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Irish Foreign Policy

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for

Ireland on the World Stage
William Crotty and David Schmitt (eds.)

1. Introduction – small state in a big world

After decades of disillusionment, the people and government of the Republic of Ireland (hereafter, 'Ireland') have begun to reassess their role and identity in the international system. The Irish state is no longer exclusively defined through its position (mental and geographic) as an "island behind an island." While a shared and complex history may always make relationships with Ireland's nearest neighbour problematic, the pursuit of, or flight from, British norms is a decreasing feature of debates in public policy. In its stead is a greater self confidence, an attempt to reach out to other European and small state models and a general ambition to orient the state and its society outwards towards all azimuths rather than eastwards.

All of this has a bearing on how the Irish see themselves in the wider world. On the one hand this has been welcomed as an overdue normalisation of Irish society. The increasing 'cosmopolitanism' and internationalisation of Irish culture, secularisation of its society and the 'Europeanisation' of Irish public policy making are three of the most widely (and often positively) cited features of this development. At the same time, however, notes of caution have also been sounded. Rapid economic growth and a cultural predisposition towards holding authority in contempt has, it is argued, made Irish society more selfish, less open and less sensitive to the plight of those marginalised at home and abroad.

In foreign policy terms this has been translated as marking the start of a 'Europeanised' phase in Irish foreign policy. Irish policy makers – whether Ministers or newly minted civil servants – are swiftly incorporated into a dense, highly structured and intensive foreign policy making framework of consultation, co-ordination and joint action. This does not assume that a 'national' foreign policy is being lost or that policy makers have abrogated their duty to defend the national interest. Instead, it argues that the definition and pursuit of national interest is now managed through a European context that has implications for the content and conduct of Irish foreign policy.

Those who study and write on Irish foreign policy appear to be divided. Some argue that Ireland's changing place in the world has been a function of individual choices. Thus, they map Ireland's course through the choppy seas of international politics by reference to the personalities and preferences of its political leaders and senior officials. These detailed, narrative stories centre, for example, around the efforts of

W.T. Cosgrave to redefine the British Empire (Harkness, 1969; Mansergh, 1969), Eamon de Valera's determination to rewrite the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and to sustain Irish neutrality (Keogh, 1990; MacMahon, 1983; Bowman, 1982), Sean MacBride's fusion of partition with neutrality (McCabe, 1991), Frank Aiken's stewardship of the golden age of Irish diplomacy at the UN (MacQueen, 1983; Skelly, 1997) and Ireland's introduction to the global economy by Sean Lemass.

Other writers look for their explanations in Ireland's geo-strategic position. Here the predominant issue is Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom. It is argued that the roots of Irish foreign policy are to be found in the necessary fixation of Irish foreign policy makers with their closest neighbour. This fixation is not one of choice but one of political geography (Sloan, 1997) and it thereby determines the range of available foreign policy choices. Irish policy, for example, has been analysed as being an attempt to fabricate independence from meaningless UN votes and vacuous political declarations (Sharp, 1990). Similarly, the most striking feature of Irish foreign and security policy – its neutrality – has been dismissed as being devoid of real substance and an almost adolescent effort to distinguish the state from its ancient enemy (Salmon, 1989)

Finally, some writers see domestic factors as illuminating the course of Irish foreign policy. In these analyses, foreign policy is a function of competing domestic claims that are adjudicated through government. Such writers focus upon the manipulation of foreign policy issues for party political gain (Keatinge, 1984), the role of interest groups in defining the policy agenda (Hederman, 1983) and the capacity of bureaucratic and political elites to rethink Irish economic and political interests (Maher, 1986).

What all of these approaches lack, however, is an interest in linking changes in the Irish State's international role with a transformation of its identity. If such a linkage were to be made then the story of Irish foreign policy would not simply be based upon an historical excavation of individual, strategic or domestic interests but would be rooted in a changing sense of self and an evolving set of collective beliefs. This is also a point evident to policy makers. In 1996 the then Foreign Minister, introducing the first comprehensive White Paper on Irish Foreign Policy, argued that it 'is about much more than self-interest. The elaboration of our foreign policy is also a matter of self-definition – simply put, it is for many of us a statement of the kind of people that we are' (Dáil Debates, 463:1273).

If the 'Irish' define themselves differently at the start of this century than they did at the beginning of the last, then surely this has had consequences for the way in which that people, through their state, relates to the rest of the world? Moreover, what is the impact of these changing international relationships (and perceptions thereof) upon collective understandings of what it is to be Irish? Simply by making this linkage we open up new questions in the study of Irish foreign policy and present a new framework from which Irish foreign policy can be analysed.

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2. Structures – an overburdened system

The central constitutional place of the Government in the conduct of the State's external relations makes the cabinet an obvious starting point in any analysis of the structures behind the Irish foreign policy process. In constitutional terms, the cabinet is collectively responsible for all government policy while individual ministers are responsible before the Dáil for all decisions and actions of their departments. Within the cabinet a number of departments and ministers are involved in the broad sweep

of Irish foreign policy formulation. While specific foreign policy proposals are brought for approval to the cabinet table by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, these may require extensive consultation and subsequent negotiation with other Departments responsible for some aspect of that proposal's implementation. Crucially, while policy may be initially defined collectively around the cabinet table, it is more often than not executed through the collective policy making structures of the European Union.

Within the cabinet itself there are no permanent, dedicated structures for foreign policy making. The only exception here are various cabinet subcommittees which have been responsible either for EU policy co-ordination on specific issues (such as the 1992 EU Single Market Plan, the 1996 and 2000 Intergovernmental Conferences on EU treaty reform or the Agenda 2000 negotiations on EU budgetary and policy reform) or administrative issues such as preparation for an Irish Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers. The membership of these committees has varied from government to government, and they have had no permanent status or any independent secretariat.

Turning to individual government departments with specific duties related to the conduct of foreign policy, the Department of Finance is a significant actor at both the European and national levels. In its European context it has responsibilities through the ECOFIN Council for setting and agreeing the parameters of the EU budget. In foreign policy terms this impinges upon EU spending on development co-operation, emergency relief operations, technical aid and assistance programmes and the funding of certain types of actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union. The Department also has specific responsibilities for the operation of structural and cohesion funds in Ireland and works through ECOFIN and its subcommittees in support of the monetary and fiscal policies underpinning the euro as Europe's single currency.

