

Irish Political Review Group Submission to the Consultative Forum

The Irish Political Review Group is grateful to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Tánaiste Micheál Martin for inviting two representatives of our Group to attend the four days of the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy. We also appreciate the opportunity of submitting this written Submission.

This Submission is restricted to arguments arranged under five headings as set out below. It includes four appendices at the end: a note on the Irish Political Review Group; a copy of a letter from the Group published in the *Irish Times* (14 June 2023); a document published on the *Republican Education Forum* website replying to criticism of that letter; and a report on the Consultative Forum published in the July 2023 edition of *Irish Political Review*.

The headings of our Submission are:

Defence of the Triple Lock

Ireland's Debt to the European Union over Brexit

International Perceptions of Irish Neutrality

Having a Conservative Dimension to Security Policy

The Role of Irish Historical Revisionism in Skewing Debate on Security Policy

Defence of the Triple Lock

Since the beginning of the Ukraine war on February 24th 2022 (conflict in Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014) and certainly since June 2022, Government leaders have questioned whether the Irish Triple Lock is fit for purpose. The term, 'Triple Lock' describes an authorisation process in which Irish troops cannot be dispatched on peace-keeping missions without the assent of Government, the Dáil (Lower House of Parliament) and either the General Assembly or Security Council of the United Nations.

The problem as outlined in Government statements is that the Russian Government could, in theory, veto an Irish decision to initiate a peace-keeping mission. The Triple Lock in that reading gives the Russian Government a theoretical right of interference in Irish sovereignty.

Despite this unhappiness on the part of the Government over the Triple Lock—some believe that ending it is already part of the Government's plans for changing security policy—a point of view put forward by many groups at the Consultative Forum, in our opinion, was that the Lock should be retained.

The pro-Triple Lock case, as we recall, rested on three points. Firstly, a Russian veto could be overruled by a majority vote in the General Assembly so, theoretically, the Russian veto does not enjoy

absolute power. Secondly, the idea that the Russians might use their veto against an Irish peace-keeping proposal, is merely a theoretical possibility: it has never happened and is unlikely to happen. Lastly and most importantly, ending the Irish Triple Lock would represent a vote of no confidence in the UN and a repudiation of Ireland's long record of service with the UN.

In relation to the UN, on Day 3 of the Forum Professor Ray Murphy of Galway University said that by removing the UN from Ireland's authorising arrangement, we would be undermining that organisation, "weakening the very organisation we're trying to strengthen". Outside of the Forum but in response to the debate about the Triple Lock, former Defence Minister Willie O'Dea (Fianna Fáil) has stated:

"The triple lock is a deliberate policy of Government. It is an exercise in sovereignty, not an abdication of it. Sovereign Irish governments, including several in which I was honoured to serve, decided that we believed in the principle of multi-lateralism and that we would not dispatch troops abroad without a United Nations mandate.

This was a point I made strongly when I acted in 2006 to update earlier Defence Acts. That Act gave greater legal clarity about our participation in international training for such missions and also allowed armed troops deploy on emergency and disaster relief missions. We did this as the UN Security Council does not pass resolutions for humanitarian operations as they do not generally represent a threat to international peace and security." (Website of Willie O'Dea, first published in the Sunday Independent, 28 May 2023)

The first deployment of Irish troops under the UN occurred in 1958. The Triple Lock was set down in law in the Irish Defence Act of 1963. So, the Triple Lock is almost as old as Irish military engagement with the UN. In 2001 the EU's Nice Treaty was defeated in a referendum in Ireland. In response a European Council summit in Seville, Spain on 21st June 2002 agreed a Declaration known as the Seville Declaration, paragraph 6 of which states:

"6. Ireland reiterates that the participation of contingents of the Irish Defence Forces in overseas operations, including those carried out under the European security and defence policy, requires (a) the authorisation of the operation by the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations, (b) the agreement of the Irish Government and (c) the approval of Dáil Éireann, in accordance with Irish law."

The legal standing of the Seville Declaration is stated in paragraph 7:

"7. The situation set out in this Declaration would be unaffected by the entry into force of the Treaty of Nice. In the event of Ireland's ratification of the Treaty of Nice, this Declaration will be associated with Ireland's instrument of ratification."

In that way the Irish people were assured in advance of a second referendum on the Nice Treaty that it would not undermine the Triple Lock. In paragraph 4 the Seville Declaration explicitly refers to Ireland's "*traditional policy of military neutrality*". What can be taken from all of this is EU recognition of the value attached to neutrality by the Irish electorate at the time of the ratification of the Nice Treaty, and the close association of Irish neutrality with a commitment to the ideals of the UN.

During the Forum discussions, when the argument against the Triple Lock gathered momentum, a counter argument was made that an implicit threat that Russia might use its veto might be sufficient to deter a peace-keeping initiative. It seems to us that this brings the discussion further into the

realm of unlikely theoretical possibilities. Would it not be better to wait until such a threat arises in practice? A discussion on the Triple Lock would then have some concrete reality. As things stand the debate is about a possibility that, almost certainly, will never happen.

The Government's concerns over the Triple Lock are clearly being driven by its political criticism of Russia at the present time. But the way that peace-keeping engagements are authorised has a deep lineage in the traditional neutrality policy and Irish respect for the UN. Government policy-making in this instance seems to lack any sense of conservative continuity with important principles from the State's history.

Ireland's debt to the European Union over Brexit

A point raised by Professor Brigid Laffan at the Forum, that because of the unwavering solidarity shown by the other 26 Member States to Ireland during the Brexit negotiations, Ireland should reciprocate by entering more fully into the EU's security and defence arrangements, especially since security concerns have acquired great urgency arising from the Ukraine conflict. This issue certainly merits consideration.

Maintaining the invisibility of the Irish Border was a key issue in the Brexit negotiations and one insisted on by the Irish Government. And the European Commission and the other Member States held firm on it all through a long drawn out and testing process.

Not only was there solidarity on the Border question but at practical level the move away from reliance on the UK land bridge was supported by Europe. The new transport links, mainly shipping routes, established between Ireland and the Continent—these jumped from twelve to over sixty as a result of Brexit—were not created solely by private sector initiatives; they had support from the EU institutions and from the Governments of some of the Member States.

Brexit caused a closer connection to be forged between Ireland and Europe and in that way helped to put right a historic injustice that goes back to the Williamite settlement of the 1690s. That settlement entailed the severing of trade and transport connections between Ireland and the Continent. It was fortunate for Ireland, in that regard, that the EU negotiating team was headed by an experienced EU official who was also a French Gaullist: Michel Barnier.

