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Panel 803: 'Assessing the Impact of Brexit on the Political and Economic Structures Across the Island of Ireland'

Captor or hostage? The Irish Government's framing of the complex power relations of Brexit

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Abstract

The traditionally asymmetric and tortuous Irish-UK relationship had been transformed in recent decades, as exemplified by the close partnership in regards to Northern Ireland. However, Brexit threatens to revive latent geoeconomic rivalries in Europe as the UK breaks away from the EU's power-structure. Ireland is in a unique position as it is both a vulnerable smaller neighbour of the UK and a part of the more powerful supranational union. This paper analyses how the Irish government has framed the unfolding Brexit drama including its linguistic content and more qualitatively how it has constructed roles, identity and power. The Irish government while stressing its unique interests, aligned Ireland's case strongly with the European interests and reaffirmed Ireland's identity as a core EU member. It stressed the need to protect the Good Friday Agreement and emphasised the historical importance and risks of the situation. The new Varadkar-led government continued the policy position but engaged more directly and explicitly in terms of criticising, advising the UK government and asserting its own power (while stressing its vulnerabilities). Irish government discourse chimed with that of the EU in representing the UK as immature while representing EU objectives as an immutable reality. There are differences apparent in the Irish refusal to contemplate a no-deal scenario and in the Irish avoidance of trivial images and metaphors. The Irish position has been grounded in rational interest and political values but its internal unity may be placed under pressure as Brexit unfolds.

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Introduction

Brexit confronts the European Union with an unprecedented challenge, as a leading member state has rejected its institutional and legal system. Brexit confronts Ireland in particular with a number of grave challenges and threatens to revive a long dormant power struggle between the Irish state and the United Kingdom. The issues raised by Brexit cut across vital questions of political economy as well as sensitive political and cultural questions, none more so than the Irish border. Political economy, values, identity and geopolitics intersect. As the Brexit process unfolded the Irish government has found itself in the unusual position of being both the vulnerable smaller neighbour of the protagonist and a part of the powerful regional institution which is exerting pressure on the UK. Structural power and market power in particular (Damro, 2012) have entered contemporary public discourse in via debates over whether the UK has the critical mass to go it alone economically. Less prominently the Brexit process has illustrated the structural power of the EU (which has taken firm control of the process). Brexit is also an excellent case study of real-time constructivism as the various actors try to frame a new emerging reality.

This paper analyses how the Irish government has framed the Brexit conundrum, in particular how it has attempted to fuse its national interest with that of Europe more broadly and how it has constructed power and authority in its discourse. It aims to offer insights into how Ireland has dealt with Brexit as well as how smaller states more generally deal with larger neighbours and overlapping power structures. The course of the paper is as follows. The basic context of Irish-UK relations is outlined with a focus on the intensive partnership of recent decades. The transformation of the relationship is then discussed more theoretically in terms of power and constructivism. Following on from this the implications of Brexit for the complex intermediation of power relations between Ireland and the UK is explained. The methodology of the approach is outlined and subsequently applied to analyse the reactions of the Irish government to the unfolding of Brexit from June 2016 to August 2017. The focus is entirely on the public discourse of the actors concerned. The technical detail concerning the various Brexit scenarios is discussed only insofar as this is necessary to understand the political implications and choices. Moving on from this there is a broader interpretation of Irish and EU discourse.

The context: the unfolding of the 'Anglo-Irish' relationship

It is a truism that the UK-Irish relationship is characterised by complex intense and overlapping political, social, cultural and economic relations. The Irish state seceded from the UK (but not the British Empire) in 1923. It would achieve full effective independence by 1938 and became a republic in 1948. The Irish state did not, of course, include the entire territory of the island as six counties of Ulster (where a large Unionist majority wished to retain the link with Britain) formed Northern Ireland within the UK. Political relations between the new Irish state and the UK were extremely problematic. Initial disputes sprung from Irish governments' efforts to achieve full independence and also included a trade war in the 1930s. Irish neutrality in WWII led to much resentment and economic pressure. Irish refusal to accept the legitimacy of Northern Ireland was the other main ongoing sore point (this refusal was codified in the constitution of 1937). After the outbreak of the 'troubles' in 1969, relations were particularly tempestuous full of mutual recriminations and misunderstandings. The UK tried to achieve greater security cooperation from Ireland which sought to change the status quo in terms of the constitutional status and internal politics of Northern Ireland. Apart from this relations were characterised by many of the sensitivities, complexes of inferiority/superiority of post-colonial relations (although the term is controversial when applied to Ireland's situation). Arguably Irish national identity was constructed as resistance to British power.

Beyond the international relations the two states were deeply intertwined and in a highly asymmetric way. Ireland's trade was wholly dependent on the UK (Fitzgerald, 2004) and its currency was linked to sterling until the 1970s. A Common Travel Area was maintained (not without some adjustments in World War II and for security measures) throughout this period. Irish migration to the UK was a vital social safety valve. Culturally, and of course linguistically, Ireland was, and still is, very much in the UK or Anglo-sphere. All of this led to classic case of structural power with the Irish state having to follow the British lead (whether explicitly directed to or not). Most notably Ireland's accession to the European Communities¹ in 1973 was inextricably linked with the UK (Hourihane, 2004: 5). Membership of the EU also transformed the context. The EU provided a regular forum of intensive dialogue and consultation. It gave the Irish state a position of relative equality with the UK² and increased its relative leverage. It is striking how much of the difficult diplomacy of the 1980s and early 1990s took place on the margins of European Council summits (Fitzgerald, 1991: 506). Although the two states disagreed over issues such as the Common Agricultural Policy they

¹ Henceforth referred to as the EU.

² As per Moravcsik the EU moderates but does not remove power considerations (1998).

developed firm alliances on other economic perspectives. Also the EU provided a means for the Irish state to transform its economic relations, building a much broader portfolio of trading and investment partners. Joining the Euro was a historical break with the UK and put Ireland firmly within the EU core. General modernisation and increased economic prosperity and confidence within Ireland helped the changing relationship also.

Gradually, via intense diplomacy concerning Northern Ireland (and relations within the EU) the political relationship was transformed. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 created an explicit regime of consultation for the Irish state in the affairs of Northern Ireland in return for recognition of the principles of consent and greater security cooperation. It is fair to say that this was still an adversarial relationship with both sides holding radically different perspectives. More profound changes occurred via the Downing Street Declaration (non-legally binding) between the two governments (1993) and the Good Friday Agreement/GFA in 1998. Bi-partisan support for the core principles of the peace process emerged within both states. The role of the Irish Government as co-guarantor of the GFA (and the St Andrew's agreement) has been respected by successive British governments. There have been no major public rows between the governments between the Good Friday Agreement of 1997 and 2016 (notwithstanding some serious disagreements behind the scenes).

Theoretical framework

This paper takes a mid-range constructivist approach, in which intersubjective ideas, identities, norms and values are deemed important factors in helping to shape the reality of international relations, but material incentives and power also matter (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986). It is based on a critical realist understanding of a reciprocal relationship between ideas/discourse and reality: discourse helps to shape reality (In this case territorial and material power dynamics) and vice versa (Patomaki, 2002). Constructivism has been applied at length to understand European integration, overshadowing the more materialist rationalist approaches (Christiansen, Jorgensen and Wiener, 2001). Constructivism is also embedded in many conceptualisations of Europeanisation (Olsen, 2002). On the other hand, while the EU is a system of norms and values it is also a system of power. This feature of the EU was much in evidence in the case of the Eurozone crisis it has always been explicit in how EU leaders conceive of the usefulness of the EU in the global arena. Crudely coercive or relational power (Lukes, 1999) as featured in mainstream realist thought has little relevance to the modern Anglo-Irish or intra-EU framework (the Greek case may be the exception which proves the rule). This paper takes a multi-factorial approach to power which conceives of operating in distinct

but 'overlapping and intersecting' sectors; political, military, economic and ideological (Mann, 1986). Especially relevant to understanding how the EU power system operates is the concept of structural power defined as the 'power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other states their political institutions, their economic enterprises ... have to operate' (Strange, 1988: 24-25). This is applicable to how European integration has created a massive market and regulatory area which, in a manner analogous to gravity, creates a pull on the economies and enterprises of states within Europe and its neighbourhood.

