

The Good Friday Agreement at 25

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On the 25th Anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, this Note:

- traces the origins of the Agreement and offers an overview of earlier peace initiatives, which provided a foundation for the historic peace deal;
- examines the substantive content of the Agreement;
- reflects upon some lessons learned from the negotiations and peace process; and
- discusses some ongoing challenges to the Agreement's full implementation.

“We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.”

(The Good Friday Agreement, available [here](#))



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Summary

This Note traces the origins of the Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, and offers an overview of earlier peace initiatives, which provided a foundation for the historic peace deal. It examines the substantive content of the Agreement, reflects upon some lessons learned from the negotiations and peace process, and discusses some ongoing challenges to the Agreement's full implementation.

Table 1: Glossary and Abbreviations

Term	Meaning
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
NIWC	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

Introduction

“When you approved the agreement you were also talking to Israelis and Palestinians, to Colombians, to Africans, Asians, to Americans – in fact you were talking to the world”

[former US Senator George Mitchell, quoted in the *Irish Examiner*, 17 April 2023, available [here](#)]

2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, on 10 April 1998. During March and April 2023, several commemorative events took place across the island of Ireland, involving political figures who played a key role in the negotiations, victims of the Troubles, and individuals from unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland.¹ Events have also been hosted by Irish [embassies and consulates](#) around the globe and at the [European Parliament](#). During historic state visits to Dublin and Belfast in April

¹ 'Events to be held in Northern Ireland on Friday to reflect on Belfast Agreement' (*The Irish Times*, 7 April 2023) available [here](#).

2023, the US President, Joe Biden, reiterated “the enduring support of the United States for the Good Friday Agreement and Northern Ireland’s democratic institutions”.²

In a keynote address to the [Agreement 25 Conference](#) hosted by Queens University Belfast, the former US Senator, George Mitchell, who chaired the peace negotiations that led to the Agreement, indicated that the peace deal offered an example of peace and “possibility of hope” for people around the world.³ He encouraged people in the region not to allow peace to “slip away”.⁴

This Note traces the origins of the historic peace agreement, outlines its substantive content, and discusses challenges to its successful implementation.

Background to the Good Friday Agreement

The Start of the Troubles

Under the 1921 Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Parliament of Northern Ireland, which was dominated by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), was afforded the option of joining the Irish Free State or remaining a devolved part of the UK.⁵ It selected the latter option. Between 1921 and 1972, Northern Ireland had its own institutions, including a Parliament comprised of a House of Commons and a Senate, a government led by a Prime Minister, and a civil service. These institutions exercised devolved powers in many areas, whilst ultimately remaining subordinate to the Parliament and Government in Westminster. The UUP consistently formed a majority government in Northern Ireland until 1972. From 1929, members of the House of Commons were elected using the ‘first past the post’ electoral system from single-seat constituencies in a winner takes all format.⁶ Under this electoral system, minority parties have less chance of gaining representation.⁷ The electoral franchise for local government (District Council) elections was based on the ratepayer suffrage and the company vote.⁸ In 1961, it was estimated that this system operated to prevent up to a quarter of the parliamentary electorate from voting in local elections.⁹

During the late 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement formed in response to the perceived unfair treatment of the minority Catholic population of Northern Ireland by the authorities. It called for several reforms, including: a ‘one person, one vote’ electoral system for local government elections, an end to the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries, fair practices in the allocation of public housing, the appointment of public service employees, a repeal of the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Acts, and the disbandment of the ‘B-Specials’ (Ulster Special Constabulary), a paramilitary style reserve police force comprised entirely of Protestants.¹⁰

² The White House, ‘Remarks by President Biden to the Houses of the Oireachtas (13 April 2023) available [here](#).

³ Jonathan McCambridge, David Young and Catherine Wylie, ‘Good Friday Agreement changed history, Mitchell tells anniversary event’ (*Irish Examiner*, 17 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ David Torrance, ‘Devolution in Northern Ireland’ (House of Commons Library Research Paper, 7 June 2022) available [here](#), at pp 19-20.

⁶ The only exception was the university constituency of Queens University Belfast which up until 1969 continued to return four candidates to Parliament using the Proportional Representation system. See Ulster University CAIN Archive, ‘Introduction to the Electoral System of Northern Ireland’, available [here](#).

⁷ For results of these elections from 1921 to 1972 see University of Ulster’s Ark, available [here](#).

⁸ See Ulster University CAIN Archive, ‘Introduction to the electoral system in Northern Ireland’ available [here](#).

⁹ See *ibid*.

¹⁰ Ulster University CAIN Archive, ‘Civil Rights - A Chronology of Main Events, 1964-1972’, available [here](#).

On 5 October 1968, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) repressed a civil rights march in Derry, an event which for many marks the start date of the Troubles.¹¹ Following the march, rioting erupted for two days between the Catholic residents of Derry and the RUC.¹² In August 1969, intense rioting took place following an Apprentice Boys parade in Derry, which became known as the Battle of the Bogside. Sectarian violence also erupted in Belfast prompting the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Major James Chichester-Clark, to request the deployment of British soldiers. At the time, it was reportedly thought that the operation would be over within six months.¹³ As it transpired, 'Operation Banner' became the longest operation in British military history with the last soldiers only leaving Northern Ireland in 2007.¹⁴ Amidst escalating violence, direct rule from Westminster was imposed in 1972.

During the three decades of civil unrest and armed violence by paramilitary forces from both Catholic and Protestant communities, over 3,500 individuals lost their lives and countless more were injured, both physically and mentally.

The Pathway to Peace

"The success of the Good Friday Agreement was due in part to factors present in 1998 such as political investment from the new Governments in the UK and Ireland, and alignment through shared membership of the European Union. However, the success of the Agreement also builds on years of effort to reach consensus and build trust, in spite of frequent setbacks"

[Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, 'Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement' (March 2023), at para. 6, available [here](#)].

