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Ireland's relations with the EEC: from the treaties of Rome to membership

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**Ireland's Relations With the EEC:
From the Treaties of Rome to Membership**

Maurice FitzGerald

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Introduction

In 1973, Ireland acceded to the European Communities (EC). This was at the third attempt. As far as some commentators are concerned, Irish involvement in the processes of European integration essentially dates from then.¹ The background and lead up to its membership have, for the most part, been glossed over.² But, as entry was never a foregone conclusion, what happened before accession is at least as important as what has taken place since.

It was not inevitable that a semiperipheral state on the "outer ring of Europe", this island behind an island, would be married to a European mainstream.³ Indeed, it was not only because sincere economic and political changes had taken place in Irish policy positions - in the intervening period between the Treaties of Rome being signed in 1957 and the EC's first enlargement in 1973 - that full membership became possible. It was a matter of opportunism as well. Certainly, the slowly maturing nature of ties with the European Economic Community (EEC) need to be established if present and prospective analyses are to find their proper context.

Having remained aloof from developments such as the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the

¹ See, for instance, P. KEATINGE (ed.), *Ireland and EC membership evaluated*, London, 1991; R. O'DONNELL (ed.), *Europe: the Irish experience*, Dublin, 2000.

² Exceptions to this rule include Brian Girvin and Dermot Keogh, both of whom have written about Ireland's first attempted entry. The contribution of the latter is of particular significance in many ways, but mainly because it anticipates what is being argued here in this article. B. GIRVIN, *Irish economic development and the politics of EEC entry*, in: R. T. GRIFFITHS & S. WARD (eds.), *Courting the Common Market: the first attempt to enlarge the European Community, 1961-1963*, London, 1996, pp.247-262; D. KEOGH, *The diplomacy of 'dignified calm': an analysis of Ireland's application for membership of the EEC, 1961-1963*, in *Journal of European Integration History*, vol.3/1(1995), pp.81-101.

³ I. WALLERSTEIN, *The capitalist world-economy*, Cambridge, 1979, pp.69-118. The term "semiperipheral" - even if unused elsewhere in this article - offers a truer impression of Ireland's situation, though not just in a geographical sense, the reality being that it was neither at the core nor totally on the periphery but somewhere in between.

early 1950s, it is often forgotten that Ireland attempted, and twice failed in 1963 and 1967, to join the EEC. By the same token, it also applied for membership of both the ECSC and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) in this period, even if it was not especially interested in either. By the end of the decade, Dublin readied itself to make another application for full membership of the merged communities. Following this new set of negotiations, its third attempt proved to be more successful, a move subsequently endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the population through a referendum held on 10 May 1972. This was no electoral accident. Ireland had been patiently preparing for EC entry for more than a decade.

The bulk of the electorate, various interest groups and most politicians, were gradually won over by the arguments favouring adhesion. This had not always been the case though. In the late 1940s, for instance, as Western Europeans convinced themselves that closer integration was the solution to the ills that had plagued the continent for centuries, Ireland's principal political figure, Éamon de Valera, advocated entering the slower stream of what was developing into a two-speed integration process. Indeed, he told the Council of Europe that: "If the nations here on the mainland of the continent consider that they cannot wait for us, perhaps they should consider going on without us by an agreement among themselves for a closer union".⁴ He was taken at his word. As a consequence, Ireland set about isolating itself - consciously and unconsciously - from the integration process.

As a country located on the geographical extremities of the European Union (EU), its experiences of integration are not unfamiliar or necessarily unique. However, in Ireland's case, it is quite clear that it was not necessarily the political elements of European integration that originally attracted adherents to the concept, rather it was the economic potential that this whole development held.⁵ Despite the fact that the EEC was recognised "first and foremost [as] a political concept and not merely an economic organisation with a few political ideas added as an afterthought", the thinly-disguised endeavour to utilise it as a means for economic betterment would cause difficulties.⁶ This was certainly its experience in efforts to convince Brussels that it was ready for all that membership implied. Not surprisingly, Ireland's choices were based on national preferences, while remaining allied to a full understanding of the contemporary and future possibilities that

⁴ Éamon de Valera (leader of *Fianna Fáil*, Ireland's main opposition party) speech to the Council of Europe, 17 August 1949, as quoted in M. KENNEDY & E. O'HALPIN, *Ireland and the Council of Europe: from isolation towards integration*, Strasbourg, 2000, p.49.

⁵ Indeed, this is the central argument presented in M. FITZGERALD, *Protectionism to liberalisation: Ireland and the EEC, 1957 to 1966*, Ashgate, 2000.