The story of UK-Irish relations summarised above lends itself to a liberal constructivist interpretation³ : a combination of material incentives/interests and rational institutions, with changing identities, values and norms led to a transformation of the relationship. The following features exemplify this element of the story:

- Complex interdependence meant that the more powerful actor could not simply impose its will (assuming that this was its aim)
- Mutual interest (including security and economic factors) called for better political relations.
- New institutions were created to manage interdependence
- Intensive and regular institutional relations helped to overcome mistrust and insecurities
- Norms of consultation developed. This took place within the context of region-wide negotiation, social learning and norm-transfer
- Naked power asymmetries were managed masked by common values, dialogue
- Within the context of intensified economic interaction (bilateral, European and global) Ireland, redefined its identity (expounding a more thoroughly liberal nationalism, less 'narrow' in terms of being ethnically or culturally based).
- The two states engaged in a conscious redefinition of sovereignty (beyond a zero-sum definition). This took place within the context of regional integration and the 'pooling of sovereignty' in Brussels.

Let us look in a little more detail at what happened. A certain formal equality is implicit in international diplomacy (a polite fiction in which, for example, the leaders of India and Malta meet as equal). To this formal equality the sense of mutual need and complex interdependence developed. Looked at in rationalist terms, in negotiating over Northern Ireland the (much weaker) Irish state had some significant cards to play, namely the offer to accept Northern Ireland and the principle of consent, greater security cooperation (on the border and in terms of extradition) and the

³ Dixon has recently argued that the peace process can be understood in realist constructivist terms, emphasizing the top-down nature of the process while also recognising the importance of changing identities and values (2017). I argue that it when it comes to intergovernmental relations the peace process is best described as liberal and note that liberal IR theory also allows for power dynamics (Morovcsik, 1998; Keohane and Nye, 2011).

influence of Irish America. The need for voting and cooperation within the EU was also a factor.⁴ The Anglo-Irish Agreement's granting of a consultative role for the Irish government in Northern Ireland gave it a foothold which has never been withdrawn (even though the subsequent package of agreements withdrew the formal direct voice of GOI in Northern Ireland's internal affairs, 'strand 1' of the Good Friday Agreement, the GOI's position as co-guarantor of the agreement means that it effectively retains a political role as evidenced for example by its role as co-chair of crisis talks in recent years). Over the course of this the discourse of British governments changed significantly, going so far as to declare that Britain had 'no selfish strategic or economic interest' in Northern Ireland (Downing Street Declaration, 1993).

Changes in the nationalist approach and the Irish government's approach were also profound and far-reaching. The EU's role in this is debated, to an extent it was an actor (in offering aid/economic inducements) but it was its structural effect that counted most. As noted the governments' constant negotiation and dialogue at a bilateral and EU level made room for greater understanding and a moderation of policy on both sides. Less prominently their joint role in European integration reduced the potential for geo-economic tension between the two states. The general transformative effects of European integration on Ireland are well known (Hourihane 2004; Coakley, Laffan and Todd, 2005). On a broader level, European integration forced a redefinition of sovereignty. The Single European programme in particular and then the establishment of EU citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty significantly removed many of the social and economic borders in Europe. To quote John Hume (arguably the primary architect of the new nationalist approach to partition) 'the border will be no more in real terms than a county boundary as goods, people and services move freely across it' (1994: 227). More abstractly he argued that the new integrated Europe did away with the 'winner takes all' zero-sum perception of relations between states (Ibid: 231). This allowed the Irish to think more flexibly about partition and the different constituencies on the Island, moving the way to more flexible solutions. This gave form to a new peace process discourse of 'shared traditions', 'uniting people rather than territory' and generally downplaying territorial sovereignty⁵.

This new thinking led to the Downing Street Declaration and the Good Friday Agreement. The traditional nationalist position (held by the largest parties to a greater or lesser degree) had been that Northern Ireland was a gerrymander engineered by British power, in which a 'false' majority

⁴ Then Taoiseach Haughey's demurral over EU support for Britain in the Falklands War was an example of the potential damage that could be done here.

⁵ A particularly elaborate, disciplined and opaque 'peace process' discourse emerged in Northern Ireland, especially on the nationalist side.

was imposed on part of the national territory thus hampering 'national self-determination'. Such language was not used by the Irish government in the era of the Troubles but its approach implicitly rejected Northern Ireland's legitimacy or at least its normality as a part of the UK (separate from the Republic). In the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish government relinquished its all-Island sovereignty claims and altered its constitution as a quid pro quo for reform within NI, the establishment of all-Ireland institutions, including some modest implementation bodies and changes to the constitutional position of NI within the UK (Good Friday Agreement, 1998). This is linked to how the change to the all-Ireland self-determination was rationalised. The agreement states that 'it is for the people of this Island alone' to exercise self-determination thus privileging the Irish framework (O'Duffy, 2000: 413) and giving Northern Ireland a unique status within the UK. It accepted that this self-determination was to be exercised in two distinct territories, thus recognising Northern Ireland and fully recognising the principle of consent. A (pre-existing) duality was crystallised in Northern Ireland in terms of the right to be either British and /or Irish citizens.⁶ As a part of this Britain repealed the Government of Ireland Act and agreed provisions for future unity of the Island taking the unusual step of abstracting itself from the fate of one of its own provinces/nations (one which was no longer an economic asset but which had been of significant strategic interest in living memory and which could offer access to coastal resources). Constructive ambiguity infuses much of the agreement in terms of where it is leading and indeed the real import of Britain's abstraction from the sovereignty of Northern Ireland. To what extent was the UK government expected to be neutral about the fate of a part of its territory? Over the next two decades the agreement and the intergovernmental partnership was consolidated: the many disputes about the interpretation of the GFA and the St Andrew's Agreement did not focus on the role of the governments. In summary the traditional antagonistic and asymmetric power relations were transcended via a complex series of institutions, norms, balances combined with economic and social liberalisation. The Good Friday settlement was agreed and constructed by the Irish government as a sea-change in sovereignty. The then Taoiseach put this in extreme terms when he said that any 'British territorial claim of sovereignty' was being superseded (Ahern, 1998). On the other hand Unionists could argue, more plausibly, that the agreement secured Northern Ireland's status under British sovereignty. This element of 'constructive ambiguity' of the agreement was contingent on joint membership of the European Union.

⁶ O'Duffy also offers a maximalist interpretation of this arguing that the Republic was given a veto over the future of Northern Ireland (2000: 413).

As such by 2016 the relationship between Ireland and the UK has been transformed and is an exemplar of the kind of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2011) and liberal international relations that occur between developed Western countries (especially within the EU) where power-politics is not pre-eminent. Yet of course the power differential was still intense. The UK has a population over ten times larger than Ireland. Its GDP is also 10 times larger. The UK still hosts a far larger proportion of Irish citizens than vice versa. Ireland could not have joined the Schengen free travel area without the UK (because of the CTA but also because the UK's territory included parts of the Island). Although Ireland's trade has been diversified and the relationship with the UK made more symmetric a far greater proportion of Irish trade is with the UK than vice versa.⁷ In particular Irish agricultural exports and domestic small to medium sized enterprises are highly dependent on the UK (CSO, 2016).⁸ Furthermore, as a consequence of geography a great proportion of other Irish exports to Europe travel through the UK. For these reasons studies such as the Bertlesmann stiftung's have argued that Brexit could impact Ireland even more negatively than the UK (2015). In many spheres of cultural, sporting and professional life Ireland is very much in the UK's orbit. Thus the UK could still be deemed to exert significant structural power over Ireland although both were enmeshed within broader structures of power at the European and the global level. As noted above the EU is a major locus of structural power, with its critical mass and market size. The fact that this supranational institution makes laws for such a large economic area means that outsiders, such as European Economic Area countries and Switzerland have to follow its rules (Holden, 2009). As individual nations are embedded in a regional supply chain structure and have used the EU to attract FDI this makes it very difficult to leave. Eurozone countries such as Ireland have pooled sovereignty to an extreme degree and incorporated themselves in a regional transnational power structure. Likewise the structural power of transnational global economic forces (financial markets, transnational enterprises) dwarfs that of the UK.