However, the EU did not conduct its negotiations with the UK for the sole purpose of supporting Ireland. The UK State commands significant heft in international diplomacy. In the aftermath of the UK decision to leave Europe, there were genuine fears that the European Union would start to unravel or suffer a major setback.

A surprising event occurred towards the end of 2016 that reduced the existential threat to the EU posed by Brexit; Irish Finance Minister Michael Noonan announced that a British House of Lords Report proposing an Agreement between Britain and Ireland in advance of the Brexit negotiations, could not be entertained. Ireland was a member of the EU and would be fully supporting the EU side in the approaching negotiations. In the context of that surprising development, it can be argued that the EU owed Ireland a debt. This was, we believe, well understood by the Irish member of the European Commission at that time, Phil Hogan.

When the Irish Border became a central issue in the Brexit negotiations, any weakness in EU support for the Irish position would have given the upper hand to the UK negotiating team. EU backing for Ireland was therefore more than altruism. It was vital for the future of the EU and the integrity of the Single Market that Brexit did not set a precedent that other States would be tempted to follow, and that the Member States maintained a united front.

At the level of the Irish diplomatic corps, it is important that the solidarity with Ireland regarding Brexit should be remembered. Irish diplomats waged a campaign in advance of the negotiations to drum up support across European capitals for keeping the Irish Border invisible and the success of that campaign does come with obligations. But the issues being discussed at the Forum are matters of State between democracies extending beyond diplomatic affairs per se.

As Carol Fox of PANA pointed out to the Forum, the EU made a Cooperation Agreement with NATO in January of this year (2023) in which European defence was described as complimentary to, and interoperable with, NATO. Since Ireland has a long-standing policy of not joining military alliances like NATO and, as the Taoiseach informed the Forum, not being a member of that alliance confers an advantage on Ireland in its dealings with the Global South, there are reasons of State why any debt to the EU arising from the Brexit negotiations should not be given excessive precedence in this context.

A decision to set aside Ireland's traditional foreign policy—to commit to EU security and defence arrangements, cognisant of their interoperability and complementarity with NATO—should not be made because of a perceived and debateable diplomatic obligation.

International Perceptions of Irish Neutrality

A contentious subject over the four days was the respect accorded to Irish neutrality internationally. Those sceptical of neutrality count this a myth whereas spokespersons on the other side like Sinn Féin's Matt Carthy stressed how the high regard afforded Ireland's anti-colonial history and foreign policy tradition enhanced Irish influence on the international stage.

We believe the truth may lie somewhere between these two positions. Ireland's support for the concepts of multilateralism and collective security epitomised by Eamon de Valera's leadership role in the League of Nations and Frank Aiken's championing of nuclear disarmament in the UN undoubtedly earned Ireland international recognition, as did the history of the independence struggle and the involvement of the Defence Forces in UN peace-keeping. This hard earned reputation is being tarnished by the equivocating of recent Irish Governments which have chosen to align with the Western Powers while paying lip service to the neutrality tradition.

Speaking from the floor during the first session at the Galway Forum, Michael Higgins, an Irish diplomat who had participated in the successful campaign to win a seat for Ireland on the UN Security Council in 2019, said that neutrality had been an important selling point in the campaign. That view was reinforced by the Taoiseach when he addressed the Forum.

Yet contemporary Irish political leaders seem oblivious to the original purpose of Irish neutrality. In the early weeks of the 2022 Ukraine war Micheál Martin dismissed the neutral stance being taken by the Republic of India as "unacceptable". And speaking at the Forum, Taoiseach Varadkar saw an advantage of not being a member of NATO as being able to more effectively press the nations of the

Global South to abandon their neutrality over Ukraine. In spirit he is aligned with NATO while wishing to use Ireland's past reputation as a tool for furthering the propaganda message of the US and its allies.

It is depressing to consider that by getting elected to the UN Security Council in 2001-2002 and again in 2021-2022, Irish Governments have traded on the high international standing earned by their predecessors while supporting policies that represent the antitheses or opposite of traditional neutrality. At different times Irish foreign policy had real substance e. g. in the role of the missions in Africa, de Valera's defence of the integrity of Ethiopia at the League of Nations, Aiken's defence of the Palestinian people after the Israeli onslaught of 1967, the Irish role in the Biafra conflict of 1970 etc.

How Ireland is perceived on the international stage is important and has important ramifications in the areas of foreign trade and international diplomacy. Foreign perception, however, should not be a main determinant of national policy. Irish foreign policy encompassing the areas of security and defence should primarily be fit for purpose for the needs of contemporary society, and like such policy areas in other States, should be firmly grounded in the historical origins and tradition of the State.

Having a Conservative Dimension to Security Policy

In the context of the above heading, two questions may be asked that are relevant to the ideas discussed at the Forum: Is the concept of conservatism, of conserving positive achievements from the past, still valuable in our modern world? And is there anything in the history of the independent Irish State worth conserving in the light of contemporary security challenges? We would answer, yes, to both questions.

Conservatism as a political stance should not be the preserve only of those on the Right of the political spectrum. It is a necessary function in any stable political order; even radical reform requires conservative resistance, if only to knock off its rough edges or render it more practical, and to win acceptance across the different sections of society. Many past achievements, important to those on the Left—the development of trade unionism, the provision of education, health and welfare services, movement towards sexual equality—are worth defending or 'conserving.'

Regarding aspects of Irish history that have relevance for the neutrality policy, and that should be conserved, we suggest that the legacies of Roger Casement and Eamon de Valera are especially important.

Roger Casement and the IRB

Casement was a career official in the British Foreign Office who, in the early years of the twentieth century, won international recognition for reports he compiled on rubber slavery affecting millions of indigenous people in the Belgian Congo and the Putumayo region of the Amazon Basin in South America. So effective were his reports in helping to end terror regimes in these regions of the Global South, that he is considered the father of modern human rights; in 1911 he was awarded a knighthood on the recommendation of Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary.

Through his experience in the British consular service, Casement became disillusioned with the idea of the Empire's civilising mission and, having grown up in Ireland and being an Irish nationalist, he

got involved in helping to found the Irish Volunteers in 1913 and became central in organising a famous gun-running operation in 1914.

