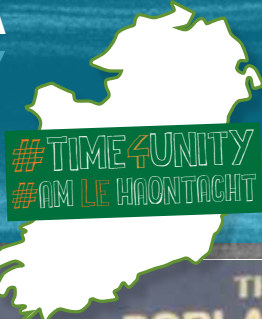


UNITY NEWS



THE PROCLAMATION OF
BOBLACHT NA H EIREANN

TIME FOR REAL CHANGE AM DON ATHRÚ CHEART



Uachtarán Mary Lou McDonald, speaking at Easter Commemoration in Belfast

This Thursday 5 May is the Peoples Day in the North. Election Day for the Assembly. It is also the anniversary date of the death on hunger strike of Bobby Sands MP.

All elections are important. An opportunity for citizens to shape the future. To determine who will lead that change. This election will be the most important of recent decades. 100 years after partition it provides the first ever opportunity for a non-unionist party to take the lead in the political institutions.

Thursday's vote will determine whether Michelle O'Neill or Jeffrey Donaldson will be the First Minister.

Speaking at the launch of Sinn Féin's manifesto Michelle

O'Neill said: "Sinn Féin's priority is to make politics work, to show that real change is possible."

Uachtarán Mary Lou McDonald said that Sinn Féin will go into the political institutions to "tackle the cost of living crisis and to put money back into the pockets of workers and families, as well as our health service."

On the key issue of Irish Unity the Sinn Féin manifesto sets out the party's priorities in working to achieve constitutional change. "Unity is central to building a modern, inclusive, fair society and a country which can play its full part in the world. Now is the time to talk about the future."

SINN FÉIN'S IS COMMITTED TO:

- ✦ Working to have the Irish government establish an all-island Citizens' Assembly to discuss our constitutional future;
- ✦ Working to improve North-South co-operation and delivery by the all-Ireland bodies.
- ✦ Securing a date from the Irish and British governments for the referenda on unity provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.
- ✦ Engaging with people on the future of Ireland in an inclusive, respectful and informed way.

**GOOD LUCK TO ALL OF THE SINN FÉIN CANDIDATES.
LET'S MAKE HISTORY ON THURSDAY.**



#Time4Unity Am d'Aontacht



Working for a New Future

Irish Unity was the dominant theme across the scores of Easter commemorations that took place in Ireland and internationally this year. Because of the Covid pandemic these were the first Easter events since 2019 and the first opportunity for many republicans to gather in such numbers.

The commemorations remember and celebrate the men and women who rose up against the British Empire at Easter time 1916. The challenge they faced was enormous. At that time the British Empire was the largest in world history. It was the global super power of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Twenty three per cent of the world's population was held in bondage and it occupied or controlled almost one quarter of the total land mass of the world. It was hugely wealthy through its ruthless exploitation of other people, their land and resources. It had a monarchy, a government, a political and economic establishment that believed it was their destiny to rule. Maps of the world were covered in the red of Empire. By 1918 it had four million men under arms to enforce its will.

Against this imperial colossus stood women and men from the four corners of Ireland – nationalists, republicans, socialists, trade unionists, gaelgeoirí, feminists – the women of the Cumann na mBan, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Citizen Army and Irish Volunteers and others.

The Proclamation they wrote for that Easter 1916 is a manifesto of intent for real and lasting change. For a rights' based society. For a new Ireland.

In a few hundred words and in language that still inspires today it addresses Irishmen and Irishwomen. No distinction. Equals in the struggle for freedom. It asserts the right of the Irish people to national sovereignty and independence. It guarantees "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities" to all. Its objective is the happiness and prosperity of every citizen and the creation of a new society that will cherish all citizens equally. These core values are as relevant today in the upcoming Assembly election as they were a century ago.



So, at Easter we remembered all of those heroes who marched out that Easter. We remember too those who fought in previous and later phases of the struggle for freedom. Including in our own time. Their focus was on the future. Making a better life for all our people and especially our children. To give them the best possible chance to fulfil their potential and to live happy, full and contented lives.

Republicans believe that this can best be achieved through the establishment of an independent and sovereign Ireland – a united Ireland – a new and shared Ireland. A modern, progressive and fair Ireland fit for all who live here.

Thankfully, and not least due to the commitment of republicans there is now a peaceful way to achieve this.



Belfast

A Sinn Féin-led government in Dublin will establish the Citizens' Assembly

Uachtarán Shinn Féin Mary Lou McDonald TD was the keynote speaker in Belfast. Thousands lined the Falls Road for the march which was led by two Irish Wolfhounds.

Speaking at the Republican Plot in Milltown Cemetery Mary Lou McDonald reminded her audience that "there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. That moment is now. We are living through the end-game of partition. Now is the time to plan, to prepare for Irish unity in our time.

