

Introduction:

Good Afternoon, Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for inviting us to meet with the Committee today to explore the issue of alliance building within the EU post Brexit. We are aware of your deep interest and commitment to European affairs and would like to compliment you, Chairman, on your participation in the Europe Day debate with Minister Mc Entee and others at the Royal Hospital on 9 May. It is an honour to be invited to address the members of this Committee, some of whom, I have had the privilege to meet in this context over the years.

In this short presentation, I will outline the context, in which the IIEA's work on the future of the EU27 project is situated. I will then briefly explore how the concept of alliances has changed, as a background to the work which the IIEA has conducted in mapping possible future alliances for Ireland in the EU. I will briefly allude to the "Country Profiles" which the Institute developed for this purpose as part of a project on the EU27 post Brexit and will conclude with a few remarks on existing and potential alliances for Ireland.

My colleague, Marie Cross, will give an overview of how the Institute engaged with Irish citizens in the course of the EU27 project by hosting public events both at the IIEA in Dublin and in rural venues nationwide, and its online outreach strategy via podcasts, "explainers", and finally by convening a group of "Emerging Voices", whose publication we have brought with us today.

Across all of these elements of the project, the Institute has sought to amplify the voices and concerns of citizens young and old, urban and rural and to bring European voices to both the Institute and the regional venues in order to broaden citizens' understanding of the priorities and concerns of other member states and to listen to their priorities.

I would like to acknowledge the key role played by Minister Mc Entee in the Citizens Dialogue process in which we and the EMI were also participants, and I would like to thank the TDs, and MEPs, who were very gracious when approached to participate in our regional events.

The Context of our EU27 Project

This is a strategic moment in the EU, its institutions are in a period of transition, and the five key appointments which will be decided at the European Council on 20/21 June 2019 are eagerly awaited.

However, the defining event in terms of the future of the EU was the Brexit Referendum in 2016, which necessarily led to widespread reflection on the Future of the EU27 post Brexit. This commenced with discussions in Bratislava and Rome, came to fruition at the Sibiu summit in Romania on 9 May 2019 and the culmination of this process will be the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 which will be decided at the summit in Brussels later this month.

One overriding conclusion from this process was the need to create new alliances between Member States post Brexit. This is particularly the case for smaller states like Ireland, which, in the absence of the UK, will need the support of other smaller states, or alliances with larger

member states, in order to exercise influence in the EU in the future and to have its voice heard at the EU table.

Strategic Partnerships:

Although alliances are traditionally understood as a *fixed* association between countries with a common goal, a new interpretation of alliances envisages bilateral relationships that involve *flexibility*, as well as long term cooperation towards common strategic goals.

Alliances can also be used as a foreign policy tool to *advance national interests* towards a common goal. Ireland, like other member states, should seek to influence the EU's Strategic Agenda for the next five years and to shape EU policy according to its policy preferences at an early stage. To achieve this it will have to turn its attention to (i) a review of its already existing alliances, (ii) to consolidating its partnership with like-minded member states, and (iii) exploring the possibility of creating new alliances with other members of the EU26 post-Brexit.

In a speech to the IIEA in May 2019, MEP Mairead Mc Guinness argued that it is not sufficient to put on the Green Jersey in the EP and promote one's national interests in an overt manner but that it is important to develop *a broader understanding* of the views and perspectives of others, in order to proactively develop Ireland's influence in the EU, by offering genuine support for the priorities of other member states when required.

A Role for Parliaments and Think Tanks?

Developing connections with our partners in the EU27 is not limited to official government relationships. It also involves engagement with civil society, think tanks and universities, to get a deeper and more informed understanding of local issues in other member states.

To this end, the IIEA engaged in a mapping exercise to identify relevant ideas from think tank analyses in other member states, speeches by Ministers and MEPs from other partner countries for the purposes of better mutual understanding of policy positions across the EU27.

The EU Explorer:

As part of a three year project on the Future of EU 27 Post Brexit, supported by the Dept. of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the IIEA developed a series of Country Profiles on the 26 EU member states, set out in the form of a map of Europe and which is accessible on the IIEA website. This interactive web tool entitled: "EU Explorer: Mapping the Future of Europe" allows the user to hover over a particular country and to search the overall profile of a given member state, or focus on a particular policy profile within a member state. Each country profile commences with a short overview of the political complexion of the member state and its vision for the future of the EU27 post-Brexit, and each one concludes with an exploration of pre-existing informal or formal alliances of that member state.