The challenge of Brexit

The meaning of Brexit as a geopolitical event is that it brings latent power politics, which had been submerged under liberal EU hegemony (Holden, 2017), up to the surface.⁹ Brexit, 'taking back control' is about rejecting the pre-existing legal and institutional framework in Europe in which economic social and political issues are fused. The act of leaving the European legal system and

⁷ Ireland is the 5th largest export market for the UK (HMRC, 2017), the UK is the 2nd largest export market for Ireland, after the US taking 14% of goods exports and 18% of services exports (CSO, 2016).

⁸ Ireland's relative vulnerability as a small state was illustrated during the Eurozone crisis when the Irish state was incapable of dealing with the financial crisis its banking sector had created (Laffan, 2012).

⁹ Many Brexit supporters may not wish for an illiberal outcome but the geopolitical dynamics point this way, at least in the short term.

renegotiating (based on the market power and leverage) a new relationship is itself an act of power politics. The desire to break away from the EU's customs union is a direct challenge to the thesis that only the EU can effectively represent European interests in the global economy. Put crudely Brexit asks: who has the critical mass? Can the EU afford to punish the UK? Can it afford to not punish the EU? Of necessity it means an element of geo-economic (if not geopolitical) rivalry between the UK and its former EU partners (who are complying with the rules it has rejected).¹⁰ It forces the EU to think of the UK as a rival especially in terms of drawing in FDI and the dominance of London as a financial centre. (Of course power matters and competition occurs within the EU, especially on attracting FDI, but it is greatly moderated by features such as the following of common rules, the free movement of people, the need for constant negotiations within the 'family' and the sense of a common fate). This has been reflected in EU discourse which has been relatively realist – note Donald Tusk's call to 'defend the interests of the 27' (Tusk, 2017). In this geo-economic struggle Ireland finds itself caught in the middle. The historical resonances are acute as Ireland was traditionally caught in the middle of Anglo-European disputes in the formative early modern era.¹¹

The UK's decision to leave the Single Market and the Customs Union creates a range of problems for the Irish government and the island of Ireland. These have been extensively studied and reported on (House of Lords, 2017; House of Commons, 2017) and the core issues are only summarised here:

- If there is no trade agreement or transitional agreement there would have to be a full customs border between Ireland and the UK (including tariffs and other checks). Even if there is a free trade agreement if the UK is outside the Customs Union there must be some form of customs checks (although of course the UK has asked for the most frictionless trade possible). Likewise if it is outside the Single Market regulatory sphere there will have to be checks (even countries with a form of CU with the EU like Turkey have customs checks). All of the above requires a border in Ireland (*ceteris paribus*) and presents major challenges to the Irish economy.¹² Ireland could of course leave the EU or seek a unique customs status within the EU (Anderson, 2017) but there is no support for any such action in response to Brexit.

¹⁰ The UK is clearly a different sort of outsider to, for example, Norway or Switzerland.

¹¹ Also trade policy was a major motivation for Ireland's independence movement, and for Irish unionists (in different senses), in the 150 years prior to independence.

¹² It is worth noting the different interests within the republic. A limited free trade agreement (no tariffs but some 'friction') with the UK would be bad but not disastrous for Irish exporters more generally. Any border with Northern Ireland would be a disaster politically and economically for the border communities.

- The Common Travel Area between the UK and Ireland is called into question but this may be one of the more solvable elements (provided that Ireland's EU partners are willing to tolerate special privileges for Irish citizens in the UK and for British citizens in Ireland).¹³
- Other aspects of island of Ireland integration (the electricity market for example) are put in question. Also Brexit arouses other territorial issues, including fisheries for example, that had been downplayed in recent decades.

The assumption of this paper (in line with the general consensus) is that the UK has placed itself in a weak position vis a vis the EU as a whole (notwithstanding its relative wealth and national power).¹⁴ This is primarily due to the much greater structural power of the EU and the fact that the UK is the protagonist which is trying to forge a new arrangement. The EU economy and market (including the 27 member states, the EEA countries, Switzerland, Turkey and a vast network of trade agreements with other states) is much larger than Britain's. The UK has relied on the EU for attracting a lot of its FDI - note the warnings of the Japanese government (Japanese Government, 2016) and the EU as a bloc is the major for UK good exporters by some way. Trade in financial services with the EU is also incredibly important for the UK. The legal process of article 50 actualises this structural power in the sense that the departing country has to leave in 2 years and an abrupt departure would be far more damaging to the UK than to the EU as a whole. Any new trade agreements with outsiders will take years to reach so the UK would need some kind of transition deal. The UK is also reliant on EU cooperation as it forges a new independent tariff schedule within the WTO. Other factors, such as the political disunity in the UK including the Scottish government's anti-Brexit position but also the disunity within the main parties and the remain majority in Parliament adds to the weakness of the UK's position. The relative expertise is also clearly on the EU side. However, the primary reason for the UK's weakness is the structural legal-economic context.

Thus Ireland, as a part of the EU, is a part of the more powerful entity. (The historical ironies are enormous). However, in another sense Ireland is uniquely vulnerable. As noted Ireland still has a large proportion of its trade with the UK, far larger than any other EU state, especially for small indigenous industries. As such Ireland could contemplate reduced access to the UK's market with less *sang froid* than a large country such as France or a more distant one such as, for example, Austria. Ireland is also reliant on the UK as a conduit for many exports to the rest of the EU. Then there are the political dangers of a hard border with NI and all that could entail. Another problem is

¹³ As such the CTA is not focused on here.

¹⁴ This is contingent; it is possible to imagine a geopolitical crisis which results in a situation where the UK has more leverage or a financial crisis in the Eurozone (less likely for the near future).

the loss of a powerful, like-minded on economic issues, island-based, transatlantic focused partner in the EU is a significant problem but that is more for the future. While it is has a voice it is one of 27 states which must agree negotiating mandates and then delegate the direct negotiations to the Commission. However, if push comes to shove the EU will have to impose some form of barriers to UK market access in the Union, with very negative effects for Ireland. As such Ireland can be considered both a part of a powerful institution with the upper hand over the UK and also a vulnerable smaller neighbour of the UK. It may even be considered a card in the UK's deck as a tough economic deal for it would impact on Ireland.

Methodology

The empirical element of the paper analyses how the Irish government has framed the Brexit question over time, with a particular focus on the issue of power and the broader relationship with the UK and EU. To frame is “to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993: 52). Framing involves shaping information (there is always some form of bias in terms of which facts are prioritised, which story is told). Political framing can deploy a range of linguistic tools, including emotional language and colourful metaphors (the ‘cliff-edge’) and analogies (Lakoff, 2001). The ability to frame is of course not just a linguistic skill but contingent on an actor's power (Warren, Holden and Howell, 2017). Framing analysis refers to various methods of analysing the language of protagonists and is commonly used in conjunction with a constructivist approach (Payne 2001). The study focuses on speeches, interviews and formal policy papers produced by the Government from the Brexit vote up until the 22nd August 2017 (a practical deadline but also one which encapsulates the transition to a new political leadership in Ireland and the publication of UK position papers on Ireland and trade).¹⁵ The approach is overwhelmingly qualitative. It does include some content analysis (frequency of words/phrases, word clusters) – done via NVivo software – as a basis for analysis rather than taken as evidence in itself. The Government's discourse is understood in context in various respects. It is analysed in relation to changing UK government discourse and policy positions as well as the overarching EU approach and discourse. (The government's approach is also understood in relation to that of other political actors and society in Ireland and Northern Ireland).

¹⁵ See appendix 1. 44 speeches, statements, interviews and position papers were analysed.

At a basic linguistic level the study analyses the form of language used. This includes the strength of language (use of emotional language) , the use of imperatives (must/need) – which have clear power-notations – and moral conditionals as compared to wishes as well as the allocation of agency; the directness and specificity of language (who is responsible, who should do what, by when?). It considers the different use of rigid legalistic as opposed to political discourse. The template for this is conventional diplomatic language which tends to avoid direct, specific language and explicit reference to power relations. This is especially the case in sensitive relations such as the Anglo-Irish one historically. Specifically it looks at the use of, and meanings of, key terms such as ‘special status’ and ‘hard border’, ‘political solution’ as well as ubiquitous vague and contested terms which have to be understood in context such as ‘flexible and imaginative solutions’. Key individual texts are analysed in their entirety for a more complete picture of how Irish leaders were framing Brexit at specific points in time. On a more conceptual level it studies how the Irish government constitutes roles, identity, power and authority in its language; including in particular how it relates its interests to the European interest.