⁶ Francis Biggar (Irish ambassador, Brussels) to Sheila Murphy (Irish external affairs official), 30 December 1961, National Archives, Dublin (NA), Department of the Taoiseach (D/T), S16877X/62.

integration held, as well as its intrinsic requirements.

In historical terms, Irish governments displayed a rather *à la carte* approach towards Europe. Quite happily entering the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), it somewhat reluctantly accepted Marshall Aid.⁷ It also participated in the aforementioned Council of Europe, thereby allowing it a political platform to raise subjects close to its heart. Meanwhile, it either maintained a distance regarding defence commitments, such as remaining outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ostensibly on the grounds of its military neutrality, or was passed over because of its economic tardiness, when it was refused entry into the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). According to Andrew Moravcsik's criteria, it is possible to assert that national self-interest meant that Ireland came to favour EEC entry above any other relationship, including deeper Anglo-Irish ties.⁸ In truth, it was quite prepared to sacrifice a fair degree of sovereignty to the European institutions and other member states - something that daunted many other countries - in return for the benefits of full membership.

Up until recently, official Irish government archives and other source materials on these three applications have not been openly accessible or fully utilised but, over the next few years, newly discovered documents will gradually throw more light on this subject. The one major text that has been available up to now - *The tortuous path* by Denis Maher - was itself based on these sources regarding the origins and early functioning of European integration as it pertained to Ireland.⁹ This account obviously needs to be supplemented by other substantial pieces of research in the years to come if the full story is going to be told.

Indeed, a history of *Ireland and the Council of Europe* by Michael Kennedy and Eunan O'Halpin has recently revealed a major change that took place in attitudes to integration even as disinterest was feigned. Frank Aiken, the Irish external affairs minister for most of the post-war era, is known to have supported the "European ideal in the political and defence fields" at a secret ministerial meeting held in Strasbourg in 1951. This was hardly a position that coincided with the government's stated policy of military neutrality, for example; at the same time, it might also be noted that he interestingly

⁷ T. GEIGER, *Why Ireland needed the Marshall Plan but did not want it: Ireland, the Sterling Area and the European Recovery Program, 1947-1948*, University of Manchester Working Paper Number 44 in Economic and Social History, Manchester, 2000.

⁸ A. MORAVCSIK, *The choice for Europe: social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*, New York, 1998, pp.5 and 162-163.

⁹ D. J. MAHER, *The tortuous path: the course of Ireland's entry into the EEC, 1948-73*, Dublin, 1986, which in effect is considered to be the official Irish government view of the country's accession.

argued against a European customs union at that stage.¹⁰ This stand would be reversed over the next quarter of a century, lending itself to the conclusion that Irish positions on integration were to change when that suited Dublin or if they were necessitated.

It is within this context that Ireland's relations with the EEC from the Treaties of Rome to membership must be viewed. This investigation is primarily concerned with analysing how this peripheral was initially excluded from that process, as well as how it perceived and reacted to the consequences of being cast into limbo. At the same time, it focuses on presenting an account of the impact European integration had on the economic and political policies the government pursued. Additionally, it must widen an existing debate even further, one that is as relevant to Ireland's contemporary history as it will be to Europe's destiny. This analysis should not put an end in its infancy to a discussion regarding this particular country's motivations for EEC entry but, rather, must open it out, providing room for comparisons with other peripherals, while not ignoring its individuality.

Ireland in a Europe at Sixes and Sevens

By the late 1950s, to a large extent because of developments beyond its control, Ireland faced a Europe that had split up into two major trade groupings. Classed as a "peripheral" by the United Kingdom (UK) and by other OEEC member states from the earliest stages of the Free Trade Area (FTA) negotiations, this tag proved extremely difficult for it to shake off. Ireland had inherited it partially as a result of its endeavours to protect lesser developed members like itself, partly because of how they were in some ways perceived as a grouping - the "Forgotten Five" - even if they undeniably had different needs.¹¹

Ireland's classification as a peripheral helped to preclude it from negotiations that saw six states sign the Treaties of Rome and made sure that it was actively excluded from negotiations to create a separate grouping of seven EFTA countries when the OEEC's attempts to create a seventeen-nation FTA finally failed. In each case, certain choices were made in Dublin but, in many respects, their room for manoeuvre was

¹⁰ Frank Aiken (Irish external affairs minister) speaking at a secret ministerial meeting at the Council of Ministers in July 1951, as quoted in KENNEDY & O'HALPIN, *Ireland and the Council of Europe*, pp.83-84. According to these authors, this "secret meeting" was just one example of the "informal meetings of ministers to discuss the international situation" that took place in Strasbourg in this period; this was an initiative that also had the full support of Robert Schuman (French foreign minister).