Regarding the early development of foreign policy in independent Ireland, Casement's view of the cause of the First World War is key. Having spent much of his career in the British foreign service, he was horrified to learn in 1911 that his former superior, Sir Edward Grey, and other members of the British Cabinet were secretly scheming to engineer a war with Germany, a war for the purpose of removing a trade rival. Casement authored a series of essays setting out his views on these matters and the essays were gathered together in pamphlet form as, *The Crime Against Europe*. Speaking on this at the 2023 Roger Casement Summer School in Dún Laoghaire, Philip O'Connor stated:

"Casement's writings were widely read in Irish circles, having appeared in Pádraig Colum's *Irish Review*, and in the US in *Clan na Gael's Gaelic American* and *Irish Freedom*. His *Crime Against Europe* appeared in numerous editions even before the War started."

Obviously, the extent to which Casement's view on the cause of the War became the prevailing view in republican/nationalist circles in the critical years before 1916, is important. When War was declared in August 1914, the executive council of Clan na Gael in New York, as a mark of official approval of Casement's views, appointed him as ambassador of the movement with instructions to travel to Germany to cement an alliance with the German Government. In due course the Proclamation issued by the 1916 rebels included the phrase: "*supported by her exiled children in America and gallant allies in Europe*", the gallant allies being Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Central Powers.

The Fenian movement or Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), organised in both America and Ireland, was in those years representative of a large swathe of nationalist opinion, as testified to by events like the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa (August 1st 1915). It is reasonable to assume that the membership was well versed in the national view of Irish history and attuned to the mood and viewpoint of the majority of the Irish people, as was later manifested in the 1918 General Election. That Casement's view of foreign affairs found a receptive audience in the IRB and became its official policy indicates that the foreign policy orientation of independent Ireland, in which Casement's thinking was a major influence, had a strong connection to the historical experience of the Irish people.

De Valera, the League of Nations and Neutrality

A view that nothing much happened in Irish foreign policy in the early years of independence under Cumann na nGaedheal is untrue. The Government of W T Cosgrave pressed for greater independence from Britain, successfully applying for membership of the League of Nations in 1923, in 1930 becoming one of nine non-permanent members of the League's Council and getting the Anglo-Irish Treaty registered as an international agreement, in all cases against the wishes of the British Government. In 1925 a Cabinet "Defence Review" stated that Ireland would always attempt to remain neutral. However, the specific orientation provided by Casement's legacy was less evident in the 1920s than after 1932 when Eamon de Valera, the leader of Fianna Fáil, became President of the Executive Council of the Free State.

The subject of de Valera's foreign policy is given detailed treatment in a long essay by Brendan Clifford entitled 'The Reasons for Irish Neutrality', published by the Aubane Historical Society as part of a book containing the spy reports of Elizabeth Bowen: *Elizabeth Bowen – Notes on Eire* (1999).

Some excerpts from that work will serve to illustrate the purpose underlying de Valera's stance at the League of Nations.

Before dealing with that it is instructive to look at a letter from de Valera in the *New York Irish World* in 1923 touching on the subject of the Versailles Treaty. The relevant section of the letter reads:

"... His [Lloyd George's] London 'treaty' has brought the same confusion and misery upon the people of Ireland that the Treaty of Versailles has brought upon the peoples of the continent of Europe. The root cause is the same. Force, not Right or Justice or Reason was made the guiding principle, and those who set out as champions of Right failed, like President Wilson, and grew afraid in the immediate presence of the task in which they had set themselves." (The Reasons for Irish Neutrality, p. 89)

In this letter, as in many of Dev's speeches on foreign policy matters, Casement's influence is clear: de Valera is insistent that international affairs should not be determined by the use of Imperial force or the threat of it.

In *Reasons for Irish Neutrality* Clifford gives the following summary of de Valera's actions at the League:

"Ten years later de Valera began to play a prominent part in the League of Nations. He took the League in earnest and was as influential in its affairs as it was possible for the leader of a small unarmed state to be. He put the League to the test for a second time, [the first test was Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931] and for a second time it was found wanting. He made a hopeful speech as President of the League in 1932. Three years later, as it became obvious that the League would not take effective action to stop the Italian conquest of Ethiopia [Abyssinia], he proposed, in effect, that it should scale down its pretensions and assume a much more modest role in world affairs. And he suggested that there should be a Great Power Conference to make a new settlement in Europe in place of the Versailles settlement which was no longer functional." (Ibid, p. 89)

The following paragraphs are from a speech de Valera made to the League on 2nd July 1936, after the invasion of Abyssinia when it was clear that the Great Powers had no intention of making accommodations that would diffuse the tensions that were growing in Europe:

"The peace of Europe depends, as everybody knows, on the will of the great powers. If the great powers of Europe would only meet now in that peace conference which will have to be held after Europe has once more been drenched in blood, if they would be prepared to make now in advance only a tithe of the sacrifice each of them will have to make should war be begun, the terrible menace which threatens us all today could be warded off ..."

"Despite our juridical equality here, in matters such as European peace the small states are powerless ... All the small states can do, if the statesmen of the greater states fail in their duty, is resolutely to determine that they will not become the tools of any great power." (ibid, p. 90)

Clifford concludes his account of de Valera's foreign policy thus:

"The responsible thing for Britain to have done was what de Valera suggested it should do: make a Great Power re-settlement in Central Europe which would be functional in the framework of the new socio-political realities and clear the Versailles resentments out of the way. What it chose to do was connive at Hitler's breaking of the Versailles conditions, one after another. Because of the lack of prior agreement, there was a sense of European crisis each time Hitler moved, and there were feelings of

considerable unease about Hitler's adventurism within his own power structure, particularly on the military side. But, each time, Hitler's judgement of possibilities proved to be sound, and his standing was enhanced and the advisers of caution were demoralised." (ibid, p. 91)

Earlier in his essay Clifford addresses the way wartime neutrality in Ireland had the backing of all parties. It is an important aspect of the story. He says:

"The Irish Government in 1939 consisted of people who in 1914 had belonged to the sceptical minority that had not supported the British war effort. Their scepticism had been amply confirmed by events. But the refusal of Nationalist Ireland in 1939 to declare war on Germany for a second time in a quarter of a century did not depend on the will of the 1914 minority, which had become the Government. The 1914 majority had been thoroughly disillusioned by the conduct of the British state. It had worked them up into a condition of high idealism, of millenarian enthusiasm, in order to get them to fight the Germans; but, when the Germans had been defeated, it had acted with the utmost cynicism, making a post-war settlement in its own narrow self-interest with relation to Ireland, Europe, and its new Imperial conquests in the Middle East. And so the disillusioned Irish majority of the Great War combined with the minority who had not been caught by the 1914 illusions to present a solid front of indifference to the refurbished British idealism of 1939." (ibid, p. 55)