The 1973 Sunningdale Agreement

The Sunningdale Agreement was signed on 9 December 1973 by the then Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, and the then British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, following tripartite talks involving political representatives from Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain.¹⁵ It sought to establish a power sharing executive in Northern Ireland with devolved powers involving the representation of both Nationalist and Unionist communities. It also sought to establish a Council of Ireland to address issues of joint concern to Ireland and Northern Ireland, which was to include:

- a cross-border Council of Ministers, consisting of seven members from the Northern Ireland Executive and seven members from the Irish Government; and
- a Consultative Assembly with advisory and review functions, comprised of thirty members from the Northern Ireland Assembly and thirty members from Dáil Éireann.

In signing the Sunningdale Agreement, the Irish government accepted that there could be no change to the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland agreed to it.¹⁶ The

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Esther Addley, 'British troops leave after 38 years' (*The Guardian*, 1 August 2007) available [here](#).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For a discussion, see: RTÉ Archives, 'Northern Ireland Can Work Together' (RTÉ, 10 December 1973) available [here](#).

¹⁶ Ibid.

British Government in turn agreed to support the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland should they in the future indicate a desire to become part of a united Ireland.¹⁷ The Agreement failed to achieve its immediate objectives. The Agreement was supported by the Alliance Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and initially by the UUP led by Brian Faulkner.¹⁸ However, after the Ulster Unionist Council, the governing body of the UUP, voted to reject the Council of Ireland in January 1974, Faulkner resigned as leader of the UUP.¹⁹ During the 1974 General Election, the Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) was formed by three Loyalist parties: the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), (Ulster) Vanguard, and Official Unionists (West). Their Campaign slogan was, 'Dublin is just a Sunningdale away'.²⁰ In May 1974, the Ulster Workers' Council, a loyalist grouping which vehemently opposed the Agreement²¹, declared a strike. This led to the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive and the suspension of plans for power-sharing.

The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement

In November 1985, the [Anglo-Irish Agreement](#) was agreed by the then Taoiseach of Ireland, Garret FitzGerald, and the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The Agreement provided for regular and formal consultation between the Irish and British governments regarding the administration of Northern Ireland.²² Under the Agreement, the UK Government recognised the right of the Irish Government to put forward views and proposals on matters related to Northern Ireland in so far as those matters were not the responsibility of a devolved administration of Northern Ireland.²³

The Agreement also established the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which entailed the convening of regular meetings between the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.²⁴ The Conference was to consider: political matters, security and related matters, the promotion of cross-border co-operation, and legal matters, including the administration of justice.²⁵ It was supported by a secretariat based at Maryfield near Stormont, which was comprised of civil servants from both states.²⁶ The principle of consent was again a central cog of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Under Article 1, both Governments accepted that a change in the status of Northern Ireland could only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement was widely opposed by Loyalists and Unionists for affording a consultative role to the Irish Government and for potentially paving the way to a united Ireland.²⁷ It

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ulster University CAIN Archive, 'The Sunningdale Agreement - Chronology of Main Events', available [here](#).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid.

²² 'Anglo-Irish Agreement: What was it?' (*The Irish Times*, 14 November 2015) available [here](#).

²³ Article 2 (b), Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985, available [here](#).

²⁴ Articles 2 and 3, Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985, available [here](#).

²⁵ Article 2, Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985, available [here](#).

²⁶ 'Anglo-Irish Agreement: What was it?' (*The Irish Times*, 14 November 2015) available [here](#).

²⁷ For a discussion, see: Ulster University CAIN Archive, 'Anglo-Irish Agreement – Summary', available [here](#); Gerry Moriarty, 'Anglo-Irish Agreement marked a crossing of the Rubicon' (*The Irish Times*, 14 November 2015) available [here](#); and 'Reactions to the Agreement - Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985' (BBC Bitesize) available [here](#).

was also opposed by some prominent Republicans who argued that by “recognising the existence of Northern Ireland in the Agreement, the Dublin government had made partition more permanent”.²⁸ On the other hand, the Agreement was supported by the Alliance Party and the SDLP. The SDLP felt that the “first step [to peace] was a joint Irish and British approach that would produce solid outer walls for a new constitutional framework”.²⁹

The Hume-Adams Dialogue

During the late 1980s, the SDLP leader, John Hume, held secret talks with the President of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams, which became known as the ‘Hume-Adams’ dialogue. When the talks were revealed in 1993, they triggered an “enormous backlash”.³⁰ However, the architects of the Good Friday Agreement have recognised the importance of the talks in terms of building another layer of understanding.³¹

The Brooke/Mayhew Talks (April 1991 to November 1992)

Between April 1991 and November 1992, a series of negotiations took place involving the British and Irish governments, and representatives of the UUP, the DUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party. The talks were named after the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, and his successor, Sir Patrick Mayhew, who played a key role in the process.³² The talks sought to work towards the achievement of a more broadly based agreement than the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The talks were based on an idea initially proposed by John Hume.³³ The SDLP maintained that any peace agreement would have to be built on relationships between Nationalists and Unionists in the North of Ireland, between the North and South of Ireland, and between the people of Ireland and the people of Britain.³⁴ The Brooke/Mayhew talks were divided into three strands concerning:

- (i) relationships between the parties within Northern Ireland;
- (ii) relations between North and South; and
- (iii) links between London and Dublin.³⁵

The talks worked off the guiding principle that “nothing will be finally agreed until everything is agreed”.³⁶ Whilst the talks did not result in a substantive agreement, they laid the foundations for

²⁸ ‘Reactions to the Agreement - Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985’ (BBC Bitesize) available [here](#).

²⁹ Sean Farren, ‘Anglo-Irish Agreement was transformative’ (*The Irish Times*, 14 November 2015) available [here](#).

³⁰ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 37, available [here](#).

³¹ The architects included political actors, diplomats, and civil servants who were involved in the negotiations. See: *ibid.*, at p. 9 and paras 7 and 37, available [here](#).