"A new generation is moving on together. We are on the cusp of an historic opportunity – the reunification of our country and our people. Not just the removal of the border but a new departure to collapse divisions and build a future that everyone has a share in.

"We have a solemn responsibility to navigate constitutional change together in an orderly, peaceful and democratic way."

Addressing the unionist section of our people the Sinn Féin President appealed for a "partnership in "building the new Ireland" and urged unionists to "walk this journey with us".

She said: "The unionist people must have an equal part in building the new Ireland. To those of a unionist tradition I say sincerely; we seek partnership with you. A future of equality and freedom belongs to you. A future of progress and change belongs to you. A future of prosperity and opportunity belongs to you.

"It is not for anybody to invite you in; that future is already yours. It is about you, it is of you, it is for you. British government after British government has disrespected and failed you,



time and again. Imagine instead the liberating possibility of full freedom to make all decisions here, in a parliament here, for the people who live here.

"Instead of a government in London turning its back on you, imagine an Ireland where your place is assured and your rights are enshrined in law. Where who you are is woven into the very fabric of who we all are, a people as one in all our diversity. An Ireland finally taking its place again as part of the European family and amongst the nations of the world, ready to realise all of our potential.

"In that spirit, in that belief, there is no limit to what we can achieve together. Walk this journey with us. This is the decade of opportunity where we have the freedom to determine our future. There is so much to gain..."

"An Ireland where everyone has decent work; can provide for their families, put an affordable roof over their head, access to public healthcare as a right, and where our communities are respected and nurtured. These are not luxuries. These are the very basics to which people are entitled. They are the necessities of life that bind us together."

Addressing the issue of who might be First Minister as a result of the Assembly election Mary Lou McDonald said: "The people will decide this election. They will decide who occupies the office of First Minister... There is not an office in this land that is off-limits or the sole preserve of one group. Those days are gone and good riddance. Democracy must prevail on terms set by the people, not by the DUP or by anyone else."

Finally, on the question of the Citizens' Assembly Uachtarán Mary Lou McDonald pledged that a Sinn Féin led government will establish a Citizens' Assembly. She said: "There is an onus on the Irish government to urgently establish a Citizens' Assembly to discuss, debate and plan for the immense possibilities the future holds.

However, in the event that Micheál Martin or Leo Varadkar continue to bury their heads in the sand let me give a clear, unequivocal commitment that a Sinn Féin-led government in Dublin will establish that Citizens' Assembly."





Carrickmore

A Stronger, Fairer, United Ireland

The main speaker at the Carrickmore Easter Commemoration was Leas Uachtarán Michelle O'Neill.

Addressing the large crowd Michelle O'Neill said:

"We can now peacefully and democratically achieve an economically strong, socially just United Ireland. Taking the best from the North and the South we can build a fairer, stronger country. We have a process allowing everyone to participate in planning and preparing for constitutional change.

This facilitates a peaceful transition to a United Ireland that cherishes all of our people, whatever their background, tradition, religion or political affiliation. A Unity referendum, explicitly provided for in the Good Friday Agreement, is not a threat to any section of our community ... All identities can and will be accommodated in an agreed, United Ireland because that Ireland will be shaped democratically by the will of the people."

Addressing the wider economic issues the Party's leader in the North said: "This island can no longer afford partition. Island-wide integration is vital for the economy, the development of public services, investment and diversity. A United Ireland will receive the support and goodwill of the international community.

European Union leaders have guaranteed that the North will resume full membership of the EU as part of a United Ireland"

Commenting on the need for a Citizens' Assembly Michelle O'Neill said: "The mechanism of an all-Ireland Citizens' Assembly can play a major positive role ahead of any referendum on Irish Unity. Citizens' Assemblies played a positive role in preparing the ground for previous important referendums.

A Citizens' Assembly can also be key to setting out a clear pathway for a new, United Ireland prior to any referendum. The Irish Government needs now to establish a Citizens' Assembly to begin responsibly preparing the ground for such a referendum."

On the issue of the Assembly



election Michelle O'Neill said: "The Assembly election is about the future, the next generation and what people, from whatever background or tradition, can achieve if we work together. It is about those of us who want to make the political institutions work for people and those who don't.

People got a glimpse in recent months of what is possible from an Assembly and Executive that gets

a chance to deliver. When the DUP walked away from the Executive I convened a meeting of party leaders to get work done.

The Assembly passed legislation on climate, housing, women's rights and the cost-of-living crisis. This was matched by initiatives by Executive ministers, despite resistance from a Tory government. A full term of similar leadership could do much more."



Galway City and Ros Muc



A better, more prosperous, more equal future

Cork TD Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire gave the main oration at the Easter Commemorations in Galway City and in Ros Muc.

Teachta Ó Laoghaire said: “Tá fíor deis anois todhchaí níos fearr, níos ráthiúl agus níos cothrom a bhaint amach. Tá Aontacht na hÉireann lárnach le sochaí níos cuimsitheach, nua-aoiseach a tógadh, a beidh in ann páirt iomlán a glacadh i gcúrsaí domhanda.”