Before leaving de Valera the following extract from a speech he made in the Dail in answer to criticism from James Dillon, gives an idea of the thinking behind his neutrality policy:

"You insist, again and again, that Ireland has erred in the sphere of morals. You proclaim that the Irish people have 'missed out somehow on the greatest moral issue of modern history', and that her continued neutrality shows this. But see how your whole picture is awry. You fail to advert to the indisputable fact that whilst, of the four principal Allied belligerents, two relinquished neutrality to enter the war, neither of them did so until they had been assailed by the Axis with fire and sword. Presumably, when Britain and France declared war upon the Axis in September, 1939, 'the greatest moral issue in modern history' came into being but Russia continued to 'miss out' on it until Hitler invaded her territory in June, 1941, and America herself 'missed out on the greatest moral issue of modern history' for 2¼ years until December, 1941, when Japan struck her the assassin blow at Pearl Harbour. These two great leviathan Powers were no voluntary crusaders leaping into the area in unreflecting and disinterested enthusiasm for high moral principle. They had made no move when others were wantonly attacked. They remained neutral when Denmark and Norway, Holland and Belgium, Yugoslavia and Greece were, in turn, ravaged and enslaved. They fought because they had to, because they had no choice left, because they were attacked, because, being attacked, they needs must fight or submit to a conqueror's yoke. And little Ireland was not attacked. That is the difference. That is the sole difference. For there is nothing more certain than that Ireland also would have fought back if she had been attacked. She would have fought with such arms as she could get and as best she might, successfully or not. Her thousand years of resistance to invasion are sufficient guarantee of that. In drawing your attention to these indisputable facts, I do not asperse the conduct of either Russia or America, as you must necessarily do if you attempt to justify your censure upon Ireland. I am fully aware—as you, apparently, are not—that national policies are the resultant of many complex motives and that considerations of material resources, of timing, of attendant circumstances, of long-term strategy, of national interests, of plain prudence and the like are all involved in the final decisions not less than regard for high moral principle. I merely cite these facts to show that your censure on Ireland is ill-considered and ill-founded." (Dáil Eireann, 16/11/1943)

Roger Casement and Eamon de Valera are two figures who influenced the development of Ireland's neutrality policy. Reviewing their contributions testifies to its historic roots and the authenticity of the State's traditional foreign policy. Any Government wishing to overthrow that tradition should be made to do so with reference to its substance rather than by making ahistorical sound bites that merely echo the latest Superpower preoccupations.

The Role of Irish Historical Revisionism in Skewing Debate on Security Policy

During the Forum session on Historical Perspective on Day 4, a member of the Irish Political Review Group, Dave Alvey, made the following two points from the floor. Members of the panel had made the point that foreign policy invariably arose out of specific circumstances in specific times. He said:

“Of course, we get involved in the details of the various situations at particular times when we are talking about neutrality, but I think there is a core principle that stays right through, and that core principle came from Casement and was very ably defended by de Valera. The principle was that because of our history we don't wish to be used by the Great Powers in wars that have the motive of preserving their supremacy. So that's a principle that comes from that period and which, with all the talk of, oh that was history, it's all different now, that's a principle that should remain.

I think also in this difficult national conversation, if you like, and some of the panel were speaking about the same discussion going on in other countries. I was very interested yesterday to hear the Finnish representatives say that the people supported their politicians. They had a discussion, everyone was involved and there was trust, and trust is a big thing in the Nordic countries, so they trusted their politicians. I think that a lot of commentary that we've had in Ireland in the last 30 years or longer has been to distance ourselves from the origins of our state and the development [that happened] in the 1930s and all of that. And that has created a disconnect and that has created distrust. So, if anything is to come out of this Forum I would like the achievements in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s to be acknowledged so that it's not as if we came out of the Irish Sea in 1973. I think that would allow more trust which has been missing.”

The first point was covered in the previous section of this Submission. The second point, that the prevailing narrative emanating from the State is to create a distance between present politics and the historical origins of the State, and that this has created a disconnect between Government or the governmental elite and the public, will be addressed in this section.

The first point to be established is that, in Ireland since the 1970s—specifically since the Arms Crisis of 1970—the official position has been to dissociate public discourse from the State's historical heritage. In the academic world this policy is referred to as historical revisionism. The point made by our representative was that this policy, which is not present in Finland or in the other countries from which representatives participated in the Forum on Day 3—Sweden, Norway and Switzerland—generates distrust between the political Establishment and the electorate because public dialogue on an important topic like security policy, in which history is important, requires a broadly common understanding as to the relevant history.

By way of evidence a quick look at what went on during the Decade of Centenaries will be instructive. In late 1915, in advance of events to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising, the Government launched a DVD which featured interviews with Irish rock stars, Bob Geldof and Bono, without mentioning the executed leaders of the Rising. A public outcry ensued and such was its vehemence that a scheme for awarding grants to local groups for commemorating 1916 had to be quickly devised.

During the centenary year a key phrase used by Government leaders was that we must remember “all who died.” To drive home the point a memorial wall in Glasnevin Cemetery was constructed in which the names of the insurgents who died in the Rising were intermingled with the names of the British soldiers who died while suppressing it. It was officially launched surrounded by extensive temporary metal barriers and a cordon of Gardaí. Such was the public controversy surrounding the Glasnevin Wall, and so damaging were various attempts to vandalise it, that the project has been abandoned.

The next Government initiative in this context was a planned commemoration of the Royal Irish Constabulary, a paramilitary police force deployed by the British administration in Ireland as part of the Imperial security infrastructure. As the date for the event began to draw near local government representatives from different parts of the country began to make public their intention to boycott the ceremony; the Minister for Justice who had initiated the commemoration, Charlie Flanagan, was forced to cancel it. The event was held some years later in London where some would say it properly belonged.

That general pattern was repeated in other events, the basic point being that a succession of Irish Governments was seen to be engaged in a culture war against the nationalist tradition upon which the independent Irish State is based, a culture war that is not having much success outside of Government Departments, academia, and the media.

