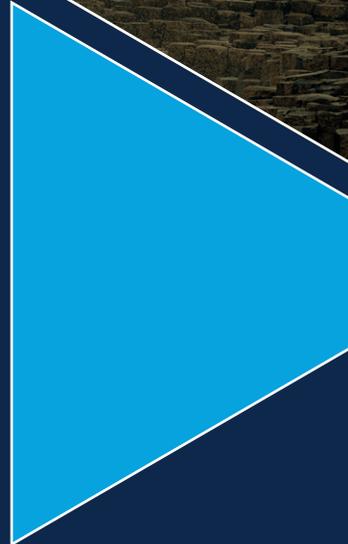
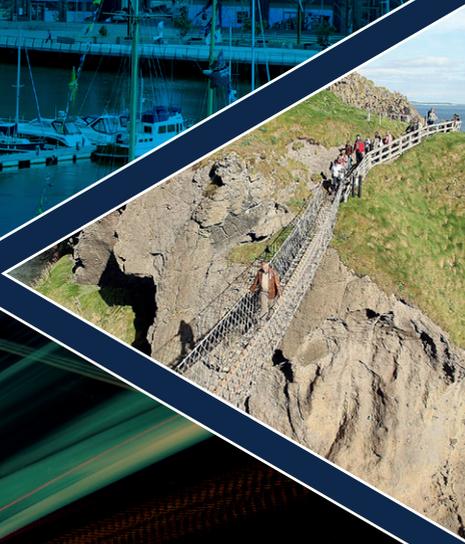




IRELAND'S FUTURE



**ADVANCING THE
CONVERSATION**
THE WAY FORWARD



INTRODUCTION

As the conversation on constitutional change intensifies and the trajectory towards referendums on the island continues, Ireland's Future releases its second discussion document titled *Advancing the Conversation – The Way Forward*.

This document asks are we preparing and planning for what lies ahead and who should be involved in the preparatory work required in advance of the change our island will experience?

It seeks to explain the values and guarantees that will frame the process and underlines why the Good Friday Agreement is so significant.

The document details the necessity and urgency of doing the work now, in advance of the referendums taking place and also outlines why we need a timeframe.

Ireland's Future also urges political parties that support the concept of a new Ireland to work together across the island. We believe that it is essential, in the national interest for political parties that support a new constitutional future to set aside electoral rivalries for the purpose of planning change. This is a time like no other.

Both governments will have a central role in the managed transition to reunification and are under an obligation to implement the outcome of the referendums. Ireland's Future, in this document also encourages discussion on these matters in the Oireachtas, the Westminster Parliament and the northern Assembly.

This document also highlights the concerns of Ireland's Future about the continuing failure of the Irish government to play an explicit and leading part in the task of nation building. We urge the government to work on all fronts to ensure the process of change is smooth.

In this document Ireland's Future states that constitutional change is feasible and achievable, that our island is on a pathway towards referendums and that a United Ireland will be the outcome. In advance of the referendums it is the view of Ireland's Future that the government should establish a Citizens' Assembly to assist in informing the debate.

Niall Murphy
Secretary
Ireland's Future

THE WAY FORWARD

A DISCUSSION PAPER

1 Will you be prepared and ready for constitutional change?

This discussion paper is a contribution to reflections on constitutional change in Ireland. Ireland's Future has stressed throughout that there is a need for informed and evidence-based discussion. In taking forward this work we remain convinced that an all-island Citizens' Assembly should be established as a matter of urgency.

The aim here is to enable further civic discussion and we highlight ways that these collective efforts can be advanced. Our objective is to ask every organisation and institution to reflect on a simple question: Will you be prepared and ready for the process of constitutional change that will likely unfold on this island in the next decade?

2 Who should be involved in this preparatory work?

The conversations about constitutional change are now becoming more focused. We welcome the intensification of interest, and the growing number of projects and initiatives is remarkable. While these are framed in distinctive ways, they will assist in generating the preparatory work and evidence base we have called for. We therefore encourage universities, funding bodies, civil society, political parties, and others, to support relevant policy and research agendas, and ensure effective co-ordination and dialogue. No institution or organisation anywhere on this island should be left unprepared for the potential transition ahead.

3 Why does Brexit matter so much?

The majority of people in the North voted to remain. The removal of this region from the EU against the express wishes of its people has significant and lasting implications. It has inspired a renewed focus on self-determination and consent. Irish reunification is an automatic route to EU return, and we are determined to

deliver on the full potential of this island. We want a better and more prosperous future for everyone. The impact of Brexit on the constitutional conversation has been dramatic, and it alters the nature of ongoing economic, social and political debates.

4 Why is the Good Friday Agreement so significant?

We have already set out the parameters of our preferred approach. In particular, we stress again the centrality of a faithful interpretation of the letter and spirit of the right of self-determination in the Good Friday Agreement. As we have indicated, this has implications for the referendum process and what follows any vote for reunification.

We remain dismayed by repeated attempts to undermine core aspects of the Agreement. The process will involve concurrent consent, and is not subject to a communal veto. There are sustained and ongoing efforts to offer unionism a veto over progress, either before or after the referendums. Undermining the integrity of what was endorsed by the people of Ireland - North and South - in 1998 is unwise and ill-advised. The requirement for concurrent consent tied to simple majority in each jurisdiction is sufficient. It is unacceptable and irresponsible to create unfounded expectations about what is involved, and to threaten the integrity of what has been agreed. Those perpetuating such approaches are creating problems in the here and now, by eroding confidence in the Agreement, and storing up risks for the future.

5 Why should you do the work in advance?

Our view is that the proposals should be as clear as possible in advance of the concurrent referendums, with subsequent implementation of stated commitments. We reject attempts to smuggle a unionist veto into the process or to give unionism multiple opportunities to block change.

