the political relationship between Dublin and London grew significantly closer after 1973. There were two reasons for this. First, the difficulties experienced by both governments in managing The Troubles in Northern Ireland meant Dublin and London needed to cooperate with each other, and gradually converged towards a common landing zone, in seeking to de-escalate tensions in Northern Ireland. Notwithstanding periodic crises, the general trend was one of increasing and cumulative cooperation and trust.

Second, the fact that ministers and key officials from both the UK and Ireland met at increasingly regular intervals after 1973 at meetings of the European Council and other forums, provided a vehicle for close communication and exchange. Indeed, one former ambassador to the UK, Dan Mullhall, in giving evidence before the House of Lords in 2016, attested that there were, on average, 25 meetings a day in Brussels where Irish and UK representatives met.<sup>5</sup> Just as European integration facilitated deep reconciliation between France and Germany (and, later, Germany and Poland), the relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom developed in the shadow of EU encounters, in both formal and informal spaces. Brussels offered ‘breathing space’, a neutral landscape in which politicians and civil servants could ‘get to know each other’. In the framework of mutual exchange which characterised the Council in particular, patterns of increased trust and better bilateral relationships became the norm.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of the ‘Council Presidency’ also encouraged at times intense interaction and engagement across the full range of EU legislative activity.<sup>7</sup>

It is also worth noting that, notwithstanding patterns of trade divergence, from the mid-1980s onwards, Ireland’s approach to economic issues increasingly dovetailed with that of the UK, with the two countries coinciding especially on competition policy, trade and taxation. In the process, Ireland decisively changed the dial on its relationship with the UK, from one of dependence and supplication to interdependence and mutual respect. Adversarial politics gradually gave way to cooperation based on mutual interest, as both countries advocated for pro-globalization policies within the European Council. The trust engendered via these two routes contributed in some part to the critical breakthrough in the peace process in the 1990s. Thus, we confront one of the key paradoxes of the Irish-UK relationship within the EU: that while Ireland used its membership to diverge significantly from the UK on trade and thus reduce its economic dependence on its nearest neighbour, political relations improved markedly over the 47 years of shared membership. Undoubtedly, the highpoint of UK-Irish relations was reached in 2011 with the hugely successful visit of Queen Elizabeth to Ireland. This was followed by an equally successful – if indeed, more low key – return visit by President Michael D. Higgins. Subsequently Prime Minister David Cameron proclaimed in 2014 that relations were at “an all-time high”.<sup>8</sup>

This positive dynamic was thrown into disarray by the Brexit vote. Brexit turned the common interests of Ireland and the UK into (potentially) competing interests,<sup>9</sup> to the point where, at times, the relationship now looks

like a zero sum game. Ireland's principal difficulty lay in the fact that, as Fintan O' Toole suggests: "Neither before nor after the referendum of June 2016 did its leading proponents come up with any serious plan for what Brexit would really mean for Britain's economy, for its place in the world, for its very existence as a unitary state".<sup>10</sup> Prime Minister Theresa May is alleged to have said (referring to Ireland) that "one country cannot hold up progress" and the UK was a "much bigger and much more important country".<sup>11</sup> Once Boris Johnson came to office in July 2019, trust was further undermined by a series of unilateral British moves.

There are different ways in which we might map this serious deterioration in Irish-UK relations. One indicator is the number of meetings between heads of government. Prior to 1973, no British Prime Minister had visited Dublin since independence in 1921.<sup>12</sup> We have seen how shared EU membership helped transform this dynamic. Tannam (2021) demonstrates that from September 2018 to July 2019, Theresa May and Leo Varadkar met about once a month, usually at EU summit meetings. However, there was a marked decline in the number of meetings between Boris Johnson and his Irish counterparts after July 2019. Notwithstanding the inevitable reduction in contact as the UK gradually disengaged from the EU, this later pattern was more consistent with the pre-1973 model of relations.

We can also evince this pattern of deterioration in relations in the discourse of politicians and senior officials. The former UK minister responsible for exiting the EU, David Davis, had remarked to a meeting in London in 2017 that there had been a change of government in Dublin and that the new Taoiseach (Mr. Varadkar) was being strongly influenced by Sinn Féin. This became a common trope in UK media outlets. Varadkar described the comments as 'strange' and 'inaccurate', while his Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade said they were 'nonsense'.<sup>13</sup> In fact, such a belief was reported to be commonly held in the Conservative party.<sup>14</sup> Priti Patel (currently UK Home Secretary) at one point threatened an economic blockade of Ireland, with the aim of cutting off the Irish food supply and starving the Irish into submission. This threat, she suggested, should be used as leverage in the negotiations with the EU.<sup>15</sup>

Some Brexiteers went a lot further by openly wondering whether the Good Friday Agreement was passed its sell-by date. Former Northern Ireland secretary Owen Patterson tweeted that 'the collapse of power-sharing in Northern Ireland shows that the Good Friday Agreement has outlived its