Government-sponsored revisionism has been conducted in myriad ways. History is taught in primary school as a series of disconnected institutions and happenings along with the proviso that we can never be definitely sure about anything connected with the past. At Leaving Cert level it has been made an optional subject, so the numbers taking it have dropped. Concepts like historical narrative or the importance of cause and effect have been effectively outlawed on third level history courses. For thirty or forty years opinion formers in the media have been lambasting the traditional nationalist narrative. And so on.

But there are unintended consequences to all of this. One hears of young people asking questions like: run it past me again what republicanism is? Knowledge of history is necessary in order to have a basic understanding of present-day politics. How can a society without historical memory process experience?

There is, of course, another side to this argument. Public revulsion against the violent conflict in Northern Ireland that lasted twenty-eight years is considered by some to justify revisionism in the sense that the way history was taught is believed to have been a contributory factor behind public support for republican militarism. Likewise, nationalism is considered too much of an out-dated ideology to be foisted on a state like the Republic of Ireland where the battles of the national struggle were fought and won by previous generations.

Against these arguments we believe that the connection between history teaching and republican violence has been greatly and mischievously exaggerated, and that the real causes of public support for the IRA are to be found in the conditions suffered by the nationalist minority and the way that Northern Ireland was politically constituted. Regarding nationalism, we favour the maintenance of a dynamic and conserving continuity with the national tradition, rather than any revival of past ideologies.

The basic point of this section of our Submission is that an honest national conversation about international security policy has been rendered impossible by the way that politics is conducted at present. How contemporary Irish politics can be characterised is debateable: a postmodern chasing after an ever changing present maybe?

To develop the point that debate has become impossible it is only necessary to consult the standard work of Irish revisionist history—Roy Foster’s *Modern Ireland*—on the specific question of Irish neutrality in 1939-45; the topic is discussed in section VI of chapter 22, *The De Valera Dispensation*. We will only discuss one detail of that section here: the way that the spy reports of Elizabeth Bowen are described approvingly.

It was interesting to learn at the Forum that espionage now comes under the heading of *Hybrid Threats*. Bowen was engaged in espionage against the Republic and, regardless of the degree of literary insight they contain, her reports constituted a hybrid threat from the British Government. This brings us to the heart of the revisionist project and the problem blocking meaningful debate on the neutrality question. Revisionism has not raised thinking of historical issues onto a higher plane of objectivity; it has exchanged an Irish national interpretation of Irish history for a British national interpretation of Irish history. From a British perspective Elizabeth Bowen was making a very positive contribution, but that is not true from an Irish national perspective: she was reporting to a hostile British Prime Minister—Churchill—who was weighing up the pros and cons of re-taking the Treaty ports.

To conclude, we believe that revisionism is a source of unnecessary division that is hampering orderly government in Ireland. This poses a problem for the Forum on International Security Policy as much as it does in many other areas. If the revisionist approach was to be reviewed or abandoned possibilities would open up for a healthier discourse. Government, at the end of the day, will run a great deal more smoothly if conducted *with* rather than *against* the grain of history.

Note on the Irish Political Review Group

The Irish Political Review Group is composed of supporters of, and contributors to, three regular magazines from the Athol Books publishing group. These are: *Irish Political Review*, a 30-page monthly magazine dedicated to Irish history and politics, produced uninterruptedly since 1986; *Church and State – An Irish History Magazine and Cultural Review of Ireland and the World*, a quarterly magazine originating in the 1970s and produced quarterly since 1983; and *Irish Foreign Affairs*, a quarterly magazine dealing with Irish foreign affairs, produced uninterruptedly since April 2008.

Irish Political Review was the successor to the Irish Communist which was produced as a monthly by the British and Irish Communist Organisation from the late 1960s. The decision to re-launch the magazine with a new title arose from a situation in which the content of the magazine no longer matched the 'Communist' label. The group had moved away from the practice common on the Left of treating Marxism and Leninism in a quasi-religious manner. Under the new title new ways of thinking about political matters were developed.

The Group was strongly associated with the two nations theory—the idea that the Ulster unionists constitute a separate national community from the nationalist community on the rest of the island—until about 1990 when countering the influence of revisionist history became a major focus. As the topics covered in the magazine broadened, new contributors including some from Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael became involved. The magazine has retained a broadly Left-wing orientation and remains true to its position on the national question but open mindedness and scepticism in relation to prevailing narratives have become something of a hallmark.

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Many of the questions asked by Paul Gillespie (“Fresh evidence and perspectives on Irish neutrality are sorely needed”, Opinion & Analysis, 10 June) are pertinent to the work of the Government’s Consultative Forum on International Security Policy and deserving of close attention.

However, when he refers to “proposals that Ireland either join or associate with the more active Non-Alignment Movement now that the world is moving towards a greater number of equal poles beyond US hegemony published by the Irish Political Review Group”, his words may create a false impression.

Our submission to the Forum will be firmly based on the relevance of de Valera’s legacy to Irish foreign policy at the present time. That legacy has certainly received a boost from the tentative emergence of a multi-polar world order as championed by the Non-Aligned Movement, and that subject has indeed been discussed and welcomed in our publications.

But over the years the main focus of our work regarding foreign policy has been detailed historical accounts of the development of Ireland’s neutrality policy, drawing on the writings of Roger Casement as well as speeches by de Valera. Despite many efforts to undermine public confidence in that policy, it has consistently retained the support of two thirds of the electorate.

Compared to the alternative of coat tailing the hawkish policies being pursued by the US, Britain and the EU, maintaining continuity with the State’s traditional policy has the double merit of being both a genuine reflection of the historical experience of the Irish people and consonant with the contemporary desire for a more equitable world order.

Yours etc

Dave Alvey
Irish Political Review Group

Perspectives on Irish Neutrality

In reply to a posting on the Republican Education Forum (REF) of a published letter from the Irish Political Review Group, Jim Monaghan posted a detailed article on Tomás Ó Flatharta's website written by Des Derwin, a veteran trade unionist and executive member of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions. In the article Des argues that the pro-neutrality public meetings being held in opposition to the Government's Consultative Forum on International Security Policy are bringing discredit on the Irish Left by failing to show solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

The Irish Political Review Group takes the view that a negotiated settlement would be desirable as a means of ending the war but that, unfortunately, the likeliest outcome at present seems to be that it will become a frozen conflict. The bragging statements made by Western and Ukrainian leaders about how they lied to buy time during the Minsk peace process has made Russia unlikely to trust the West again. International distrust, especially in the Global South, of the motivation behind US involvement in Ukraine has caused a shift away from US control of the international order. This development, although still at an early stage, is to be welcomed as a possible deterrent against the use of war as a means of furthering geopolitical objectives.