At national level the Department has the central role in setting government spending plans and overseeing individual departmental budgets and personnel policies. This gives the Department a direct input to foreign policy. It is centrally involved in decisions on issues such as the opening and closure of overseas missions, the size of the bilateral Overseas Development Aid budget, the scope and extent of training offered to members of the Diplomatic Service and the shape of promotional structures within the department. In sum, any foreign policy proposal that involves a charge upon public funds must be approved by the Department of Finance and, if not, by the cabinet as a whole

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment also has an input to Irish foreign policy at both European and national levels. Within the Union, the Department has, alongside its EU partners, key policy making functions in respect of bilateral trade agreements, multilateral trade negotiations and regulation of the single market. At the national level the Department chairs meetings of the Foreign Earnings Committee (FEC). It is the FEC that seeks to co-ordinate the activities of Irish trade and investment promotion agencies overseas. The FEC also has a crucial role to play in advising on the establishment of Irish diplomatic missions overseas. Here the Department's contribution is based upon its judgement of the economic potential that any new mission might be able to offer. This, in turn, is based upon the views of the executive agencies involved in trade and investment promotion. The Department also has an important national role in licensing the export of goods that have dual (military/civilian) use to third countries.

The Department of Agriculture and Food's contribution to foreign policy making is centred upon its European involvement. Here, the Department is involved in decision making that has the effect of setting product prices in major sectors of the European agricultural market. It also contributes significantly to collective Union policymaking in bilateral and multilateral trade and agricultural assistance programmes to third countries. The Department is also active at the national level of policy making through its direct involvement with the multilateral agencies of the United Nations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation. Many of the executive agencies for which the Department is responsible are also actively engaged in trade promotion overseas.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is another with foreign policy responsibilities rooted in its European activities. With the 1993 establishment of the 'Third Pillar' of EU policy responsibility in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, the Department formally participates in European level policy making in areas related to migration, refugees, asylum, cross-border police co-operation and co-operation between criminal law agencies (Barrett, 1996 and Regan, 2000). At the national level the Department takes lead responsibility for handling requests for asylum status and dealing with refugees. It is also deeply involved in security issues related to the peace process in Northern Ireland and here its work is directly and closely co-ordinated with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and that of the Taoiseach.

The role of the Department of Defence in foreign policy making is rooted primarily in the national level but it also has an emerging European focus. EU defence ministers first met collectively in 1998. Within the institutional frameworks established under the 2000 Nice Treaty, they meet more regularly alongside their counterparts in national foreign ministries to establish and develop the 60,000-strong European Rapid Reaction Force. Contributing to the political and operational direction of that force, senior military staffs now also participate in a range of new institutional structures based in Brussels. At national level the Department has a key function in supporting Irish participation in various international peacekeeping missions and maintaining security along the land border. Traditionally, peacekeeping missions were restricted under Irish law to duties of a police character. However, the 1993 Defence Act dropped this restriction to facilitate an Irish contribution to the UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM). It also made possible participation in UN-mandated but NATO-led operations in Bosnia and Kosovo and other multilateral operations such as that in East Timor. The budget of the Permanent Defence Forces (PDF) is also administered and managed through the Department.

For its part, the Department of the Taoiseach is in somewhat of a unique position. As 'first among equals' within the cabinet, it is the Taoiseach who chairs the weekly cabinet meetings and who is ultimately responsible for setting the overall political agenda of the Government. In a European context, the Department contributes to Irish foreign policy making through the European Council and its six-monthly summit meetings. Among many other functions, the European Council is responsible for setting the strategic parameters of the Union's own Common Foreign and Security Policy and its emerging Common European Security and Defence Policy. At a national foreign policy level, the Department takes the lead in all negotiations on Northern Ireland and associated constitutional issues. Officials within this department work closely with colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs to co-ordinate negotiating positions through the Anglo-Irish Conference/British-Irish Council, bilaterally with the British Government and with other parties in Northern Ireland.

The striking feature of cabinet and departmental involvement in the foreign policy process is its fragmented nature. There is no equivalent of a National Security Council or any sustained, co-ordinated approach to foreign policy formulation. The only substantial cabinet-level foreign policy structures relate to the EU and even here the approach is largely an ad hoc one. Senior policy makers argue that this lack of cabinet and interdepartmental structures reflect the small size of the Irish administration, the high degree of personal familiarity at senior levels within that administration and a underlying political hostility towards hierarchies and 'heavy bureaucracies'.

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ministers of State

In common with all other government ministers, the Minister for Foreign Affairs is formally appointed by the President, on the nomination of the Taoiseach. From 1921 to 2000 just 20 men have held this post and in that 79-year period ministers from just one party, Fianna Fáil, have held office for a total of about 50 years.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs may be said traditionally to have had four key roles. The first is a managerial one in which the Minister directs, and is held accountable to the Dáil for, the actions of the Department and of the officials within that Department. The second role is that of policymaker. The Minister's responsibility here is to offer direction to the state's external relations and to work with cabinet colleagues in pursuit of agreed foreign policy objectives. The third role is that of spokesperson. Here the Minister represents the interests of the Department and its staff around the cabinet table, in negotiation with other ministers, in the Oireachtas and to the broader public. Finally, the Minister's role is that of a representative of the state. The Minister's function in this instance is to negotiate with the representatives of other governments both bilaterally and through multilateral fora in pursuit of policy objectives.

These roles have changed over time and become increasingly complex as the Department has grown both politically and physically. As Minister for External Affairs in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, for example, it was unremarkable for Frank Aiken to spend upwards of six to eight weeks in New York attending the General Assembly of the United Nations. At that time the Minister's policy responsibilities were quite narrow, were seen to be distant from day to day political priorities at home and were seen largely within the context of just one major international organisation. At the start of the 21st century, by contrast, the Minister for Foreign Affairs' policy responsibilities are broad and deep, impact directly and often immediately upon domestic political interests and are conducted within a much denser institutional framework centred upon membership of the European Union.

The managerial role has perhaps been the subject of the least substantive change. The Minister continues to direct the actions of officials within the Department of Foreign Affairs and continues to be held accountable for those actions before the Dáil. However, participation in the EU's policy-making machinery has contributed to pressure for departmental reform such as additional training demands from staff and to some increases in resources. Second, although the direct accountability of the Minister to the Dáil is formally unchanged, it has been argued that foreign policy formulation at EU level has made it more difficult to hold ministers to account (Tonra, 1996).