³² J.P O’Grady. 2001. Forcing the Question of Northern Ireland: The Brooke-Mayhew Talks, 1990-1992. *New Hibernia Review* 5(4): 73-92, available [here](#).

³³ *Ibid.*, at p. 76.

³⁴ ‘SDLP - a positive approach: An Agreement Inspired by SDLP Principles’ available [here](#).

³⁵ J.P O’Grady. 2001. Forcing the Question of Northern Ireland: The Brooke-Mayhew Talks, 1990-1992. *New Hibernia Review* 5(4): 73-92, at p. 76, available [here](#).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, at p. 79.

the multi-party talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement, which applied the same three-strand framework and guiding principle.

The 1993 Downing Street Declaration

In 1993, the then Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and the then British Prime Minister, John Major, issued a [Joint Declaration](#), known as the Downing Street Declaration, which was to operate as a charter for peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. It was based around the core principles of self-determination and consent in relation to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Under the Declaration, the British Government agreed that:

“it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish”.³⁷

The Irish Government in turn agreed that:

“the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland”.³⁸

In addition, the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds confirmed that:

“in the event of an overall settlement, the Irish Government will, as part of a balanced constitutional accommodation, put forward and support proposals for change in the Irish Constitution which would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland”.³⁹

This was significant, given that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, as originally drafted, stipulated that the national territory consisted of the whole island of Ireland, and asserted the right of the Irish Parliament and Government to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory, pending the re-integration of the national territory.

The Downing Street Declaration also afforded actors associated with paramilitary violence a pathway into the political process.⁴⁰ Paragraph 10 stated:

“The British and Irish Governments reiterate that the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence. They confirm that, in these circumstances, democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the Governments and the political parties on the way ahead.”

³⁷ The Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993 (Downing St. Declaration) available [here](#).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Government of Ireland, ‘About the Good Friday Agreement’ available [here](#).

The 1995 Framework Documents

A joint Framework Document was agreed by the Irish and British Governments in 1995, which outlined potential future arrangements for North-South cooperation. The then Taoiseach, [John Bruton](#), indicated that its purpose was “to assist discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland political parties”. A second Framework Document was prepared by the [British Government](#), following consultation with the main political parties in Northern Ireland. It outlined the British “Government’s ideas for restoring local democracy in Northern Ireland as part of a full political settlement”. The Framework Documents also helped to provide an important foundation for subsequent multi-party negotiations, including by setting out what various parties wanted.⁴¹

Support from International Partners

International actors, in particular the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), played a key role in the peace process, including by helping to build trust and create external pressure for progress.⁴² In 1994, the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary organisations announced ceasefires, which presented an opportunity for negotiations. Senator George Mitchell was appointed by the US President, Bill Clinton, as Special Envoy for Northern Ireland from 1995 – 2001.

Together with the former Prime Minister of Finland, Harri Holkeri, and General John de Chastelain of Canada, Senator Mitchell formed an international commission to independently assess the decommissioning of paramilitary arms. The Commission produced a report in January 1996 in which it outlined the [Mitchell Principles](#). These principles became the basis for participation in the multi-party negotiations, which led to the Good Friday Agreement. They required parties involved in the peace talks to agree to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations, and to agree to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues.⁴³ Participants in the peace talks have described Senator Mitchell as “extraordinarily important in keeping the show on the road” and “a masterful Chair”.⁴⁴

Ireland and the UK’s membership of the EU is also considered to have propelled the peace process forward by providing a:

“framework in which relationships could be deepened at all levels – from politicians exchanging ideas in the corridors of Brussels, to businesses across the island finding new ways to work with one another, made possible by our joint access to the Single Market”.⁴⁵

The participants in the peace talks drew inspiration from the EU model for conflict resolution.⁴⁶ In addition, the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (the

⁴¹ As stated by former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, in episode one of the ‘As I Remember It: Bertie Ahern and the Good Friday Agreement’, available [here](#).

⁴² Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at paras 20-30, available [here](#).

⁴³ The [Mitchell Principles](#).

⁴⁴ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 26, available [here](#).

⁴⁵ Government of Ireland, ‘About the Good Friday Agreement’ available [here](#).

⁴⁶ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 30, available [here](#).

'[PEACE programme](#)'), which was established in 1994, demonstrated the EU's solidarity with the people of Northern Ireland. Between 1995 and the end of 2020, four successive PEACE programmes provided almost €2.3 billion to fund 22,500 projects across the eligible area of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.⁴⁷

Multi-Party Talks and Votes for Peace

Multi-party negotiations commenced on 10 June 1996, which were chaired by Senator Mitchell. The talks involved the participation of the Irish and British Governments, which were led at the time by Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Prime Minister Tony Blair. Representatives of the following parties in Northern Ireland were also involved in the negotiations: Alliance, the DUP, the Labour Coalition, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the SDLP, Sinn Féin, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), the UUP, and the UK Unionist Party.⁴⁸ Sinn Féin was excluded from the talks from June 1996 to September 1997 following the IRA bombing of Canary Wharf. However, Sinn Féin was readmitted after the IRA announced a further ceasefire in 1997. This prompted the DUP and the UK Unionist party to leave the negotiations.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the talks were unprecedented in terms of their inclusivity and involved parties linked to parliamentary groups from both sides. The inclusivity of the talks is considered to be a key component of their success.⁵⁰

The Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10 April 1998. In order to be implemented, it required amendments to both British legislation and the Irish Constitution, in particular, Articles 2 and 3. On 22 May 1998, the majority of voters in referendums held on both sides of the border effectively agreed to these changes. The results represented an overwhelming endorsement of the Good Friday Agreement, with 71.2% of voters in Northern Ireland, and 94.39% of voters in the Republic, voting in favour of the peace deal.

The former SDLP leader, John Hume, and former UUP leader, David Trimble, were awarded the Nobel Peace prize for their vital role in the peace process.