We support the pro-neutrality meetings currently being held at different locations around the country. And we applaud President Higgins for his intervention in the debate. At the least, the last three Irish Governments have been acting to kill Irish neutrality by minor incremental policy changes. The Ukraine war is now being used to expedite that agenda. If our governing elite wishes to ditch the neutrality policy, they should go about it openly, and they should do so through full engagement with the foreign policy tradition that has been developed since the foundation of the State.

We are replying to Des Derwin's article because it was posted on the REF in reply to our letter published in the Irish Times (14 June) under the above heading. But the argument has a wider reach. The sentiments expressed in the Derwin article are shared by a large swathe of Irish public opinion in the sense that the sometimes-questionable evidence of opinion surveys shows a clear majority favouring neutrality and an equally clear majority supporting the idea that "Ireland must continue to stand by Ukraine even if this means energy shortages". That viewpoint is to some extent also supported by Sinn Féin, the only one of the three large political parties that has supported neutrality on a principled basis in recent years.

Summary of Des Derwin's Case

Derwin's concluding paragraph summarises a lot of what he has to say. It reads:

"The nuanced and varied, but almost universal, consensus on Ukraine, on the Irish organised radical socialist left, is conspicuously put on display in the unitary and cross-over platforms for these *People's Forums* and *Conversations*. It is a consensus that essentially abandons the people of Ukraine, and either soft-peddles on Putin or blames 'the West' equally for the war. It is a consensus that is branding the left as defenders of dictatorship and playing right into the hands of politicians, press, publicists and propagandists that have always tried to brand the left in this way.

Neutrality Yes! Solidarity Yes!

Des Derwin

17th June 2023"

Referring to a neutrality that he defines as, “staying out of NATO and common European armies, and not multiplying military spending”, Derwin expresses his core argument as follows:

“That neutrality should be maintained and defended. It is the neutrality that we who support the resistance of the Ukrainian people *claim!* It is the neutrality that we have as much right to defend as any alliance of political positions seeking to monopolise and define neutrality for their own purposes in relation to the war in Ukraine. Those claiming to defend Ireland’s neutrality are, for all practical purposes, *not* neutral when they oppose military aid to Ukraine. In effect that policy if implemented would lead to the defeat of Ukraine, and victory for Russian aggression.

At one point in his article Derwin invokes the following from Bishop Desmond Tutu:

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor”

Knee-Jerk Emotion

In relation to that last point, in order to discover where justice lies it is necessary to first amass the evidence and then investigate the root causes of any given conflict. Regarding the war in Ukraine that entails taking account of that country’s history since at least the collapse of the Soviet Union. Among other developments needing to be covered are: the US-backed ‘*Orange revolution*’ of 2004, the 2008 NATO declaration of intent to bring Ukraine into membership, Russia’s vehement opposition to that declaration, the US-backed coup of 2014, the protests against the coup leading to declarations of independence in Donetsk and Luhansk, Kiev’s war against the Donbass rebels, subsequent peace negotiations leading to the Minsk Agreements, Kiev’s failure to honour Minsk, the efforts of the Biden Administration to raise the temperature in Ukraine all through 2021, the refusal of the West to even countenance Russia’s repeated requests for a comprehensive agreement on the security architecture in Europe, etc.

While many commentators in the West have made the case for solidarity with Ukraine along lines similar to Des Derwin, numerous critics of the war, mainly but not exclusively in the US, have made the opposite case. A list of such critics might include Professor John Meirsheimer, Jeffery Sachs, Democratic Party presidential contender Robert F. Kennedy jnr, Tulsi Gabbard, Max Blumenthal, Aaron Maté, Colonel Douglas MacGregor, Tucker Carlson, George Galloway, Clare Daly MEP, Mick Wallace MEP, and more.

What is notable about the approach of Derwin and his associates is that they don’t engage with the arguments of these critics and they don’t delve into the parts of Ukraine’s history that throw light on the causes of the war. To them the Russian intervention is a moral outrage and the Kiev regime is engaged in a heroic struggle against an aggressor: an open and shut case. A handful of emotive phrases about resisting Russia is all there is to his case. To borrow from the poet, John Keats that is ‘*all ye know on earth and all ye need to know*’. Basing a policy on such knee-jerk emotion leaves activists wide open to manipulation by propagandists engaged in whipping up war hysteria. Des Derwin can’t accuse his Left-wing opponents of bringing discredit on their cause if he refuses to engage with the evidence as to the historical causes of the war, evidence that his Left-wing opponents are very familiar with.

A Riposte from de Valera

Throughout the course of World War II Irish neutrality was subjected to trenchant criticism on moral grounds by James Dillon TD. On November 16th 1943 his pontifications brought forth a famous

riposte from then Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera. In the way that his reply elucidated Ireland's policy of neutrality at that time, it is worth quoting in full. It also answers those who, in refusing to even consider historical causes, would reduce complex national and international questions to simplistic moral absolutes.

"You insist, again and again, that Ireland has erred in the sphere of morals. You proclaim that the Irish people have 'missed out somehow on the greatest moral issue of modern history', and that her continued neutrality shows this. But see how your whole picture is awry. You fail to advert to the indisputable fact that whilst, of the four principal Allied belligerents, two relinquished neutrality to enter the war, neither of them did so until they had been assailed by the Axis with fire and sword. Presumably, when Britain and France declared war upon the Axis in September, 1939, 'the greatest moral issue in modern history' came into being but Russia continued to 'miss out' on it until Hitler invaded her territory in June, 1941, and America herself 'missed out on the greatest moral issue of modern history' for 2¼ years until December, 1941, when Japan struck her the assassin blow at Pearl Harbour. These two great leviathan Powers were no voluntary crusaders leaping into the area in unreflecting and disinterested enthusiasm for high moral principle. They had made no move when others were wantonly attacked. They remained neutral when Denmark and Norway, Holland and Belgium, Yugoslavia and Greece were, in turn, ravaged and enslaved. They fought because they had to, because they had no choice left, because they were attacked, because, being attacked, they needs must fight or submit to a conqueror's yoke. And little Ireland was not attacked. That is the difference. That is the sole difference. For there is nothing more certain than that Ireland also would have fought back if she had been attacked. She would have fought with such arms as she could get and as best she might, successfully or not. Her thousand years of resistance to invasion are sufficient guarantee of that. In drawing your attention to these indisputable facts, I do not asperse the conduct of either Russia or America, as you must necessarily do if you attempt to justify your censure upon Ireland. I am fully aware—as you, apparently, are not—that national policies are the resultant of many complex motives and that considerations of material resources, of timing, of attendant circumstances, of long-term strategy, of national interests, of plain prudence and the like are all involved in the final decisions not less than regard for high moral principle. I merely cite these facts to show that your censure on Ireland is ill-considered and ill-founded." (Dáil Éireann, 16/11/1943)