¹¹ M. CAMPS, *Britain and the European Community, 1955-1963*, Princeton, 1964, p. 211. The 'Forgotten Five' - obviously coined with the EEC or Six and EFTA or Seven in mind - refers to Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Spain, and Turkey.

circumscribed by the actions of others. Crucially, the immediacy for Ireland to decide its relative position vis-à-vis the EEC or EFTA was intimately linked to the choices that the UK was making and the effects that these would then have on Ireland, especially its agriculture. As long as Anglo-Irish economic relations remained stable, Dublin appeared reluctant to take any concrete European initiative.¹²

A radical Irish government attempt to remodel economic policy, spearheaded by politicians of the calibre of Seán Lemass and civil servants such as T. K. Whitaker, coincided with these major developments and divisions in European integration.¹³ Indeed, these pivotal figures propelled a concerted move away from provincialism and conservatism to an outward-looking and progressive perspective by virtue of confident and enlightened leadership. As industry & commerce minister, Lemass had warned that, in pursuing economic isolation in the face of a 17 nation FTA, the "implications (...) would be political as well as economic" and argued for a "reconsideration of economic aims and policies".¹⁴ Looking to the future rather than the past, the Irish government thus made a conscious decision to progress gradually, but purposefully, away from a foreign economic policy based on protectionism to one of liberalisation.

It was realised that Ireland could not remain outside of, and untouched by, the shake-up in European trading patterns. It was therefore decided that Ireland must strive for improvements in domestic agricultural methods and production, thereby boosting the strongest sector of the economy, while modernising its industrial base, essentially by promoting it as a prime location for foreign-owned and export-oriented firms to set up. The latter was achieved by espousing the fact that such companies would be able to take advantage of a generous government incentives package, as well as relatively low-cost, readily available and educated labour. It was clearly recognised in government that, in opening the economy up to external competition by the gradual elimination of quota and tariff barriers, inefficient indigenous industry would fail. Those that were strong and willing to change would survive; meanwhile, this sector would be supplemented by the

¹² In economic terms, Ireland was inextricably linked to the UK. Its level of dependence is perhaps best illustrated by export and import figures. In the decade following the Second World War, on average, Ireland exported 89.2% of its goods to the UK, but only 5.5% to the Six. Import data is equally revealing, with average figures for the same post-war period revealing that Ireland sourced 51.5% of its goods from the UK, but only 8.3% from the Six.

¹³ Seán Lemass was Irish deputy prime minister and industry & commerce minister from 1957 to 1959, thereafter prime minister to 1966, while T. K. Whitaker was Irish finance secretary from 1956.

¹⁴ Lemass speech delivered to the National Agricultural and Industrial Development Association, 5 March 1958, as quoted in *Seanad Éireann parliamentary debates official report*, 27 March 1958, Volume 49 Columns 330-331.

introduction of overseas firms. At the same time, it was obvious that, in seeking to revolutionise the economy, changes would be beneficial in their own right, though they would also mark a long-term reorientation in the economy from being inward to outward-looking.

The focus of this change would be a redirection away from dependence on the UK to interdependence with Europe. The means of achieving this aim were not yet clear, especially when London flirted with the Six and actively excluded Ireland from the Seven because it suited them.¹⁵ The UK was happy with the agricultural benefits that it received from the Anglo-Irish relationship and the industrial benefits that it would receive from EFTA. Ireland was of course seriously worried that, as a member of EFTA, Denmark might receive substantial agricultural concessions from the UK.¹⁶ Additionally, there were domestic political implications for Ireland as a result of Portugal being in a position to join, but as was pointed out, "Ireland could not accept the obligations which it is likely Portugal will".¹⁷

As it turned out, despite its potential, EFTA did not meet Irish needs in agricultural terms, even if it seriously eroded industrial preferences in the UK market. Meanwhile, economics were beginning to come ahead of political considerations in Irish foreign policy decision-making. It was clearly time however for a change of leadership in Dublin, with the more proactive Lemass taking over from de Valera as *taoiseach* (prime minister); in turn, Jack Lynch became industry & commerce minister. The official Irish position regarding EFTA hardened as there was "little case for contemplating joining" but, as Dublin's suggestion of an Anglo-Irish FTA (AIFTA) was excluded for the time being, it soon became clear that a little more imagination was required.¹⁸ Irish thoughts therefore turned to the possibility of EEC membership instead, a move that would also become a national necessity if, and when, London decided to apply.

Relations with its neighbour were vital to its future, no matter what the scenario. Ireland was effectively in an economic union with the UK, "one from which she could not find

¹⁵ Dermot Keogh has argued that the UK "strongly encouraged" Irish membership of EFTA; D. KEOGH, *The diplomacy of 'dignified calm'*, p.85. But, this was not the case until some years after it had been created. In truth, both the UK and Sweden made sure that Ireland did not join in 1959. Hubert de Besche (Swedish foreign affairs deputy secretary) quoted in J. D. Brennan (Irish minister, Stockholm) to Con Cremin (Irish external affairs secretary), 29 May 1959, NA, Department of Foreign Affairs (D/FA), D/2/3Pt1.