use'.<sup>16</sup> Michael Gove also stated on a number of occasions that the Good Friday Agreement (which he had opposed in 1998) had outlived its usefulness.<sup>17</sup> Labour's staunch Brexiteer, Kate Hoey (herself born in Northern Ireland) called the Agreement 'unsustainable'. Leading Tory MEP Daniel Hannan claimed the Agreement was nothing other than 'a bribe to two sets of hardliners' in Northern Ireland. In addition, he argued that the Agreement was 'a consequence, not the cause, of the end of terrorism'. While serving as Foreign Secretary in 2018, Boris Johnson demonstrated his ignorance of the border problem by comparing the Northern Ireland border with that between the London boroughs of Camden and Westminster.<sup>18</sup> Jacob Rees-Mogg, leader of the so-called 'European Research Group' (ERG, the hard-line Brexit grouping within the Conservative party) conspiratorially declared the Irish border problem did not really exist – it was an 'imaginary problem' created by Dublin and Brussels to prevent Brexit happening. Later Rees-Mogg went so far as to suggest that it might be a good idea to 'inspect' people crossing the Irish border after Brexit.<sup>19</sup> This led Simon Coveney to warn that 'reckless shouting and sloganeering has consequences for the people of Northern Ireland'. He went on to say, 'psychologically, it (peace) has transformed the landscape and allowed identity to breathe more freely. Protecting this precious achievement, a backbone to our hard-won peace, is the only motivation in prioritising Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations'.<sup>20</sup> When Arlene Foster, leader of the DUP, claimed that the Agreement 'wasn't sacrosanct', Varadkar told the Dáil that the Agreement:

is not a piece of British legislation. It is an international agreement between the British and Irish governments as well as a multi-party agreement among the various parties. And certainly, as far as the government is concerned, the Good Friday Agreement is not up for negotiation in these talks over Brexit.<sup>21</sup>

The (later) repeated threats by the UK government to resile from the Northern Ireland Protocol also caused great friction between Dublin and London. An early indication of the direction of travel of the Johnson administration came in the autumn of 2020 when the government published the Internal Market Bill which contained controversial measures relating to the way trade would function between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. These measures would have overridden the Withdrawal Agreement the UK signed with the EU in 2019. Article 4 of the Agreement made it clear that the provisions of the treaty took precedence over UK domestic legislation. Commenting on the move, Northern Ireland Secretary of State Brandon Lewis

asserted that the Internal Market Bill would break international law in a “very specific and limited way”. Reacting to the comments, Simon Coveney stated in the Dáil: “if those comments represent the considered view of the British government, then I find them gravely concerning”.<sup>22</sup> Boris Johnson didn’t help matters when he went to Northern Ireland and assured Unionists there would be no border in the Irish Sea (when it was perfectly clear that this was exactly the outcome which the Agreement necessitated).

In June 2021, Lord Frost threatened to invoke Article 16 of the Protocol (which he himself had negotiated), in publishing a so-called ‘Command Paper’ (UK Government, 2021). The paper referenced animal, plant and health checks, customs and VAT arrangements, the treatment of manufactured goods, Northern Ireland trade with Great Britain and state aid rules. DUP leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson claimed that it was clear that the Protocol “has failed” and “is creating very substantial trade problems”. He said that it was now time for the EU and UK “to renegotiate”, a move firmly ruled out by the EU.<sup>23</sup> Frost argued that the EU should operate a light touch, “risk-based” approach for the UK because of the fact that “we both operate the high food standards which are, in most areas extremely similar”.<sup>24</sup> This reflects a central Brexiteer belief – that the UK could (and would) have all the benefits of membership of the EU without any of the costs of membership.<sup>25</sup> As Chris Grey puts it, “Frost wants the benefit of being aligned without making any commitment to being aligned [...] the UK has left but shouldn’t be treated as if it had left”.<sup>26</sup> The “common sense” approach which Frost demands from the EU is really cover, in other words, for a renewed model of UK ‘cakeism’. These threats came after Boris Johnson had earlier unilaterally delayed the implementation of some measures required by the Protocol. From Dublin’s perspective, Lord Frost’s intervention was most unwelcome and presented further confirmation that ‘cakeism’ was still the driving force of HMG policy and that, for Boris Johnson and Lord Frost, Brexit does not in fact mean Brexit. Chris Grey, in alluding to these examples, suggested that the UK had not moved on from the debates of 2016 and was stuck in a cul-de-sac of performative gesture politics.<sup>27</sup> For Ireland, every new iteration of such gesture politics, meant that trust in the UK government was further reduced.

## How do we replicate the common spaces of the EU?

Perhaps the most important question engendered by Brexit for Irish-UK relations is what kind of institutional structures or policy networks might replace the common/shared EU spaces? The obvious answer lies in Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement and, in particular, the British-Irish Intergovernmental Council (B-IIGC) and the British-Irish Council. Tannam points out that the well-established practice of issuing joint statements after heads of government meetings all but disappeared in recent years.<sup>28</sup> And, although in June 2021 the B-IIGC met in Dublin, giving hope that it might take on a beefed-up function, at the time of writing its future role is far from clear. Dublin and London also have to contend with Unionist hostility to the B-IIGC, despite, as Brendan O' Leary points out, the fact that "the all-island and cross-border aspects of rights, justice, prisons and policing are part of the remit of the B-IIGC",<sup>29</sup> even where devolution of functions in these domains has taken place. In the wake of the tensions provoked by the Northern Ireland Protocol, however, it is difficult currently to see Unionists reconciling themselves any time soon to the Strand Three institutions, or indeed any structures that meaningfully include the Irish government as a partner.

Etain Tannam, however, points out that the relative neglect of the institutions set up by the Good Friday Agreement by both the UK and Irish governments, was as much a factor in the deterioration of UK-Irish relations as Brexit. She suggests that both governments tended to neglect the B-IIGC. Amongst the reasons she cites are: DUP opposition to the body; a certain complacency built on peace process 'successes' such as the visit of Queen Elizabeth to Ireland and that "both governments mistook an absence of core conflicts for cooperation" with Northern Ireland no longer needing "any hands-on involvement".<sup>30</sup> Tannam further cites the reduction in the number of non-devolved policy areas, following the St. Andrews Agreement (2006) and the reduction in staff numbers on both sides. The loss of institutional memory is directly linked to this, in particular on the UK side. Finally, she cites the preoccupation of the Irish government with the financial crisis after 2008. All these factors led to Strand Three being less prioritised than should have been the case.

