### A pro-EU defence of Irish Neutrality

### As testified by recent statements from Professor Brigid Laffan, Director of the *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies* in Florence, and Brendan Halligan, President of the *Institute of International and European Affairs* (IIEA), the official pro-EU lobby in Ireland is pressing for Ireland’s military neutrality to be abandoned. The rationale behind this attack on what is a cornerstone of traditional policy is a belated recognition from both writers that Ireland needs to distance itself from Britain and move closer to Europe because of Brexit. If Ireland is now to tie its colours more firmly to the EU mast, they argue, we must commit fully to all the common EU policies, including those pertaining to the Union’s security and defence.

### The purpose of this document is to state the case for retaining Irish neutrality while actively supporting the integration of the EU. The urgent priority following the sovereign debt crisis of recent years must be the further integration and consolidation of the Eurozone, but that is a separate topic. This document, which is confined to the topic of Irish neutrality, begins with relevant extracts from media statements by Professor Laffan and Brendan Halligan and proceeds to treat the topic under four main headings: Hard geo-politics; Historical orientation; Realpolitik and the EU-US relationship; and Nation states in a supranational union. The case concludes with a discussion of possible conditions under which a review of Irish neutrality might be warranted.

**The case against neutrality**

### Brigid Laffan considers it important in the longer term that “*Ireland adjusts to the EU27, as opposed to the EU28*”. Viewing neutrality in this context she says:

“Moreover, a second sacred cow needs attention and that is the Republic’s policy of military neutrality.

Irish policy in this regard was always conditioned by the safety of its geographical location.

However, the return of hard geopolitics in a world of Putin and Trump challenges European security and means that the State’s neutrality deserves sustained scrutiny.

The so-called triple lock which binds the State into a UN resolution before committing to the deployment of Irish troops does not do justice to the Irish Republic.

The consent of the [Oireachtas](https://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_organisation=Oireachtas&article=true) should be sufficient for such a move, and the Republic should take full part in the further development of the EU’s security capacity.”

(Irish Times article, 16 May 2017)

### For Brendan Halligan the EU is essentially a Franco-German project whose engine is about to be kick-started following the election of Emmanuel Macron as President of France. He argues that Ireland will need to adopt the agenda of Macron and Merkel (assuming she wins a fourth term in September) and adapt it to our own requirements. He places the question of neutrality in a historical context as follows:

“Ireland volunteered to join the EEC in 1961 and gave certain commitments that now need to be revived. The then Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, fearing that Ireland would otherwise be isolated, virtually broke down the doors in [Brussels](https://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Brussels&article=true) to get into the community. Our application was opposed on many grounds, of which non-membership of [Nato](https://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_organisation=Nato&article=true) was the biggest. Lemass took this head-on and asserted that Ireland agreed with the objectives of Nato, was not neutral in the conflict between democracy and communism and implied that, if admitted as a member, would be prepared to join in the common defence of the EEC.

But defence remains a legacy issue because that commitment got lost after Lemass’s retirement, and is now forgotten. Discussion is off-limits and neutrality has become more a matter of theology than international politics. We have failed to update what it means in practice, as the Finns and Swedes have done.

But we won’t be able to do that for much longer because the Franco-German alliance has undergone a renaissance with the arrival of President Macron and with the imminent re-election of Mrs Merkel. European defence is back on the agenda, not least because of the US retreat from global affairs and the re-emergence of a truculent [Russia](https://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Russia&article=true).”

(I**r**ish Times article, 27 July 2017)

### Halligan’s focus is on extracting EU aid in compensation for the losses that Brexit will impose on sectors of the Irish economy. Arguing that a cost will have to be incurred for procuring such aid he identifies ‘*playing a full part in the future common defence*’ [of the Union] as a necessary part of the cost. Ireland, he advises, should invoke the principle of solidarity and show that solidarity works both ways. He describes the strategy he is proposing as being based on ‘*realpolitik*’ as opposed to woolly ‘*sentiment*’. His text reads:

“We will inevitably be looking for assistance in building a new economic model while absorbing the shock of Brexit. To succeed at both we will need something analogous to the cohesion funds that eased our way into monetary union as well as special measures to offset the loss of competitiveness in the UK market, a consequence of the inexorable decline in the value of sterling.

This will be a tough case to make given the competing needs of the less well off member states. But it will have to be made and will be best done by invoking the principle of solidarity. Common sense dictates, however, that to win solidarity we must show solidarity and that means playing a full part at the centre of the Union. It’s a question of realpolitik, not sentiment.

In sum, playing a full part at the centre of the Union means playing a full part in the future common defence and security policies, playing a full part in creating a fiscal union involving corporate tax harmonisation, playing a full part in the Franco-German re-launch of Europe and finally cutting the umbilical cord with Britain and accepting the full consequences of the hard Brexit being brewed up by the Tories.”