¹⁶ Draft Irish Department of Finance memorandum, 8 July 1959, NA, D/T, S16674A/61.

¹⁷ UK Treasury note, 8 July 1959, Public Record Office, London (PRO), Records of the Cabinet Office (CAB), 134/1871.

¹⁸ Irish Industry & Commerce memorandum, 14 October 1959, NA, D/T, S15281T.

a way of disengaging".¹⁹ Indeed, despite having left the British Commonwealth more than a decade earlier, it was, to all intents and purposes, especially in economic terms, still a member. The UK was determined though not to treat the OEEC peripherals as a distinct entity or Ireland any better within that context.²⁰ In many ways a "millstone" around its neck, Ireland was relatively low on London's list of priorities, especially if the UK could maintain easy access for its industrial goods into the Irish market and continue to source cheap agricultural produce from there.²¹ On the other hand, in part seeing it as an escape-route from dependency, Ireland saw EEC membership as a reasonable step for it to take, especially if the UK itself applied. It was not as if Ireland would have had much of an alternative.

Attempted entry ... and exclusion

In the end, there were many reasons why Ireland tried to join and was then effectively excluded. Attempted entry into the EEC was a logical step in - what had been up until then - its disjointed European integration process. The facts are simple enough. It had always been clear in Irish circles that they faced four choices. If the UK applied to join the EEC, Ireland could do the same or do nothing; if the former decided not to apply, the latter still had a similar choice regarding whether or not it should apply. Ireland's four choices effectively boiled down to none once Harold Macmillan, the UK prime minister, informed the Irish that his government was finally going to make its move.²² Ireland had to apply too if it was going to protect its economic standing.

From an uncomfortable position on the sidelines at the turn of the decade, Ireland applied to join the EEC on 31 July 1961, knowing full well that the UK was itself about to do the same, as in fact happened on 10 August. Even though the London government applied ten days after Dublin, there was no disguising the fact that the Irish had applied because their neighbours were about to do so too.²³ Ireland's experience of

¹⁹ P. GERBET, *La construction de l'Europe*, Paris, 1983, p.294.

²⁰ UK Treasury note, 8 April 1959, PRO, CAB, 130/136.

²¹ Anthony Meyer (UK foreign office official) note, 6 June 1961, PRO, Records of the Foreign Office (FO), 371/158219.

²² Harold Macmillan (UK prime minister) to Lemass, 26 July 1961, NA, D/T, S16877N.

²³ The Dublin government had stolen a march on the UK; there is no suggestion here that these applications were synchronised. Quite the opposite, in fact; the Irish applied ten days earlier in order to make political capital. As Macmillan subsequently recorded, the "Prime Minister of Eire had made it clear that if Britain went into the Common Market his country would probably wish to do so". H. MACMILLAN, *At the end of the day, 1961-1963*, London, 1973, p.11. London had learned that it could not easily persuade the Irish to do its bidding in such matters; the latter had a way of choosing its own "appropriate moment" when making its choices in European matters, sometimes to the detriment of UK interests. H. A. F.

the negotiation process soon made it clear that it was a secondary consideration for the Six as well; indeed, the Irish suspected, with good reason, that - of the four applicants - they were fourth in line. Accession negotiations with the UK were not long in coming, opening in October 1961, before being followed by the Danes a month later and the Norwegians a year after that again. There had previously been mutterings in the Irish external affairs ministry that "we applied first".²⁴ But, it was wisely decided that it would be both rash and "impolitic to rush" the Six into a decision. The fear was that otherwise they "may take up the position suggested by the most negatively minded member, this being the line of least resistance".²⁵

In January and May 1962, Ireland was twice required to present its case for EEC membership at gruelling meetings in Brussels; indeed, the EEC Council of Ministers only decided in October 1962 to approve its proposal for negotiations to begin. At the start of that year, the *taoiseach* divided his presentation to the Council into two parts, one addressing political aims, another firmly centred on economic issues. However, he was not entirely convincing on either. His woolly political assertions - that the Irish "people have always tended to look to Europe for inspiration, guidance and encouragement" - were always going to need substantiation if his government was to convince the EEC regarding Ireland's propensity for membership. Following this up with an extensive list of economic difficulties, ills and needs, was not the best way to satisfy the EEC that Ireland was ready to join on that score either.²⁶ The Irish soon found themselves back in Brussels when the Council submitted a list of fifteen questions on aspects of their position upon which they needed further elucidation.