It is in the Minister's role as policymaker that perhaps the greatest evolution has occurred. While the Minister continues to work with cabinet colleagues in offering direction to Ireland's external relations and the pursuit of agreed national policy objectives, the Minister pursues many of these within a European context. The

Minister is responsible for working with the Taoiseach at the level of the European Council to offer a political direction to the Union as whole that fits in with Ireland's own strategic interests. He also acts as a policy advocate within the General Affairs Council when it discusses issues under the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In the role of spokesperson, the Minister's duties have also expanded in a European context. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is now an advocate of the Union in Ireland and of Ireland in the Union. The former function is especially important in the context of successive referenda to ratify Irish accession to amending European Union treaties. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, alongside the Taoiseach, has traditionally taken a leading political role in referenda campaigns to support ratification of the various European treaties.

The Minister's representative role has been partially redefined by virtue of EU membership. In the first instance, the successful conduct of EU Council Presidencies has been a top priority of Irish governments since accession to the European Communities in 1973. A key ministerial function of such presidencies is the representation of the Union internationally. This representative function is a highly prized aspect of EU membership since it is one that offers a level of international profile to the Minister, the Department, the government and the state that would otherwise be unobtainable. Senior officials argue that this has the effect of increasing the political weight of Irish foreign policy makers in third countries.

With such an expansion and change in the role of Ministers it is hardly surprising that a major challenge is their capacity physically to fulfil all of these roles as well as those deriving from an exclusively Irish context – and in particular the pursuit of peace in Northern Ireland. To date, however, the only structural assistance provided has been the appointment of one or more junior ministers (Ministers of State) assigned either exclusively or partly to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Since the early 1980s junior ministers at the Department of Foreign Affairs have tended to cover one of two functional areas of responsibility, either development aid or European affairs. In neither area have such junior ministers succeeded in achieving for themselves a significant political profile although the European affairs portfolio – which has been either jointly or exclusively assigned to the Department of the Taoiseach – has been perceived as a platform for later ministerial preferment. To date, no junior minister responsible for development aid has made it to the cabinet table

Department of Foreign Affairs

The Department of External Affairs was established by legislation in 1923. By 1934 there were just 15 officials accommodated in a hallway of the Department of Agriculture building while the Department's budget amounted to just 0.34 percent of government expenditure (Keogh, 1982). Sixty-six years later the full complement of officials in the Department amounted to just under 1,000 persons divided almost equally between headquarters staff based at Iveagh House and those posted to overseas missions. Expenditure on the Department and its activities in 1999 amounted to just under 0.5 percent of total government spending while the Department oversaw diplomatic relations with a total of 95 countries through a network of 53 overseas resident missions.

The Department's early political profile was initially built around its pursuit of what might be called constitutional diplomacy. Until the state was declared to be a Republic in

1948, the Department and its officials played a comparatively significant role in establishing the legal and political status of the state within the League of Nations, the British Empire and later the British Commonwealth (Kennedy, 1996 and McMahon, 1983). At the end of the 1939-1945 war the Department was essentially re-tooled as a public relations agent whose aim was to direct international attention to the inequities of the partition of the island of Ireland and to support the Irish Government's position on the re-unification of the 'national territory' (Cruise-O'Brien, 1969). With UN membership in 1956 the Department's horizons were broadened and it played a key role in developing Ireland's international profile on issues such as disarmament, support for UN peacekeeping missions and decolonisation (MacQueen, 1983; Holmes, Rees and Whelan, 1992).

It was membership of the European Communities, however, that brought the Department into the mainstream of Irish government. The newly titled Department of Foreign Affairs led the accession negotiations for EC entry in 1970-1972 and was given the central co-ordinating role for policy towards the EC by taking over the chair of the Cabinet's European Community Committee. This had the effect of putting the Department at the heart of domestic socio-economic policymaking (Sharp, 1993: 111). At the same time the gradual development of foreign policy co-operation among the EC member states provided an additional rationale for an expansion in the diplomatic infrastructure of the Department and increased staffing levels within the Political Division.

The small size of the diplomatic corps (less than 300 individuals), the limited number of overseas postings (53 resident missions), and the linkage of specific postings to specific grades poses major staffing difficulties for Departmental managers. In the first instance, recruitment to the Department has occurred in episodic waves. This has given rise to demographic bulges within certain grades. As a result, the scope for highly competent and otherwise ambitious officials to be 'stranded' at mid-level grades is considerable.

Another problematic issue for departmental managers is gender. Until 1972 all women were required by law to resign from the civil service upon marriage. This policy had the obvious effect of eliminating most women from senior grades in both the general service and the diplomatic corps. The end of the marriage 'bar', however, did not result in equality within the Department. A review of data for headquarters staff in 1998 reveals that, on average, men occupied 75 percent of all diplomatic grade posts. The situation was even worse overseas. At the Assistant Secretary (Ambassador) grade 90 percent of overseas posts were held by men compared to 70 percent at the same grade among headquarters staff.

The eight Divisions in the Department reflect its functional duties. The Administration and Consular Division is responsible for the consular needs of Irish citizens overseas and for the management of the Department's own resources, both human and material. The Anglo-Irish Division is primarily occupied with the conduct of policy towards Northern Ireland and, as a consequence, bilateral relations with the United Kingdom. The Development Co-operation Division manages and evaluates all official aid and assistance programmes to the developing world. The Economic Division directs policy on external economic relations and also takes lead responsibility for co-ordinating the Irish position on EU domestic policy issues, including treaty and institutional reform. The Inspectorate Division was set up in 1992 and is tasked with the performance evaluation of departmental units and the conduct of a rolling 4-year programme of on-the-spot audits of all overseas missions. The responsibility of the Legal Division is to provide advice on matters of international law and treaty obligations. The Political Division is responsible for the conduct of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in areas such as security and disarmament policy and human rights. It is also tasked with

leading the Irish contribution to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Finally, the Protocol and Cultural Division manages all state and official visits, advises on protocol issues and is responsible for bilateral cultural relations.