“There is now a real opportunity to shape a better, more prosperous, more equal future.

“Unity is central to building a modern, inclusive, fair society and a country which can play its full part in the world.”



Crossmaglen

Unity will unlock the potential of our island

Finance Minister and local MLA Conor Murphy was the main speaker at the Easter Commemoration in Crossmaglen, South Armagh. Addressing the large crowd Conor Murphy said:

“The Easter Rising was not just about ending British rule for the sake of it. Ending British rule was the means to address issues like poverty, inequality, worker’s rights, access to healthcare, and education, sectarianism and the denial of self-determination.

“It is the same today. We do not seek reunification solely to address an ancient grievance. We seek it as the bedrock to build the best possible future for all the people of Ireland, including the unionist members of our community.

“All-Ireland planning and integration is vital for the development of public services, investment, economic development, social inclusion and diversity. Our island can no longer sustain two separate health and education systems, economies, tax regimes and legal systems.

“Unity benefits all our people, north and south, unlocking the potential of this island.

“A United Ireland will receive the support and goodwill of the international community. The Good Friday Agreement was made possible by the engagement of Irish America and the involvement of President Clinton. All administrations since have defended the Agreement, and in recent times Congressional leaders have defended it against the threat of Brexit. In the EU European Union leaders have guaranteed that the north will resume full membership status as part of a United Ireland.

“The Irish Government must now establish an all island Citizens’ Assembly to begin the structured planning needed to create a new united Ireland.”



Cork City

PLANNING FOR A NEW FUTURE – A NEW IRELAND

The Sinn Féin TD for Fingal Louise O'Reilly, who is the party's spokesperson on Workers Rights, Enterprise, Trade, and Employment, was the main speaker at the Easter Commemoration in Cork.

She said: "We must plan today for the future our children and grandchildren deserve. We must be about the business of building a new Ireland.

"The new Ireland that we seek is one in which every citizen has the foundation for a good life. An Ireland where people can expect decent work, can provide for their families, put an

affordable roof over their head, access public healthcare as a right, and where our communities are respected and nurtured...

"We have never in my lifetime been closer to achieving the Republic envisaged by James Connolly and the men and women who struck for Irish freedom on that Easter morning. We salute them, we remember them, and we will continue their work to its conclusion.

"Now is the time to plan and prepare for Irish Unity in our lifetime."

Derry City

Forging a new Republic

The oration in Derry was given by Donegal TD Pearse Doherty who said:

"The fundamental principle remains – the people of Ireland are best placed to determine and shape our own future, together. Not this or any other British Government.

"We now have the means to build a united, stronger and fairer Ireland. To build a reconciled society in which everyone can participate in planning and preparing for constitutional change. To build a united Ireland – not by bolting one state onto another, but by forging a new Republic.

"The Good Friday Agreement is explicit in its provision for a referendum on the unification of our country. Recognising, as it does, that "it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone... to exercise their right of self-determination... to bring about a united Ireland".

"Every day, developments in the social, economic and political realms are leading to the holding of a referendum to unify our country. Problems we have faced in the past, challenges we face today, and opportunities for the future all point towards the weakness caused by partition and the strength we can build through unity.

"The legacy of austerity, the folly of Brexit and the actions of this British Government harm the interests of the North.

"In contrast, the opportunities for a united nation moving forward are clear and are there to be seized. The development of public services, co-ordinated investment, and building a prosperous Ireland that creates well-paid jobs, high living standards and energy independence.

"That is our future."





Dundalk

Delivering a United Ireland

Despite the bad weather there was a large turnout at St Patrick's Cemetery, Dowdallshill for the Dundalk Easter commemoration. Louth TD Ruairí Ó Murchú gave the oration.

In his speech, Teachta Ó Murchú said that Ireland has "changed utterly" and is "a very different place than it was, even in 2019." He said that there was now "a real opportunity that should not be squandered to deliver what men and women, for generations, have fought for - a united Ireland."

Referencing the war in Ukraine, the Dundalk TD said: "Annually, 'fraternal greetings' are sent by republicans at Easter to Catalans, Basques, to the Palestinian people and others struggling for freedom. This year we send fraternal wishes also to the people of Ukraine who are suffering under Russian aggression."

The Louth TD said: "The Ireland we live in is still far from perfect, but it is a better place because of the sacrifices of those who have gone before us. One hundred years ago, we were going through a revolutionary period where there was great hope, but it was followed by a civil war where that hope was dashed.

"We ended up with two conservative states - an apartheid state in the North where nationalists were treated as second class citizens, and a conservative state in the South that has, to this day, failed its people."

"Republicans are for a new Ireland - a united Ireland in which there would be equality for all and would be intolerant of hate."