This second presentation saw senior Irish civil servants dealing with each of the issues raised by this questionnaire in front of the Six permanent representatives in Brussels. Rather suddenly, it was the economic aspects of Ireland's candidacy, rather than political aspects, that were attracting all the attention. By the spring of 1962, an important realisation was dawning on the Dublin government; it was economics, not so much politics, which was going to be the vital consideration in its case for full membership. Over the next few months, while continuing to allay any fears that it might have on Ireland's political capacity for entry - regarding its neutrality, for instance - the *taoiseach* concentrated on convincing the EEC

Rumbold (UK foreign office official) memorandum, 1 June 1961, PRO, FO, 371/158219.

²⁴ T. O'Carroll note (Irish external affairs official), 12 August 1961, NA, D/T, S168770/61.

²⁵ Whitaker to Cremin, 1 March 1962, NA, D/T, S17246D/62.

²⁶ Lemass speech to the EEC Council of Ministers, 18 January 1962, as quoted in D. J. MAHER, *op.cit.*, pp.375-385.

that there was nothing to worry about on either score.²⁷ Beginning with an invitation to prominent European and UK journalists to visit the country in September 1962, Lemass followed up this public relations coup with a tour of the main European capitals the following month. His efforts paid off when an official communication was issued by the Council to the effect that the Six had decided unanimously to accede to Ireland's entreaty to open accession negotiations.²⁸

The fact that the UK's application for membership was vetoed by Charles de Gaulle, the French president, less than three months later effectively meant that Irish efforts were somewhat in vain. Nonetheless, in the intervening eighteen months between its decision to apply for full membership and the UK's exclusion, the Dublin government had at least been preparing itself and the general population - specifically Irish agriculture and industry - for the exigencies that membership would require. With the prospect of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) there were obvious market benefits for the farming community, explaining why the National Farmers' Association and the agricultural lobby was so in favour of membership, but achieving greater efficiency and higher production levels was proving to be a problem. The opening up of the traditional UK agricultural market to European competition would mean that imaginative enterprise and rapid adaptation was required if Irish farmers and exporters were to be successful, something Lemass was keen to stress.²⁹ However, if the scenario facing agriculture presented an opportunity, the future for industry could be seen as a threat.³⁰

It was readily apparent that indigenous Irish industry was going to have to adapt or fail especially as it was felt that accession would be achieved by the end of the decade, the promulgation of "membership by 1970" a constant refrain.³¹ It was a case of modernising or dying and the *taoiseach* was quick to emphasise the need to adapt to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the industrial lobby.³² It was clear that the car assembly industry and textile production would suffer when

²⁷ In truth, by the time Lemass famously declared that Ireland was "prepared to yield even the technical label of neutrality" - seen by some as an impediment to Irish entry even though it had applied for full and not associate membership - the focus of EEC attention had shifted to its economic capacity. *New York Times*, 18 July 1962, as quoted in D. J. MAHER, *op cit*, p.152.

²⁸ Emilio Colombo (EEC Council president) to Lemass, 23 October 1962, NA, D/T, S17339/62.

²⁹ Lemass to Juan Greene (National Farmers' Association president), 13 July 1961, NA, D/T, S16877M/61.

³⁰ Matthew McCloskey (US ambassador, Dublin) to John F. Kennedy (US president), 14 September 1962, John F. Kennedy presidential library, Boston (JFK), Kennedy Papers (KP), NSC Box#18.

³¹ Lemass interview with the *Irish Independent*, 23 April 1965, NA, D/T, S17427Q.

³² D/T memorandum on a meeting held on 11 July 1961 between Lemass and a deputation from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 14 July 1961, NA, D/T, S16877N/61.

their places in Ireland's protected economy were exposed to the realities of liberalised trade. However, efficient industries, especially those benefiting from foreign direct investment, would prosper with the result that the gains to Irish industry from full EEC membership would outweigh the losses.³³

Essentially, Ireland was unable to join the EEC in 1963 because it was not possible for it to do so on its own. It was too economically dependent on the UK. Ireland's application was effectively tied to the fortunes of its neighbour. This was despite all declarations to the contrary.³⁴ If that was not the case, it could still have joined independently of London; indeed, the *taoiseach* had previously reassured the French president that Ireland wanted to enter whether or not the UK itself ultimately adhered.³⁵ It can be assumed that, just like the Danes, there were limited overtures for Ireland to press on with its application, but it was incapable of so doing. The "feasibility" of full membership had been considered.³⁶ But, without the UK's accession, it was not yet possible to join for economic reasons, though it was clear that the time would come. Excluded from EFTA four years earlier, Dublin subsequently realised that this was not necessarily a bad thing. It was quite sure however that it eventually wanted Ireland to join the EEC.