Overview of how the Irish government reacted to Brexit. Period 1: The Irish Government’s reaction to the Brexit vote and to the triggering of article 50

When the Brexit vote occurred Fine Gael had been in power since 2011, with Enda Kenny as Prime Minister/ Taoiseach throughout this time. This was via a coalition with Labour until early 2016 and then on as a minority government working via a confidence and supply arrangement with Fianna Fail (the other traditional centre-right Irish political party). Fine Gael is a strongly pro-European party (a longstanding member of the European Peoples’ Party) and has always been regarded as less nationalist than Fianna Fáil (a party with more populist leanings that had traditionally taken a harder line on issues such as partition). The Irish Government had openly campaigned for a remain vote in the referendum and had engaged in contingency planning for a leave result (unlike the British government).

The reaction to the Brexit vote took the form of an immediate statement and similarly worded statements in the Dáil (Kenny 2016a; Kenny 2016b). The Government reaffirmed Ireland’s membership of and faith in the EU, asserted the ‘unique bilateral interests’ it had. It affirmed the importance of the GFA and the spirit of ‘partnership and engagement’ with which the UK’s departure should be worked out. Notably Enda Kenny asserted that the European Council would have leadership of the process (this is the channel member state influence and there might be a

concern that the supranational institutions take a harder less flexible line). It is also noteworthy that he suggested that the talks on a future trade relationship would take place 'in parallel' with the talks on the terms of departure.

The EU response was robust and unified from the beginning and it stipulated that no negotiations could take place until Article 50 was triggered and that there would be no bilateral negotiations at all, the EU as a bloc would negotiate via the Commission (Consilium, 2016; Whelan 2017). Ways to persuade the UK as a state to remain were not considered. There was powerful logic behind this relatively hard-line approach but it is not inevitable that a regional organisation faced with the prospect of losing its second largest member state would react in this way. The major early decision that Ireland had to make was to support and comply with the EU approach, in particular the demand for no early bilateral negotiations. Given the unique Anglo-Irish situation bilateral negotiations would have seemed natural but Ireland took the European option. Ireland also supported the prioritising of the EU's financial settlement as a pre-condition for further talks and did not deviate from this position. (In fact Ireland had little real choice as anything other than full support for the EU could have put its own position in the EU in question).

Generally the Irish government continued its cautious language but there were signals that things had changed. Enda Kenny (who had remained studiously neutral during the Scottish referendum on independence) had let it be known that he supported Scotland's case to remain in the EU in a Council meeting, arguably a breach of diplomatic norms in discussing an internal UK matter. He also began to talk openly about the prospects for a United Ireland (Kenny, 2016c). This was not to demand a border poll but merely to clarify that a unified Ireland would inherit the Republic's membership (as per the German case). The Taoiseach set in motion an All-Ireland forum on Brexit against the wishes of the Northern Ireland unionists who did not participate. The Government emphasised the need to 'protect' the Good Friday Agreement and the need to avoid a 'hard border'. The Democratic Unionist Party had supported Brexit but at the North-South Ministerial on November 2016 they agreed to support the continuation of free movement of goods and people across the island of Ireland.

The Government's policy of speaking softly while asserting its rights and role (combined with an unprecedented diplomatic engagement with European partners) remained unchanged as the UK's position on Brexit developed in a manner unfavourable to Ireland. Prime Minister May's relatively hard-line position that the UK would end freedom of movement and would not accept the

jurisdiction of ECJ was hinted at in the Conservative party conference of autumn 2016 and confirmed in the Lancaster House speech of 17 January 2017. This also confirmed that the UK would not seek to stay in the Customs Union although it would seek a customs agreement. The British Government declared its aim to maintain the CTA with Ireland but given its stance on FoM, Single Market/ECJ and now the Customs Union a significant border between Ireland and the UK was now the default option. The government's official reaction to this was modest but repeated its insistence on the need to protect the GFA. The Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA (analysed in Box 1) encapsulated the government's reaction to the emergence of a 'hard Brexit'. This speaks of tumult and crisis, argues for a 'strategic' approach (hinting of discipline, arguably sacrifice) and anchors Ireland firmly in the European power structure.

Ireland's tangible input into the process came in helping to shape the EU's negotiation mandate for the European Commission once Article 50 had been triggered (European Council, 2017). This text asserts the EU-27's control over the process in no uncertain terms. It is replete with imperatives: the UK 'must'. 'will respect' and so forth. Substantially it outlines that three core issues (citizen's rights, the financial settlement and the Irish border) must be agreed before there can be any talk of a future relationship. Apart from including the Irish border as a priority issue the language on Ireland very much reflected the GOI's language:

'in view of the *unique* circumstances on the island of Ireland, *flexible and imaginative solutions* will be required, including with the aim of avoiding a hard border, while respecting the integrity of the Union legal order. In this context, the Union should also recognise existing bilateral agreements and arrangements between the United Kingdom and Ireland which are compatible with EU law'. (Author's emphasis).

The precise 'flexible and imaginative solutions' phrase did not feature in Irish government language before the Council mandate but was taken up as a mantra afterwards (Appendix 2). Much was made in the British media of Spain's veto over the inclusion of Gibraltar in a future agreement. However in reality all member states will have a veto over the economic agreement between the UK and the EU. The text hints that Ireland has a veto over the beginning of trade talks also as it is hard to imagine the Council voting that the border issue has been resolved if the member state concerned did not agree. The text was viewed as a victory by the Irish government although it did not solve its dilemma and it is hard to see how the Irish border can be dealt with satisfactorily before the trade and customs arrangements are known. A later European Council statement clarified that Northern Ireland could re-join the EU via unifying with the Republic, an important but essentially defensive

move by the Irish government. In May 2017 the government released an official position paper, which summarised its position and continued the tone as described above (Irish Government, 2017).

All in all the Irish government had asserted its rights but in the year since the vote Brexit had progressed in a manner unfavourable to it. Its strongest position was on protecting the Good Friday Agreement but as noted, the interpretation of this agreement is open to debate. (The all-Ireland agreement to maintain the free movement of goods and people in November 2017 was relatively meaningless given the DUP stance on the Customs Union and Single Market. The complexity of the issues involved allows for a form of ambiguity but that will only be temporary). Its language can be contrasted with that of Fianna Fáil and Sinn Fein (the main opposition parties). The leadership of Fianna Fáil (unsurprisingly for an opposition party) was much more direct in its criticism of the Brexit campaign's 'irresponsible populism' and the 'bombastic complacency' of May's government (Martin, 2016; Martin, 2017). Sinn Fein the all-Ireland nationalist party was predictable stronger still. It labelled Brexit a 'hostile act' (Sinn Fein, 2017), an undermining of the Good Friday Agreement and used words such as 'disaster' in relation to it. Sinn Fein's major policy proposal was to call for 'special status' for Northern Ireland and for a border poll on reunification.¹⁶ (Arguably the GFA already gave Northern Ireland a special status in the UK constitution). This wording was not taken up by the government, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs argued that the phrase was not welcomed by European partners (Flanagan, 2016a), although the Government seemed to hint at special status in its call for 'imaginative solutions' regarding the border.

¹⁶ Within Northern Ireland itself the situation darkened as the power-sharing executive collapsed in January 2017 and was not revived, leaving NI without a government.

Box 1: Address by the Taoiseach to the Institute of International and European Affairs
Dublin, 15 February 2017

'Ireland at the heart of a changing European Union'

The speech begins with the language of crisis, 'tumult', the 1916 proclamation and the great crises and transformations of Irish history. It goes on to discuss Brexit. Kenny anchors Ireland firmly in the EU community and power structure. There is no mention of the British government's position or the obvious disappointment there was over the form of Brexit chosen. He also presents himself as the defender of Northern Ireland. He outlines Ireland's rights and powers. Generally, the speech develops a sense of urgency and historical moment with doubtless a hint of sacrifice/struggle to many listeners also.

Excerpts:

'Brexit poses unprecedented political, economic and diplomatic challenges for Ireland. Challenges to our peace, and challenges to our prosperity. How we deal with it in the months and years ahead will define the future of our island for decades to come'.

'common values' of the Union 'under increasing threat'

Ireland at 'the heart of Europe', a list of the various benefits, economic social security

'Bad for Britain for Ireland and for Europe'

NI is being 'removed from the European Union' despite a strong remain majority.