Ballyfermot

Achill and Castlebar

Easter Commemorations were held in Achill and Castlebar this year. Rose Conway Walsh is the first Sinn Féin TD for Mayo in almost 100 years and this year, because of the pandemic, was her first opportunity to give the oration at an Easter commemoration in the county.

The inclement weather didn't deter the crowds from turning out to recommit to the cause of independence, sovereignty, and a united Ireland based on equality and social justice.

Teachta Conway Walsh said: "We have a real opportunity to shape a better, more prosperous and more equal future. We can only fully realise the potential our island and its people in an independent and United Ireland.

"Indeed, Brexit and the COVID 19 Pandemic have served to bring into sharp focus the folly of the partition of our small Island. You don't have to be a republican or a nationalist to know the importance of being in charge of our own affairs.

"Provision for a unity referendum is enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. We have solid evidence that the changes in demographics and the electoral landscape which constitute the criteria for calling this referendum are present. The current Irish government has a responsibility to prepare for the unity referendum. It is reckless of them to continue to refuse the call for a Citizens Assembly.

"A Citizens Assembly will explore the potential and any pitfalls of an all-island economy, national health service, education system, agricultural and fishing sectors and other public services. People are hungry to know what Irish Unity would look like for them, their families, and future generations. They want to be able to make an informed decision when the opportunity of a referendum is presented.

"We are grateful for the continued support and good will of the international community in creating a new and United Ireland. We know that European Union leaders have guaranteed that the north will resume full membership of the EU as part of a United Ireland.

"Ireland is changing and now is the time to face the world as a place that is moving forward, outward looking, confident and ready for the future.

"As your TD I will continue to work hard to hold this Government to account until such time as Sinn Féin can lead a government that will put rural Ireland and Mayo front and centre of decision making. That means fairness for farmers and fishing families, being able to cut your own turf, afford your own home, access healthcare, and live the best life possible.



Carál Ní Chuilín, North Belfast



Drumbo, County Donegal

A Stronger, Fairer United Ireland

The North Belfast MP John Finucane was the main speaker at the Easter Commemoration in Drumbo, County Donegal.

Commenting on the impact of partition on Donegal he said: "Partition was a tragedy which sundered communities and separated neighbours. It cut off Donegal from its natural hinterlands in Derry and Tyrone. Partition has held back the potential of this island for too long. North and South, it has damaged economic development, created divisions and, as we know only too well, led to decades of violence.

We can now peacefully and democratically achieve an economically strong, socially just United Ireland. Taking the best from the north and the south we can build a fairer, stronger country. We have a process allowing everyone to participate in planning, and preparation for, constitutional change.

This can facilitate a peaceful



transition to a United Ireland in which all of our people are cherished equally irrespective of their background, ethnicity, gender, tradition, religion or political affiliation.

This island can no longer afford partition. Island-wide integration is vital for the economy, the development of public services, investment and diversity."

The North Belfast MP echoed the call of others in demanding that the Irish government establish an all-Ireland Citizens' Assembly. He said that it "can play a major

positive role in preparing for the referendums on Unity provided for in the Good Friday Agreement. Citizens Assemblies played a positive role in preparing the ground for previous important referendums. A Citizens assembly can also be key to setting out a clear pathway for a new, United Ireland prior to any referendum. The responsibility to establish such a Citizens' Assembly at this time rests with the Irish government but if Martin and Varadkar refuse then a future Sinn Féin led government will."



Caoimhe Archibald. Drumagarnner, Kilrea



Claire Kerrane in Teevnacreeva with Cllr Michael Mulligan



USA

AN EPIC ENDEAVOUR FOR FREEDOM

This year in person Easter Commemorations returned across the US and Canada. Irish republican supporters gathered to honour Ireland's dead and to look forward with confidence to the building of a new and united Ireland.

Martin Kenny TD spoke at the commemoration in Toronto, and on the west coast activists marked 1916 Rising in Vancouver.

In New York Mairead Farrell TD attended and spoke at Commemorations in Queens and Mineola, Long Island. Not far from the site in Mineola where Thomas Clarke owned a farm before returning to Dublin in preparation for the Rising. Mairead was following in the footsteps of a previous Galway TD, Liam Mellows, who was exiled in New York.

Mairead then moved on to speak at the Commemoration in Philadelphia.

On the west coast of the USA the Sinn Féin representative to North America, Ciarán Quinn spoke at the graveside of Thomas Desmond in Colma just outside San Francisco. Desmond was instrumental in organising the Catalpa escape of six Fenian prisoners from Fremantle Western Australia. It was fitting that the commemoration fell on the exact day April 17th when Desmond sprung the prisoners in 1877.

Ciaran Quinn said: "The escape from Fremantle was an epic endeavour, initiated in the USA. The success of the escape went down to the wire. A British ship closed in on the Catalpa and it seemed that the prisoners would be captured along with those that led the escape. The Catalpa raised the US flag. The British backed off boarding an American ship in international waters.