There were considerable domestic reasons why Ireland was being encouraged to take part in the European integration process, including parliamentary support and the lobbying done by informative pressure groups such as the Irish Council of the European Movement chaired by Garret FitzGerald, a respected economic and political commentator.³⁷ Obviously, there were external considerations as well, ranging from the support of the United States (US) for British and Irish entry to an understanding in London that the UK could not stand in Ireland's way.³⁸ Ostensibly, there was also support from the

³³ McCloskey to Kennedy, 14 September 1962, JFK, KP, NSC Box#18.

³⁴ Lemass speaking at a press conference, 5 September 1962, as quoted in D. J. MAHER, *op.cit.*, p.158. In fact, the *taoiseach* admitted as much when he said: "a failure of the British negotiations would require us to reconsider our position in the light of the circumstances which may then prevail". Lemass speech to the Cork Chamber of Commerce, 15 November 1962, NA, D/T, S17389/62Annex.

³⁵ Pierson Dixon (UK ambassador, Paris) to the Foreign Office, 17 October 1962, PRO, FO, 371/164772; Dixon to the Foreign Office, 19 October 1962, PRO, FO, 371/164772.

³⁶ Lemass to Seán MacBride (former Irish foreign minister), 7 May 1963, NA, D/T, S17427G/63; MacBride to Lemass, 10 June 1963, NA, D/T, S17427G/63; Lemass to MacBride, 13 June 1963, NA, D/T, S17427G/63.

³⁷ Garret FitzGerald (Irish Council of the European Movement chairman) to Whitaker, 29 April 1961, NA, D/T, S16023C/61. Of course, this supplemented the information that the government was receiving from diplomatic sources, but there is little evidence to suggest that this lobby group was particularly influential.

³⁸ Clearly, the US was particularly interested in the UK joining the EEC but, because Ireland had applied for full and not associate membership, it enjoyed a strong degree of US support as well. McCloskey to Kennedy, 14 September 1962, JFK, KP, NSC Box#18. At times, the UK's view of Ireland was more ambiguous and self-interested; indeed, surreptitious attempts to

Six, even if the institutions themselves were not always convinced of the propensity of such a move.³⁹ Ultimately, the decision lay with the Irish government and it was convinced that membership would be good for the country.

Third time lucky

At the third time of asking, Ireland managed to join the EEC, along with Denmark and the UK - the Norwegians demurring - during the first wave of enlargement in 1973. In some respects, partly because it was a peripheral, its entry was unique, but it has been argued here that this was not an exclusive or predestined phenomenon; indeed, Ireland's singularity might have as readily been interpreted as being as troublesome as it was appealing. The reality of this position begs an obvious question: why was Ireland allowed to join? Whitaker argued in 1962 that "nobody so loves us as to want us in the EEC on our own terms".⁴⁰ Indeed, why did it thus become the first peripheral to accede?

The role external and internal influences played cannot be underestimated. During the course of the 1960s, the Irish government worked very hard to make its case for membership convincing. However, it was not just a case of Ireland looking to Europe, as it was also paying full attention to matters closer to home and across the Irish Sea. As Roy Foster declares, it would indeed be "disingenuous" to argue that the European continent is more influential than Ireland's closest neighbour.⁴¹ So, who was responsible for this turn around in Irish fortunes and who or what were these powerful influences?

Certainly, Ireland would not have contemplated joining without the UK acceding as well; in reality, it would not have applied in the first place way back in 1961 if the latter had not indicated that it was about to do the same. It would have been an "economic disaster" for it to do otherwise.⁴² In the intervening period between initially applying and finally succeeding, the government had constantly been readying itself, as well as the rest of the country, for the uncertain vagaries that full EEC membership implied, while also readily acknowledging and recognising its real and inherent value. The effects, especially on industry, but also on agriculture, of

dissuade its attempted entry were made. Roderick Barclay (UK foreign office official) minutes, 18 & 21 July 1961, PRO, FO, 371/158220; Cremin memorandum, 26 July 1961, NA, D/T, S16877N/61.

³⁹ Florence O'Riordan (Irish chargé d'affaires ad interim, The Hague) report, 11 August 1961, NA, D/T, S168770/61; S. TOSCHI, *Washington - London - Paris: an Untenable Triangle (1960-1963)*, in: *Journal of European Integration History*, vol.1/2(1995), pp.81-109.

⁴⁰ Whitaker to Jack Lynch (Irish industry & commerce minister), 5 January 1962, NA, D/T, S16877X/62.

⁴¹ R. FOSTER, *Paddy and Mr Punch: connections in Irish and English history*, London, 1993, pp.31-32.