The focus of Irish foreign policy is directed towards Anglo-Irish relations and general political issues – including the United Nations and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Approximately one half of all headquarters' diplomatic staff are assigned almost equally between the Anglo-Irish and Political Divisions. The Economic Division and the Development Co-operation Division with 18 and 13 diplomatic grade staff respectively are the other substantial units within the Department. Others, such as Administration may have more staff, but these are overwhelmingly drawn from the general service rather than diplomatic grades.

A dedicated Human Rights Unit, which was established in 1997 within the Department's Political Division is significant for what it illustrates about the growing links between the Department and the NGO community. Through the 17 member Joint Department of Foreign Affairs/NGO Standing Committee on Human Rights the Unit has established a vigorous bilateral dialogue with the NGO community. Since 1998 the unit also sponsors an annual NGO Forum on Human Rights which brings together NGO activists as well as academics, politicians and Department officials to discuss human rights issues and to nominate two NGO representatives onto the Standing Committee (the other 15 members being nominated by the Department). The Unit's significance rests particularly upon its positive and direct engagement with the NGO community. As the Minister of State, Liz O'Donnell argued at the 1998 conference 'modern governments can only be enhanced by strong links and regular dialogue with the NGO community' (Dáil Debates, 489: 812)

Throughout the 1990s there were debates on structural reform in the Department. One of the most significant of these is related to its functional sub-division. The primary distinction is that between the 'political' and 'economic' divisions. The perceived utility of such a division is related to a traditional diplomatic distinction between foreign policy and foreign economic policy. The question that arises is whether or not a geographic 'desk' system might be more logical where regional or country 'desks' bring together diplomats responsible for both economic and political relations.

In the EU, so long as a clear distinction was maintained between the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union and the conduct of its external economic relations, the rationale for maintaining a functional differentiation within the Department was a strong one. However, following the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice treaties, these two policy realms are being brought increasingly together. For example, diplomats from Iveagh House are now participating in a single set of Brussels-based foreign policy working groups constructed from two previously parallel systems. In addition, the General Affairs Council now deals with a single agenda drawn up by the committee of member states' Permanent Representatives in Brussels (COREPER) instead of facing two - one dealing with EC international trade matters and a second on CFSP. The logic of such a development would suggest that the Department will have to consider its own structural change so as to engage effectively with those in Brussels. The Danish foreign ministry, for example, was reorganised along this principle in 1991 and, according to the Department's Permanent Secretary, Henrik Wohlk, this was in direct response to the evolution in EU foreign policy structures (Jørgensen, 1997).

Another major structural issue is the position of the Development Co-operation Division. That division manages a spending programme three times the size of the Department's own budget. Despite the sometimes specialised nature of activity in this division, officials working there are rotated with the same regularity and with the same

determination to avoid excessive 'specialisation' as those elsewhere in the Department. Some senior officials and many spokespersons for major development NGOs see a logic in spinning that division off from the department and establishing it as a stand-alone executive agency. Such an agency would have its own management structure, hire its own professional staff and be held accountable to the Dáil on the same basis as other executive agencies. One central counter-argument raised by senior departmental officials is the impact of such a move on the promotional prospects of diplomats. The loss of diplomatic posts from that Division and its associated overseas assignments would seriously exacerbate existing staff difficulties.

3. policy process – a modest democratisation in view

The starting point for any analysis of democratic control of the foreign policy process is parliament. Despite constitutional claims to the contrary, the Oireachtas (parliament) is a servant of the executive rather than its master (Gallagher, 1996: 126). Weak committees, powerful party whips and an electoral system that is seen to reward local constituency work over national legislative activism all serve to undermine the capacity of the Oireachtas to hold the executive to account. Thus, traditional analyses of Irish foreign policy have tended to downplay both the role and the significance of the Oireachtas in the conduct of foreign policy (Keatinge, 1973).

In 1990 one former Minister for Foreign Affairs, described the Oireachtas as being 'the least developed legislature in the European Community' and noted that it was unique in Europe in having no parliamentary committee to consider foreign affairs (Dáil Debates, 396: 1638). The 1974 establishment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Secondary Legislation of the European Communities had been the first parliamentary foray into what might be described as foreign policy and this was only the second Joint Oireachtas Committee ever to be established. That committee did not, however, succeed in developing a strong political profile for itself.

Not until 1993 was a Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs (FAC) finally established. It was constructed from the creation of two parliamentary select committees – one each from the Dáil and the Seanad and provision was also made for Irish members of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to attend but not vote in meetings.

Meeting very often weekly during the parliamentary term, the new committee quickly established its own precedents and working methods. Initially, its work included that previously conducted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Secondary Legislation of the European Communities and a subcommittee was established for that purpose. By 1995, however, it was judged that this division of labour was unsatisfactory and a separate Joint Committee on European Affairs (EAC) was established. The remit of the latter was also extended beyond European legislative scrutiny to include any matter arising from Irish membership of the Union. In addition, this committee was given the mandate to represent the Oireachtas in meetings and activities of the inter-parliamentary Conference of European Affairs Committees (COSAC) within the European Union.

According to its members, the Foreign Affairs Committee can be characterised as being only a partially successful experiment in parliamentary supervision. The committee's strengths flow from its ability to set its own agenda, to review policy in greater detail than is possible within either the Dáil or the Seanad and the committee's generally non-partisan approach. At the same time, the committee's weaknesses are seen to be rooted in its limited resources, its consequent

dependence upon the executive, the broad and shallow nature of its agenda and its failure to engage successfully with the public through the media.

Many of the central weaknesses identified by members are a function of the committee's structure. In 1999 it was composed of 20 Oireachtas members (14 from the Dáil and 6 from the Seanad). Despite its size, the committee has no substantial secretariat, no independent research staff and, until the appointment in 2000 of a parliamentary law officer, it had to rely upon the Government's own Attorney General for any legal advice. The senior staff that work with the committee are often seconded from the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Committee itself can offer no long-term job security or career advancement to its staff since its life span is limited to the 5 year maximum constitutional life of the Dáil itself.

This paucity of back-up support means that the agenda of the committee tends to be broad but shallow. Unlike most other committees, it does not have a ready made agenda flowing from the passage of legislation and members, therefore, rarely have the chance to involve themselves in the nitty gritty of legislative amendment and formulation. In reaction to this limitation and its lack of resources, the Committee has come to rely upon the contribution of consultant experts commissioned to write draft reports on issues of interest. These reports are debated within the committee and may or may not be linked to public hearings. They are then published as formal reports of the committee.

