

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Difficult Decisions for the New Ireland Forum1. Introduction

1.1 The parties to the Forum accept that the New Ireland will have to be based on agreement and consent freely given by all sections of the people in Ireland. This paper is a first attempt to list the difficult decisions facing the Forum in the light of the different and often conflicting concerns and interests of the principal groups that would be affected by a New Ireland. The major groups are the unionists in the North, the nationalists in the North and the population/Government in the South and in Britain.

1.2 Irish nationalists have in the past made many proposals for all-Ireland arrangements but none of these have succeeded in receiving the consent of the unionist population. Was this because previous nationalist initiatives never took sufficient account of all unionist perceptions and interests? Will the Forum be different because it will assess the validity of unionist interests from a standpoint that transcends and accommodates the two identities? In addition, should the Forum put forward a range of proposals on approaches to a New Ireland on a phased basis involving actions by each of the parties to the problem, to the extent that it is within their power to take such action and to the extent that a consensus permits?

2. Political/Constitutional

2.1 Is the key political problem the mutual acceptance of the Irish nationalist and British unionist identities? In the case of unionists does this mean preserving their Britishness? How can the Forum elicit from the unionists their definition of Britishness? What sort of political/constitutional arrangement could accommodate this identity in a New Ireland? What elements of the union do the unionists consider essential and why? For example, how should unionists be able to exercise their rights of British citizenship? Should it include voting in Westminster elections and sending representatives there? How can the New Ireland accommodate this sort of right? What role could the British Government play in facilitating

the expression of the unionist strong political allegiance to Britain?

- 2.2 For nationalists in the North, does acceptance of their identity mean being able to give political expression to their Irishness? Would the South agree that the effort to accommodate the two identities in a New Ireland would be helped by joint agreements between Britain and the South to transfer some decision-making powers to British-Irish structures at either the governmental or parliamentary level? In a framework of British/Irish co-operative arrangements would the South offer representation to Northern Ireland parties in the Oireachtas?
- 2.3 Would the Forum envisage a new political unit with the aim of pursuing British-Irish integration on issues of common interest to the two sovereign states? What form of political association with Britain, going beyond non-binding bilateral arrangements as exemplified by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, would be considered by the Forum? For example, could the South consider some association with the Commonwealth?
- 2.4 Does the unionist concern to preserve their numerical and political majority reflect their widespread belief that a permanent majority is the only way to protect their distinct identity, their future freedom of decision about how to organise their society and to preserve them against erosion of their status and position by a nationalist Catholic population which would constitute a 75% majority in a New Ireland? How can the Forum respond to unionist unwillingness to change their majority status to a minority one? Why is it that unionists prefer to remain a largely powerless majority in Northern Ireland ruled directly by London until this constitutional question is resolved to their satisfaction?

- 2.5 Would the New Ireland agree on a measure of autonomy for Northern Ireland? Would the nationalists accept such autonomy on the basis of power-sharing in the Northern government? Or would nationalists consider some form of local government constituted on a majority rule basis but subject to controls from the all-Ireland political (and possibly judicial) unit, especially in relation to arbitrary, discriminatory or oppressive measures? If the answer is yes, what arrangements should be made to ensure the involvement of the Northern nationalists in government at federal or confederal level in the New Ireland? Would modification of the autonomy of Northern Ireland always require unionist consent or how would unionists be permanently protected from the powers of the nationalist majority in a New Ireland? Would majority voting in referenda be considered a democratic way of making decisions or would some form of weighted majority be required instead?
- 2.6 To what extent is the South prepared to enable participation of unionists in the government of a New Ireland? In a unitary state would unionists have a guaranteed power-sharing role with power of veto in certain specified areas? In a federal state to what extent would unionists participate with nationalists in the federal government?
- 2.7 A major concern shared by all traditions is the suffering and disruption caused by political violence. All parties to the Forum reject the use of violence but unionists consider that the violence is inflamed by proposals for all-Ireland political structures. Nationalists believe, however, that violence is encouraged by the frustration of such proposals. Should the Forum suggest measures that would demonstrate that in the effort to build a New Ireland vigorous policies would be pursued to eliminate violence and assure the security of all sections of the population?

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2.8 What arrangements for policing and for military forces available to render aid to the civil power would best combine acceptability with effectiveness in action against law-breakers? How can the forces of law and order be made more acceptable to nationalists in the North? Are there particular forms of security operation/co-operation in a New Ireland that can be proposed by the Forum? To what extent should security institutions, North and South, such as army, police and judiciary, be changed in a New Ireland?