While the commemoration was a solemn occasion to remember the patriot dead, it was also a celebration of their lives and resistance. Songs were sung. The Rhythm of Time, written by Bobby Sands in prison was recited. A wreath was led a by Gerry Boyle, a ninety year old veteran supporter. A reminder that we also honour activists who work tirelessly over years to promote the cause of an Irish Republic."

Other Commemorations were hosted in Rhode Island and Chicago.



Castletown



Sligo



Portlaw, Waterford



Ciarán Quinn in San Francisco



1916 Easter 2022

Clonakilty



Cork City



Derry



Cork South West



Liz Kimmins in Newry



The Loop



UCC Commemoration



1916 Easter 2022



Limerick



Mairéad Farrell in New York



Martin Kenny, Toronto



Joe McGarrity grave, Philadelphia



Mayo



Newry



Mulhuddart, Dublin



South Monaghan

#Time4Unity Am d'Aontacht



1916 Easter 2022

Belfast



Gerry Kelly, Ardoyne and Short Strand, Belfast

Padraig Delargey in Buncrana



Oranmore



Riverdale, West Belfast



Louise O'Reilly and Thomas Gould, Cork

A PROCESS OF PHASED TRANSITION TOWARD UNITY

BY DECLAN KEARNEY

Writing last month in his regular weekly blog for 'An Phoblacht' the Sinn Féin National Party Chairperson Declan Kearney focussed on the anniversary in April of the Good Friday Agreement and the importance of establishing a Citizens' Assembly to plan for constitutional change. He also addressed the process of 'phased transition' toward Unity.

Declan Kearney wrote: "Reunification will be brought about through a process of incremental, phased transition. That is why the proposal to convene a national Citizens' Assembly on the future of the island as a first step makes so much sense.

Properly structured, it would provide a representative forum for diverse political and civic opinion to conduct a conversation about the future of Ireland - to think out aloud; imagine; brainstorm; to challenge; and reflect on the scope of future change without any pre determination.

Thereafter a formal debate will inevitably be integrated to the conduct of a unity referendum. But beforehand the question which needs to be put in the referendum will have to be formulated. That in itself will require thoughtful consideration.

The experience of Brexit has taught us all how not to stage a referendum debate.

The referendum debate on Irish unity should be informed, inclusive and democratic. The substance of the discourse will be as important as the process of engagement itself.

Those of us advocating for a united Ireland will have to make and win the argument that Irish unity is a superior option to the failure of partition, and the current status quo. That vision should be ambitious and one of aspiration. The positive case for constitutional change will need to be set out in concrete economic, social and political terms.

Once a popular consensus for Irish unity has been secured a process of negotiation will inevitably commence on the shape and form of new constitutional arrangements, and national, democratic structures.

In South Africa a constitutional convention was established during its transition to

negotiate and find agreement on such modalities and institutions.

A constitutional convention or similar setting is one possible model to engage full representative participation of all political parties, the Irish and British governments, and also key social partners in the negotiation of our transition towards Irish unity. That being; how to ensure an orderly, planned integration of economic models and a negotiated fiscal settlement, including pensions. All of this alongside a new public administration and investment in public services would be agreed, implemented and time-framed.

Of course different political parties and civic interest groups, including the trade union movement, will have various ideas about what national and democratic arrangements, governmental institutions and structures would be desirable. All of this needs to be subject to rigorous discussion and ultimately agreement.

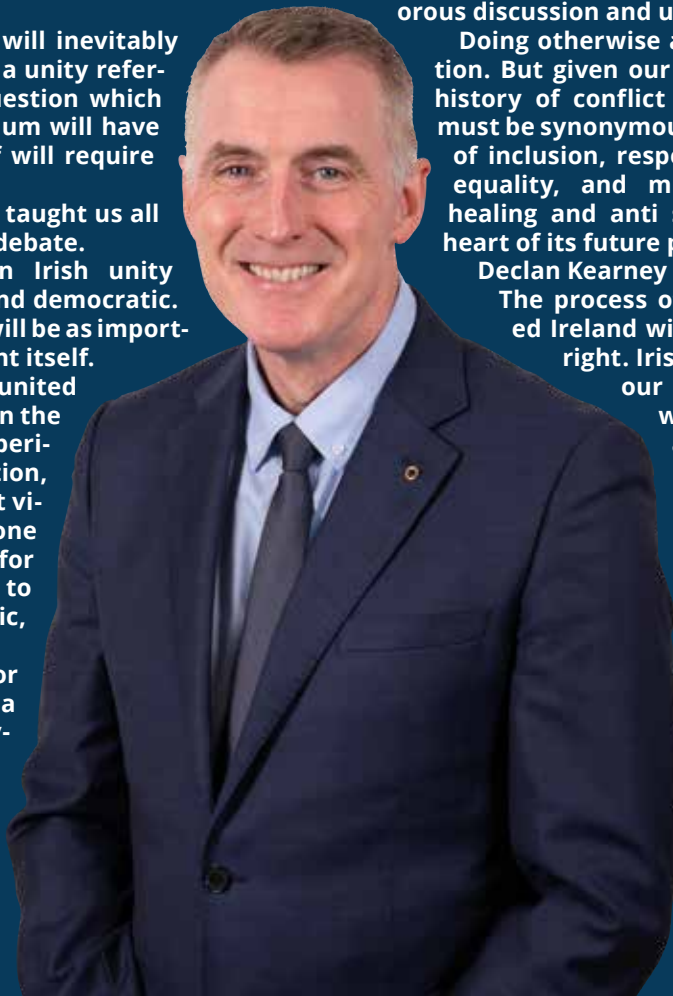
Doing otherwise amounts to premature speculation. But given our experience of colonialism, and history of conflict and division, the new Ireland must be synonymous with the principles and values of inclusion, respect for difference, compassion, equality, and multiculturalism. Reconciliation, healing and anti sectarianism should be at the heart of its future political and civic institutions."