(Ibid)

Laffan and Halligan both argue that Ireland will need to strengthen its relationship with the EU as a result of Brexit and the new political landscape that is forming on the Continent, especially the renewed Franco-German relationship, and they both consider the ending of Irish neutrality as necessary because of a perceived threat to European security from Russia and Donald Trump’s retreat from global affairs. Brendan Halligan adds a further dimension by proposing that neutrality should be dropped as a gesture of solidarity with the EU at a time when Ireland will need to procure funding from Brussels in compensation for the damage that Brexit will eventually cause.

**Hard geopolitics**

‘Hard geopolitics’ means the reality of military power, influenced by geographical factors, that lies at the back of international rivalries and relationships; we should thank Professor Laffan for introducing it, except that it should be widened beyond current Western concerns about Russia. Since the end of the cold war in November 1989 the overwhelming geopolitical reality has been the hegemony of the US. A ‘*new world order*’ initiated by the US at that time has not gone to plan; and the repercussions provide the context in which all major questions of international alignment and peace-keeping need to be addressed.

In geopolitical terms the EU is part of the West and the military strategies of the West are determined by the Anglosphere, a long standing alliance between the US, the global super power, and the UK, the sixth strongest military power in the world, but also including minor powers like Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Why should Ireland’s defence forces become integrated with EU military structures that are ultimately a minor cog in an alliance that exerts a destabilising influence in the world? The invasion of Iraq by a multi-national force in 2003 destabilised a volatile region, and the effects of the destabilisation continue to pose a security threat to the nations of the West. The involvement of NATO forces in Afghanistan arising from the September 11th atrocity in New York in 2001 has failed to end the destabilising effect of military conflict in that country and contributed to Europe’s migration crisis. Nor is there much evidence that lessons have been learned from these entanglements. In 2014 rebels backed by Western air strikes toppled the Qaddafi regime in Libya with the result that the country has been wracked by conflict between three rival groupings of jihadists ever since. As is well known the ensuing chaos has been a major factor in the trafficking of immigrants across the Mediterranean into Italy.

The other conflict that has contributed significantly to Europe’s migration crisis is the war in Syria; it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that US involvement there, being focussed mainly on the prevention of Russian success, is having the effect of prolonging the distress of the Syrian population. The Syrian war also raises the question of the antagonism between the US and Russia and why it has been escalated by the US. The opportunity created by the collapse of the Soviet Union to forge a mutually supportive relationship between the West and Russia was squandered through misconceived efforts to implant the US variant of capitalism during the Yeltsin era, but even allowing for that as an honest failure the wilful aggravation of relations with Putin in the years following 9/11 are difficult to fathom. The tensions arising from disputes between the US and Russia, over Ukraine as well as Syria, are a direct concern for Europe.

Professor Laffan’s reference to ‘*hard* *geopolitics in a world of Putin and Trump*’ and Brendan Halligan’s reference to ‘*the US retreat from global affairs and the re-emergence of a truculent* [*Russia*](https://www.irishtimes.com/search/search-7.1213540?tag_location=Russia&article=true)’ both reflect a viewpoint that sees President Trump’s attempted rapprochement with Russia as misconceived. The logic of their position, widely shared by anti-Trump media commentators, is that the opponents of Trump in the US Congress who recently voted to codify and strengthen economic sanctions against Russia have the right idea. But have they? When anti-Russian sanctions were initially imposed by the US and the EU in 2014 following a referendum vote by the population of Crimea to leave Ukraine and join the Russian Federation, the trade links most affected were those between the EU and Russia. Essentially the US was using the EU as an instrument to damage the Russian economy. Following the recent vote in the US Congress, which if followed through on will inflict far greater damage on European interests than the earlier sanctions, the EU Commission has vigorously opposed the new measures to the point of drafting ‘*WTO-compliant retaliatory measures*’. However that story turns out the underlying message is that US dominance over the present geopolitical system is harmful to European interests and detrimental to international peace.

The debate in the US Senate (early August 2017) over sanctions against Russia included some illuminating comments on the US relationship with Europe. The legislation is described by Alistair Crooke as a measure designed ‘*to hurt and incapacitate the US President in any future dealings with Russia’*. According to Crooke this objective takes precedence over the risk of causing collateral damage to Europe. He writes:

“Congress Senator Dianne Feinstein, D-California, blandly stated that the concerns of U.S. allies come second to the need <https://theintercept.com/2017/07/27/with-the-european-union-livid-congress-pushes-forward-on-sanctions-against-russia-iran-and-north-korea/>to punish Russia for its election interference. When asked whether the bill took account of the European Union’s interests, one of the main authors, Senator John McCain, R-Arizona, said simply: “Not that I know of. Certainly not in the portion of the bill I was responsible for.”