Apart from any direction provided by the Chairperson, the committee's focus is in large part driven by the organisations that contact it according to several members. TDs and Senators receiving communications from NGOs tend to pass these on to the committee as specific agenda items that then may form the basis of a hearing or even a series of hearings. The witnesses or experts brought before such hearings are themselves often identified or even provided by the NGOs that made the initial contact. This creates what was described by one member as a 'somewhat incestuous circle' of policy insiders and was a process that, according to another member was a boon to 'professional sore-heads'.

The breadth of the committee's agenda is illustrated well in its 1998 work programme, characterised by one member as looking more like a 'wishlist rather than a programme'. It covered 28 separate topics divided amongst five categories of issues (both thematic and geographic). The size of the committee's agenda meant that there wasn't, according to another member 'a hope in hell of getting through it and little point even if we did.' This latter point underscores serious dissatisfaction, often expressed as a sort of weary resignation, that the work of the committee, while worthy, has little or no substantive policy impact or public profile.

Many members feel that the work of the committee is rarely if ever a factor in policy formulation. The general view appears to be that at best the committee is treated 'with respect and politeness.' For some, the fault is seen to rest at least in part with the committee itself. One member argues that the committee's tendency to flit from one issue to the next with no concrete follow-up and little original research leaves very little for the media to get their teeth into. Most members, however, feel that the media, both print and broadcast, give the Oireachtas as a whole very little attention and parliamentary committee's even less so.

More traditional mechanisms of parliamentary oversight reflect many of the same weaknesses evident in the work of the committees. The use of Parliamentary Questions in the Dáil for example, highlights the fact that members' interests tend to be driven by media and NGO interest. What is especially striking in the pattern of parliamentary

questions addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs is that the contemporary focus of Irish parliamentary interest in foreign policy is to be found in the Asia Pacific region. Of approximately 551 individual Parliamentary Questions (written and oral) submitted to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1998 just under 20 percent focused on this single region and especially East Timor and Indonesia, Tibet and China and Burma-Myanmar.

Questions related to Northern Ireland accounted for 14 percent of the total with those directed towards Anglo-Irish relations making up an additional 11 percent. The majority of questions in these two categories were concerned with ongoing peace negotiations and the position of the Irish Government on many of the matters associated with them. A significant minority, however, were preoccupied with what might be categorised as 'sovereignty' issues: alleged border incursions by Northern Ireland and British security forces, delays in re-opening border roads, general complaints against the security forces and specific queries about the status of Irish prisoners in UK jails. The balance of questions concerned political issues in other parts of the world: the Middle East and Africa 12 percent, Western Europe (including Turkey) 10 percent, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America both 8 percent.

When questions are categorised on the basis of functional (rather than geographic) interest it is evident that political issues predominate overwhelmingly. More than 22 percent of questions in 1998 asked the Minister for his political assessment of events in areas of tension or conflict. Many if not most of these questions appear to have been driven by media reports. The second major category of questions, 17 percent of the total, related specifically to human rights issues. Security and disarmament were the focus of 14 percent of questions with a substantial proportion here related to Irish neutrality and perceived threats thereto.

At the interface between parliament and executive it is also interesting to note that while Ministers for Foreign Affairs (in the period 1993-1999) have devoted between 20 and 30 percent of their annual estimates' speech to issues related to EU membership, less than eight per cent of parliamentarians' contributions have touched upon this set of issues. For them, the areas of greatest interest were related to security and defence (26 percent), Northern Ireland (23 percent), Departmental structures and administration (23 percent), human rights (11 percent) and the United Nations (9 percent).

In sum, while the scope for parliamentary scrutiny over foreign policy has expanded considerably, the depth of its penetration into the policy process is as yet marginal. The potential of the parliamentary committees has not been fully exploited. They are seen by their members and by officials and ministers as being peripheral to the policy process and, as a consequence, they have not achieved the kind of political profile that is seen to accrue to similar committees in other parliaments. While access and relevance to the policy process is crucial, the committees' limited profile is also seen to be a function of its lack of resources and the limited dedication of members

Many parliamentarians take an active part in raising foreign policy issues through Parliamentary Questions. However, it is evident from the content of these interventions that members' interests are quite narrow, are poorly focused and are more often than not either the product of a recent news report or effective NGO lobbying. Only in rare instances can they be seen to be part of an ongoing policy commitment and when they are such members may often be seen – quoting one long-serving parliamentarian – as 'cranks and bores' by their colleagues. At the same time, the pattern of parliamentary intervention does indicate certain lines of predominant interest – in human rights, in the developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa and in disarmament issues.

An Informed Public

Political parties lay at the intersection of policy formulation and democratic consent. Whatever their flaws as mechanisms for aggregating interest, representing public opinion, mobilising public participation and offering leadership, Irish political parties are key to an understanding of the public policy process. The analysis here seeks to identify the significance of foreign policy issues for all of the major parties represented in the Oireachtas by looking at their policy documents, press releases and the profile they give to their international linkages with trans-national party organisations. In looking at this documentation, attention will then focus upon the pre-eminent foreign policy narratives that may be seen to emerge.

The largest party in the State, Fianna Fail, would appear to direct comparatively little attention to foreign policy matters. In its electronic archive of party statements and press releases for the first six months of 1999 just two out of 54 such documents (4 percent) were primarily concerned with such issues (Fianna Fail, 1999). However, this limited activity was largely a consequence of its position as the leading party within the Government with the result that most of its press efforts were directed through official rather than party channels. In reviewing archived party policy documents a greater level of interest does indeed emerge. In the nine policy chapters of its 1999 European Parliament election manifesto, for example, three were directly related to foreign policy issues; reform of the EU, the peace process in Northern Ireland and European security. In 1995 the party also published a comprehensive policy statement on foreign policy (Fianna Fail, 1995). This document, which was issued while the party was in opposition, was published in advance of the Government's own White Paper on the subject (Government of Ireland, 1996). On the party's web site, however, no specific linkage or mention was made in 1999 to of the party's links in the European Parliament with the Gaullist-led Union for Europe group.