Declan Kearney concluded:

The process of transition to an agreed, united Ireland will take time, and it must be got right. Irish unity has to be agreed among our people north and south. And we need a plan for how it will be achieved. So the Irish government should fulfil its constitutional obligation; it should start planning now.

The opportunity to establish world-class public services, a thriving, fair and prosperous island economy, a modern, outward-looking society is the prize. We can make the new Ireland better than the old one.

The vision of 1916 is still to be realised. It remains our reference point for the new Ireland. Now we have the momentum and road map to bring it into being."



FULL BLOG:  <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/28303>

Time 4 Unity Am d'Aontacht

Major report by NESC points way forward for all-island cooperation



April saw the publication of a major Irish Government-backed think-tank report from the NESC. It is the first all-island report published as a result of an initiative by the Shared Island initiative.

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was commissioned "to produce a comprehensive report based on its mission of providing advice on strategic policy issues, relating to sustainable economic, social and environment development in Ireland ...". The final report is the culmination of research over 2021. (Links to the full report and to the Executive summary are included at the end of this article.)

This involved "more than 100 meetings with practitioners, policy makers, academics and experts from a diverse range of institutions across the whole island, detailed work in the North West including four focus groups, a public consultation on climate and biodiversity, plus a number of NESC Shared Island publications on the economy, regional development, good jobs, climate and biodiversity, poverty and mental health."

THE REPORT DREW THREE OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS

FIRST, there is very significant support, in practice, for an all-island approach to key economic, social, environmental, and wellbeing challenges. A solid foundation for the Shared Island initiative exists. This foundation is made up of working connections and relationships operating and evolving at various levels, from formal institutions to community level networks.

SECOND, climate change and biodiversity loss provide a clear and urgent platform for ambitious all-island action and collaboration. The Council believes that this area is now ripe for further ambition, collaboration and action. Given the urgency and scope to protect and enhance the island's environment, and to maximise the available opportunities, the Council has made a series of recommendations to strengthen and deepen shared island collaboration on climate and biodiversity.

THIRD, the key factors which are shaping current and future collaboration are a shared agenda, resources,

political certainty and support, legislative and regulatory coherence, and collaborative projects.

The Council also found ample evidence of a shared agenda raising the profile and support for action in many areas, including on climate change, mental health services, and social enterprise supports. It also found that sustaining and deepening of resources, and legislative and regulatory coherence, is needed to strengthen co-operation.

It reported that a conducive and certain political environment is fundamental to continuing all-island cooperation and engagement. The Council argues that in the period ahead, the main political actors – the Irish and UK Governments and the NI Executive – should seek and prepare for an opportunity to reset the context and agenda for north-south and east-west co-operation.

Finally, the Council found that, in order to deepen progress, efforts need to be focused on collaborative projects and outcomes which make a real difference to communities on the ground - on both sides of the border.

The NESC report has made 25 specific recommendations related to the economy and investment, social policy, climate and biodiversity, wellbeing measurement, and data co-ordination. These include for example:

- Increased investment in infrastructure is needed to strengthen economic development, on an all-island basis and in the border areas.
- Further investment in the built infrastructure of the all-island energy network is needed, to ensure that the Eirgrid and SONI (System Operator for Northern Ireland) commitment to reach at least 70 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 can be achieved.
- A strategic working group should be established to explore the renewable energy opportunities – both economic and environmental – associated with solar, offshore wind, wave and tidal energy, and anaerobic digestion.