Another of the bill’s authors, Bob Menendez, D-New Jersey, laconically replied to the same question: “Not much, to be honest with you.”

McCain carelessly then quipped that essentially it was “the job of the E.U. to come around to the legislation, not for the legislation to be brought around to them.””

A different take on the US-EU relationship is to be found in a recent briefing from the IIEA. Referring to Angela Merkel’s Munich beer tent statement “*we Europeans must take our fate in our own hands to some extent*”, the briefing author counsels against overstating the significance of the Chancellor’s comments during the run-up to a Federal Election or seeing them as “*heralding a dramatic shift in Germany’s and Europe’s approach to geopolitics*”. Later in the briefing a statement from a senior fellow from the Brookings Institute, Dr Constanze Stelzenmüller, is quoted which highlights an ambivalence in the European view of US-EU relations. The statement reads:

“None of this means that Europeans are turning their backs on America, the trans-Atlantic relationship, or NATO, its military arm—or are attempting to set up a counterweight. But it is a declaration of emancipation”.

The first sentence seems to be contradicted by the second, a sequence that aptly summarises the true position. Subservience to the US is not popular with European electorates but European elites are well aware of the geopolitical reality that the West must abide by the leadership of the leading nation of the Anglosphere.

The relevance of all this to the Irish debate on neutrality is that for all intents and purposes the EU is subject to the leadership of the US. If war were to break out between the US and Russia, not as unlikely an eventuality as may seem, the EU would quickly fall into line with its master across the Atlantic; in terms of hard geopolitics the EU is a subsidiary of the US. In these circumstances and given that the *new world order* has turned out to be disastrous in its major initiatives, there is a strong case for withholding Irish involvement in the security affairs of the EU, for defending the traditional neutrality policy. Criticism of American foreign policy will appeal in normal circumstances to a relatively small percentage of the population. Because of the magnitude of the catastrophe in Iraq, however, an intervention described by the pro-Western author, Jason Burke, as a ‘*grotesque strategic mistake*’, defending neutrality is likely to resonate with a clear majority of the electorate. It will be said that Irish neutrality has been effectively negated by the stop-off at Shannon used by the US military for re-fuelling en route to Iraq, but Ireland must bend to geopolitical realities no less than the EU. Even in its compromised form as a result of the use of Shannon, Irish neutrality stands out among the policies of European states and is worth defending.

**Historical orientation**

The reference to Lemass in Brendan Halligan’s letter to the *Irish Times* has the merit of being an attempt to place Ireland’s relationship with the EEC/EU in a historical perspective, but it rests too heavily on economic criteria. In this Mr Halligan is representative of a great number of contemporary commentators who portray Ireland as a basket case that was belatedly rescued by the modernising effects of free trade in the 1960s. The following paragraph from a previous essay by Professor Laffan published in 2001 is an example of such commentary. Speaking about Ireland’s entry into the EEC in the course of a Thomas Davis lecture she said:

“The Taoiseach and his party were seen off at Dublin airport by the then President, Eamon de Valera. The photograph capturing the departing Taoiseach and the ageing President was hugely symbolic. This tableau captured the ties but also the tensions between the Ireland of 1972 and the Ireland of 1916. Jack Lynch’s departure to sign the Rome Treaty represented the end of the Ireland that de Valera would have wished for and experienced. Right up to the mid-1950s de Valera’s idea or ideal of Ireland was that of a rural and preferably Gaelic-speaking society committed to spiritual rather than material values. The Ireland of the twenties, thirties, forties and fifties was an Ireland fearful of the consequences of economic modernisation, urbanisation and growth.” (Hourihane, 2002, p. 54)

The basic message informing the Laffan/Halligan view of Irish twentieth century history is: Lemass - good; De Valera - bad. Under this ‘narrative’ neutrality belongs on the opposite side of the equation from economic modernisation; it was devised by De Valera and is consequently tainted by pre-modern conservatism. Before setting out an alternative narrative in which neutrality is viewed from a historical perspective, it will be instructive to briefly answer Professor Laffan’s skewed portrayal of the relationship between Sean Lemass and Jack Lynch on one side and De Valera on the other.

Policies implemented by Governments headed by De Valera in the 1930s and 1940s included industrialisation in the form of increased industrial employment enabled by protectionist tariffs, a failed drive to increase agricultural employment through the expansion of tillage, an accelerated provision of public housing, a system of family allowances aimed at reducing poverty, rural electrification and the development of the bogs. Many of these policies entailed increased public spending and on that ground were vigorously opposed by Fine Gael and the large farmer interest. They were also opposed by the civil servants heading the Department of Finance and the Central Bank, especially Joseph Brennan and James McElligott. In a nutshell De Valera confronted and disproved the conservative view inherited from the British that agriculture should form the mainstay of the Irish economy and in this he was ably assisted by Ministers like Sean Lemass and Frank Aiken.