In a 2021 speech, Leo Varadkar pointed out that there were other structures to facilitate dialogue. For one thing, the Joint Committee and the specialised committees of the Brexit Agreement provided outlets for engagement. In addition:

“Under Strand Three, the British-Irish Council covers matters of mutual interest, bringing together representatives from 8 jurisdictions, including Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey. The BIIGC provides a formal structure for enhanced relations between the two sovereign governments. And we are exploring other ideas to enhance UK-Irish dialogue, such as the Nordic Council model which the Taoiseach has spoken about. Whatever form it takes, we are agreed that there needs to be more engagement between the UK and Irish Governments.”

Tellingly, he added the rider: “We just hope the British Government feels the same way”.<sup>31</sup>

As part of the response to Brexit, the Irish government announced plans to open new diplomatic representations in the UK regions. The Irish relationship with Scotland became significantly closer after Brexit as Nicola Sturgeon and her SNP government sought to increase economic and cultural ties between Edinburgh and Dublin. In January 2021, Ireland and Scotland published the results of a bilateral review into the future relationship. The report set out a series of actions to be undertaken by the two governments in business and the economy, community and diaspora relations, academic exchange and research, and rural, coastal and island communities as well as government to government ties. The report includes over 40 different recommendations across the thematic areas and expresses a desire to develop the closest possible relationship in the years to come. Among the recommendations were: regular high-level contact between Scottish and Irish Ministers and continued cooperation through the British-Irish Council; a new Ireland-Scotland Trade Taskforce, supported by the Consulate General of Ireland in Edinburgh and the Scottish Government Office in Dublin, which will work with the public and private sectors to develop and support trade relations; a conference scheduled for late 2021, to address the opportunities and challenges of living in rural, coastal and island communities, to be convened by both Governments, working with the University of Highlands and Islands and Údarás na Gaeltachta.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Ireland is currently conducting a review of relations with Wales, with the expectation of increased intensity of ties across a broad spectrum of fields. The Irish consular office in Cardiff was re-opened in 2019 and this will be followed by the opening of a new consulate in Manchester to serve the northern and north western region of England. This pluralisation of

relations with the regions of Great Britain is meant to balance the focus on London and help develop economic, cultural, and educational links with regions of Britain hitherto somewhat neglected.

## **Changes to trade patterns**

When Ireland joined the EEC (along with the UK and Denmark) in 1973, it was still highly dependent on the UK in respect of its international trade. From accounting for 75% of Irish exports in 1960, and 61% in 1971, the UK market share fell steadily to under 20% in 2009, and 13% in 2018.<sup>33</sup> By 2020 it had reduced significantly again to less than 10 per cent. So, one of the main features of the Republic's economic development has been a marked reduction in trade dependency on UK markets. In parallel with this, we have seen exports to EU states (excluding the United Kingdom) rise concomitantly, from just 13% in 1970 to almost 47% in 2016<sup>34</sup> and close on 50% in 2020. Thus, market diversification away from the United Kingdom and towards continental partners has been one of the most striking features of Ireland's membership of the EU.<sup>35</sup>

One of the key indicators of Ireland's increased commitment to European integration is the extent to which trade with the UK has been replaced by trade with the EU because of Brexit. Although it is difficult to precisely disentangle 'Brexit effects' from 'Covid effects', the underlying patterns to emerge in 2021 suggest a significant divergence of Irish goods trade from the UK to EU states. In August 2021, the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) published data on port freight volumes in Quarter 2/2021. It provides a clear picture of this divergence. The IMDO points out that the Quarter 1 data may have been distorted by Brexit stockpiling combined with Covid restrictions (which saw hard lockdowns in both the UK and Ireland). Overall, trade volumes were back to 2019 levels in Quarter 2. The key point, however, relates to the very significant change in the composition of trade. The share of Roll on/Roll Off produce going to ports in the EU doubled in Q2/2021, relative to Q2/2019. The share of similar volumes going to the UK decreased by 20 per cent, relative to the same period in 2019. The reduction for the first half of 2021 amounted to 29 per cent. The trend can also be observed and, in fact, is even more apparent in container traffic. These set a record in Q2/2021, with the vast majority of these now being directed to continental EU ports. Irish importers and exporters now benefit from a significant

increase in direct Roll on/Roll Off EU services to the EU: from just 5 in 2019 to 12 (with more planned) in 2021.<sup>36</sup>

The IMDO data also includes figures for Northern Ireland's three ports: Belfast, Larne and Warrenpoint. Like ports in the Republic, these ports individually and collectively experienced a record quarter in Q2/2021, with traffic up more than 10 per cent compared to Q2/2019. Belfast and Warrenpoint recorded their busiest ever quarterly activity. Additional impacts will surely be felt when Great Britain starts enforcing its trade border at ports, after October 2021.