The party's policy documents do not reveal any clearly dominant foreign policy narrative. The 1999 EP election manifesto, for example, identifies the central purpose of Fianna Fail's approach as being the pursuit of Irish national interests at both European and international levels through an 'enlightened foreign policy' (Fianna Fail, 1999). That document also goes to some lengths to assert the party's commitment to neutrality and to demote foreign policy co-operation at EU level to those occasions 'that may require decisions with the other like-minded countries in the EU, including the neutrals.' (Fianna Fail, 1999). Alongside this very sovereignty-conscious and independent approach, the moral and ethical dimension of foreign policy is also highlighted. In its earlier policy document, Ireland's 'particular affinity' with the developing world is asserted and the ambition that Ireland might be 'a voice for the Third World in the chambers and corridors of power' is also expressed (Fianna Fail, 1995).

For the second largest party, Fine Gael, foreign policy appears to be an area of some considerable interest. Just under 20 percent of its 141 electronically archived press releases and statements issued in the first six months of 1999 related to foreign policy issues. The focus of these was Northern Ireland (40 percent), security and defence (30 percent) and the EU (15 per cent). Of its 29 archived policy documents and 'consultation' papers, five were foreign policy related. These dealt with the Amsterdam Treaty, Irish membership of the Partnership for Peace, development co-operation, the European Parliament elections and the proposal of a Transatlantic Institute to be established in Ireland to analyse EU-US relations. Furthermore, within its European Parliament manifesto the party devotes 13 chapter headings from a

total of 27 directly to foreign policy issues. On its web site the party vigorously promotes its linkage to the European People's Party within the European Parliament but makes no mention of its participation in the Christian Democrat International (CDI) of which it is also a member.

The dominance of a European narrative in the party's documentation emerges very strongly indeed. Its commitment to Irish membership of the European Union goes beyond the fulfilment of specified national interests (although these are frequently invoked). It also includes the pursuit of collective European interests, summarised as 'the cause of a peaceful, prosperous and stable Europe' and invokes the increased political and institutional capacity of the 'Union' as a necessary condition to that end (Fine Gael, 1999). Membership of the European Union is presented as requiring a fundamental rethink of 'how we can participate more effectively in the evolving post-Cold War European security architecture' (Fine Gael: 1996: 8). Finally, the values underpinning Irish foreign policy are frequently presented as being rooted in collective European principles rather than being something that is uniquely or exclusively Irish.

The Labour Party too devotes considerable attention to foreign policy. Of the 241 press statements and news releases archived by that party in the first six months of 1999 more than 25 percent were devoted to foreign policy issues. The European Union was the pre-occupation of nearly 40 percent of statements with Northern Ireland (20 percent), security and defence (20 percent) and human rights and asylum issues (8 percent each) being the other central issues. With only three policy documents electronically archived it was difficult to assess the extent of the party's ongoing research into foreign policy issues. Only one of these documents directly related to foreign policy and that was its European Parliament election manifesto. However, in a statement of the party's general priorities and principles, more than 35 percent of the text was devoted to foreign policy issues, primarily Northern Ireland, human rights, international economic justice, European security, international environmental co-operation and EU development. . On its web site, the party also highlights both its European and international party linkages through the Party of European Socialists and the Socialist International respectively.

Two narratives emerge strongly from the Labour Party's published documentation and statements. First the party clearly has a strong self-image as being dedicated to international justice, development and peace. Direct linkage is made between social and economic development at home and that same development overseas. The 'moral obligation' of work against global poverty is also invoked but, interestingly, this is immediately placed within a European context where 'the European Union should take the leading role.' Ireland should then 'play its part in this development' (Labour, 1999a). The Union is thus presented here and elsewhere as the means through which Irish foreign objectives are to be pursued since 'action taken in conjunction with our European neighbours is far more effective than any action we might take on our own' (Labour 1999b). Ireland's distinctive contribution to global development is then later defined as its contribution to UN reform, diplomatic support for international debt relief and a greater allocation to the Irish bilateral ODA programme. By contrast, sovereignty issues are not highly valued. In Northern Ireland the party looks forward to the removal of nationalist and sovereignty issues from the political agenda.

The fourth largest party in the State – based upon its parliamentary representation in the period 1997-2000 – is the Progressive Democrats who show comparatively little interest in foreign policy issues. Of 76 statements issued to the press and electronically archived by that party in the first six months of 1999, just 10 percent related to foreign policy issues. Of these, half were concerned with developments in

Northern Ireland while the remainder related to EU issues and security and defence. Of 13 archived policy papers just one dealt with foreign policy and this too was devoted to Northern Ireland. Finally, there was no acknowledgement of the party's linkage with the Liberal group in the European Parliament nor with the Liberal International.

There is no decisive indication of dominant narratives emerging from this limited pool of source documents. PD party statements on Northern Ireland speak in generally vague terms about the need for consensus, mutual respect and accommodation and an equivalence of rights. They decisively reject the language of sovereignty, nationalism and independence. At the same time, however, the party does extensively employ the language of national interests towards developments within the European Union.

Of the remaining parties represented in the Dáil in 1999; the Green Party, Sinn Fein and the Socialist Party, all devote some attention to foreign policy issues and all are anxious to highlight their linkages with parties and political groups internationally. They also share, to a very large extent, the same dominant foreign policy narrative. All three focus upon what they see as the threats posed to an independent and sovereign foreign policy by co-operation at EU level which has already turned Ireland into 'a puppet of the main western powers' (Green Party, 1999a). All three maintain that consecutive governments have engaged in a long term strategic effort to undermine Irish neutrality in the interests of a 'European military superstate' (Sinn Fein, 1999), the imperialist ambitions of several of the larger EU member states (Socialist Party, 1999) and the United States and/or major arms manufacturers (Green Party, 1999b). The EU itself is seen to be fundamentally undemocratic or at least critically deficient in terms of democratic accountability and all three parties opposed ratification of both the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties. They see the roots of a progressive, positive and engaged Irish foreign policy to be found in its neutrality and the conduct of a sovereign and independent foreign policy. Finally, all three highlight Ireland's experience of colonialism as giving the Irish State and people a unique capacity to speak and act alongside countries in the developing world.