Jack Lynch is not a politician that the *Irish Political Review* would single out for praise, quite the contrary given his role in the Arms Crisis of 1970. Like Lemass his abilities and contribution to Irish politics are greatly exaggerated. Nonetheless his political career was not without achievement. He served in the Cabinets of both de Valera and Lemass and admired both. In a short memoir published on the Politico website entitled, ‘*Jack Lynch: My Life and Times*’, Lynch makes two points regarding the EEC that show the degree of his sympathy for the De Valerite worldview: that he was proud to have led Ireland into the European Monetary System in 1979 when Britain remained outside of it; and that the great effect of EEC membership was “*to remove Ireland’s almost complete dependence on the British economy and to abolish the exploitative element, that was inherent in that dependence, primarily through the operation of the British cheap food policy*” (Lynch, 1979).

In old age De Valera is reported to have been apprehensive about Ireland’s joining of the EEC. This was probably due to a fear, widespread at the time, that Irish industrial employment would collapse in the face of international competition. In the event many Irish jobs were gradually lost but the losses were compensated by other jobs created through foreign direct investment. That ‘*Dev*’ would have been pleased by the later developmental successes of Irish involvement in the EU is a reasonable assumption.

In short the Laffan/Halligan view of the Irish experience of the EEC/EU is based on a false dichotomy between anti-modern nationalism symbolised by De Valera and economic liberalism led by Sean Lemass. De Valera and Lemass shared the same nationalist outlook; they both contributed to the creation of the modern Irish state, one as a state builder, the other as a political administrator; of the two the contribution of De Valera was by far the more important.

In dismissing the Irish commitment to military neutrality as ‘*a matter of theology*’ Brendan Halligan demonstrates a notable lack of historical understanding. The maintenance of neutrality by the Irish state throughout the six years of World War II was the culmination of a long campaign by De Valera and the Fianna Fail party aimed at rolling back a British policy of curtailing Irish sovereignty. The Irish drive to unwind the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, waged by De Valera during the 1930s provides a clear example of the *primacy of politics* principle in practice. Even though the Irish Government was pursuing radical economic policies by increasing public expenditure and maintaining protective tariffs during that time, thwarting British plans to retain Ireland within its sphere of influence was of a higher priority; the establishment of meaningful independence from Britain, a political objective, was considerably more important than the economic reforms; it laid the basis for the subsequent emergence of the Irish Republic as a successful modern state.

In a study of the common travel area (CTA) between Ireland and the UK, historian Elizabeth Meehan describes a policy conflict faced by the Irish Government between the aims of asserting independence from the UK while upholding the CTA on pragmatic grounds. She concludes that “*Irish governments were remarkably successful in realising this uncomfortable pair of objectives*” (“*Free movement between Ireland the UK: from the 'common travel area' to the COMMON TRAVEL AREA*” by Elizabeth Meehan, produced by the Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin in association with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2000, p. 10)

She describes the process as follows:

"The Oath of Allegiance had been abolished by constitutional amendment in 1933 and, in 1934, during consideration of the Nationality and Citizenship Bill, instructions were given by the Executive Council to the Department of External Affairs to delete 'specific references to the British Commonwealth of Nations'. Following its enactment, Ireland introduced its own Aliens Act under which anyone who was not a citizen of Saorstat Eireann was an alien. This made the British as alien as any other nationality but an exemption Order (S.R. + O. No 80 of 1935) excluded them and the peoples of the Commonwealth from the application of the 1935 Act and, hence, permitted the continuation of free movement. In 1936 the External Relations Act was passed. This Act reflected de Valera's position at the time of the 1921 Treaty; that the King should not be Head of State in Ireland, though he would be Head of the Commonwealth with which Ireland might have an external relationship. Thus, the Act brought into being a 'state internally a republic' but with 'an act of parliament [i.e. a statute, not 'a fundamental law'] associating us in certain respects with the states of the British commonwealth' for the duration of the legislation 'and no longer'. The 1937 Constitution, for which preparation had begun in 1935, the year of the Nationality and Citizenship Act and the Aliens Act, contains no direct reference to the British Crown or Commonwealth. Article 29, however, maintains a general possibility for legislation allowing the state to associate itself with 'any group or league of nations'…" ( ibid p. 13, 14).

The political and economic objectives of the de Valera Government became intertwined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1938. That Agreement had the purpose of ending the economic war between Ireland the UK which arose out of a decision by de Valera to cease paying land annuities to the British Government. In the negotiations the Irish agreed to pay the relatively low amount of £10 million as a final payment, a settlement usually adjudged a triumph for the Irish side. Also decided in the Agreement was that the UK would return to Dublin three sea ports which had been retained by Britain as part of the 1921 settlement. Having control of the ports allowed the Irish Government to take a neutral stance in future international conflicts, a power that was used by de Valera’s Fianna Fail Government with the support of the Opposition to keep Ireland neutral during the Second World War. The exercise of neutrality in that context was the ultimate expression of Irish independence from Britain; it was the culmination of a long campaign to establish Irish sovereignty.