In August 2021, new data from Ireland's Central Statistics Office also shone a light on changes in Ireland's trade patterns. The data showed the value of goods imported from Northern Ireland to the Republic increased by 77 per cent in the first half of 2021, compared to the same period in 2020 (€1.77 billion, compared to just under €1 billion). At the same time the value of exports from the Republic to Northern Ireland increased by 43 per cent (€1.57 billion, compared to €1.1 billion). Some British based traders have established bases in Northern Ireland to gain easier access to the Republic, while some companies in the Republic have replaced imports from Great Britain with imports from Northern Ireland. Although there is no equivalent data on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, anecdotal evidence suggests it may be significantly down as a result of difficulties in implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol. The CSO data also demonstrates that the value of the Republic's exports to Great Britain in the first half of 2021 increased by 20 per cent (€6.7 billion, compared to €5.6 billion in 2020). Conversely, imports from Great Britain to the Republic decreased by €213 million (16 per cent) to about €1 billion in the same period. The largest such decreases were in food and live animals and manufactured goods. In a separate report Grant Thornton suggests that four out of ten Irish businesses are reporting delays to their supply chains as a consequence of Brexit, while a substantial proportion have changed their strategies ahead of an expected increase of Brexit red tape over the next year.<sup>37</sup>

Tying the different strands of this section together, we can say that Brexit catalysed a very serious deterioration in Irish-UK relations as well as a further divergence of Irish trade from Great Britain to the EU. This deterioration reflected the determination of Ireland to protect its interests in the Brexit

negotiations and the equal determination of Brexiteers to pursue a 'sovereignty first' Brexit which threatened the Good Friday Agreement and peace on the island of Ireland. Even after the eventual agreement of the EU and UK on a deal in late 2020 (following the Withdrawal Agreement in 2019), Northern Ireland remained the key zone of contention of both sides, with London presenting an interpretation of what was agreed which was entirely unacceptable to Dublin and Brussels. Analysis suggests that the Strand Three institutions, in particular the British Irish Intergovernmental Council, could help fill the gap presented by the loss of shared spaces in EU forums for Irish and UK officials. But the lack of investment of political capital (both Irish and British) in the B-IIGC and other institutions to date does not augur particularly well for the future.

## **Ireland and the EU post-Brexit**

If Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom is significantly challenged by the difficulties in operationalising the Northern Ireland Protocol, the deepening of its commitment to European integration also brings challenges. Before reviewing those challenges, it is worth examining how Ireland sought to employ the EU as a buttress against Brexit harm.

The nature of threats to the Peace Process triggered an expansive diplomatic effort on the part of the Irish government to educate EU leaders about the explicit nature of those threats. Ensuring that Ireland's EU partners and the key institutional actors in Brussels understood the potentially existential impact of Brexit on Ireland called for an unparalleled engagement by the government and administrative system at all political and diplomatic levels across the European Union. More than 400 meetings were held between Irish officials and EU counterparts between June 2017 and March 2018 alone.<sup>38</sup> The early focus was on Germany and Chancellor Merkel, because as Charlie Flanagan, then Ireland's foreign minister, put it: "she is the towering political figure of her age".<sup>39</sup> Brexit thus forced the Irish system to engage more systematically and intensively with EU institutions and member states than at any other time in its membership, apart from EU presidencies.

From an early point it was clear that Ireland's bargaining power within the negotiations exceeded that of the UK. This was evident in any number of statements by key EU actors. But it was conveyed quite emphatically by Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, when he stated that

“Ireland’s position (on the so-called ‘backstop’) will be the European Union’s position”.<sup>40</sup> The Irish strategy included bringing every important visiting European delegation to the border, to underline the physical and social realities of peace and what was at stake in the Brexit negotiations. Both Michel Barnier and Jean Claude Juncker delivered historic addresses to joint sittings of the Oireachtas. British efforts to exploit alleged divisions on the EU27 side so as to optimise their negotiating hand, met with a consistently negative response in EU capitals. Those efforts were more than countered by an at time intense and much more sustained Irish campaign across the European Union.<sup>41</sup>

The Brexit vote prompted considered thinking within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade about Ireland’s future in the EU without the UK, and the future power balance within the Union. This led to the most comprehensive reconfiguration of Ireland’s diplomatic relationships since accession to the EEC in 1973.<sup>42</sup> Analysis of voting patterns in the EU Council of Ministers provides evidence of extensive long-term Irish-UK cooperation and successful coalition-building as a result of shared membership of the EU.<sup>43</sup> The question of alliances within the Council is not straightforward, however; far from demonstrating a ‘Eurovision’-style pattern of geo-cultural voting groups, member states tend to converge around specified issue areas rather than defined blocs.<sup>44</sup> Evidence from 22,000 Council votes between 2009 and 2016 demonstrated that Ireland corresponded most closely with a cluster of mainly smaller member states – including Belgium, Slovenia, Slovakia, Luxembourg and Romania. This shouldn’t surprise us, as the EU is a collective of mainly small and medium-sized states. Of the largest five member states, Ireland voted most closely with Italy, Spain and France. But while this snapshot provides a largely quantitative analysis of Council voting alignments, if one engages in a deeper *qualitative* evaluation of concrete Irish policy priorities, we find a significant convergence of preferences with the UK on key issues.<sup>45</sup>

The UK and Ireland were allies in the EU Council of Ministers because both countries, from the mid-1980s onwards, favoured economic policies which embraced free trade, deregulation and globalisation. Allied to this was a suspicion of the protectionist instincts of some member states.<sup>46</sup> There was little to divide Ireland and the UK on trade and competition policy nor on approaches to EU corporate taxation policy. Irish officials were keenly aware that the disappearance of this UK-Irish cooperation from the Council risked

leaving Ireland isolated at the Council table and necessitated new thinking about locating allies within the EU.<sup>47</sup> Ireland's vulnerability was very evident when, in June 2021, it was one of only nine countries (out of 139) still opposing the OECD plans for the introduction of a global minimum tax rate for corporations of 15 per cent.<sup>48</sup> And although other member states such as the Netherlands also oppose a collective EU Tax approach, the absence of the UK from the European Council leaves Ireland more exposed in the decision-making sphere and may be keenly felt in the years to come.