Women also played a significant part in the peace talks, which has sometimes been overlooked. For example, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which was co-founded by Monica McWilliams and Avila Kilmurray, brought together women from unionist and nationalist communities with common concerns. It successfully advocated for the inclusion of provisions on human rights, equality and reconciliation in the Good Friday Agreement.⁵¹ Mo Mowlam, the former

⁴⁷ Of this, €1.6 billion came from the European Commission, and the remaining €0.7 billion, from the government of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive. See: Peace Programmes Learning Platform, available [here](#).

⁴⁸ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, 'Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement' (March 2023), at para. 56, available [here](#).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., at para. 57.

⁵¹ Ibid., at para. 59. For a more detailed discussion of the Coalition's role, see: Freya McClements, 'Peace heroines: "We wanted women to have a strong voice in the peace talks, but we wanted more than that"' (*The Irish Times*, 10 April 2023) available [here](#); Peace Research Institute Oslo, 'The Role of Civil Society and Gender in Reconciliation: Lessons from the Good Friday Agreement' (2019) available [here](#); and 'Desperate, old fashioned misogyny' - Liz O'Donnell recalls Good Friday talks' (*Newstalk*, 2 March 2023) available [here](#).

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, also had a “huge impact” on the peace process through her “informal style and willingness to break barriers”.⁵²

“People working together can overcome many obstacles, often within themselves, and by doing so can make the world a better place”

(Former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, cited in the [Irish Examiner](#) 7 April 2023)

The Substance of the Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement was effectively comprised of two agreements: the [British-Irish Agreement](#) and the [Multi-Party Agreement](#). Under the British-Irish Agreement, the British and Irish governments agreed to the institutions provided for under the Multi-Party Agreement. They also set out a shared position regarding Northern Ireland’s current and future constitutional status, which was based on the principles of self-determination and consent. Under [the British-Irish Agreement](#), both Governments undertake to:

- “(i) recognise the legitimacy of whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its status, whether they prefer to continue to support the Union with Great Britain or a sovereign united Ireland;
- (ii) recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland”.

[The British-Irish Agreement](#) also addresses the important question of identity. It acknowledges that it is “the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose”. It also confirms their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship.

There are three strands to the multi-party agreement:

- Stand One: Relations between the Northern Irish parties;
- Strand Two: North-South relations; and
- Strand Three: East-West or British-Irish relations.

Strand One: Relations between the Northern Irish Parties

Strand One concerned the establishment, responsibilities and functioning of democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. It provided for the establishment of a [Northern Ireland Assembly](#) with devolved powers, which was to be “inclusive in its membership, capable of exercising executive and legislative authority, and subject to safeguards to protect the rights and interests of all sides of the

⁵² Kim Bielenberg, “‘She was racing against time’: how Mo Mowlam shook things up to secure the Good Friday Agreement” (*Irish Independent*, 8 April 2023) available [here](#).

community.”⁵³ The Agreement stipulated that the Assembly’s members were to be elected from existing Westminster constituencies using the [Proportional Representation \(Single Transferable Vote\)](#) system. Initially, the Assembly had 108 members (6 per constituency); however, its membership was reduced to 90 members (5 per constituency) from the 2017 Assembly election onwards.⁵⁴

The Assembly is authorised to adopt legislation in Northern Ireland in areas of devolved responsibility subject to certain requirements being satisfied. In particular, the Agreement incorporated safeguards, which sought to ensure that:

- key decisions and legislation did not infringe the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and any Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland that was subsequently agreed; and
- key decisions were taken on a cross-community basis.

Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly were required to register a “designation of identity – nationalist, unionist or other” in order to facilitate a determination of the extent of cross-community support for key decisions. Key decisions require the support of either:

- parallel consent, namely, a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting; or
- a weighted majority, namely, 60% of members present and voting, including at least 40% of each of the nationalist and unionist designations present and voting.

The Agreement provides that [Executive Authority](#) is to be discharged on behalf of the Assembly by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, and up to ten Ministers who have responsibilities for specific Departments. The ministerial portfolios are allocated using [the d’Hondt system](#) based on the number of seats won by the political parties. A special arrangement was later agreed whereby the Minister for Justice would be appointed by way of a decision of the Assembly requiring cross-community support. Ministers must comply with a code of conduct included in the Good Friday Agreement.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister are the leaders of the largest nationalist and unionist parties with a view to ensuring cross-community representation and co-operation at the top level of decision-making.⁵⁵ The holders of the positions “share equal responsibility within government and make their decisions jointly”.⁵⁶ Since 1998, the institutions outlined in Strand One of the Agreement have periodically been out of operation. Most recently, the Stormont institutions have been suspended since February 2022 due to the DUP’s opposition of post-Brexit trading arrangements.⁵⁷

Strand Two: North: South Relations

Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of a [North South Ministerial Council](#) to “bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and

⁵³ The Good Friday Agreement, (Multi-Party Agreement) available [here](#).

⁵⁴ ‘The Good Friday Agreement’ (Citizens Information, last edited 19 August 2022) available [here](#).

⁵⁵ Government of Ireland, ‘About the Good Friday Agreement’ available [here](#).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ‘Good Friday Agreement: Does the Peace Deal Still Work?’ (BBC, 10 April 2023) available [here](#).

the Irish Government” in order to “exchange information, discuss and consult with a view to co-operation on matters of mutual interest”.

The Agreement provided for bi-annual meetings of the Council in plenary format. During these meetings, the Northern Ireland representation is led by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and the Irish Government representation is led by the Taoiseach. The Agreement also provides for meetings of the Council in a specific sectoral format with each side represented by the relevant Minister. Finally, the Council may meet in an appropriate format to consider institutional or cross-sectoral matters and to resolve disagreements.