One further aspect of the historical aspect of Irish neutrality needs to be noted. It would be wrong to conclude that the policy had no purpose other than to take up a position different to that of the UK. In important respects the policy had its origins in the stance taken by the leaders of the 1916 rebellion, a stance of opposition to John Redmond’s support for the British war effort in 1914-18. Two of the leaders in particular, Roger Casement and James Connolly, viewed the war from an international as well as a national perspective. It was Casement’s opinion that Britain’s decision to wage war on Germany reflected an unjustifiable attempt to destroy a trade rival. Connolly had the same view but added a socialist perspective. For Connolly socialist reforms had brought immense benefits to Germany and lay “*at* *the back of her military achievements*”. The Casement/Connolly view—which might be summarised along the lines that a superior social system in Germany was in danger of being crushed by a more capitalist, rapacious and, in relative terms, socially backward system in Britain—became the position of the 1916 leaders and subsequently of the Irish national movement as a whole. It might be summarised that the Irish national revolution was based a foreign policy matter.

In calling for Irish neutrality to be dropped in place of support for a common EU defence policy Brendan Halligan and Professor Laffan are acting in ignorance of the policy’s historical significance. They are calling for a major national policy change on the basis of an inadequate and partial analysis.

**Realpolitik and the EU-US relationship**

The Irish Europhile position as articulated by Professor Laffan and Brendan Halligan, sees the EU essentially as an external phenomenon over which Ireland has little or no influence; in it the new momentum of the European project is portrayed as a Franco-German development to which Ireland, in pursuing its narrow interests, must now adapt. As argued in the section following this section, this stance constitutes an overly passive response for a nation state, even a small one, in a supranational union, but the pragmatic approach that Halligan and Laffan are advocating—expressed in the Halligan article using the concept of ‘*realpolitik*’—is also inappropriate, especially at a time when the debate about the EU’s future following Brexit has re-focussed attention on fundamental principles.

‘*Realpolitik*’ is a term that has meant different things at different times and its evolution, summarised in a book review of “*Realpolitik: a history*” by John Bew, (Financial Times review by Duncan Kelly, Feb 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/802c822e-d0d6-11e5-831d-09f7778e7377>) is instructive. Originally it seems to have been coined as a synonym of ‘politics’ in its most positive sense but following the success of Bismark’s drive to unify Germany in the mid-nineteenth century it acquired the meaning of ‘hardheaded realism’ as against wooly ‘moralism’. Following the Great War it became a term of abuse for the German political tradition but it was subsequently adopted in lower case form by British supporters of imperialism as a counter to the perceived moralism of the League of Nations.

The term became much used in US discussions on foreign policy in the 1940s for the reason that it accorded with the rise of US world power and accompanying theories about the primacy of national interest. In these discussions to be labelled ‘Utopian’ and therefore unable to grasp the realpolitik of US national interests was to be damned. In the 1950s and 1960s a ‘Bismark Debate’ took place attracting contributions from luminaries like AJP Taylor, George Kennan and Henry Kissinger, in which Bismark’s achievements were ascribed to luck as much as genius and the counterposing of realism to idealism was recognised as a theoretical formulation that could be overplayed.

Allowing that Brendan Halligan uses the term realpolitik in its customary usage as ‘pragmatism/hardheaded realism’, it is nonetheless apposite to point out that Irish foreign policy rests on a view of international peace keeping that is fundamentally at odds with the concept of realpolitik. The historical example that demonstrates this is de Valera’s criticism of Great Power aggression in the League of Nations in the 1930s. When, as president of the council of the League, he indirectly denounced the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1932, he caused an international sensation. Three years later he took a similar stance against the Italian annexation of Ethiopia (then Abyssinia). The Irish position that the obligations of the covenant of the League needed to be enforced by military force where necessary, was widely respected at the time. De Valera’s case that the machinery of international peace-keeping needed to be strong enough to override the wishes of the major Powers is effectively the case for international law. His work in the 1930s was followed up in later decades by Frank Aiken as Minister for Foreign Affairs. The following paragraph in a document with the title, ‘Disarmament and non-proliferation’ from the website of the Department of Foreign Affairs indicates the success of Aiken’s efforts on the international stage.

“In 1958 Ireland introduced at the UN the first of what became known as the “Irish Resolutions”. This initiative culminated in the adoption of the [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty](http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPT.shtml) (NPT) and Ireland was the first country to sign the NPT in 1968. Almost half a century later, the NPT remains at the heart of international efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. The next NPT Review Conference will be held in New York in 2015.”