Dave Alvey, for Irish Political Review Group
23 June 2023

The Consultative Forum on International Security— a Report

As one of two members of the Irish Political Review Group invited to represent the group at the Government's *Consultative Forum on International Security Policy*, I attended the Galway meeting of the Forum (23 June) and the two meetings in Dublin Castle (26, 27 June). I also attended a pro-neutrality open air rally at the Spanish Arch (22 June) sponsored by the Galway Anti-War Alliance, a packed meeting in the Morrison Hotel in Dublin (24 June) organised under the auspices of *'The Left in the European Parliament'* and a protest meeting held outside Dublin Castle (8 am on 26 June).

This article is intended to give a rough impression of some of what went on over the five days. The important element of our group's contribution, however, will be a written submission to the Forum which, all going well, will be published in the August edition.

Allowing that the neutrality debate often generates more heat than light, I found many of the discussions inside and outside the Forum to be genuinely informative and thought-provoking, notwithstanding the obvious fact that the Government had skewed the proceedings to discredit the traditional policy. The event that stands out for me was the Morrison Hotel meeting which included, in addition to Clare Daly and Mick Wallace, impressive speakers from Greece, Germany, Britain and the US, all emphasising the value of Irish neutrality at the international level. Not only were the speeches riveting in the amount of new information imparted but the contributions from the audience were also impressive.

In terms of my own participation a highlight was a discussion on Irish neutrality in historical perspective on the final day in Dublin Castle. After many failed efforts in previous sessions to attract the attention of moderators, I finally got a chance to speak from the floor. Given the importance assigned to historical perspective in this magazine, it was opportune to be able to make a few points under that heading.

Spanish Arch Rally

Popular speakers at the Spanish Arch were two Irish MEPs who have effectively become Leaders of the Opposition in the European Parliament—Clare Daly and Mick Wallace—both always worth listening to. Daly argued strongly for defending the Triple Lock, the agreed policy in which Irish peace keeping missions can only occur when authorised by the Government, the Oireachtas (Parliament) and the UN Security Council. The Triple Lock question is currently the main point of contention between the two sides of the debate. Wallace, on the other hand, outlined how EU military involvements in Africa are advancing the interest of European companies just like under the old colonial arrangements – a graphic example of why the Irish anti-colonial perspective needs to be retained.

Due to either the public address system or my poor hearing, I misheard one of the speakers, Karen Devine, an academic specialising in European studies, refer repeatedly to *'Jammy Professors'*. It turned out she was saying, Jean Monnet Professors. She took exception to the practice whereby all Professors in her discipline, herself being the sole exception, are funded by the EU. She described how the head of the association of Jean Monnet Professors had recently admitted that, as a

professional body, they are conflicted. Required to toe the EU line they are also, as academics, obliged to pursue objective truth – these days an increasingly difficult circle to square.

Protest Tactics

The mood of both audience and speakers at the Spanish Arch was outrage at what the Government was attempting, and that outrage was seen in the protests at the Cork Forum when the Gardaí had to drag people from the venue. It was present at the Galway Forum when Margarita Darcy, a woman with a respected record as a peace campaigner, positioned her wheelchair on the stage before the event started so that she could make the case for a Citizens' Assembly rather than what she described as a "this sham forum". Protesters heckled the early sessions in Galway and Lelia Doolan, a well-known figure in Galway arts circles, invited herself onto the stage and, against loud protestations from Government supporters, read out a pre-prepared script denouncing militarism.

The tactics used by various elements on the pro-neutrality side are debateable. The Guiding Principles of the Forum lay out the standard rules of tolerant debate—no personal attacks or personalised criticism etc—and a summary of these was read out by each moderator before the commencement of each of the sixteen panels.

However, the overall structure of the Forum was prejudiced towards what Government spokespersons and media commentators have been saying since the outbreak of the Ukraine war, indeed what they've been hinting at for decades: that Ireland should abandon neutrality and become a compliant participant in EU security arrangements. The Forum was perceived as an anti-neutrality stitch-up and protestors acted accordingly.

Viewed from a different perspective, people who are not well versed in political arguments and procedures, ordinary members of the public, whether from the Left, the Right or the Centre, may not always express their opinions coherently or keep to the exact topic under discussion. It is nonetheless extremely important that their opinions are listened to. Generally speaking, that truism of political life in a democracy is well understood by the political class. In short, in a large public debate on a contentious subject as occurred at the Forum, an element of rough-and-tumble messiness is unavoidable, and in some ways, no bad thing.

Saying all of that, some very effective contributions were made at the Forum by people on the pro-neutrality side using well-informed reasoned arguments directly related to the topics under discussion. A contribution that stood out for me was a question asked by Carol Fox of PANA (Peace and Neutrality Alliance) and the Swords to Ploughshares group. She spoke during the first panel on the EU's Common Security and Defence (CSDP) policy (Day 3). She said:

"I would like to congratulate the EU on naming the EU battlegroups with that name, something they failed to do when naming the European Peace Facility with its billions of Euro being spent on military activities.

I'm interested that you say there are no obligations between NATO and the European Union. In January, as you know, the EU and NATO signed a Cooperation Agreement and on that the *Financial Times* headline was, "Stronger European armies are to support the US alliance, not offer an alternative to it". Part of that Declaration that they signed was that European defence will contribute positively to global and trans-Atlantic security and is complimentary to, and interoperable with, NATO.

Finally, the Rapid Response Force was mentioned. Ireland was one of fourteen initiators of that. You said the battlegroups never got off the ground because of the Unanimity Principle. I'm wondering

about the 5,000-strong European Rapid Reaction Force with air, land and maritime facilities which is being advertised as going abroad on missions. Will there be a move now to try to switch from unanimity to Qualified Majority voting in foreign security policy? I see that Micheál Martin himself has come out saying that Ireland is willing to have a look at that. So, if you could just comment on the NATO links and what this new Rapid Reaction Force might be getting up to.”