'When Article 50 is triggered, the world will move on, and it will move on quickly. Of course I will do my best to put forward the interests of the North in the Brexit negotiations. I will defend the Good Friday Agreement, in its spirit as well as its letter'.

'vital national interest for Ireland that we do not return to the days of a hard border that we knew only too well. Or indeed create a new one in the future. This is a political matter, not a legal or technical matter'.

'Closest possible economic and trading relationship'

'We need to be calm, clear-eyed and strategic.

Our negotiations with the UK must recognise the wider, long-term interests of Europe and all of her people'.

'Ireland will be on the EU side of the table when the negotiations begin.

We will be one of the 27.

... We will seek an outcome that is good for Europe and good for Ireland. We will negotiate from a position of unity and strength'.

...

The European Council, which consists of all the leaders of Member States including myself, will provide political oversight of all of these negotiations'.

Figure 1 A content analysis of the Irish government's official position paper on Brexit

Period 2: The new Fine Gael leadership

On June 14th 2017 Enda Kenny was replaced by Leo Varadkar as Taoiseach. Varadkar replaced foreign minister Charles Flanagan with his own leadership rival Simon Coveney. The new leadership is considerably younger than their predecessors and presented itself as a modernising force. They shared a very strong commitment to the European Union and internationalism. Leo Varadkar had made a reputation for being straight talking and an arch critic of Sinn Fein. This transition coincided with a new (weaker) UK government (dependent on a confidence and supply agreement with the DUP) and the formal opening of Article 50 negotiations, when the extent of the task facing the UK further crystallised. On the first day the UK's lead negotiator David Davis had to accept the EU's sequence for the negotiations. The substantive discussions on the three foregrounded issues began soon after.

The first substantive issue in the talks – the British government's proposal on the rights of citizens – was dealt with quite positively by the new Taoiseach (who was more positive than many European leaders). However the subsequent period would see a sharpening of the rhetoric between elements of the Irish government and the British government. The decision to revoke the London Convention on fisheries was made without forewarning. The new foreign minister described it as unhelpful while the Irish Fisheries Minister declared that it would be 'a matter for the Brexit negotiations', hinting that the power of the EU would be brought to bear (Dunning, 2017). As a part of this changing 'mood music', the outgoing Irish ambassador to London gave a speech on 18 July which also more direct in terms of its criticisms of Brexit arguments and his 'sadness', 'regret' and 'worry' at the situation (Mulhall, 2017). In the last week of July a minor media storm took off, beginning with a story in the Times that the Irish government was taking a harder line and hoping to push border checks back to an inter-Island basis. This was something the government never publicly demanded, although it might be read as an implication of its stance. The Foreign Minister was clear that the proposed 'technical solutions' to the border problem he's seen wouldn't work that a 'unique political solution' was needed. In response to Unionist anger about the proposed sea-border he noted 'we need to make it very clear from the very start of these negotiations that we cannot support any British proposals or EU proposals for that matter, that result in the re-emergence of a border on the island on Ireland' (Coveney, 2017a).

This sense of a new harder line was given traction by a new tone emanating from the Taoiseach who declared that ‘he wouldn’t design a border for the Brexiteers’, noting that the Irish government did not want a border and that it was Britain who had decided to leave the EU. ‘we’re not going to be helping them to design some sort of Border that we don’t believe should exist in the first place’. He also added later ‘if anyone should be angry it’s us’ (Minihan, 2017). This was noteworthy in its singling out of the ‘Brexiteers’ and it is challenging them more directly and framing the situation as a problem of their making. These words were given wide coverage in the British media. This viewpoint was outlined more substantially in a speech in Belfast the following week (see Box 3) in which his power was asserted more directly. The government’s new tone was criticised by Northern Ireland Unionists as ‘megaphone diplomacy’ (Moriarty, 2017). As the Irish government pointed out the risks to the UK of downgrading economic relations with its neighbours the Unionists emphasised the danger to Ireland of an economic divorce with its larger neighbour (Lord Kilclooney, 2017).¹⁷ Conversely Sinn Fein praised the new sharper language adopted. Others noted the increased assertiveness as a recognition of the power Ireland holds in the process. Ireland will have an effective veto over the move to the next phase of the negotiations although in fact the ability to postpone discussions on a future trading relationship is a double-edged sword for Ireland as it is dependent on a future trading deal. Given that there will have to be a transition deal anyway, there may be space to make a political signal by using its power to delay the launch of talks (damaging British plans to establish certainty), but this would be a risky action.

In August the UK released a series of position papers on the Brexit talks and the future partnership with the EU. The two of most relevance here are those on the customs union and on Ireland/Northern Ireland itself (DXEU, 2017b). Regarding the customs union the UK proposed an immediate transition period in which the UK would maintain the customs union but have the right to negotiate new trade deals. After that the UK proposed more complex and creative ways of aligning UK customs procedures with that of the EU to minimise disruption to trade (DXEU, 2017A). The position paper on Ireland is a diplomatic one; it quotes at length from Irish government statements and the EU Council negotiating mandate. The paper goes so far as to state that there should be no border infrastructure. It does not just rely on technical solutions but a range of political solutions which are linked to the UK’s overall idea for a customs partnership with the EU. Some of these are clearly unrealistic, for example an exemption for small cross-border businesses would be counter to international trade law. The broader idea of a customs partnership with the EU in which the UK

¹⁷ The impact of the new British government’s reliance on the Democratic Unionist Party for support is as yet unclear but could be extremely significant.

applies some EU policies but retains a separate international trade policy could be viewed as self-serving and arguably impractical. It could be argued that the UK was leveraging Irish vulnerabilities to press the case for a unique trading relationship to the EU but on the other hand it is hard to discuss the border without discussing the overall future trade relationship. The Irish reaction was positive but again forceful. It welcomed the aspirations but questioned the detail. A government statement repeated the hope that sufficient progress would be made to allow trade talks to progress in the autumn. The foreign minister asserted that Ireland 'will not be a pawn in the negotiations' and gave a vigorous interview on the BBC in which he reiterated the power balance at hand (see box 3). Days later the Taoiseach again directly criticised the UK's cherry-picking approach and explicitly explained that he had a veto over the talks moving on (McAdam, 2017).

As noted in the brief content analysis (see appendix 2), the Irish government's language throughout was focused on the need to *protect* the status quo and the Good Friday Agreement. (They also stress the need to protect European unity and cohesion). It is not a resurgent nationalism and the new Taoiseach only mentioned a United Ireland in the context of explaining that it was not on the agenda. It has not taken up the call for a 'special status'. Throughout this period the Irish government has not used highly emotional or recriminatory language; neither has it used trivial terms such as 'divorce' or 'cliff-edge' very often. However, the new leadership has used emotional and strongly negative words more frequently (appendix 3). There's been much commentary on the more assertive approach of the new government. In fact Enda Kenny had also stressed a strong line on the border and a need for a 'political not a technical' solution. However, what is new is the direct framing of responsibility and the invocation of Irish power/influence vis a vis the EU's progress. More substantially, specifically advocating policy positions (that the UK should stay in the customs union) and threatening to veto the development of talks is a significant escalation.