Not only has Irish foreign policy been opposed to the principle of realpolitik in international affairs, Irish diplomats have led the way in showing that it can be overturned. (It is an unfortunate fact that the non-proliferation Treaty has been used to block non-nuclear states like Iran from developing a nuclear power programme. Indeed a global regime in which nuclear armament is confined to those powers that already possess nuclear weapons is patently unjust. Why should some states—the US, Russia, the UK, France, Israel, Pakistan, India, China and North Korea—be allowed to develop such weapons while other states that deem such weapons necessary to their defence be prevented from doing so? This is clearly a complex issue but at the least it must be conceded that the non-proliferation Treaty has been used to defend militarism by protecting the advantaged position of the nuclear powers.)

***EU-US relations***

To underline the point that the present focus on the future of the EU affords an opportunity for making a principled defence of Irish neutrality, it will be useful to briefly examine the history of EU foreign policy, especially the relationship between Europe and the US and how that relationship has been affected by UK Governments over the years. Many commentators have noted that since the UK Government was the lead exponent of neo-liberal ideology in the EU, the British exit may hasten a shift to the left in matters of economic policy. Less commented on is the possibility that Brexit may spur a greater independence from the US on the part of the EU; if weaknesses in free market ideology are now up for debate, might not the same be true for the customary EU subservience to US hegemony?

The following analysis is based mainly on an essay, “*European Union Foreign Policy: a Historical Overview*” by Federiga Bindi published by Brookings Institution Press (2010, <https://www.google.ie/search?q=federiga+bindi+european+union+foreign+policy+a+historical+overview&oq=federiga+bindi&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59j0l4.8408j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>).

From the immediate post war years to the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1958, while the EEC was in gestation, a central question in international politics was how Germany could be allowed to rearm as part of the defence of Western Europe in the circumstances of the emerging Cold War. The underlying tension revolved around whether Western European defence should be controlled by the Europeans themselves or by some form of Atlantic alliance. A US plan in which a German army would operate under direct American control was rejected by the French in 1950. Eventually in May 1952 a European Treaty, the European Defence Community (EDC), described as “*the brainchild of Jean Monnet*” (known to history as the founder of the European project) was signed. While the Treaty was ratified by four of the six states that later constituted the EEC, the Italians withheld ratification pending a French decision and, reflecting the instability of French politics at the time, in August 1954 the measure was defeated in the National Assembly. Later that year, with the backing of the US, a military alliance, the Western European Union (WEU) was formed. Bindi concludes, “*The question of European defence thus became a transatlantic issue and a taboo in Europe for decades*” (p. 14). Notably, the initiative that culminated in the formation of the WEU began with a proposal from Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary.

After being elected the first President of the French Fifth Republic in November 1958, Charles de Gaulle became the dominant personality in the newly formed EEC. He wanted a ‘*European Europe*’, meaning a Europe free of US dominance and believed this could be achieved through close political cooperation between the six member states rather than integration. In this he had mixed results; his more ambitious projects like the Fouchet Committee on political cooperation met resistance from a number of member states. In 1961 the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Norway applied to join the Community and in 1962 President Kennedy launched his *Grand Design* initiative which was aimed at enhancing cooperation between the EEC with the UK as a member and the US. In line with this strategy Kennedy offered Polaris missiles to both Great Britain and France. The UK accepted the offer while de Gaulle turned it down seeing the British acceptance as evidence of ‘*the UK’s true allegiance*’. By way of response de Gaulle abruptly ended the enlargement negotiations. In 1966 he withdrew French involvement from the operative structures of NATO while remaining in the Atlantic alliance. By his actions the French leader showed the depth of his abhorrence for being brought under the aegis of American power, he also made plain his attitude towards America’s main European ally.

Historians generally treat de Gaulle’s antipathy to the Anglosphere as prejudiced but had he accepted the US offer of Polaris missiles Europe would today be considerably more beholden to American power than it is. Viewing the history of the UK’s involvement in the EU who could now say that his suspicions about Britain’s allegiance were not well founded?

During the 1970s further divisions between Europe and the US opened up over issues as diverse as the Vietnam War, the oil crises, the Arab-Israeli wars, the establishment of martial law in Poland, the Falklands war, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution. On more specific differences between the two blocs Bindi states:

“By the 1970s, the United States perceived the EEC as an economic competitor and held it responsible for the deficit that the United States experienced in its balance of payments. U.S. behaviour vis-a-vis the EEC became rather contradictory. The United States insisted that Europe should contribute more to NATO expenses while the U.S. president, Richard Nixon, affirmed the principle of American leadership over the organization. Similarly, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger called 1973 the ‘year of Europe’. Yet the idea was essentially that the United States had global responsibilities and interests while Europe’s interests were and could only be regional.”