The individual policy areas chosen for the initial pilot programme were: The budget, EMU, Tax, Defence, Digital, Justice and Home Affairs, Agriculture, Social Affairs and Trade policy. The objective of the country profiles was to *build an understanding* of the wide variety of

views and policy positions across the EU and to *examine the potential for alliances* with other member states based on convergent or divergent strategic goals.

Using a traffic-light colour system, the EU Explorer highlights areas of divergence from Irish policy positions in red, and areas of possible alignment or existing convergence between Ireland and a given member state in green.

The 'country profiles' can be found at: <https://www.iiea.com/eu-explorer/> and are updated on a monthly basis at the end of each month.

One advantage of the EU explorer is that it provides information that has not previously been available to policy makers or the wider public in an accessible visual mode.

A somewhat similar exercise was carried out by the Think Tank, the European Council on Foreign Relations, (ECFR), and its "EU Coalition Explorer", which adopted a different methodology to that of the IIEA to identify the Preferences, Influence, Partners and Policies of member states and their potential for future coalition building in the EU. One of the important conclusion of that study was that Ireland needs to select its strategic partners with care, prioritizing those who already offer a broad network of contacts and relationships.

While the ECFR explorer seems to imply that countries on the periphery (be it Finland, Portugal or Ireland) have more difficulty in engaging in successful networking, I would contend that Ireland's position as a "psychological insider" in the core of the EU since its accession, coupled with the practice of diplomacy and networking by the Irish Foreign Service and by Irish business, citizens and officials, is second to none.

Ireland's Alignment with Like-minded countries:

It is interesting to note that the Irish government approach to alliances seems to have moved from ad-hoc issue-based alliances to *strategic partnerships* with like-minded countries . An example of such a new alliance is the so-called **Hansa group** which includes the Nordic Baltic states plus 2 (Ireland and the NIs). This group share a liberal economic view of trade and financial matters with a focus on growth and innovation. In the absence of the UK, such a coalition of states is necessary in order to have a voice at negotiations.

(The IIEA, by the way, is organizing a public seminar in the autumn of 2019 in tandem with all the ambassadors of the Nordic and Baltic countries and with the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to develop a broader understanding of our mutual interests).

Portugal is another small member state, which, like Ireland has a long established relationship with the UK and is seeking to re-align itself. As an Atlantic country, Portugal shares Ireland's interest in maritime issues, in transatlantic relations, as well as a common interest in Africa. Similarly, Ireland is actively involved the wider 'Group of 17' on Single Market issues.

Traditional alliances such as the **Franco-German alliance** will however, continue to play a significant role in determining the future of the EU . It is important for Ireland to continue to maintain a strong link to both France and Germany and to invest in deepening these relationships. Traditionally, the relationship with France has been based on a common interest in the CAP, while the relationship with Germany focuses mainly on financial services matters. Nowadays, there is an appetite to take cooperation to new fields e.g. Digital cooperation, (where France, for example, is playing a leading role in Artificial Intelligence), and where Ireland is already establishing its digital credentials as part of the Digital Forerunners group.

This year the IIEA hosted a second annual German Irish Vision Forum in May 2019 (the first of which was hosted in Berlin in 2018) involving senior representatives from the SWP think tank in Berlin as well as senior officials from the German Foreign Ministry and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Such cooperation between the Foreign Ministries and relevant think tanks are an example of how think tanks can contribute to a wider reflection on the Future of the EU27.

The IIEA's motto is Sharing Ideas, Shaping Policy. The Institute is grateful to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its support for this EU 27 project, which amongst other things examines how Ireland can play a leading role in certain policy portfolios, in forming new alliances and aligning itself with like-minded countries, and in shaping the future of the EU for the next five years. The EU Strategic Agenda will provide the outline/framework, but the challenge will be to fill it with ideas that will represent the vision and voices of our government, our parliament and our citizens.

