

When I was asked to speak about the European Common Security and Defence Policy in front of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence on the occasion of Europe Day, the first topic coming to my mind was the role of Irish Neutrality. The debate is probably as old as the country itself and, surely, has not lost its intensity since then. Even though, I finally decided to still talk about it because, due to recent developments in the area of European Common and Security Policy, it is as topical as never before.

There are a couple of new developments, bringing neutrality back on the agenda and calling for a discussion about the meanings and the implications of Irish Neutrality:

- First of all, as usual, there is *Brexit*. The loss of the major atlanticist power within the European Union has serious consequences for the further development of the European Common Security and Defence Policy. Having always tried to prevent or at least slow down the integration in this policy field, the United Kingdom has, therefore, been some kind of natural ally to Ireland in trying to keep security issues out of European Integration. The consequences of this development are already visible. Not long after the Brexit vote, the President of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the French President, Emmanuel Macron, later joined by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, were calling for the creation of an EU army. Although, at the time being, this is not yet much more than a blurry vision, it became obvious where the integration in the European Common Security and Defence Policy field is heading to.
- Already in 2018, the Permanent Structure Cooperation, better known as PESCO, was launched, marking a huge integration step in the security and defence cooperation towards a military alliance. Causing a lively discussion in Ireland, its participation was finally backed by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, denying a conflict between Irish Neutrality and the participation in PESCO. Of all the other neutral member states of the EU, only Malta opted out to first observe if PESCO and neutrality are compatible. Especially in Finland and Sweden, former neutral states, however, a consensus has been reached that EU membership in general is not logically compatible with the traditional notion of neutrality. Thus, in practice these EU Member States have given up their neutrality to a large extent. In Ireland, Sinn Féin proposed a bill to enshrine the Irish Neutrality in the constitution. After a lively debate in which European politicians were even called *war mongers* the bill got eventually rejected in the Dáil in the end.

- Finally, let me draw your attention to a poll by Red C for the European Movement Ireland, published just last week. Apart from an overwhelming support for EU membership in general, the poll also revealed that a majority of 58% of the Irish people think that Ireland should be part of an intensified EU security and defence cooperation and that PESCO would not pose a threat to Irish Neutrality. The approval is even stronger amongst young Irish.

For me as a German citizen this whole discussion about neutrality is new. Despite the *tabula rasa* after the Second World War, Germany did not have the chance to have its own discussion about this, but in the face of an expansionist Soviet Union had to align itself to NATO. Therefore, while living in Ireland for one year and studying at University College Dublin, it is very interesting to follow the public debate about neutrality as well as also discuss it with my Irish and non-Irish fellow students. This brings insights into this very politicised topic and the fact that Irish Neutrality is loaded with different meanings and historical resonances. Various narratives are contesting the nature of Irish foreign and security policy, especially neutrality, of course, and its expression in Europe's contemporary security architecture. While there seems to be a broad consensus that Ireland can and should make a contribution to global peace and security, this is not the case for the question through which institutional framework this should be achieved.

Due to the aforementioned recent developments, however, Ireland seems to be forced to take a decision. Especially the leaving of the major damper of integration in the area of foreign and security policy and the concomitant developments, i.e. PESCO and EU army, make it an urgent topic. For Ireland's European partners, and, therefore, also for me in this case, on the other hand it is essential to know where Ireland is coming from in order to fully understand the significance and the implications of neutrality for Ireland.