The Irish move to join the so-called 'Hansa Group' in 2017 was indicative of new strategic thinking among Irish officials and political leaders about Ireland's future positioning within the Union. This informal alliance includes like-minded states, advocates of free trade and globalisation, and to some extent acting as a counter to the Franco-German tandem within the Council. Its members include Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, and Sweden.<sup>49</sup> And despite representing a total population share well short of that necessary to produce a 'blocking minority' within the Council, a united Hansa group that can win over one large member state – particularly Germany – will be difficult to defeat in Council settings where QMV applies post-Brexit.<sup>50</sup> Hansa is far from the only game in town for Ireland, however. In a 2021 speech Leo Varadkar, now Tánaiste, said: "Ireland is now actively seeking to build new alliances to fill that gap and to advance our interests. As Taoiseach, on occasion, I was invited to the Nordic-Baltic Group meetings and we have much in common with the Benelux countries and places further afield – like Cyprus and Malta". He also said "I now meet with a group of like-minded Trade Ministers to discuss how to position ourselves on major trade issues. This includes Germany".<sup>51</sup>

Ireland has also spent an increasing amount of time and resources in beefing up bilateral relationships with partner states in the EU. The most important development here potentially is the new partnership with Germany, announced in early 2018 after a strategic review by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This wasn't entirely straightforward. Germany, after all, had been the principal advocate of the austerity which Ireland had to accept after the financial crash, as the price for the bailout by the 'Troika'. Brendan Howlin, former Minister for Public Expenditure in the Fine Gael-Labour coalition which took office in 2011, states that: "there was a Calvinist view [in Germany] that the peripheral countries had been wastrels, spendthrift, and that there had to be some element of punishment attached to the recovery". Over time Angela Merkel and other German leaders came

to see Ireland as the success story of the recovery of the Eurozone, as it implemented tough austerity and then saw growth and investment rebound strongly. Diplomats believe that the “goodwill” banked in the process of “taking our medicine” helped crucially with getting Germany on side in the Brexit negotiations.<sup>52</sup>

The reset of the Irish relationship with Germany saw a new Irish consulate opened in Frankfurt in June 2019 (to raise the profile of Ireland in Germany’s south), significantly enhanced cultural links, and, most importantly, an Irish-German economic council to deliberate on issues of importance to both member states. Senior Irish and German civil servants would meet regularly to review key bilateral issues.<sup>53</sup> This was a reminder that the UK’s departure from the EU also impacts on Germany, especially regarding its preferences for generally liberal trade policy and dismantling further barriers to trade. Berlin identified Ireland, along with the three Nordic member states as priority states with which to pursue stronger engagement under the German Foreign Office’s so-called ‘Like-Minded Initiative’. Ireland was also seen as a key interlocutor with the US and UK post-Brexit.<sup>54</sup>

Ireland’s deepening commitment to European integration can also be evidenced through analysis of speeches by leading political figures. One good example is then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar’s speech to the European Parliament in January 2018. The Taoiseach consciously linked the EU as a peace project with the peace process on the island of Ireland, emphasising interdependence and institutionalization and the indivisibility of the two:

I was born European, and am part of a new generation of political leaders born after our countries joined the Union. [...] The vision that delivered peace in Europe, opened the door to peace in my country [...]. For us, Europe enabled our transformation from being a country on the periphery, to an island at the centre of the world, 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 place among the nations of the earth.<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup> The Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, 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 deepen cooperation. Amongst 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'.<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup>

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 38, Simon Coveney 45, and Helen McEntee, Minister of State for European Affairs, only 31. Their rhetoric and approach to European integration reflects a substantial generational change in attitudes about Ireland's position in the world. Instead of thinking of and describing Ireland as a peripheral member state, on the geographic margins of Europe and in need of permanent subvention from the Union, the new approach situates Ireland within a more expansive 'imagined community' of open, pluralist, globalised 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.<sup>59</sup> This perspective could not be more different to the monolithic, sovereignty-obsessed Brexiteer worldview which currently prevails in London.

## Conclusion

Chris Grey suggests Brexit is comparable to "an embarrassing episode at the Christmas office party that it would be bad taste to remind anyone of in the new year".<sup>60</sup> While Ireland viewed the problems thrown up by Brexit through the lenses of realist pragmatism, the UK increasingly exhibited an 'Alice in Wonderland' conception of its position. To that end, Ireland has had to deal with a UK government that has no actual strategy on Brexit, that has spent its time in office – literally – 'winging it', exhibiting an ideological obsession with a completely discordant notion of 'sovereignty' and playing a game of almost permanent performative gesture politics for the benefit of shoring

up its position in domestic politics by ‘bashing Brussels’ (and Ireland). Unless there is a significant change in tone and behavior from the UK government and a more conciliatory approach to the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, Irish-UK relations will continue to be difficult and could get a lot worse.

The difficulties experienced by the United Kingdom in seeking to detach itself from the EU after 2016 provide a striking reminder of the depth of inter-penetration of economies and legal systems set in train by decades of shared EU membership.<sup>61</sup> Brexit, however, turned the increasingly common interests of Ireland and the UK into (potentially) competing interests, to the point where at times the relationship now looks like a zero-sum game. The return of identity politics which accompanied Brexit has been particularly discomfiting for Ireland as it brought back some of the most difficult constitutional, institutional and inter-communal issues which many thought had been settled comprehensively by the Good Friday Agreement. The ambiguity and fluidity which characterised the Agreement (and European integration) have given way to a familiar kind of tribal rigidity, as identity politics flourishes once more.

The central argument put forward in this article is that Ireland has had to operate a difficult balancing act between its commitments to the EU and the need to protect the Good Friday Agreement while maintaining a positive working relationship with the UK. Brexit caused a hugely significant deterioration in the Irish-UK relationship, a relationship which had blossomed in the latter part of the years of shared membership of the EEC/EU, with Queen Elizabeth’s state visit to Ireland in 2011 (and President Higgins’ reciprocal visit) the highpoint of that cycle of rapprochement.