Throughout this period it has not always been clear what Ireland is looking for. Varadkar clarified this in his Belfast speech suggesting the Customs Union option for the UK as a whole (asking the UK to look again). Short of this occurring, the implication seems to be some kind of 'special status' (without using the words) for Ireland. Coveney reaffirmed this in arguing for 'Northern Ireland to become an extension of the EU customs union, to create equivalence north and south of the border' (Coveney, 2017b). This new tone drew more attention to the Irish border issues in the UK media and

public discourse. It signalled that Irish support for the UK is not to be taken for granted and added to the pressure on the UK government.¹⁸

Box 2: Varadkar's speech at Queens University Belfast

'The Future of Relationships North and South'
<p>The new Taoiseach discusses the historical legacy of World War I before moving onto the Northern Ireland conflict and the peace process. He then discusses the liberalisation and modernisation of Ireland. He expounds on European identity before going onto the seriousness of Brexit and its implications. He asserts his own responsibility and authority in this process and also calls upon the North-South Ministerial conclusions of November 2016 to support his position against a hard border. He criticises the lack of an executive in Northern Ireland and directly criticises and challenges the 'advocates of a so-called hard Brexit', which obviously includes many members of the British government (arguably Theresa May herself). The Taoiseach puts forward his own solutions.</p>
<p>'In October, I will sit around the European Council table with 26 other Prime Ministers and we will decide together whether sufficient progress has been made on three key issues to allow the Brexit negotiations to proceed to the next phase.'</p>
<p>'I passionately believe that being European is an essential part of the modern Irish identity, an enhancement not a dilution of who we are...it is a tragedy of the Brexit debate that it appears that this common European identity is not valued by everyone on these islands.'</p>
<p>'We will do all we can, in Brussels, in London and in Dublin, to achieve the best outcome for everyone on this island - to protect our peace, our freedom, our rights, and our prosperity'.</p>
<p>'I do not want there to be an economic border on our island nor do I want one between Ireland and Britain.'</p>
<p>'there are people who do want a border, a trade border between the United Kingdom and the European Union and therefore a border between Ireland and Britain and a border across this island. These are advocates of a so-called hard Brexit. I believe the onus should be on them to come up with proposals for such a border. They've already had fourteen months to do so. If they cannot, and I believe they cannot, we can then talk meaningfully about solutions that might work for all of us'.</p>
<p>'These solutions will not be offered, they will have to be asked for. And this can happen only after sufficient progress is made'.</p>
<p>'At a time when Brexit threatens to drive a wedge between north and south we need to build more bridges and fewer borders'.</p>

¹⁸ There are a number of potential factors explaining the changing approach. The negotiations had begun in earnest. The new British government was weaker. The new Irish leaders are younger and more willing to press Britain directly.

Box 3: Excerpts from the Irish foreign minister's Newsnight interview BBC 2 August 2017

'If Britain decides to take an approach that applies different food safety standards to Britain and NI from the common market well then we have a real problem. There are two sides to this negotiation. The other happens to represent 27 countries. And so what we have today from Britain – which is welcome – is an approach to the negotiations much of which is supported by the Irish government but we will have to thrash through the issues, find compromises, make sure we protect the integrity of the European Union in these negotiations as well as try to facilitate British ambition

The idea that Britain is going to be able to negotiate its own free trade agreements with countries all over the world and at the same time expect barrier-free access into the single market I don't think that that in itself is realistic.

We need to work this out and find political solutions that in my view effectively allows Northern Ireland to become an extension of the EU customs union, to create equivalence north and south of the border.

Ireland is a country that had nothing to do with the decision for Britain to leave the EU but is very much now in the middle of the debate to try and ensure that we protect ourselves in that context.

And that is what I mean when I say Ireland will be fair and realistic but also stubborn

If we believe that these negotiations are moving in the wrong direction, if we believe that the British government is being unreasonable we will say so

I believe that Ireland is actually Britain's closest friend here. Friends need to talk to each other honestly. Some of the aspirations I've heard are not realistic in the context of the Brexit negotiations and you know I need to be honest about that.'

Overview of the Irish discourse

On the EU's part Brexit has been framed not primarily as a wake-up call (although this was noted) but as a threat to order on the continent. The EU's response has been quite statist, the 16 million plus EU/UK citizens who voted to remain so were not considered. The UK as a state was departing and the EU's concerns were 'the interests' of the EU as a whole and the remaining 27.¹⁹ The EU's response was to display unity and also assert its authority regarding the integrity of the single market both in terms of the 4 freedoms being indivisible and that the market could not be divided into sectors. Likewise no negotiations at any level were allowed before the UK triggered Article 50. In fact the history of the EU shows numerous examples of it being flexible in terms of providing political solutions to various issues but this legalistic and comprehensive approach asserted its power.²⁰ The EU has been keen to paint itself (accurately) as busy with many issues and Brexit as a relative sideshow (Elder and Herszhenhorn, 2017). This is hardly consistent with the framing of Brexit as an existential threat. The 27's Bratislava Declaration of 16 September 2016 on the future of the Union did not mention Brexit or the UK.

The UK government has been consistently framed as an unreliable partner, unrealistic, unprepared, lacking 'clarity', unsure of what it wants, harbouring 'illusions' and obsessed with cherry-picking the benefits of European integration without taking on 'obligations'. The Brexiteer's own phrase of 'having our cake and eating it' provided a gift to this framing of the UK position as essentially immature. As the departure process took shape it was inevitably the EU who took the lead in terms of the procedures and phases. Similarities emerged with the accession process in which again it is the EU institutions as teachers measuring the 'progress' of candidates. In this case the 'progress' is on highly political issues regarding the border, rights of citizens, and financial obligations and its a feature of EU hegemonic discourse to paint political disagreements within or with partners as essentially due to misunderstanding or delinquent behaviour on their part. EU leaders, such as chief negotiator Michelle Barnier have been quick to correct and clarify the UK's positions and approaches. EU leaders (within the institutions and member states) have given consistent signals to the market that the UK will be an inferior base from which to do business in Europe in. Note Barnier's direct contradiction of the UK's hope for 'frictionless trade' (2017). Generally the EU has framed the existing political and legal institutions of Europe as an immutable 'reality' with which the UK will have to accommodate itself.²¹

¹⁹ Guy Verhofstat is the exception here.

²⁰ Arguably the relationship with Switzerland already interferes with the integrity of the Single Market.

²¹ This is a political choice, albeit one grounded in long-term socially constructed realities in Europe.

The Irish framing of the problem chimes with a broader EU approach which is forcing the UK to accept trade-offs between its willingness to accept EU rules and its desire for greater freedom of action in the global political economy. The consistent features of the Irish discourse have been as follows. Ireland is firmly anchored in the European Union and this is non-negotiable. Its close relationship with the UK is acknowledged but definitively second place behind the EU relationship. The previous foreign minister articulated the distinction as 'our friends in the UK, our family in the European Union' (Flanagan, 2017). Brexit has not been framed as bilateral issue. Ireland's 'Europeanness' is linked with Ireland's self-identification as a modern outward highly globalised country, in the words of its Taoiseach: 'an Island at the centre of the world' (Time, 2017). Combined with this is a minor nationalistic (patriotic) frame of resisting being drawn into Britain's orbit. This, more emotionally potent frame, is necessary given the potential economic damage that might occur. In fact there is a strong historical pedigree of combining nationalism with internationalism in Ireland. Even the relatively insular Ireland of the 1930s strongly supported powerful international institutions (Gageby, 1999: 37), and its contemporary foreign policy is unequivocally Europeanist (Tonra, 2012). The EU is painted as the source of authority and of legal order; the UK is painted as a somewhat unreliable partner, called upon to provide clarity as to what it wants. The Irish government also frames the EU as a source of unity and strength and paints the UK's plans as 'unrealistic'. As such Ireland may be understood as an uneasy agent of EU hegemony.

The new leadership team went further than the previous government in explicitly advocating courses of action for the UK and in highlighting its role as an arbiter of UK 'progress'. It presents itself as a critical friend but the power implications are clear and have been noted in the British media: 'Ireland holds the upper hand in negotiations with Britain' (Evening Standard, 2017). At times Ireland has adopted a softer approach than many EU leaders, being less willing to dismiss UK proposals, but this is very much a complementary approach (along the standard good cop/ bad cop lines). Irish interests are conceived of as intrinsically linked with European interests although the potential for dissonance is noted. At the same time the Irish leadership portrays Irish vulnerability and potential as an innocent victim of Brexit. The issue of Northern Ireland is approached not in an expansive or nationalistic manner but a protective one. The government does not advance a maximalist interpretation of the Good Friday Agreement in terms of its status within the UK. Given that Northern Ireland voted to remain and according to the GFA 'it is for the people of this Island alone' to determine their future an argument could be made that Northern Ireland cannot be taken out of the EU against its will (O'Leary, 2016). This is not the position of the Irish government. The

lead political parties in Northern Ireland are also painted as somewhat delinquent or dysfunctional for their failure to form an executive.

Conclusion

Ireland has found itself caught in a middle between a radical British approach to Brexit and a tough unyielding response by the EU institutions. Ireland's response to Brexit has been to unequivocally cast its lot in with the EU and its EU partners. There are both rational interest and cultural reasons for this. For Ireland to cast doubt on its EU membership, especially in favour of a UK government that was flailing, would have been irrational. At the same time there is no doubt that the political leadership has a firm commitment to the EU and the European project. In a striking role reversal the UK is now the nationalist entity, breaking away from supranational power structures. (The Irish government's position on the border is clearly not 'nationalist' in ethos, but primarily defensive, in terms of protecting the peace process and the economic status quo on the island).