⁴² Whitaker to Lynch, 5 January 1962, NA, D/T, S16877X/62.

shifting the Irish economy from protectionism to liberalisation were to be profound.

In signing the AIFTA agreement in 1965, Ireland clearly demonstrated that it could compete on an even economic playing field with the UK, at the same time showing that bilateral Anglo-Irish political relations had finally matured beyond pubescence. Dublin was even prepared to take a step backwards towards further dependence on the UK in order to go two steps forward in the direction of interdependence with Europe.⁴³ This was readily recognised by the EEC, while confirming the view in Brussels that - though it might not have been joining as part of some UK package or addendum - Ireland was only now dealing with the reality of its economic situation. There was still some way to go in its transition from being a marginal consideration. In the lead up to - as well as during, their second and third applications - the Irish were very aware of the need to maintain close contact with the UK. At the same time, they had to work on their own case for membership, convincing the EEC that Ireland was ready to join when that became more feasible for its neighbour.⁴⁴

Closer to home, repeated calls by farmers and federalists for Ireland to join were tempered by the plight that indigenous industry faced. However, pure economics favoured membership. Countries like Italy and Germany were importing considerable quantities of Irish cattle and beef, even if Irish manufactured goods were slowly becoming more significant. In turn, Ireland was importing manufactured goods demanding high capital and technological input, including cars and scooters. Thus, the Six provided a ready market for Irish agricultural produce and a ready source for the consumer products its population demanded.

In political circles, the arguments for joining the EEC were already won. Even if the left was divided on the subject, the overwhelming majority of politicians in both houses of parliament recognised the inevitability and imperative behind accession. Persuading the Irish population that this was the case proved to be no mean feat. But, it was achieved with some style when over eighty-three per cent of the polled electorate

⁴³ As evidence of this, it is possible to point to a considerable change that took place in Irish trading patterns. During the years in which Lemass was *taoiseach*, the average figures for exports to the UK and the Six were 72.8% and 8.4% respectively; concurrently, import figures became 50.7% and 14.1%, proof of a significant economic reorientation. In fact, this was an ongoing pattern. Trade with the EEC increased dramatically in the period after its creation was mooted in 1955, when 4.4% of Irish goods went in that direction; on the eve of its third set of negotiations at the end of the 1960s, it stood at 11.3% of exports. In the same period, exports to the UK fell from 89.2% to 65.9%, a significant and ongoing decrease. All data comes from official figures to be found in CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE, *Ireland: trade and shipping statistics*, Dublin, volume published in 1959, pp.5-10; vol.1969, pp.16-17 and 26-27; and vol.1970, pp.14-15.

⁴⁴ Irish embassy (Brussels) report, 27 January 1965, NA, D/T, S17427Q/62; Department of the Taoiseach report, 24 March 1965, NA, D/T, S17427Q/62.

voted in favour of acceding less than five months after Ireland signed the Treaty of Accession on 22 January 1972. Efforts throughout the previous decade had proved to be worthwhile and - even if it has been viewed in retrospect - it has rightly been argued that "one can scarcely doubt the economic advantage (...) of the time gained through the reluctance of France (...) to see Great Britain in the EEC".⁴⁵ Ireland effortlessly slipped from the boundaries to the heart of the EEC once the UK entered too.

Opportunity or threat?

It is clear that, once the debate focused on the choices Ireland faced, the argument regarding whether or not it should join the EEC came down to determining the costs and benefits on two separate interlinked levels: one economic, the other political.⁴⁶ Obviously, it was crucial to determine whether integration presented an opportunity or posed a threat. In the end however, it was just a matter of weighing up the economic advantages against the political price of membership.

Economically, the advantages had been made clear at the outset, even if the realities of the situation were rather passed over at times. The reasons behind its application to join the EEC in the first place remained as valid, perhaps even more so, when the second and third attempts were made. Simply put, Ireland needed to continue the radical revamp of its economy. Certainly, agriculture stood to gain from the CAP, while inefficient industry would undoubtedly fail in the face of liberalisation. Outside investment would in turn create jobs to replace those that would be lost, leading it was hoped to the steady alleviation of emigration, poverty and unemployment.

Of course, this new situation would institute a reliance on multinationals and footloose industries with all of their inherent disadvantages, but that was a price that was considered worth paying. It would also create interdependence with Europe rather than establishing the autarky of myth; again, this was preferable to absolute reliance on the UK. By this stage Minister for Foreign Affairs, Garret FitzGerald argued in the early 1970s that, though "economic dependence" on the UK had proved to be "unfavourable" to Ireland, "the general economic and trading relationship between the two countries will (...) necessarily be determined on a Community basis [within the EEC]".⁴⁷ They would thus be on a much more equal footing.