Decisions of the Council are taken with the agreement of both administrations. The approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas is required for decisions beyond the defined authority of those attending. Notably, the Agreement stipulates that the North/South Ministerial Council and Northern Ireland Executive are “mutually interdependent, and that one cannot successfully function without the other”.

The Agreement identifies the following [six areas of North South cooperation](#) in which common policies and approaches may be agreed by the Council, but implemented separately in each jurisdiction:

- Agriculture,
- Education,
- Environment,
- Health,
- Tourism, and
- Transport.

The Agreement also enabled the establishment of the following six [North South Joint Implementation Bodies](#), which operate on an all-island basis:

- Waterways Ireland,
- Food Safety Promotion Board,
- Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradeIreland),
- Special EU Programmes Body,
- The Language Body (consisting of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster Scots Agency), and
- Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

A [North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association](#) was also established to provide “a forum for regular formal discussions between Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas on issues of mutual interest and concern”.

Strand Three: East-West/British-Irish Relations

The third Strand of the Good Friday Agreement concerned East-West/British-Irish relations. This Strand provided for the establishment of a British-Irish Council to be comprised of representatives of the British and Irish Governments; representatives of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales; and representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. Its purpose is to “exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach

agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest”.⁵⁸ The Agreement indicated that suitable matters for early discussion could include transport links, agricultural, environmental, cultural, health, education and EU issues.

The Agreement stipulates that the British-Irish Council will normally operate by consensus; however, decisions on common policies and actions require the agreement of all members participating in such policies or actions. The Agreement provides for the British-Irish Council to convene in the following formats:

- twice annually at summit-level, with the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister in attendance;
- regularly for specific sectoral matters with the appropriate Ministers from both jurisdictions in attendance; and
- in an appropriate format to discuss cross-sectoral issues.

The Agreement also provided for the creation of a standing British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in place of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference established under the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which had been opposed by Unionists. The purpose of the Conference is to “promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Governments”.⁵⁹ The Agreement indicated that the Conference would meet at summit-level, with the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister in attendance, when required. Otherwise, the Governments would be represented by Ministers at meetings of the Conference, with police and security advisers in attendance where appropriate.

The Agreement also provided for regular and frequent meetings of the Conference concerning non-devolved Northern Ireland matters. These meetings were to be co-chaired by the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Irish Government was permitted to present “views and proposals” on non-devolved issues.⁶⁰

Confidence Building Measures

Critical to the viability of the Good Friday Agreement was agreement to take action on other issues that were central to the conflict. These were frequently referred to as ‘confidence-building measures’ and address the following core areas of concern:

- *decommissioning and demobilisation*, entailing the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and demobilisation of paramilitary organisations under the supervision of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning;
- *demilitarisation*, including the dismantling of security installations and emergency powers, and the reduction of British armed forces to levels compatible with a peaceful society;
- *policing*, including the establishment of an Independent Commission to make recommendations for future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland. The recommendations of the resulting Patten Commission would lead to the creation of the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) (PSNI) in place of the dismantled RUC;
- *criminal justice*, including the appointment of an independent commission to review the criminal justice system and make recommendations for reform;

⁵⁸ The Good Friday Agreement, (Multi-Party Agreement) available [here](#).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

- *prisoners*, including commitments from both the British and Irish governments to introduce mechanisms for the early-release of prisoners associated with the Troubles, conditional upon the groups they were affiliated with maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire;
- *human rights*, including a commitment from the British Government to complete the incorporation of the ECHR into Northern Ireland law, commitments from both the British and Irish Governments to establish human rights commissions, and commitments from both the British and Irish Governments to create a joint committee with representatives from both commissions as a forum for the consideration of human rights issues across the island;
- *reconciliation*, including continuing support for organisations involved in the provision of support to victims of the Troubles; and
- *economic, social and cultural issues*, including a recognition by all participants of the need for respect and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, and the need for sensitivity when using symbols so as to ensure that their use promotes mutual respect rather than division.

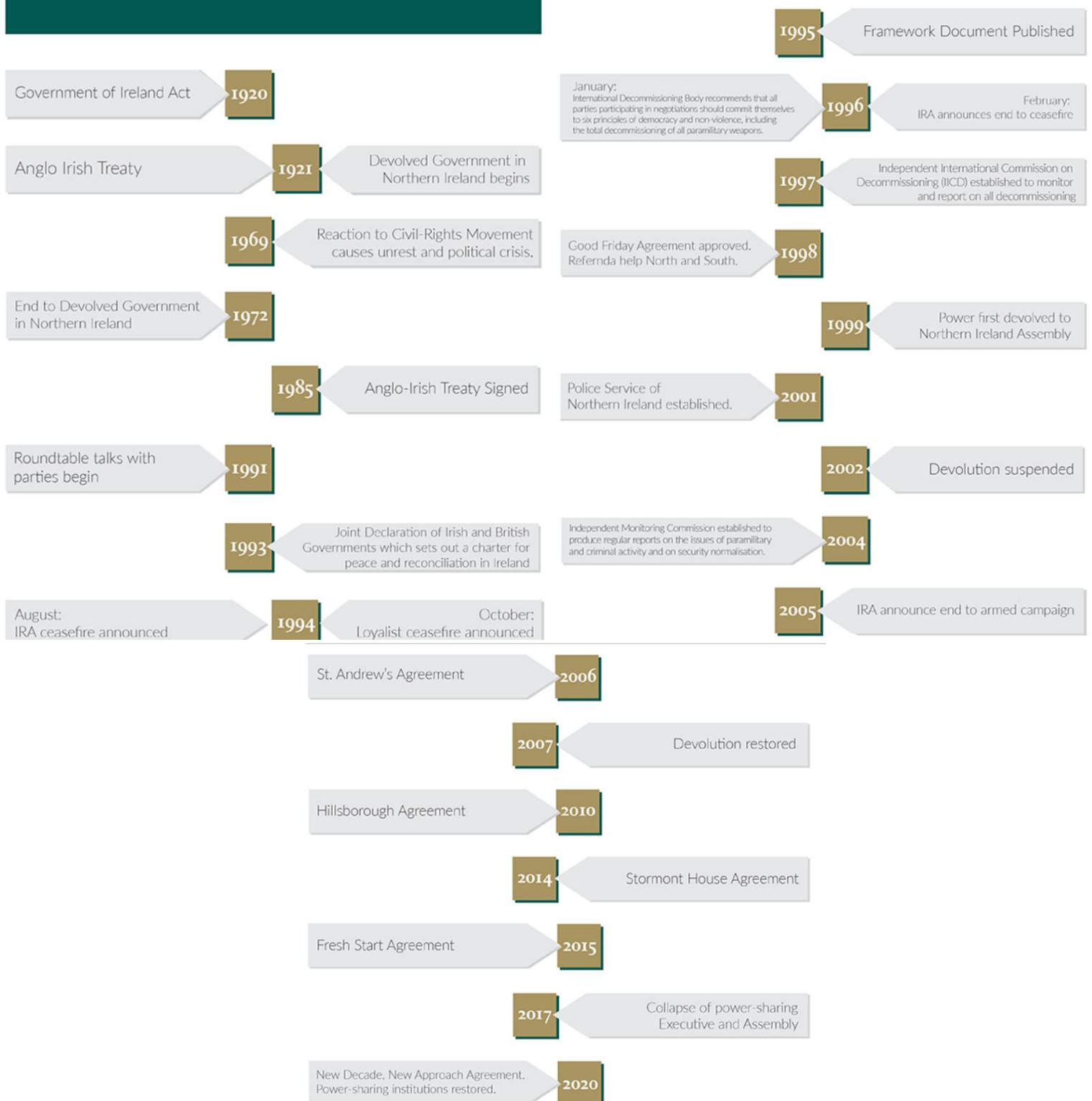
Subsequent political and legal agreements