Brexit also acted to make Ireland’s ‘choice for Europe’ emphatically clear and the five years since the Brexit referendum has seen a progressive Irish deepening of its engagement with EU structures and processes. In contrast to the UK’s chosen path of ‘sovereignty first’, the Irish engagement with European integration has been one of pragmatic adaptation and cumulative embrace of EU norms. Because of participation in the integration process, Ireland learned to live with ambiguity and institutional fluidity. The basic rationale of the EU as an international collective which allows its member states to cooperate on different issues, via different levels of institutional power, is one that Ireland embraced enthusiastically as a small state, seeking to maximise its influence internationally. For Ireland now the challenge is to

maintain that commitment to the EU as its external anchor, while protecting the Good Friday Agreement and ensuring that the relationship with the United Kingdom can be repaired.

## Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> John O'Brennan, 'Government, Parliament and the Civil Service' (2012), and 'Ireland and European Governance' (2021).
- <sup>2</sup> The Taoiseach's speech can be accessed at: MerrionStreet.ie, 'Address by An Taoiseach Micheál Martin to the IIEA 2021: Ambitions and Challenges for Ireland in a Changing World' (15 January 2021), [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/news/address\\_by\\_an\\_taoiseach\\_michel\\_martin\\_to\\_the\\_iiea\\_2021\\_ambitions\\_and\\_challenges\\_for\\_ireland\\_in\\_a\\_changing\\_world.166190.shortcut.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/news/address_by_an_taoiseach_michel_martin_to_the_iiea_2021_ambitions_and_challenges_for_ireland_in_a_changing_world.166190.shortcut.html).
- <sup>3</sup> O'Brennan, 'Ireland and European Governance' (2021), Brigid Laffan, 'Ireland in a European Context' (2021).
- <sup>4</sup> See European Movement Ireland (2021) Ireland and the EU 2021, <https://www.europeanmovement.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EM-RED-C-Infographic-2021-FINAL.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> Etain Tannam, 'The British-Irish Relationship and the Centrality of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference' (2021).
- <sup>6</sup> John O'Brennan, 'Requiem for a Shared Interdependent Past: Brexit and the Deterioration in UK-Irish Relations' (2019), and 'Ireland and European Governance' (2021).
- <sup>7</sup> O'Brennan (2019), Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>8</sup> O'Brennan (2019), Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>9</sup> Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>10</sup> Fintan O'Toole, *Three Years in Hell: The Brexit Chronicles* (2020), p.xvi.
- <sup>11</sup> Cited in David Frum, 'England's Difficulty Is Ireland's Mortal Danger' (2019).
- <sup>12</sup> Paul Gillespie, 'The British-Irish Dimension' (2021), O'Brennan (2019).
- <sup>13</sup> See *The Irish Times* (18 April 2018), 'Ireland and Germany: Gaining friends and influence', <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/ireland-and-germany-gaining-friends-and-influence-1.3464595>.
- <sup>14</sup> Gillespie, *ibid*, O'Brennan (2019).
- <sup>15</sup> See Adam Daly, 'UK will not use potential food shortages in Ireland as Brexit bargaining chip, says May' (12 December 2018), *thejournal.ie*, <https://www.thejournal.ie/food-shortages-uk-ireland-4390711-Dec2018/>.
- <sup>16</sup> Gillespie, *ibid*, O'Brennan (2019).
- <sup>17</sup> Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>18</sup> Gillespie, *ibid*; see also *BBC News*, 'Boris Johnson likens Irish border challenge to congestion charge' (27 February 2018), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-43210156>.

- <sup>19</sup> See *The Irish Times*, “‘Have people inspected” at Irish border after Brexit, says Rees-Mogg’ (26 August 2018), <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/have-people-inspected-at-irish-border-after-brexit-says-rees-mogg-1.3608305>, and O’Brennan (2019).
- <sup>20</sup> See Lisa O’Carroll, ‘Irish deputy PM warns on “reckless shouting” in Brexit war of words’ (8 September 2018), *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/08/brexit-has-anglo-irish-relations-at-30-year-low-fianna-fail-leader-says>, Gillespie, *ibid*, and O’Brennan (2019).
- <sup>21</sup> *The Irish Times*, ‘Varadkar insists “Good Friday Agreement not up for negotiation” in Brexit talks’ (2 October 2018), <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-insists-good-friday-agreement-not-up-for-negotiation-in-brexit-talks-1.3648709>.
- <sup>22</sup> *thejournal.ie*, ‘Simon Coveney: Concerns about proposed change to Brexit deal “exacerbated” by recent comments’ (8 September 2020), <https://www.thejournal.ie/northern-ireland-brexit-international-law-5199144-Sep2020/>.
- <sup>23</sup> John Downing, ‘Brexit minister “to announce marked changes to protocol”’ (20 July 2021), *Belfast Telegraph*, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/brexit/brexit-minister-to-announce-marked-changes-to-protocol-40670888.html>.
- <sup>24</sup> See Tony Connelly, ‘Head-on collision: Hardening British rhetoric and the NI Protocol’ (22 May 2021), *RTE News*, <https://www.rte.ie/news/analysis-and-comment/2021/0522/1223207-brexit-protocol/>.
- <sup>25</sup> Fintan O’Toole, *ibid*.
- <sup>26</sup> Chris Grey, *Brexit Unfolded: How No one got what they wanted (and why they were never going to)* (2021).
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>28</sup> Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>29</sup> Brendan O’Leary, ‘Getting Ready: The Need to Prepare for a Referendum on Reunification’ (2021), p.25.
- <sup>30</sup> Tannam, *ibid*.
- <sup>31</sup> *MerrionStreet.ie*, ‘Speech by An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD – Two Islands – ‘One Future, Ireland, the UK and the EU’ (15 April 2021), [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two\\_islands\\_one\\_future\\_ireland\\_the\\_uk\\_and\\_the\\_eu.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two_islands_one_future_ireland_the_uk_and_the_eu.html).
- <sup>32</sup> The Bilateral Review can be accessed here, via the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/our-work/casestudiesarchive/2021/january/ireland-scotland-joint-bilateral-review—report-and-recommendations-2021-25.php>.
- <sup>33</sup> O’Brennan (2021).
- <sup>34</sup> Department of Finance, ‘UK EU Exit – An Exposure Analysis of Sectors of the Irish Economy’ (2017), <https://assets.gov.ie/7022/2e8e467fc3e542a79a399f4825dfacd1.pdf>.
- <sup>35</sup> O’Brennan (2019, 2021).
- <sup>36</sup> Daniel Fallen Bailey and Darragh Treacy, ‘Unitised Traffic Report Q2 2021’ (2021), Irish Maritime Development Office, <https://www.imdo.ie/Home/sites/default/files/IMDOFiles/Q2%202021%20IMDO%20Unitised%20Traffic%20Report%20%284%29.pdf>.