Ireland's core position has been consistent and has always had implications that restrict the UK's freedom on manoeuvre. However, the new Irish leadership vocalised this in a more manner.

Ireland's discourse has generally reaffirmed the role and hegemony of the European Union and its institutions. It has defined itself as a stable pro-European liberal open member state in contrast to the unstable threat posed by Brexit. Irish leaders have asserted their autonomy and potential power as EU members. The power of the UK is never mentioned, except perhaps obliquely when mentioning the vulnerability of Ireland.

Time will tell whether the more direct approach of the Varadkar government has been politically efficacious. The tough approach of the EU and Ireland has certainly crystallised the realities of Brexit for the UK. On the more negative side it may be that Ireland's potential role as a mediator in future EU-UK dispute is under threat. Furthermore, it is clear that in many respects Ireland's national interests may differ from those of the rest of the EU, in particular the threat of a no-deal scenario is catastrophic for Ireland and cannot be contemplated (even superficially) with the relative detachment it is in other parts of the Union. There are still multiple scenarios for Brexit. If in the future the UK adopts a more conciliatory approach and the EU appears overly punitive, the EU's unity could come under threat as the Irish government for one would find it harder to frame its national interest as aligned with the European interest. It is also highly possible that Anglo-Irish relations will decline further, as could the Irish government's relationship with the Northern Ireland unionists. This is an ongoing research project. There is room for a much more rigorous (longitudinal and comparative) content analysis of the language of Brexit. In regard to this paper the focus on

public discourse is valid but elite interviewing would help to inform our understanding of the actors' intentions. Thus far it is clear that Brexit has already transformed Anglo-Irish relations from one of intimate partnership to 'megaphone' diplomacy.

Appendix 1: List of texts analysed

A. Under Enda Kenny's leadership June 2016-June 2017

Statement by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, on the UK Vote to Leave the European Union - Department of Taoiseach 24 June 2016

Statement in the Dáil on the UK EU Referendum Result by the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD, Monday 27 June 2016

Statement by the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD, following Meeting with UK Prime Minister Theresa May, Tuesday 26 July 2016

UK exit from the EU Statement to the Dail by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade 27-06-2016 - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Speech by Minister Flanagan at Asia Matters Summit - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 6 July 2016

Address by Minister Flanagan to the diplomatic corps on the occasion of the National Day of Commemoration - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 10 July 2016

Address by Minister Flanagan to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Departmental Conference - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 20 August 2016

Address by Minister Flanagan at the British Irish Association Conference in Oxford - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 10 September 2016

Address by the Taoiseach Mr Enda Kenny T.D. at the British-Irish Association, Oxford, 9 September 2016

Keynote address by Minister Flanagan at Fordham University, New York - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 20 September 2016

Address to the United Nations General Assembly by Minister Charles Flanagan - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 24 September 2016

Minister Flanagan, Welcome remarks at launch of BICC Brexit Seminar Series - 29 September 2016

Keynote address by the Taoiseach, Irish Times Brexit Summit, 7 November 2016, Westin Hotel, Dublin - Department of Taoiseach

Speech by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny T.D., Ireland France Business Awards, Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Thursday 24th November 2016

Statement by the Taoiseach Mr. Enda Kenny TD on the outcome of the European Council in Brussels on the 20 and 21 October 2016; Dáil Éireann, 26 October 2016

Statement by the Taoiseach in advance of the December meeting of the European Council, Dáil Éireann, 14 December 2016

Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Enda Kenny T.D. at the Opening of EIB Dublin Office, Friday 9 December 2016

Statement by the Taoiseach, Statements on Northern Ireland, Dáil Éireann, 17 January 2017 -

Irish Government statement 17 January 2017

Daniel Mulhall Statement to Northern Ireland Affairs Committee - 8 February 2017

Address by the Taoiseach to the Institute of International and European Affairs on.pdf 15 February 2017

Statement by Minister Flanagan on Northern Ireland - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 29 March 2017

DCU Conference~ "The Law and Politics of Brexit" - Minister Flanagan - Ministerial Keynote - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 20 April 2017

Minister Flanagan - Keynote Address - RIA Annual Conference - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 31 May 2017

Ministerial address at the Centre for Cross Border Studies Annual Conference - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 1 March 2017

Minister Flanagan Seanad statements on Northern Ireland - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 30 March 2017

Address by Minister Flanagan at the launch of IIEA "Brexit Status Update" - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 26 May 2017

Statement by Minister Flanagan to Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 25 May 2017

Irish Government (2017) Ireland and the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union The Government's Approach, May 2017, http://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/EU-UK/Key_Irish_Documents/Government_Position_Paper_on_Brexit.pdf (accessed 29 August, 2017)

B. Under Leo Varadkar's leadership June 2017 – August 2017

UK PM press conference with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar~ 19 June 2017

Statement by the Taoiseach on the European Council, Brussels, 22-23 June 2017, Dáil Éireann, 28 June 2017 - Department of Taoiseach

Speech by the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar T.D., to honour Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Dublin Castle 4th July 2017 - Department of Taoiseach

Ambassador Mulhall Brexit and British-Irish Relations, Remarks to the Euro-Atlantic 18 June 2017.

Ambassador Mulhall The Challenges of Brexit~ An Irish View - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 10 July 2017

Ambassador Mulhall Remarks to the Conservative Peers House of Lords - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 12 July 2017

Leo Varadkar TIME Magazine Interview on EU, Brexit, Trump ~ Time 13 July 2017

Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Leo Varadkar TD, Queen's University, Friday 4 August 2017 - 'The Future of Relationships North and South' - Department of Taoiseach

Minister Coveney on conclusion of second round of Brexit Negotiations - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 20 July 2017

Facing Brexit~ Ireland, Northern Ireland and the EU ~ Chatham House 20 July 2017

Coveney RTE Radio 1 interview (news at 1) 28 July 2017

Minister Coveney undertakes stakeholder engagement on Brexit in London - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Press Office 21 July 2017

Varadkar Press Briefing 31 July 2017

Speech by the Taoiseach Mr. Leo Varadkar TD, Queen's University, Friday 4 August 2017 - 'The Future of Relationships North and South' - Department of Taoiseach