The question was not answered by the panel. In fairness to Rory Montgomery, the moderator, he acknowledged that all questions had not been answered but said that as the Taoiseach was about to address the Forum, the available time had been used up. Carol Fox repeated the above points and tied them in with a defence of the Triple Lock in a letter to the *Irish Times* which was published on 29 June, two days after the finish of the Forum.

Feelings run high on the subject of Irish neutrality. Various protest tactics were used by those who perceived the Forum as a stitch-up. That was all fair enough in my opinion, but the most effective defence of neutrality, the best tactical approach, was that used by Carol Fox.

A Stitch-up or Not?

That the intent behind the Forum was to soften up the ground in advance of a further erosion of neutrality can be seen in the structure of its Programme. Panels of experts addressed the changed global security environment consequent upon the Ukraine war followed by the new threats represented by cyber attacks and the vulnerability of maritime cables and pipelines. There were sessions on the Triple Lock in the context of the “*fractured UN Security Council*”; the need to “*work with partners in Europe and NATO*”; lessons from neighbours—Norway, Switzerland, Finland and Sweden; and other emerging threats in the forms of disinformation and economic coercion (competition from China). On the afternoon of the final day, we finally got to the history of Irish neutrality and a debate on its implications.

A statement from a panellist on the subject of disinformation jumped out at me. Jane Suiter from Dublin City University identified the threats to watch out for under this heading as: anti-Vax, anti-trans and the idea that the conflict in Ukraine is a proxy war between NATO and Russia. In the same breath she named solid philosophical foundations as the principal defence against disinformation. The illiberalism of modern liberals is a sight to behold! Allowing that false information circulated regarding Covid vaccines, voices critical of big pharma certainly still need to be heard.

After Day 3 an interview with one of the Swiss representatives was broadcast on the news bulletins in which he stated that neutrality was “*not a religion*”. This point was picked up repeatedly on the following day at the Forum. Controlling the narrative is, I believe, what such manoeuvres are called.

Yet despite the obvious bias, the case against neutrality that emerged over the four days was often less than compelling. Conscious perhaps of the public mood and of next year’s elections, the word from Government was that Ireland would be neither joining NATO nor abandoning neutrality.

I have already quoted the statement from Carol Fox that was left unanswered. In the session on Ireland’s participation on the UN Security Council on Day 2, Professor Edward Burke from University College Dublin made a valuable contribution. He said he had been disappointed by and, expressed disagreement to, Department of Foreign Affairs officials over their position on the Iraq war back in 2003. That was a useful reminder that an Irish Government had abandoned neutrality in practice long before the Ukraine war.

In the session on the Triple Lock, also on Day 2, Professor Ray Murphy from Galway University said that by removing the UN from Ireland's authorising arrangement, we would be undermining that organisation, "weakening the very organisation we're trying to strengthen". In reply to criticism of President Higgins from a member of the audience, Murphy defended the President's intervention in the debate as having had a positive effect. Clare Daly also made a very effective short intervention in defence of the Triple Lock in a later session which I've been unable to locate in the video tapes from the Forum website.

In the final session on Day 4, Roger Cole of PANA spoke about the growing importance of the Global South. Emphasising how Irish neutrality had been expressed through active participation in the UN—he cited Frank Aiken's work in championing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty—he argued that India and Brazil needed to be made permanent members of the Security Council. He also stated that the Irish historical experience was very different to that of other European countries and that being a neutral state was closely linked to deep strands in Irish history.

The Forum was biased but people were free to say what they wanted and there were interesting pro-neutrality statements at different points, more than I have listed here. The final verdict on the four-day consultative process, of course, can only be given when its final report is published. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Historical Perspective

When I got a chance to speak in the session on historical perspective, I introduced myself as a member of the Irish Political Review Group and complimented the panel on the discussion so far. During the panel discussion the point had been made that foreign policy invariably arose out of specific circumstances in specific times. I said:

"Of course, we get involved in the details of the various situations at particular times when we are talking about neutrality, but I think there is a core principle that stays right through, and that core principle came from Casement and was very ably defended by de Valera. The principle was that because of our history we don't wish to be used by the Great Powers in wars that have the motive of preserving their supremacy. So that's a principle that comes from that period and which, with all the talk of, oh that was history, it's all different now, that's a principle that should remain.

I think also in this difficult national conversation, if you like, and some of the panel were speaking about the same discussion going on in other countries. I was very interested yesterday to hear the Finnish representatives say that the people supported their politicians. They had a discussion, everyone was involved and there was trust, and trust is a big thing in the Nordic countries, so they trusted their politicians. I think that a lot of commentary that we've had in Ireland in the last 30 years or longer has been to distance ourselves from the origins of our state and the development [that happened] in the 1930s and all of that. And that has created a disconnect and that has created distrust. So, if anything is to come out of this Forum I would like the achievements in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s to be acknowledged so that it's not as if we came out of the Irish Sea in 1973. I think that would allow more trust which has been missing."

In response the moderator, Conor Gallagher (Crime and Security correspondent of the *Irish Times*) asked the panel to talk about "what the questioner had said about our achievements in the 40s and 50s. I presume the questioner was referring to Frank Aiken's role in the UN and the non-proliferation treaty. How closely linked was that to our neutrality? Who wants to come in on that?"

Michael O’Kennedy: “I think I would go back further from the questioner’s point of view and look at some of our diplomats like Sean Lester in the 1930s, one of the trail blazing generation of Irish diplomats who becomes an international civil servant of the League of Nations and goes on to become the High Commissioner of Danzig. We joined the League a hundred years ago this year and the role Lester played in Danzig was to warn Europe of the Nazis, and he wasn’t listened to. So I think there are figures like that we can bring out from our past and show—Aiken is another one of them, of course—show how we have an ongoing tradition of involvement in collective security, of peace making. We talk about 1958 as the beginning of Defence Forces peace keeping but the first thinking about it was in 1934 when the Defence Forces were asked by the League of Nations to contribute, I think, two companies of troops to the League’s policing of the Saarland plebiscite between France and Germany. So, once we examine history, once we go into history, we see so many episodes that have been written out of or taken out of the contemporary debate for whatever reasons and when we re-install them—I think this gentleman’s point is very important—we begin to see a much richer national story that we can use to inform our current debate.”

The points I made regarding historical perspective were somewhat complex. With luck these can be clarified and developed in the Irish Political Review Group’s submission to the Forum.

Dave Alvey