- <sup>37</sup> See Eoin Burke-Kennedy, 'Brexit fuels major pick-up in North-South trade' (16 August 2021), *The Irish Times*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/brexit-fuels-major-pick-up-in-north-south-trade-1.4648388?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fbusiness%2Feconomy%2Fbrexit-fuels-major-pick-up-in-north-south-trade-1.4648388>.
- <sup>38</sup> Laffan, *ibid*; Nicholas Rees and John O'Brennan, 'The dual crisis in Irish foreign policy: the economic crash and Brexit in a volatile European landscape' (2019).
- <sup>39</sup> Cited in Jack Horgan-Jones, "'A crucial relationship": How Merkel helped determine Ireland's place in EU' (29 July 2021), *The Irish Times*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/a-crucial-relationship-how-merkel-helped-determine-ireland-s-place-in-eu-1.4632936>.
- <sup>40</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*; O'Brennan (2019).
- <sup>41</sup> Gillespie, *ibid*; O'Brennan (2021).
- <sup>42</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>43</sup> Doru Peter Frantescu, 'France more likely than Germany to lead the EU Council after Brexit, voting records in the Council show' (29 March 2017), *VoteWatch Europe*, <https://www.votewatch.eu/blog/france-more-likely-than-germany-to-lead-the-eu-council-after-brexit-voting-records-in-the-council-show/>.
- <sup>44</sup> O'Brennan (2019); Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>45</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>46</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>47</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>48</sup> See Reuters, 'Ireland fails to back global corporate tax proposal over 15% rate' (1 July 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/business/ireland-declines-back-oecd-corporate-tax-agreement-due-rate-2021-07-01/>.
- <sup>49</sup> Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>50</sup> Aaron Burnett, "'Our Gallant Allies in Europe": Irish Diplomacy in a post-Brexit EU?' (2019), and Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>51</sup> MerrionStreet.ie, 'Speech by An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD – Two Islands – 'One Future, Ireland, the UK and the EU' (15 April 2021), [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two\\_islands\\_one\\_future\\_ireland\\_the\\_uk\\_and\\_the\\_eu.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two_islands_one_future_ireland_the_uk_and_the_eu.html).
- <sup>52</sup> Jack Horgan-Jones, "'A crucial relationship": How Merkel helped determine Ireland's place in EU' (29 July 2021).
- <sup>53</sup> *The Irish Times* (18 April 2018), 'Ireland and Germany: Gaining friends and influence', <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/ireland-and-germany-gaining-friends-and-influence-1.3464595>.
- <sup>54</sup> Burnett, *ibid*; Rees and O'Brennan, *ibid*.
- <sup>55</sup> MerrionStreet.ie, 'Speech by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, to the European Parliament' (17 January 2018), [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/speech\\_by\\_an\\_taoiseach\\_leo\\_varadkar\\_to\\_the\\_european\\_parliament.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/speech_by_an_taoiseach_leo_varadkar_to_the_european_parliament.html)
- <sup>56</sup> O'Brennan (2021).
- <sup>57</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Minister Coveney – The Europe we want' (28 November 2017), <https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2017/november/europe-we-want/>.

<sup>58</sup> O’Brennan (2021); Rees and O’Brennan, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> O’Brennan (2021).

<sup>60</sup> Grey, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> O’Brennan (2021).

## References

---

Bailey, D.F., and Treacy, D. (2021), ‘Unitised Traffic Report Q2 2021’, Irish Maritime Development Office,

<https://www.imdo.ie/Home/sites/default/files/IMDOFiles/Q2%202021%20IMDO%20Unitised%20Traffic%20Report%20%284%29.pdf>

Burke-Kennedy, E. (16 August 2021), ‘Brexit fuels major pick-up in North-South trade’, *The Irish Times*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/brexit-fuels-major-pick-up-in-north-south-trade-1.4648388?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-orig=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fbusiness%2Feconomy%2Fbrexit-fuels-major-pick-up-in-north-south-trade-1.4648388>.