Following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, additional political and legal agreements have been necessary to consolidate the peace settlement including:

- the Saint Andrews Agreement (2006), which outlined a pathway to full devolution of policing and justice, and provided for a stable power-sharing arrangement;
- the Hillsborough Agreement (2010), which provided for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, and included an agreement on controversial parades;
- the Stormont House Agreement (2014), which addressed a wide range of political, social and economic issues, sought to promote reconciliation and economic renewal in Northern Ireland, and provided for the establishment of a new institutional framework for dealing with the past;
- the Fresh Start Agreement (2015), which dealt with the implementation of several aspects of the Stormont House Agreement and sought to address the continuing impact and legacy of paramilitarism; and
- the New Decade New Approach Agreement (2020), which provided for a balanced package aimed at making politics and government in Northern Ireland more stable, accountable, transparent, inclusive and effective.⁶¹

⁶¹ Department of Foreign Affairs, 'The Good Friday Agreement and today', available [here](#).

Timeline of the Peace Process



Source: Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Peace Process Timeline' available [here](#).

Reflections and Lessons Learned

On the eve of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement met with the Architects of the Agreement in order “to better understand how the Agreement came to be and what lessons we can learn to inform politics today”.⁶² As part of this process, the Committee heard from witnesses who participated in the negotiation of both the Good Friday Agreement and earlier peace initiatives.

Whilst noting the “centrality of compromise” to the Good Friday Agreement, witnesses indicated that compromise was “possible because not all the most contentious issues were addressed directly in the negotiations”.⁶³ Indeed, the Agreement has been described as “a masterclass in constructive ambiguity, allowing all sides to agree to disagree and maintain their opposing goals, albeit through peaceful means”.⁶⁴ Whilst this constructive ambiguity facilitated the finalisation of the Agreement in 1998, it also contributed to future problems, including frequent suspensions of the devolved power-sharing institutions due to slow progress in implementing key confidence-building measures, such as decommissioning. One media article published on 7 April 2023 reported that “[i]n the 25 years since peace, Stormont has been out of action for at least nine years”.⁶⁵

Some witnesses before the Joint Oireachtas Committee inferred that implementation mechanisms should have received more attention during the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement.⁶⁶ Jonathan Powell, who acted as former Prime Minister Tony Blair’s Chief of Staff from 1995-2007, observed that one of the lessons from the process “is always to think about the implementation phase even when in the early stages of negotiation”.⁶⁷ The Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee noted that:

“[w]itnesses expressed concerns regarding non-implementation of and underuse of the Agreement on a range of issues, in particular the poor functioning of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, the underdevelopment of North-South co-operation, the failure to progress a Civic Forum in Northern Ireland, the complementary North-South civic consultation arrangements, and the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland”.⁶⁸

⁶² Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), available [here](#)

⁶³ Ibid., at paras 63-64, available [here](#).

⁶⁴ Lisa O’Carroll, ‘How did the Good Friday agreement come about and why is it so significant?’ (*The Guardian*, 7 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 82, available [here](#).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., at para. 81.

“We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicated ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.”

[The Good Friday Agreement, available [here](#)]

The Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee notes that “[s]everal witnesses attested that the issue of the legacy of the Troubles did not get much attention in the Agreement”.⁶⁹ It further notes that “[s]ome witnesses identified the lack of consideration of legacy issues as a shortcoming of the Agreement”.⁷⁰ In the Report, members expressed “grave concerns” regarding the UK’s [Northern Ireland Troubles \(Legacy and Reconciliation\) Bill](#), which seeks to establish a new Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery.⁷¹ Notably, the Bill provides for the granting of immunity from prosecution to individuals who perpetrated crimes during the Troubles in certain circumstances where they cooperate with the Commission.⁷² The Bill has been criticised by the five main political parties in Northern Ireland, victims and human rights groups, the Irish Government and other political parties in Ireland and Britain.⁷³ The Bill was originated in the House of Commons during the 2022/2023 session and, as of 19 April 2023, was at Committee Stage.⁷⁴

The Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee also notes that the Good Friday Agreement fails to specify the exact grounds upon which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland may determine that a border poll is required concerning the question of a united Ireland, and also fails to outline any role for the Irish Government in this process.⁷⁵

In an opinion piece published in the *Washington Post* on 9 April 2023, former US President, Bill Clinton, observed that:

“A generation on, the situation in Northern Ireland is far from perfect. Too little progress has been made in true integration between the two communities. Divided neighborhoods remain, and economic inequality persists. The uncertainty surrounding Brexit — which Northern Ireland voted against — has led to political paralysis and left the country without a standing government for more than a year.”⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Ibid., at para. 76.