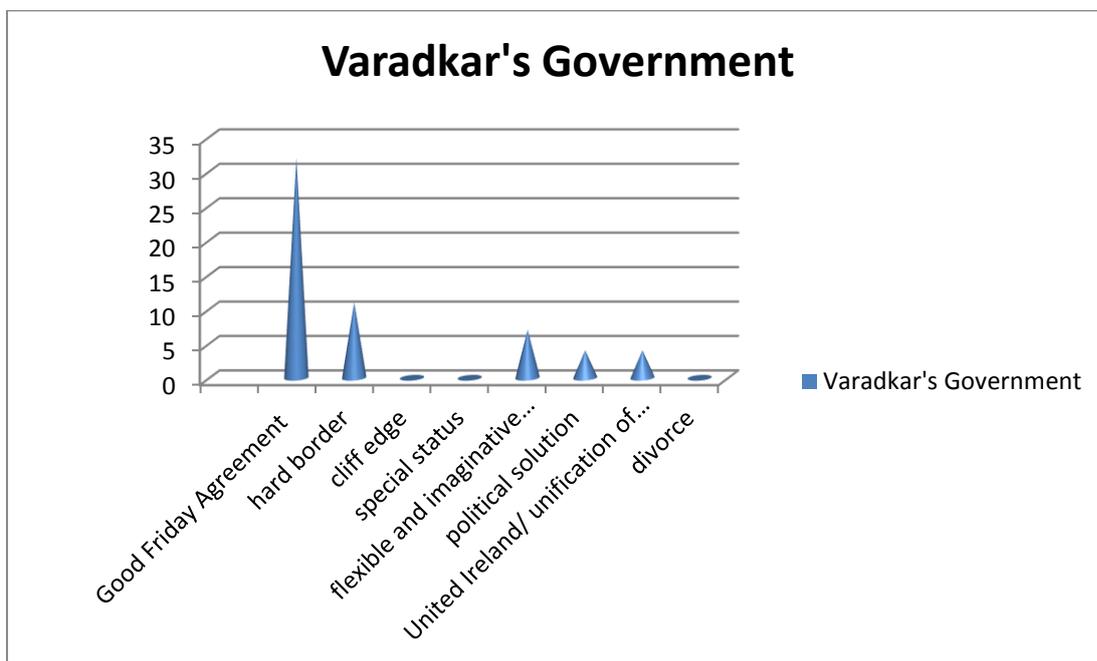
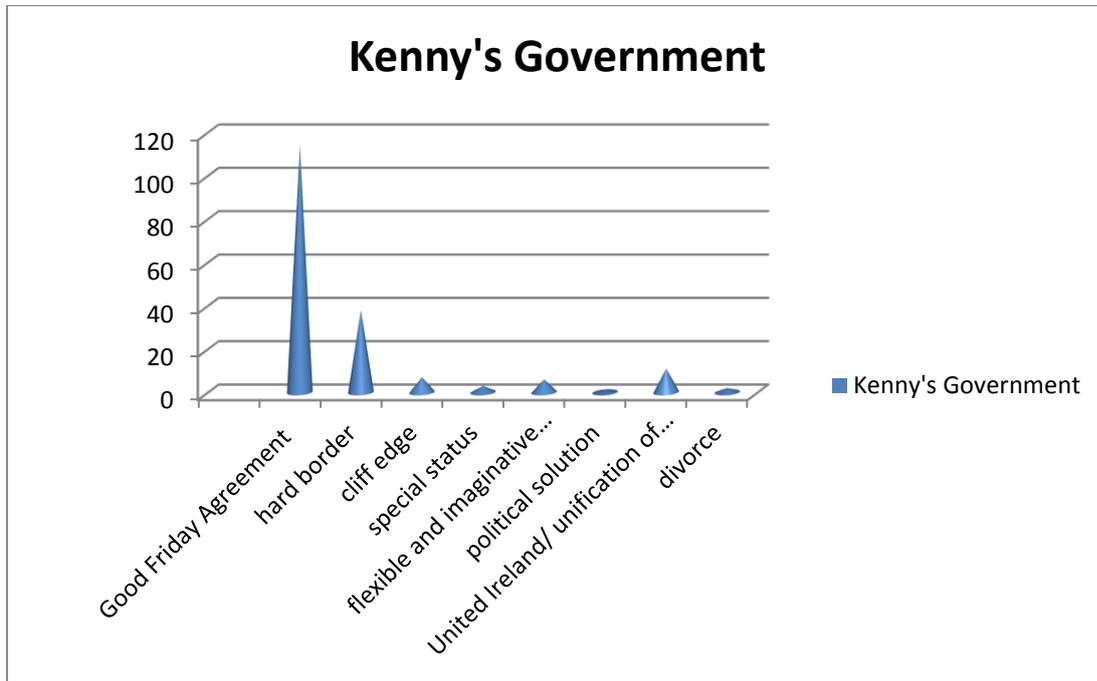
Simon Coveney~ Technology alone can never solve a political quandary like Brexit 17 August 2017

Coveney Newsnight interview 16 August 2017

Coveney reaction to UK position paper on Ireland 16 August 2017

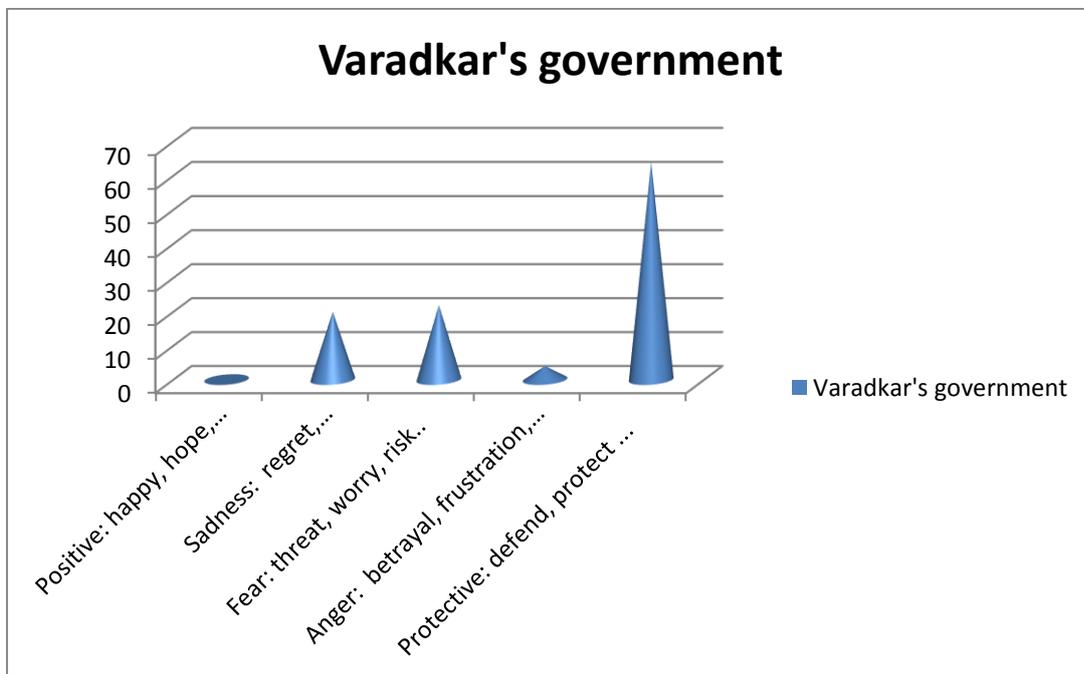
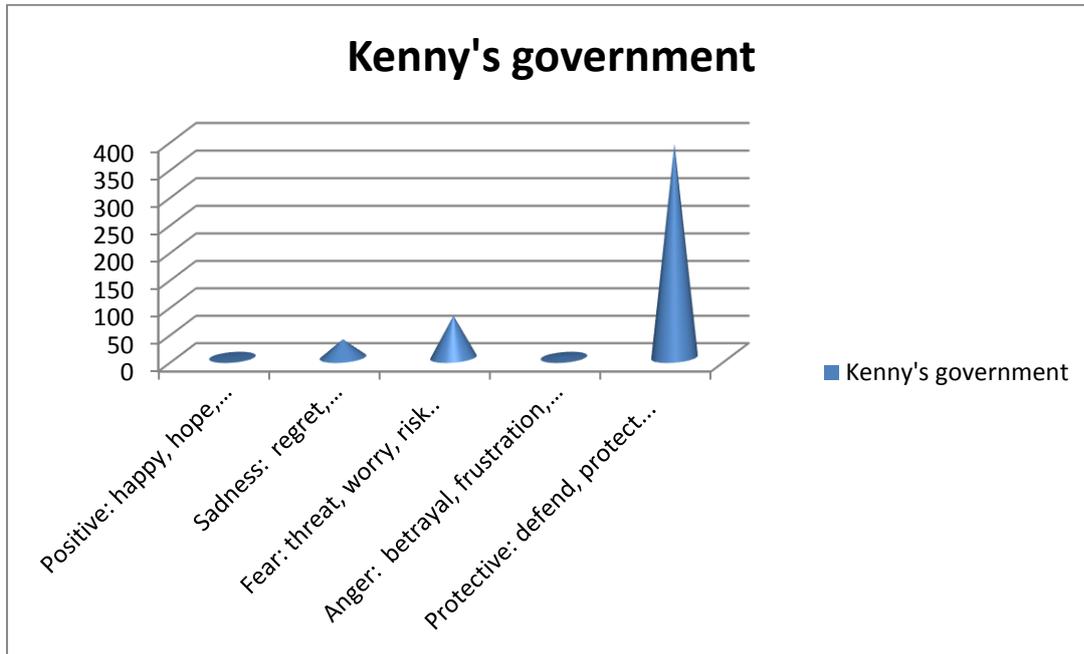
Varadkar remarks Canada 22nd August 2017

Appendix 2: Indicative content analysis I. The frequency of citation of key terms in the Brexit lexicon by the Irish government (from the sample in appendix 1).²²



²² Note: the content analysis is quite basic at this stage (hence indicative).

Appendix 3: Indicative content analysis II - use of language in relation to Brexit²³



²³ Cutting across linguistic categories this looks at language under the 5 rubrics (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, protection). Generic word searches (those indicated and other homonyms) are conducted on NVivo and then analysed to check that they refer to Brexit.

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