This focus on frontloading places considerable emphasis on civic and political engagement prior to referendums taking place. It is difficult to see how a credible and meaningful 'in principle' referendum campaign could be held in the North, for example, in the absence of transparent plans that can be endorsed and then delivered. We are appalled by the approach adopted in Britain to Brexit and believe

that the people of Ireland deserve clarity and certainty about the future before being asked to vote.

Our primary recommendation remains for the establishment of an all-island Citizens' Assembly to explore all aspects of the transition to reunification. We are convinced that structured civic dialogue is vital. We call once again on the Irish Government to advance this work immediately.

6 Do you need a time frame?

The insertion of a range of time frames has given the discussion renewed momentum, in a context where many still prefer prevarication and delay. We make no apology for bringing a sense of urgency to the table. No serious planning process can take place without an 'in principle' timetable. We believe that our determined emphasis on timing has helped to propel this debate forward in a constructive way.

7 Will the political parties work together?

We welcome the emerging evidence of convergence among pro-unity political parties. We note that there is general agreement that Brexit has transformed the debate, and that the next decade will be key. We believe that it is essential, in the national interest, for political parties that support unity to set aside electoral rivalries for the purpose of planning for change. While divisions are well rehearsed, it would be inexcusable for electoral competition to stand in the way of this process of national reconciliation. We will continue to support, assist and enable efforts to bring parties together and, where possible, to adopt common approaches. We urge the parties to create a mechanism for ongoing dialogue that respects political differences but acknowledges the need to advance common platforms.

8 Will both governments work together?

Both governments will have a central role in the managed transition to reunification, and are under an obligation to implement the outcome of the referendums. There is no need, however, for the governments to wait, in terms of addressing basic questions

of process, in particular. The Irish and British Governments should already be in discussion through the established forums of bilateral cooperation, including the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. While we note that the Secretary of State has a significant role, there is nothing to prevent both governments engaging in the management of a process that will have consequences for the island of Ireland. As projects proliferate, and as more enter the conversation, there will be questions around co-ordination and ensuring that dialogue is facilitated. The Shared Island Unit could, for example, have a useful role in enabling such discussions to take place.

9 What role can legislatures play?

We are also surprised that there has been so little detailed consideration of these matters in the Oireachtas, the Westminster Parliament and the northern Assembly. We note the significant work of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, but this remains an isolated example in a context where we believe these democratic institutions, and their members, should be playing a much more proactive role. Extending this further, should, for example, the Scottish Parliament consider the implications of Irish reunification for Scotland, with Senedd Cymru doing similar work in Wales? The European Parliament could, for example, undertake useful research on the implications of reunification for the European Union. We raise this because this debate should not simply be for governments, but also for legislatures, and there is useful work that could be done.

10 Why is the Irish Government not doing more?

Our principal focus will remain on encouraging, enabling and supporting civic, political and other initiatives that will inform the debate. We will also continue to provide constructive input. In this discussion paper our aim is to set out our views, note a range of options and highlight where others might contribute. We are, however, particularly concerned about the continuing failure of the Irish Government to play an explicit and leading part in this work. Only so much can be done by civil society, and by institutions such as universities. Government-led and resourced preparatory work will be needed to ensure there is clarity on the implications and the nature of the offer. Therefore we agree that at the appropriate time, and following civic dialogue, a White Paper should be produced.

11 Is our preferred constitutional outcome achievable?

It is apparent that people are no longer prepared to wait for questions about the constitutional future to be addressed by both governments. Civil society is taking the initiative. We note that key considerations around, for example, the referendum process are being examined and that other work is progressing. We hope that these efforts will be productive and useful and that pressure to introduce novel hurdles, and additional procedural devices to thwart constitutional change, will be resisted.

We know that opponents of constitutional change have an interest in placing obstacles in the way, and in delegitimising individuals and organisations that are explicit about their constitutional preferences. No one on this island should be fearful of participating, whether in making the case for a United Ireland or for the maintenance of the Union with Britain. We do not doubt the work involved, but Irish reunification is a feasible and achievable project of transition involving states with the domestic capacity and international support to deliver a successful outcome.

12 What will Ireland's Future be doing?

Ireland's Future will encourage planning and preparation, enable conversations, and contribute constructively to the debate, as it becomes more detailed and focused. We believe this island is on a pathway towards referendums and that a United Ireland will be the outcome. This is our objective and the principal focus of our efforts.

We think that an all-island Citizens' Assembly will assist in informing the debate, but as noted here, this is only one element of the work that can be undertaken now. We commend those who have already engaged in a project that will transform this island for the better for everyone and we urge others to join in.

CONCLUSION

Ireland's Future encourages everyone with an interest in the future of our island to engage in this conversation.

The discussion on constitutional change has accelerated rapidly.

Whilst our primary focus is engaging with stakeholders on our own island, it is not lost on us that the decision to call a referendum in the north rests with the government in London.

We encourage the British government to outline the criteria, that in their view, would be required for a referendum to be called. We encourage the European Union and political influence in the United States of America to work with Britain in the process of informing Irish people what the criteria for a referendum is.

Refusing to outline the criteria is no longer a tenable position for the British government to take.

Ireland's Future and others will continue the work of planning and preparing for change. We cannot overstate the importance of the Irish government immersing itself in the process of nation building and change.

Ireland is in a period of immense change. There is an opportunity for both the British and Irish governments to oversee and manage that change. It is the responsible thing to embrace the change that our island is going through. That change, will in our view, lead to referendums and a new constitutional dispensation in Ireland.

Ireland's Future will intensify its programme of work in the coming period and we urge others to do the same.



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