(Bindi, p. 21)

Meanwhile, along with Ireland and Denmark, the UK became, in 1973, an EU member state. During the first seven years of membership the UK received valuable support from the EEC on international issues like the Rhodesian civil war and the Falklands campaign. Notwithstanding this the UK opposed a number of common EEC positions on foreign policy; Bindi provides the example of EEC sanctions against South Africa in 1985 which the British only signed up to so long as member states were free to decide their own actions.

In the thirty years between 1980 and 2010 a power struggle went on in the background of US-EU relations, with the main issue of contention being Europe’s military alignment. At times the balance seemed to swing in the EU’s favour as when the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 created the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which was ‘*permitted*’ to address the previously taboo question of European defence, or when in the run-up to the Berlin Council of 1996 the EU began to plan for a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) which threatened to rival NATO, or on the occasions when proposals for the WEU to be merged with the EU were discussed. However, the US always maintained the upper hand and its dominance is most clearly seen in the appointment of the ex-Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solano, to simultaneously holding three key posts from 1999 to 2009: High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU; Secretary General of the Council of the European Union; and Secretary-General of the WEU.

Both Gulf Wars were flash points in EU-US relations. In 1991 friction between the Thatcher Government and the rest of the Union over Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait spilled over into disagreements over “*issues of security, majority voting, how to integrate foreign policy into the Community, and whether the philosophical distinctions made between security and defence could be abandoned”* (Bindi, p. 26). These disagreements in turn provoked US concerns that the authority of NATO was being undermined. Differences arising from the 2003 war when France and Germany opposed the plans of America and Britain to invade Iraq were more significant again as has been well documented.

In more recent times three developments, the 2008 Great Recession, Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, have complicated the picture regarding the relationship between the EU and the US. The essential pattern of that relationship has been an unwillingness in Europe to submit to US dominance leavened by a need to adapt to its existence as a geopolitical reality. The UK’s position as the defender of US interests in Europe has been a factor in the divisions between London and the rest of the EU, divisions that contributed to the parting of the ways that is Brexit. It has also been a factor in holding Europe in an unpopular subservience to Washington. Precisely because of Brexit, Trump and the financial crash there is now a space for the EU to take stock and re-orient itself. In these circumstances it behoves Ireland to take a principled stand in defence of its foreign policy tradition which in its way is a beacon for multilateralism, collective security and the rule of international law, as opposed to a position based on realpolitik. Such a stance would imply movement by the EU away from allegiance to the US hegemon. Political development is often shaped by pragmatic accommodations and negotiated compromises, but it is also determined by ideas and adherence to principles. This is a time for more of the latter than usually obtains.

**Nation states in a supranational union**

However much they may wish to disavow it, Professor Laffan and Brendan Halligan are both members of the EU elite. Their treatment of the topic of Irish neutrality, especially as exemplified by the Halligan argument that Ireland will need to give something in order to procure financial assistance from Brussels that may be needed as a result of Brexit, reveals an understanding of the way the Union functions that bears the unmistakeable hallmark of the EU elite.

The officials responsible for the creation of the supranational institutions that underpinned the EEC back in the 1950s distrusted electoral democracy and especially distrusted the force of nationalism. Their focus was on saving Europe from the possibility that war would ever again threaten the survival of the Continent, a commendable aim. In recent times, however, especially since the 2008 crash, populist movements of right and left, recognising the anti-democratic bias of the EU, have make major inroads against the dominance of the pro-EU establishment parties. This development can be easily exaggerated; its only solid gain to date has been the Brexit referendum result; it may even be possible to say that the election of Macron in France has stemmed the populist tide. Yet a more realistic assessment would be that the EU has been granted a temporary reprieve, an opportunity to put its house in order so that the legitimate concerns raised by large swathes of its citizens can be addressed.

While Merkel, Macron and other member state leaders seem to understand all this the indications are that among many members of the supranational elite of the EU, among many high bureaucrats and think tank intellectuals, the customary anti-nationalist economic rationalist mindset continues to reign supreme. In this mindset the world is viewed through the prism of economics; history, culture, politics, and such factors as national identity and religion count for little. Instead of seeking to build allegiance to the EU as an extension of national allegiance the EU elite prefers to appeal to the mercenary instincts of member states. The problem is that where the loyalty of member states to the EU is built exclusively on economic factors the entire edifice becomes unstable every time economic development fails to go to plan. In a healthy polity economic development follows political allegiance, not the other way round.

The idea that we will need financial assistance similar in scale to the structural funds that were transferred to Ireland in the 1990s in order to cope with the fallout of Brexit, and that we will need to give up neutrality to have any chance of getting such funding, is a direct appeal to the mercenary instincts of the Irish State. If such a scenario were to be acted out it would constitute the worst possible building block for constructing a supranational union of nation states; it would signify a European Union resting on the pursuit of narrow self-interest and the selling out of national traditions.