While political parties are an important part of the framework in the policy process another is that provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There is no agreed definition of NGOs and the label has been acknowledged by several analysts to be imprecise and unsatisfactory (Sheriff, 1996: 33). In an Irish context the term has been used to include everything from a four-person, all-volunteer single-issue solidarity campaign group to a professionally staffed development agency with an annual budget running into the tens of million of pounds annually

The first and largest 'cluster' of NGO activity (at least in terms of budgets and professional staff) is perhaps that of NGO development organisations. These might be said to be involved, either directly or indirectly, in the pursuit of development issues either at home (in terms of development education) and/or overseas (the provision of long or short-term aid). In the Irish context, NGOs such as Concern, Trocaire, Christian Aid, Gorta, the Irish Red Cross, ActionAid Ireland and World Vision Ireland might be included here.

A second cluster is centred upon single country solidarity campaigns and single-issue interest groups. Such groups, often small, poorly resourced and reliant upon volunteer staff or government-sponsored social employment schemes, campaign to raise public consciousness towards oppression or perceived injustice in specific parts of the world such as East Timor, Nicaragua, Tibet, Mozambique, Nigeria, Peru, Cuba, Burma, El Salvador, Liberia-Sierra Leone, Brazil or Bosnia. Alternatively, they

might be very specifically related to a single, often development-related, issue. Organisations in the latter category might be said to include Baby Milk Action, the Debt and Development Coalition, Fair Trade, Tools for Solidarity etc.

A third cluster of NGOs might be identified that focus upon broader issues of peace, welfare and human rights. Their campaigns may focus on particular trouble spots, campaigns or individual issues but, in the main, they try and keep an eye on what might be perceived to be the wider and inter-related issues of global politics and/or development. They may also come from a particular philosophical or religious perspective and seek to bring this perspective to bear upon contemporary global issues. Organisations in this category might include Pax Christi, Irish CND, Amnesty International, Action from Ireland (Afri) and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.

A fourth cluster of NGOs might be said to focus very closely upon either informing or moving major and specific public policy debates. Organisations such as the Institute for European Affairs, the National Platform, the European Movement, the Peace and Neutrality Alliance or umbrella associations such as Dochas would see their roles perhaps as one of education, information and/or mobilisation on a particular public policy issue. Such organisations may present themselves as either grass-roots membership/campaigning organisations or as forums for education/research.

A fifth and final cluster could be seen as providing more of a social or even professional service to its members. While many solidarity campaigns and support groups provide an important social link for expatriate members, other organisations are perhaps more tightly focused upon this service-related goal. Examples of such NGOs include Comlámh, Irish-Argentine Society, Irish-Finnish Society, Islamic Relief Agency and the Overseas Institute.

There has been some spectacular growth in the NGO community over the last number of years. By its very nature the NGO community is difficult to keep track of. As noted above, while there are large, professional and well-funded NGOs these are a minority of the population. The majority have less than 100 members, rely heavily upon co-operative and volunteer structures and frequently operate within larger supportive ‘umbrella’ associations. However, using an annual register of social, political and other organisations it is possible to sketch a rough map of the growth of Irish foreign policy NGOs from the mid-1960s (IPA, 1999).

In 1999 it was possible to identify more than 80 organisations that were dedicated to participate in, to influence or to challenge the foreign policy-making process in Ireland. In 1966 there were four such organisations that might be seen as directing their attention beyond Irish borders. Looking at the subsequent annual data it is possible to identify several ‘waves’ of NGO development. In the period 1970-1980, for example, a three-fold increase in the number of foreign policy NGOs was largely a result of the proliferation of overseas development aid agencies sparked by the 1974 inauguration of an Irish bilateral aid programme. From 1980 to 1985 a doubling in the number of foreign policy NGOs resulted from the growth of Latin American solidarity groups and the anti-nuclear/peace movement. This was associated with heightened East-West tensions from 1979-1980, the resulting proliferation of ‘proxy’ Cold War conflicts in Latin America and the politicisation of debates surrounding Irish neutrality in the early 1980s. The third identifiable wave is to be found in the period from 1995 with the establishment of refugee and asylum support organisations and various solidarity campaigns associated with other specific areas of conflict.

The role of NGOs is substantially greater at the start of the 21st century than it was in the early 1970s when it was argued that outside the arena of Anglo-Irish relations there was no discernible public constituency of interest in foreign policy (Keatinge, 1973: 293). NGOs are actively engaged across a range of issues and campaign both publicly and privately to shift the course of Irish policy makers. While the content of such efforts is unremarkable – personal lobbying, letter writing, advertising, charity collections, petitions, demonstrations and direct action such as boycotts – the access of some groups to policy process is quite remarkable.

Despite the best efforts of parliamentarians, parties and partisan interest groups, however, the level of direct public interest in foreign policy issues in Ireland is limited and narrow. For one long-time development aid campaigner this leads to frustration when she views the '…absence of public debate on foreign policy matters during (the) recent election campaign' (Mary van Lieshout, Irish Times, 14 June 1997). Even when, as in the case of EU treaty reform, the implications for citizens are direct and meaningful it can be difficult to generate any serious public attention. Within six weeks of the 1998 referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty less than half of the electorate had decided to vote either 'yes' or 'no' with 36 percent still in the 'don't know' category and only 38 percent of the entire electorate 'genuinely interested' in the issues involved (Sunday Independent/IMS 5 April 1998). Even in that foreign policy sector where popular support is highest – development co-operation – public opinion is ambiguous. While, according to a poll conducted by the Advisory Council on Development Co-operation, there is broad and enthusiastic support for development aid, understanding of the core issues associated with it are lacking (Holmes et al, 1993: 58). For one commentator, the explanation for all of this lies close to home; 'Northern Ireland and, by extension, Anglo-Irish relations absorbs much of such limited public attention as is directed beyond our boundaries' (Ronan Fanning, Sunday Independent, 2 April 1995).