3. Economic

3.1 Is the unionist concern to remain British significantly related to their belief that the economic well-being of unionists can only be guaranteed by continued financial support from Britain? Is this also a concern of nationalists in the North or do they consider there are alternative sources of financial support for the Northern economy and social services? What are these alternatives and are they acceptable to unionists? Is the South prepared to maintain the higher standard of living in the North by replacing in whole or in part the British subvention in an all-Ireland structure or by sharing the subvention in joint Irish-British co-operative arrangements? For what period of time would the external subvention to the economy in the North be required?

3.2 Can the Forum demonstrate that the medium or long term benefits of the integration of the two economies on the island would be greater to the degree that consent on political/constitutional arrangements can be achieved? The unionist view is that economic benefits can be achieved without tampering with present political structures. How can the Forum demonstrate that new political arrangements really are necessary to achieve effective economic co-operation in areas of mutual interest? For example,

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what are the real cost/benefits of integration in the various economic sectors - energy, transportation, telecommunications, agriculture, industrial development, education, health, social services, tourism, mariculture, science and technology? What would be the relationship of the new integrated economy to the British economy in all these areas?

- 3.3 Does the present state of public finances in the South, including adverse balance of payments and external indebtedness, inhibit an early economic integration with an economy in the North which has even greater problems? How practicable is harmonisation of taxation, social services and public administration in both parts of Ireland and what would it cost to achieve? Is the South's capacity to contribute to economic integration dependent on having a sound economic and financial situation? How does the Forum propose to respond to the disparity in currency rates in the island? Is there an economic benefit in belonging to the E.M.S. or should the South leave it? How much would that cost?
- 3.4 What economic functions would need to be assigned to the central, all-Ireland structure in any political model for a New Ireland (other than a unitary state)? What economic/financial sacrifices is the South prepared to make in order to promote the benefits of co-operation? Would the population of the North also have to make financial sacrifices? Would it be useful in the meantime, to facilitate political agreement for both parts of Ireland, to co-operate in winning mobile overseas industrial investment and thereby end the competition between the IDA and IDB? Would the South subsequently accept that in a New Ireland industrial location decisions would have to take account of high unemployment in the North, particularly in the Northwest? Could co-ordination also

be achieved on tourism, trade promotion and marketing? Should the South, as an immediate measure, not reexamine on a regular basis how its policies in the economic field also accommodate Northern concerns and thereby assist their economic development?

4. Social, Cultural, Educational

- 4.1 Is a key unionist concern the maintenance of the Protestant ethos of the primacy of individual rights and conscience? Does this concern become paramount when threatened by a possibility that a Catholic ethos, as distinct from a Protestant one, will be reflected in the laws and institutions that govern unionists? Should the Forum first identify and then accommodate the principal social and cultural differences and problems between the Protestant/unionists, the Catholic/nationalists and proponents of a secular society.
- 4.2 Or would the Forum prefer to allow, that within an all-Ireland entity, the two parts of the country could retain legislative and regulatory autonomy in these areas? Would there be a distinct danger, however, that this latter provision would perpetuate the partition of the island and enable discrimination against minorities, North and South?
- .3 The principal differences to be accommodated between the religious/cultural groups relate to divergent attitudes on legislation in the following social areas:- contraception, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, censorship and Sunday leisure and licensing hours.
- 1.4 There are also important decisions to be made about Church/State relations. Should there be a separation between Church and State in all matters of government and administration in the New Ireland? Should legislation on social matters in Ireland, North and South, be minimalist on those social issues where the two major traditions do not share an identity of view, thus leaving it to the moral teaching of the individual Churches to guide their adherents?

- 4.5 Should the New Ireland be a secular, pluralist state?
- 4.6 To what extent should the Churches have a role in the administration of state-subsidised education and health facilities in a New Ireland? Should all education and health facilities funded by the state be fully integrated and available to all, irrespective of religion or belief, and be administered without regard to the ethos of a particular religion or belief? Or should the state fund private education and health facilities that would be controlled or administered by religious groups?
- 4.7 How should official support for cultural activities in the New Ireland accommodate both the Irish nationalist and British unionist identities? What are the implications for the official status and position of the Irish language? What efforts would be needed to give adequate official recognition to the British unionist heritage of culture and folklore (e.g. Battle of the Boyne, pride in British Empire achievements, Battle of the Somme)? What efforts similarly would be needed to give official recognition to nationalist history and culture in the Northern part of the New Ireland?
- 4.8 What steps should the Forum consider, in addition to the publication of its proposals, to deal with the problem of unionist alienation from the South? Should the Forum, for example, propose amendments to certain articles in the present Constitution of the South which in unionist eyes appear to reflect a Catholic ethos or a nationalist irrendentism? Should the Forum consider drafting a constitution that would facilitate the transition to a more pluralist society in the New Ireland?