The *Irish Political Review Group* has argued that in response to Brexit the infrastructure of the ports and airports of the Republic need to be upgraded to facilitate direct trade to the Continent rather than the current landbridge across the UK. In making that case we have argued that the EU should provide special funding to Ireland or at least relax the State aid rules. That argument is made in the context of an overview of Ireland’s EU involvement which draws on the European dimension of the 1916 Rising and the ending of dependence on the UK market that the EU facilitated. In other words, the *Irish Political Review Group* sees membership of the EU as a logical extension of the Irish national tradition. That approach is qualitatively different to the mercenary approach counselled by the IIEA. Without pretending to have all the answers to the many challenges confronting the EU at the present time we would suggest that allegiance to the supranational union needs to be placed on a more secure basis than the anti-national, anti-democratic prejudices of the founders of the European project.

Another justification for the Europhile case against Irish neutrality is the federalist argument that the power of the member states in the Union needs to be eroded. This is similar to the argument that in order to secure the Euro, progress in the direction of a European federal state needs to be speeded up. But these points exaggerate the extent of supranational integration that has already been achieved. For the foreseeable future, perhaps as far as the 22nd century the nation state is likely to remain as the main site of public allegiance in the EU. Progress can be made towards ‘*ever closer union*’, as described in the Treaty of Rome, but federation remains a far off aspiration.

Regarding the need to strengthen the position of the Euro, an institutional framework that *mimics* the structures of a federal state would be nearly as effective as actual federal structures. When the single currency was introduced as notes and coins in January 2002 the prevailing orthodoxy decreed that it should be left under the exclusive management of the European Central Bank (ECB) and that Governments should refrain from interfering in its operation. As Jean Pisani Ferry has pointed out in ‘The Euro Crisis and its Aftermath’ (2014) the opposite course needed to be followed. The Euro needed to be subjected to close political supervision through interactions between the Commission and the member states as well as between the member states. The growth and stability pact needed to be enforced and differences in rates of inflation across the Eurozone needed to be monitored and, in the case of property bubbles like those that developed in Spain and Ireland, corrective measures needed to be implemented locally. So even without more institutional integration the Euro could have been and for the future, could be, better supported by coordinated political supervision. There are a number of different plans for the Single Currency currently under examination and debate, none of which require the creation of a federal state and most of which would have the effect of creating an apparatus whose effects would be similar to that of a state.

***Conditions under which a review of neutrality might be considered***

The case for abandoning Irish military neutrality has yet to be made; it cannot be tossed off in a few paragraphs of a newspaper article. If pro-EU elements in Ireland wish to see the policy replaced by a commitment to common EU defence arrangements, they will need to make a detailed case for it. Such a case would need to cover topics like: why Ireland’s defence forces should become integrated into EU military structures that are ultimately subservient to the US General Command; why faith should be placed in the competence of the US as the world’s Super Power and policeman; why the historical legacy of Casement and de Valera should be abandoned; why the Irish diplomatic tradition of challenging militarism should be displaced by realpolitik; and why a major Irish policy shift should be based on ill-founded assumptions about European federalism.

The European Union is a vast organization encompassing a great diversity of political opinion. Even in circumstances where leaders of the Union expressed a preference to see the EU follow a path independent of the US in global affairs, there would be legitimate grounds for asking how long such a policy would last and how genuine it was. To be credible such a policy would need to be accompanied by a sea change in official thinking; it would need to be expressed in a statement backed up with the force of constitutional law. In short it is difficult to envisage it occurring in a modern political setting.

Nonetheless the EU has its own anti-militarist legacy. It was founded as a bulwark against the possibility of military conflict among European nations. If there ever was to be an authentic European voice in world affairs it would likely advocate for international law along lines similar to the foreign affairs tradition instigated by Roger Casement and demonstrated at the League of Nations by Eamon de Valera.

The neutrality policy is now being presented as a virtual dead letter, having been chipped away by various minor military initiatives and by the use of Shannon for military flight re-fuelling. But it still exists and it is regularly defended by groupings on the Irish left like the Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA). No political party advocates its abolition. The attention that has now been drawn to it in the context of Brexit should be taken as an opportunity to revive interest in the entire subject of Irish foreign policy. There is no reason why the Irish foreign policy tradition from which the neutrality policy derives, should not be defended as a positive example of European anti-militarism, relevant to the defence and security deliberations of the EU.

To conclude, there are no conditions under which the abandonment of Irish neutrality should be contemplated. The case for an international order that is superior to the will of militarily powerful nations, based on the rule of law, grounded in collective security, and protected by an international organisation that has its own military resources can be made in all times and circumstances. Anti-militarism needs to be defended regardless of its practicality as a political project.

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