Over a quarter of a century since Ireland joined and half a century since its inception, the EU continues to offer the

⁴⁵ T. K. WHITAKER, *From protection to free trade: the Irish experience*, in: *Administration*, 21/4, 1973, pp.405-423.

⁴⁶ IRISH COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN MOVEMENT, *Opportunity: Ireland and Europe*, Dublin, 1972, p.5.

⁴⁷ G. FITZGERALD, *Towards a new Ireland* Dublin 1973, p.161.

country an economic escape-route away from dependence on the UK. In 1973, two-thirds of Irish exports still went in that direction; those arguing in favour of joining the EEC saw alleviating this degree of reliance as one of the main benefits of membership. The UK nevertheless remains as economically important to Ireland today as the rest of the EU member states put together, one third of Irish exports going in each of these two directions. At the same time, dependency on the UK has been replaced by a greater sense of interdependency with the EU. As a peripheral, Ireland has thus attained what it set out to achieve - equality and individuality within a collective.

During the decade and a half following the signing of the Treaties of Rome, Anglo-Irish political relations have improved to such a degree that it is possible to remark that they have hardly ever been better. Bilateral contrivance on many policies has since been unmistakable, even if Ireland has generally demonstrated a greater degree of sophistication and far-sightedness when dealing with its EU partners. The economic balance sheet had clearly shown that accession to the EEC would be favourable to Ireland. However, this just meant that questions regarding politics were explained away or ignored, even if there was no doubt but that the government was prepared to make the difficult decisions if and when required. This was a policy that Jack Lynch continued once he took over as *taoiseach* in November 1966.

Political considerations - such as its military neutrality, an independent stance in international organisations, sovereignty, the partitioning of the island of Ireland, *et cetera* - needed to be addressed or demonstrated to be of secondary importance in the different sets of negotiations.⁴⁸ It was crucial for Irish supporters of European integration to stress the various economic benefits - such as access to the CAP or the possibility of acquiring regional and structural funds - while emphasising that Ireland would have a "seat at the table" afforded by full EC membership. In the process, it would no longer have to rely on unevenly balanced bilateral relations with the UK. In this endeavour, successive Dublin governments have proved to be very successful.

None of Ireland's traditional political positions, regarded as central to an independent foreign policy line during and after the Second World War, were allowed to get in

⁴⁸ The neutrality issue is a particularly fine instance of the government downplaying, what had been up until the 1960s, a fundamental pillar of Irish foreign policy in return for economic advancement. Another good example was the transformation of its radical agenda at the United Nations into that of a more conformist participant. M. FITZGERALD, *Irish neutrality and European integration, 1960-1972*, in: M. GEHLER and R. STEININGER (eds.), *Die Neutralen und die europäische Integration, 1945-1995*, Vienna, 2000, pp.144-172; J. M. SKELLY, *Irish diplomacy at the United Nations, 1945-1965: national interests and the international order*, Dublin, 1997.

the way of an economically advantageous *quid pro quo*. Irish politicians have thus expended, but not wasted, substantial time and energy in directing the foreign policy agenda away from the political to the economic. This switch in emphasis was no doubt overdue. It was also considered worthwhile and has undeniably moved Ireland from the geographical periphery to the mainstream of integration.

Conclusions

In the fifteen years from its creation to its first enlargement, Ireland's relationship with the EEC radically transformed from that of outsider to equal member. Europe became a focal point for government policy despite, perhaps even because of, its experiences. These included the traumatic phase of economic stagnation that occurred during the 1950s, disappointment regarding its utter rebuff by EFTA later that decade, the EEC's outright indifference to its candidacy in the early 1960s, and the AIFTA's express implications for it from the middle of that decade onwards. Once it had domestic and Anglo-Irish affairs in order, it looked further afield towards EC membership with a certain degree of openness, even if a large degree of opportunism - both economic and political - was allied to this determination.

The impact of full membership on all areas of Irish life has been extraordinary. It has been argued here that this has been especially revealing in foreign policy terms. The EEC indisputably played a major role in shifting emphasis away from outdated political considerations to encouraging the government to give the lead in dealing more effectively with the requirements of a rapidly modernising world economy. This direction, which had been lacking for most of the 1950s, burst into life as the result of a number of factors, both internal and external, so that the 1970s opened with Ireland in a reasonably comfortable - and certainly a more confident - position. It was now ready to take on the responsibilities and face the challenges that would inevitably present themselves. Indisputably, the EEC was central to this set of changes, Ireland experiencing a reformation in its outlook and, in time, how it is itself perceived. Slowly but surely, the Irish learned a valuable lesson; no matter how historic, principled or worthy the politics, the economic periphery can be a very lonely place indeed.

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