Burnett, A. (2019), “‘Our Gallant Allies in Europe’”: Irish Diplomacy in a Post-Brexit EU’, in *Emerging Voices: a Future of Europe Anthology* (Dublin: Irish Institute for Institute for International and European Affairs), pp.51-63, <https://historyiiea.com/the-future-of-the-eu27/the-future-of-europe-anthology/>

Connelly, T. (22 May 2021), ‘Head-on collision: Hardening British rhetoric and the NI Protocol’, *RTE News*, <https://www.rte.ie/news/analysis-and-comment/2021/0522/1223207-brexit-protocol/>

Daly, A. (12 December 2018), ‘UK will not use potential food shortages in Ireland as Brexit bargaining chip, says May’, *thejournal.ie*, <https://www.thejournal.ie/food-shortages-uk-ireland-4390711-Dec2018/>

Department of Finance. (2017), ‘UK EU Exit – An Exposure Analysis of Sectors of the Irish Economy’, <https://assets.gov.ie/7022/2e8e467fc3e542a79a399f4825dfacd1.pdf>.

Department of Foreign Affairs. (28 November 2017), ‘Minister Coveney – The Europe we want’, <https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2017/november/europe-we-want/>

Downing, J. (2021), ‘Brexit minister “to announce marked changes to protocol”’, *Belfast Telegraph*, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/brexit/brexit-minister-to-announce-marked-changes-to-protocol-40670888.html>

Frantescu, D.P. (2017), ‘France more likely than Germany to lead the EU Council after Brexit, voting records in the Council show’, *VoteWatch Europe*, <https://www.votewatch.eu/blog/france-more-likely-than-germany-to-lead-the-eu-council-after-brexit-voting-records-in-the-council-show/>.

- Frum, D. (2019), 'England's Difficulty Is Ireland's Mortal Danger', *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/03/ireland-has-remarkable-power-over-brexit/584434/>
- Gillespie, P. (2021), 'The British-Irish Dimension', in Farrell, D. and Hardiman, N. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), forthcoming
- Grey, C. (2021), *Brexit Unfolded: How No one got what they wanted (and why they were never going to)* (London: Biteback Publishers), forthcoming
- Horgan-Jones, J. (29 July 2021), 'A crucial relationship: How Merkel determined Ireland's place in the EU', *The Irish Times*, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/a-crucial-relationship-how-merkel-helped-determine-ireland-s-place-in-eu-1.4632936>
- The Irish Times*. (2 October 2018), 'Varadkar insists "Good Friday Agreement not up for negotiation" in Brexit talks', <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/varadkar-insists-good-friday-agreement-not-up-for-negotiation-in-brexit-talks-1.3648709>
- The Irish Times*. (26 August 2018), '"Have people inspected" at Irish border after Brexit, says Rees-Mogg', <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/have-people-inspected-at-irish-border-after-brexit-says-rees-mogg-1.3608305>
- The Irish Times*, (18 April 2018), 'Ireland and Germany: gaining friends and influence', <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/ireland-and-germany-gaining-friends-and-influence-1.3464595>
- Laffan, B. (2021), 'Ireland in a European Context', in Farrell, D. and Hardiman, N. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), forthcoming
- MerrionStreet.ie. (15 April 2021), 'Speech by An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD – Two Islands – 'One Future, Ireland, the UK and the EU'', [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two\\_islands\\_one\\_future\\_ireland\\_the\\_uk\\_and\\_the\\_eu.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/two_islands_one_future_ireland_the_uk_and_the_eu.html)
- MerrionStreet.ie. (15 January 2021), 'Address by An Taoiseach Micheál Martin to the IIEA 2021: Ambitions and Challenges for Ireland in a Changing World', [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/news/address\\_by\\_an\\_taoiseach\\_michel\\_martin\\_to\\_the\\_iiea\\_2021\\_ambitions\\_and\\_challenges\\_for\\_ireland\\_in\\_a\\_changing\\_world.166190.shortcut.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/news/address_by_an_taoiseach_michel_martin_to_the_iiea_2021_ambitions_and_challenges_for_ireland_in_a_changing_world.166190.shortcut.html)
- MerrionStreet.ie, 'Speech by An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, to the European Parliament' (17 January 2018), [https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/speech\\_by\\_an\\_taoiseach\\_leo\\_varadkar\\_to\\_the\\_european\\_parliament.html](https://merrionstreet.ie/en/news-room/speeches/speech_by_an_taoiseach_leo_varadkar_to_the_european_parliament.html)
- O'Brennan, J. (2021) 'Ireland and European Governance', in Farrell, D. and Hardiman, N. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), forthcoming
- O'Brennan, J. (2019), 'Requiem for a Shared Interdependent Past: Brexit and the Deterioration in UK-Irish Relations', *Capital and Class*, Special Issue on Twentieth Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, Volume 43, Issue 1, pp. 157-172.

- O'Brennan, J. (2012). 'Government, Parliament and the Civil Service', in Kennedy, M. et al (eds.), *Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan), pp.83-97
- O'Carroll, L. (8 September 2018), 'Irish deputy PM warns on "reckless shouting" in Brexit war of words', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/08/brexit-has-anglo-irish-relations-at-30-year-low-fianna-fail-leader-says>
- O'Leary, B. (2021), 'Getting Ready: The Need to Prepare for a Referendum on Reunification', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 32(2), pp.1-38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.3318/isia.2021.32b.1.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Aa619aff82eed9faaca219e6ac7262ff4>
- O' Toole, F. (2020), *Three Years in Hell: The Brexit Chronicles*, (London: Head of Zeus)
- Rees, N., and O' Brennan, J. (2019), 'The Dual Crisis in Irish Foreign Policy: the economic crash and Brexit in a volatile European landscape', *Irish Political Studies*, 34(4), pp.595-614, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2019.1669563>
- Tannam, E. (2021), 'The British-Irish Relationship and the Centrality of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Volume 31, Number 2, pp.341-67
- thejournal.ie*, (8 September 2020), 'Simon Coveney: Concerns about proposed change to Brexit deal "exacerbated" by recent comments', <https://www.thejournal.ie/northern-ireland-brexit-international-law-5199144-Sep2020/>