 <https://www.nesc.ie/publications/shared-island-shared-opportunity-nesc-comprehensive-report/>

 http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/157_shared_island_comp_exsum.pdf

Time 4 Unity Am d'Aontacht

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta National Economic & Social Council

Sinn Féin Economy spokesperson Caoimhe Archibald has welcomed the report which highlights significant support for an all-island approach to key economic, social, environmental, and well-being challenges facing the island of Ireland.

Caoimhe Archibald said:

“The NESC report highlights very significant support for an all-island approach to key economic, social, environmental and wellbeing challenges. It also highlights the potential for greater ambition, collaboration and action to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises.

“The report recommends that further action on co-operation should now be considered by the Irish government and the North South Ministerial Council and others with an interest in all-Ireland cooperation and engagement.

“It is clear there are significant opportunities through developing the all-island economy and in deepening cooperation on social, environmental and other issues. It makes no sense on an island this size that we would have separate systems of taxation, and separate education, health and public services.

“Post Brexit, there is a growing conversation and debate across this island on Irish unity. We need to ensure this is planned for and everyone should have the opportunity to have their voice heard in this process. The Irish government must now establish a Citizen’s Assembly to provide a forum to plan for constitutional change.

“In the interim we must explore all opportunities, such as those highlighted in this report, for greater all-Ireland cooperation.”



Time 4 Unity Am d'Aontacht

Referendum on Presidential Voting in 2023

In September 2013 the Constitutional Convention in Dublin voted overwhelmingly in favour of citizens in the North and in the diaspora having the right to vote in Presidential elections. The members of the Convention were asked to vote on several propositions: 'Should citizens resident outside the State have the right to vote in Presidential elections?' Seventy-eight percent of the 100 members of the Convention voted yes.

Delegates were then asked: 'Should citizens resident in Northern Ireland have the right to vote in Presidential election?' Seventy-three percent voted yes.

Since then several dates have been set for the referendum. In 2018 the government set 24 May 2019 for the referendum. The government has resiled on all of these.

In April Minister Colm Brophy claimed that the referendum on voting in Presidential elections will be held before 2024. Brophy went on to say that if the referendum is successful new voters will be able to participate in the next presidential election in 2025.

It is therefore important that all of those who are for greater democracy, accountability, equality and inclusiveness on the island of Ireland, actively campaign in support of Irish citizens in the North and in the diaspora having the right to vote in future elections for the President of Ireland.

Seanadóir Niall Ó Donnghaile called on Minister Brophy to set a firm date for the referendum.

US continues to back Good Friday Agreement



Declan Kearney

The British government has indicated that it plans to announce new legislation this month to allow Ministers to unilaterally ditch key parts of the Protocol. Such a move would almost certainly collapse the post Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, threaten the all-Ireland structures established under the Good Friday Agreement and create a crisis in the already strained relationship between Britain and the EU.

British sources have been claiming for some time that many people in the North have no confidence in the Protocol. They have also claimed that any moves by Westminster are about protecting the Good Friday Agreement. In reality any breach of the Protocol is a clear attack on the Agreement.

In addition, the low turnouts at the DUP/Loyalist and Orange Order organised anti-Protocol rallies, as well as a succession of opinion polls suggest that the Protocol is not the priority for many unionists. Many believe, as do most nationalists and others, that the Protocol is protecting business and jobs.

Meanwhile Washington's trade representative in the negotiations around a possible USA-British trade deal has warned that the threat to the GFA is a major obstacle to such an agreement.

Katherine Tai was in Britain meeting the British International Trade minister Anne-Marie Trevelyan. Kai said: "There's a lot of interest in the US, from the president and from leading members of Congress, and also from our very, very large Irish-American population."

"We're watching closely and feel very, very strongly about the legacy of peace and prosperity on the island of Ireland, and we care very much about the fate of all the people here."

Leading Congressional leaders have expressed their determination to defend the Good Friday Agreement and President Biden has stressed his commitment to the GFA.

Sinn Féin Brexit spokesperson Declan Kearney welcomed the very strong reaffirmation of support by US negotiator Katherine Tai for the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The Sinn Féin National Chairperson said:

"This intervention from Katherine Tai strongly reaffirms the United States administration's unswerving commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. This is the latest in a series of public statements from very senior American government officials and legislators throughout recent months.

"This statement confirms that the administration will not agree to post Brexit Trade arrangements with Britain unless it upholds the Good Friday Agreement.

"There is overwhelming international support for our peace process, the need to protect the Agreement, and to secure proper power sharing. The Protocol provides an important mechanism to achieve these priorities. There is also growing international annoyance at, and opposition to the continued sabre rattling by this London Government, and its latest threats of unilateral action against the Protocol."

Time 4 Unity Am d'Aontacht

Nationality and Borders Bill must be opposed

Under the Nationality and Borders Bill all 'non-UK and non-Irish EU citizens' will have to apply for an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) if they want to cross the border. The proposed legislation is an obvious breach of the Good Friday Agreement and has been widely condemned by human rights organisations and business and tourism bodies.