⁷⁰ Ibid., at para. 77.

⁷¹ Ibid., at para. 74.

⁷² Freya Clements, ‘UK tweaks controversial Troubles legacy Bill, but resistance remains from victims’ groups’ (The Irish Times, 17 January 2023) available [here](#).

⁷³ Ibid.; and Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 74, available [here](#).

⁷⁴ Parliamentary Bills, ‘Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament’ (UK Parliament Website, last updated 19 April 2023), available [here](#).

⁷⁵ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 78, available [here](#).

⁷⁶ Bill Clinton, ‘Opinion: Why has peace endured in Northern Ireland? Hope and history rhymed’ (*The Washington Post*, 9 April 2023) available [here](#).

Nevertheless, he noted that, despite the odds, the peace in Northern Ireland had endured where other processes had failed. He attributed this achievement to the following core factors:

- the process was driven by the people and their demand for peace;
- political leaders on all sides demonstrated courage in making sacrifices and compromises with their adversaries, and committing to inclusivity in the knowledge that they were putting their own political futures in jeopardy;
- the US was deeply involved in a way, which both sides ultimately viewed as positive; and
- the framework of the Good Friday Agreement “proved to be fair to all sides and better than any other deal that’s out there”.⁷⁷

The Challenge Posed by Brexit

During the commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, the challenge posed by Brexit arose in discussions. As noted previously, the EU is considered to have propelled the peace process forward, including by offering a positive model for conflict resolution, helping to build trust and providing vital financial assistance. It also helped to facilitate policies, which reduced the significance of the border to everyday lives and has been an important part of building peace. Consequently, there were concerns that the UK’s departure from the EU could have negative ramifications for Northern Ireland.

Following Brexit, paperwork and border checks are required on goods transported between the UK and EU markets in order to ensure their compliance with EU rules.⁷⁸ However, some feared that border checks could give rise to instability and jeopardise peace. In order to protect the Good Friday Agreement, maintain its undertaking to remove all security installations, and ensure continuing cross-border co-operation, both sides sought to avoid the establishment of new checkpoints on the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.⁷⁹

In an effort to resolve the impasse, the UK and EU agreed to implement the Northern Ireland Protocol whereby goods are checked, and documents are inspected, when they arrive in Northern Ireland from England, Scotland and Wales. Under the Protocol, the checks apply even if the goods are intended to remain within Northern Ireland.⁸⁰ Sinn Féin and the SDLP supported the protocol.⁸¹ Sinn Féin argued that it was necessary to protect the Good Friday Agreement.⁸² However, prominent unionist parties opposed the Protocol and accused it of creating an effective border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.⁸³

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ The EU requires border checks when certain goods - such as milk and eggs - arrive from non-EU countries. See: ‘Brexit: What are the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework?’ (BBC, 12 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁷⁹ ‘Good Friday Agreement: What is it?’ (BBC News, 3 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁸⁰ ‘Brexit: What are the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework?’ (BBC, 12 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁸¹ Alix Culbertson, ‘What is the Northern Ireland Protocol and why does it matter?’ (Sky News, 17 February 2023) available [here](#).

⁸² ‘Good Friday Agreement: What is it?’ (BBC News, 3 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁸³ ‘Brexit: What are the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework?’ (BBC, 12 April 2023) available [here](#).

On 19 February 2023, prior to the announcement of the Windsor Framework, the leader of the Alliance Party, Naomi Long, indicated that maintaining dual access to both EU and UK markets is the “bottom line” for Northern Ireland businesses.⁸⁴ At the same time, concerns had been voiced by some businesses that checks introduced under the Northern Ireland Protocol increased costs and delays.⁸⁵

On 27 February 2023, the UK and EU Commission jointly announced the publication of the Windsor Framework, which aims to significantly reduce the number of checks on goods arriving in Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. It provides for the division of such goods into two lanes:

- a green lane for goods, which are to remain in Northern Ireland, and which will not undergo checks and will require minimal paperwork; and
- a red lane for at-risk goods, which may be sent on to the EU and which will be subjected to checks and paperwork.⁸⁶

The Windsor Framework also provides for a so-called ‘Stormont brake’, which would effectively permit the Northern Ireland Assembly to object to proposed new EU rules in certain circumstances under strict conditions.

The UK and the EU support the Windsor Framework. However, the DUP, Northern Ireland’s largest unionist party, voted against it in the UK Parliament. The DUP leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, has agreed to “continue to work with the government on all the outstanding issues”.⁸⁷ The DUP is refusing to participate in power-sharing arrangements until its concerns are resolved.⁸⁸ Former US President, Bill Clinton, has voiced his support for the Windsor Framework, which he asserts “offers the opportunity to maintain a growing Northern Ireland economy”.⁸⁹

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, this Note recalls a key finding of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in its March 2023 Report, entitled, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’:

The Committee heard a wide range of evidence that the Good Friday Agreement was an outstanding success in ending violence and has undoubtedly saved many lives. However, it is also clear that the promise of the Agreement remains unfulfilled. The institutions of the Agreement have operated only fitfully and some elements of the Agreement have yet to be implemented at all. While Northern Ireland has achieved peace, it has not achieved reconciliation. The political leaders of Northern Ireland and the British and Irish Governments, as co-guarantors of the Agreement, must act together urgently to

⁸⁴ Jonathan McCambridge, ‘Continuing dual market access bottom line for majority in the North – Long’ (Breaking News, 19 February 2023) available [here](#).