When fingers are then pointed, in search of an explanation for a perceived public apathy, the media is usually to found at the sharp end of the digit. Several arguments are to be found floating in this intellectual ether. The first is that the media has been captured by minority interests, that it reflects a radicalised and unrepresentative sample of opinion and that through either laziness or complicity it allows the agenda to be driven by small unrepresentative NGOs. One reflection of this, it is argued, is to be found in issues related to neutrality and defence where one commentator asks the rhetorical question 'can any reader remember even one article arguing that there are sound moral political and economic reasons why we should support NATO…' His answer is that '…to argue any of that is totally taboo in Irish journalism' (Eoghan Harris, Sunday Times 14 April 1996). Another, more establishment voice, echoes some of these concerns when – in relation to the same issues – he identifies a 'visceral anti-Americanism' in much of what passes for analysis of major international events (Garret FitzGerald cited in Kirby, 1992: 163-64)

From the other side of the political trenches similar brickbats are lobbed in the direction of Irish print and broadcast journalism. The corporate and/or state control of all the mass media outlets, the penetration of US and UK information providers in the Irish media market and the scale of market share captured by UK broadcast and print journalism have all conspired to create an establishment-backed consensus on major foreign policy issues. For Patricia McKenna MEP – a visceral critic of the European Union – this has meant that the Irish media have 'sold out' to pro EU arguments and refuse to publish sceptical views on EU-related issues (Irish Times, 20 October, 1997).

There is certainly no doubt that the media has a crucial role to play in generating public debate around foreign policy issues. Certainly the Government recognised this when, 10 days in advance of the formal publication of its 1996 White Paper on foreign policy it sent draft copies to the media and provided briefings to select journalists 4 days prior to its launch and distribution to parliamentarians (Irish Times, 28 March, 1996). According to a study by John Horgan (1987) the media is indeed the first source of public information followed by Church and formal political debates. The Irish media is also credited by that report as being considered fair and even-handed by its audience.

In meeting the challenge of public disinterest, Irish Governments have begun to claim that public engagement in the policy process is a necessary part of a healthy and effective foreign policy. Through the construction of the 1996 White Paper, Irish policy makers tried directly to engage the general public and foreign policy activists in a broader dialogue on the nature and direction of Irish foreign policy. (Government of Ireland, 1996). Explicitly intended to vest the 'ownership' of Irish foreign policy in the hands of the people, the drafting process was based upon a series of seven open public meetings in 1994 and 1995. On average, these brought together more than 200 government ministers, politicians, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, foreign policy activists and members of the public to debate the principles and purpose of Irish foreign policy in a number of specific issue areas. In addition, public written submissions were invited through press advertisements and more than 60 individuals and organisations sent in their views.

For the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring TD, the effort was central to engaging public involvement and was a response to popular demand. He insisted that 'a revolution is taking place in Ireland…slowly but with growing resolution the people are seizing power…through demands for greater accountability from their elected representatives, more openness in government and wider access to information.' (Spring, Irish Times, 16 January 1995). In the case of the White Paper he argued that '*Above all I want the white paper to contribute to a real sense of ownership of policy*. Secondly I want the white paper to demonstrate that our foreign policy is about defending our *interests* but *also* is capable of reflecting *values* that are deep-seated in Ireland and the Irish people' (original emphasis) (Spring, Irish Times, 26 March 1996). Whether that clarion call to democratisation has yet taken root – or indeed is allowed to – has yet to be determined.

4. Conclusion: The Europeanisation of Irish Foreign Policy

Just after Ireland joined the European Communities in 1973 a new Minister for Foreign Affairs convened the first ever conference of all of Ireland's Heads of Mission from its embassies worldwide. Part of its purpose was to study the implications of this new European context to the conduct and principles of Irish foreign policy. Nearly 25 years later another Minister for Foreign Affairs reflected upon that impact by noting that membership of the European Union "...has become the biggest single factor in our international relations and is crucial to our economic development...(it) also enhances our ability to exert an influence on the wider international stage." (Government of Ireland, 1997:3)

Membership of the European Union has undoubtedly expanded the horizons of Irish diplomats. Their involvement in global issues today is both substantively wider and deeper than at any time in the history of Irish diplomacy. Through EU foreign policy working groups and the CFSP Secretariat, through presidency activities, through the Political Committee, Political and Security Committee, the Military Committee, the Military Staff Committee, COREPER and in support of the General Affairs Council,

Irish diplomats and military personnel now engage with their European colleagues across the entire range of global issues.

The socialisation of Irish diplomats into a European diplomatic regime is also evident. This is most obvious at the level of Political Director and European Correspondent, but also at official level through the many EU foreign policy working groups. The commitment to something like a 'European foreign policy' is identifiable. While some officials will speak in terms of the Union as being an amplifier for 'national' policy, others - especially younger diplomats - tend to speak more in terms of the credibility and efficacy of the collective European policy where that would have greater impact in reflecting Irish foreign policy “values” and “concerns”.

This internalisation of norms can sometimes be made explicit. Department officials, for example, have said that there is a "... habit of thinking in terms of (an EU) consensus." Another notes that "... where there is ever any new foreign policy initiative in the making, the first reflex is European. The question is now 'what will our European partners say - what is the opinion in Europe.'" Some even more senior officials insist that it is this EU context that gives meaning, substance and significance to Irish foreign policy.

The structural changes wrought in the Department of Foreign Affairs as a result of EU membership have been noted above. Both the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the responsibilities associated with EPC were initially linked with more than doubling the number of Irish overseas missions (from 20 in 1970 to 51 in 1998) as well as organisational adaptation within the Department. The impact on individual embassies has also been significant - and has been paralleled by a reassessment of the role of Irish embassies. As the White Paper on Irish foreign policy puts it; "Embassies now have an important additional function in influencing the relationship between their host country and the European Union; ensuring that the host country's policies towards the European Union are as favourable as possible to Irish interests and that the (host) country is familiar with and responsive to Irish policies across the whole spectrum of activities covered by the European Union."

In this respect, scope is left open for some level of co-operation with EU partners and institutions. On a value for money basis, flexibility and innovation are invoked as a basis for the possible co-location of Irish missions with those of EU partners. According to the White Paper this is an option which "...will be fully explored" in further consideration of diplomatic expansion. There has also been discussion of the possibility of co-location with European Commission delegations overseas where Ireland is without direct diplomatic representation.

The key outstanding question for Irish policy makers is the extent to which they can reconcile their ambition for greater democratic input to the policy process with the reality of an emerging European identity to foreign policy. While in principle there is no necessary inverse correlation between democratisation and Europeanisation, it is certainly true to say that Europeanisation – with its spatial and psychological distance from the ‘national’ political arena – will increase the challenge of democratisation. Some smaller European states, such as Denmark, have made explicit efforts to square that political circle by investing significant policy responsibilities in their national parliament. It remains to be seen what strategy, if any, will be adopted by their Irish colleagues.

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