The legislation was back in the British House of Lords last week which voted through several amendments and was then sent back to the House of Commons. In all the Nationality and Borders Bill has suffered 12 defeats in the Lords but the London Guardian quoted one senior Tory who described the legislation as "morally indefensible and economically illiterate" but added that there is little appetite in the British government for compromise.

Meanwhile tourism leaders have warned that the proposed ETA will seriously impact on tourism. The chief executive of the Tourism Alliance estimate that the proposed scheme could impact on "half a million visitors and £160 million of visitor spend is at risk."

Joanne Stuart revealed that there has been "no consultation at all with the industry or with ourselves with regard to the introduction of the ETA... We haven't had any engagement, I have raised a number of questions seeking clarification but we really have not got any information... one of the really concerning things is that it seems to be single entry ETA and given the border, all of the ways you can cross it multiple ways on a trip, if this was just a single entry this would just be unworkable, completely impractical and could really cause huge cost to tourists who are travelling across

the island... people want to have hassle-free travel."

The claim that the Bill is needed to prevent illegal entry was exposed as nonsense. Figures released by the Chair of the NI Affairs Committee at Westminster revealed that there were just three prosecutions 2017 of people trying to enter Britain via the North, five in 2018, 32 in 2019, two in 2020, 15 in 2021 and two in 2022 so far.

Sinn Féin MEP Chris MacManus who was in Dundalk to meet the local Chamber of Commerce urged the Irish Government and the EU to engage with the British Government to ensure that the Nationality and Borders Bill is reversed.

MacManus commended the Chamber for their work in attracting investment into the town and in particular the support it gives to tourism projects. He said: "There are ongoing challenges in the area in relation to Brexit, particularly the Nationality and Borders Bill, which would require EU and EEA citizens travelling to the North to pre-register with authorities before they travel. This will have a hugely detrimental effect on the freedom of movement of people across the border, particularly non-Irish EU citizens who work across the border."

"It highlights the lack of understanding by those in the British administration about daily life here, the impact these proposals would have for workers, for social and family life and for tourism. It is vital that the Irish Government and the EU engage with the British Government to ensure that this Bill is reversed so that there is no return to a hard border for anyone living anywhere in Ireland."

• Pictured at DKIT are (L-R): Paddy Malone (Dundalk Chamber), Ruairí Ó Murchú TD, Chris MacManus MEP, Frankie Watters (Dundalk Chamber) and Aidan Browne (Head of Innovation at the Regional Development Centre in DKIT)



Time 4 Unity Am d'Aontacht

Northern audiences must be respected

Sinn Féin Seanadóir Niall Ó Donnghaile and Sinead Ennis have been long standing champion for citizens in the North having access to important sporting events on RTE, as well as premium competitions run by the broadcaster.

Currently many of these international sporting events are geo-blocked and northern audiences regularly excluded. The broadcasters approach is in stark opposition to the commitment in its own Charter to represent and reflect the whole of the island.

Speaking in the Seanad recently Seanadóir Ó Donnghaile said: "Audiences in the North should be respected, and our existence acknowledged, not least in line with Article 2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann which says; 'It is the entitlement and birth right of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish Nation.'

"The regular geo-blocking of important and often significant sporting events, as well as the exclusion of the Six Counties from maps which should depict all of Ireland, generates much frustration and causes deep offence.

"It is a practice which should end, and we will continue to work to ensure that it does."



Niall Ó Donnghaile

EU must prepare for Irish Unity

Louth TD Ruairí Ó Murchú told the penultimate meeting of the Conference of the Future of Europe (CoFoE) that the European Union needs to prepare for a united Ireland. The CoFoE was established last April and has drawn together more than 50,000 participants who have discussed ideas, proposals, on the future direction and shape of the EU. It has been described as a unique exercise in 'deliberative democracy.' The process is due to conclude with a final conference on 9 May and a report will be presented to the Presidents of the EU institutions.

The Louth TD is part of the Oireachtas EU Affairs Committee and was in Strasbourg with other EU parliamentarians taking part in the discussions based around papers and

proposals generated by nine working groups. Teachta Ó Murchú spoke about the Ireland's Future civic group and their engagements across Ireland. He told the conference that "there is a widespread programme of outreach taking place with citizens" who are actively discussing and planning for a united Ireland.

Deputy Ó Murchú said: "The EU institutions need to be discussing and planning now for the referendums on Irish Unity provided for by the Good Friday Agreement. The EU has a key role to play in facilitating change and making the transition of the entire island back into the EU as easy as possible."



Ruairí Ó Murchú



RESOURCE FOR ACTIVISTS

All of the recent articles and significant contributions on the United Ireland theme are available on the Sinn Féin website. Log in to www.sinnfein.ie/irish-unity for all of the news on uniting Ireland.