⁸⁵ ‘Brexit: What are the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework?’ (BBC, 12 April 2023) available [here](#).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Bill Clinton, ‘Opinion: Why has peace endured in Northern Ireland? Hope and history rhymed’ (*The Washington Post*, 9 April 2023) available [here](#).

redouble their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, which should be implemented in full.⁹⁰

The Conclusion of the Oireachtas Joint Committee, which includes key recommendations, is replicated in full in Appendix 1 to this Note.

Suggested further reading and viewing

- Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985, available [here](#).
- ‘Brexit: What are the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework?’ (BBC, 12 April 2023) available [here](#).
- McClements F., ‘Peace heroines: “We wanted women to have a strong voice in the peace talks, but we wanted more than that”’ (*The Irish Times*, 10 April 2023) available [here](#).
- Clinton B, ‘Opinion: Why has peace endured in Northern Ireland? Hope and history rhymed’ (*The Washington Post*, 9 April 2023) available [here](#).
- Government of Ireland, ‘About the Good Friday Agreement’ available [here](#).
- McCambridge J., Young D., and Wylie, C., ‘Good Friday Agreement changed history, Mitchell tells anniversary event’ (*Irish Examiner*, 17 April 2023) available [here](#).
- Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), available to download [here](#).
- RTÉ Archives, ‘Northern Ireland Can Work Together’ (RTÉ, 10 December 1973) available [here](#).
- The Fresh Start Agreement (2015), available [here](#).
- The Good Friday Agreement: the [British-Irish Agreement](#) and the [Multi-Party Agreement](#).
- The Hillsborough Agreement (2010), available [here](#).
- The Joint Declaration of 15 December 1993 (Downing St. Declaration) available [here](#).
- The New Decade New Approach Agreement (2020), available [here](#).
- The Saint Andrews Agreement (2006), available [here](#).
- The Stormont House Agreement (2014), available [here](#).

Suggested viewing

- RTÉ Player, ‘The Agreement’, available [here](#).

⁹⁰ Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement’ (March 2023), at para. 125, available [here](#).

Appendix 1

Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, 'Lessons from the Architects of the Good Friday Agreement' (March 2023) Conclusion.⁹¹

125. The Committee heard a wide range of evidence that the Good Friday Agreement was an outstanding success in ending violence and has undoubtedly saved many lives. However, it is also clear that the promise of the Agreement remains unfulfilled. The institutions of the Agreement have operated only fitfully and some elements of the Agreement have yet to be implemented at all. While Northern Ireland has achieved peace, it has not achieved reconciliation. The political leaders of Northern Ireland and the British and Irish Governments, as coguarantors of the Agreement, must act together urgently to redouble their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, which should be implemented in full.

126. The Committee urges the political parties of Northern Ireland to return to power-sharing as soon as possible. The British and Irish Governments, as coguarantors of the Agreement, should continue to strongly support efforts in this regard.

127. It is evident that a strong partnership between the British and Irish Governments, underpinned by trust, was essential to the Good Friday Agreement. This partnership is also essential to efforts to support reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Given reduced opportunities for contact at political and official level following the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, efforts should be made to maximise the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. The Committee calls on the British and Irish Governments to intensify their engagement under Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement. Meetings should take place frequently at political and official level. There should also be frequent opportunities for British and Irish Ministers to meet informally and privately.

128. It is clear that international actors, in particular the United States, played a vital role in the Peace Process. The United States continues to play a key role in maintaining peace in Northern Ireland. In this regard, continued investment in Ireland's relationship with the United States is vital. The expansion of Ireland's diplomatic presence in the United States via the Global Ireland⁴ strategy is welcome.

129. The Committee calls for increased efforts to build Strand Two North-South co-operation. The Committee hopes for a return to power-sharing, which would in turn enable the North-South Ministerial Council to function normally. The Committee also calls for exploration of new and emerging areas of co-operation. The Committee strongly supports the efforts of the Shared Island Unit to strengthen practical co-operation on this island.

130. The Committee heard an array of perspectives on the constitutional future of Ireland. There was no consensus from the witnesses as to the appropriate next steps. However, the Committee will explore this issue further as part of its work programme, continuing some vital conversations started in this series. There was broad consensus among witnesses that appropriate and detailed planning would have to take place in advance of referenda on constitutional change in Ireland. The Committee will endeavour to outline more specific recommendations in future reports such as the 'perspectives on constitutional change' report.

⁹¹ Ibid., paras 125-134.

131. The Committee calls for a renewed focus on reconciliation. It is clear that while the Good Friday Agreement succeeded in ending most violence, there is still progress needed towards true peace and a shared society. Victims of the legacy of the Troubles must be central to efforts at reconciliation.

132. The Committee calls for the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill to be abandoned and calls for a collective path forward, that is victim-centric, to be prioritised urgently.

133. The Good Friday Agreement was the product of empathy, partnership, compromise, and political bravery. Every effort should be made to ensure that the lessons of the Peace Process inform the next generation of political leaders in Northern Ireland, in Ireland and in the United Kingdom.

134. As stated by Senator George Mitchell, "Those in 1998 who were no different from us. They had been in the conflict. That was really the only difference in circumstance, although it was a substantial one. They had been through the conflict, had seen death and destruction and were worried about their family's safety and their personal safety. That does not exist now. People tend to forget that. Their minds move to other things. For anyone under 25, this all happened before they were born, but we must keep reminding ourselves and them what is at stake and encourage them as best we can to reach agreement. There is no magic formula I or any external person or force can suggest or impose on them. It must come from within - from the courage, strength and vision of the current political leaders of Northern Ireland in particular but also Ireland and the UK".

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