THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS: LESSONS FOR UKRAINE?

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This article explains the factors that have made Northern Ireland an arena of conflict, and evaluates the obstacles that for so long hindered a negotiated settlement, before exploring the factors that contributed to creating a sustainable peace process. It concludes with some general observations on what lessons might be taken from the Irish peace process and considers how these might be of relevance to other conflicts, such as that which is ongoing in Ukraine.

Introduction: Unhappy Families

'Many talk about a solution to Ulster's political problem but few are prepared to say what the problem is. The problem is there is no solution'.[1] Richard Rose's grim analysis during the 1970s reflected the general pessimism that for decades had dominated coverage of the Northern Ireland imbroglio. The perception that the Irish conflict was intractable was in part influenced by its longevity. The labyrinthine road to a negotiated agreement after numerous false dawns has confirmed the oft-noted observation that peace is a process, not an event.

The Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements institutionalised a peace process that has fundamentally altered day-to-day life in Northern Ireland. Violence has abated and erstwhile antagonists have shared power, supported by the British and Irish Governments. While remaining within the United Kingdom, provision has been made for Northern Ireland to unite with the rest of Ireland at some point in the future. The agreements constitute a successful attempt at conflict management though it is perhaps too big a leap to say that what has been achieved is conflict resolution, let alone conflict transformation. Northern Ireland retains the scars of prolonged misrule. Society remains segregated in the most fundamental of ways, with nationalists and unionists living apart, going to separate schools and churches, reading rival communal newspapers, playing different sports and so on. The agreements have respected the integrity of the conflict by institutionalising it to an extent where it is difficult to conceive of a form of government that is not a coalition of opposites composed of unionists and nationalists who have little in common beyond a mandate to rule bestowed by the peace agreements. One can perhaps say that such a form of government is the worst for Northern Ireland except for the realistic alternatives.

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[1]   R. Rose. 1976. *Northern Ireland: a time of choice*. New York: Springer, p. 166. Ulster is one of Ireland's four historic provinces and Northern Ireland is composed of six of Ulster's nine counties.

Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina famously begins with the observation that 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'. One might say the same of communal discord. While societal conflicts involve animosity, and very often loss of life, all to some degree are sui generis, with a unique history and with each protagonist hating the 'other' in their own peculiar way. Since 2013, Ukraine has become an arena of conflict combining features of a foreign invasion with those of a civil conflict. Considering the current pessimistic prognoses for a speedy end of the discord in Ukraine, not unlike that of Richard Rose cited above, there might be some value in outlining how Ireland exited the cycle of continual violence that infected politics for decades.

Why Ireland Has Been a Conflict Zone

Despite its relatively isolated position on the western edge of Europe, Ireland has been an arena of conflict for many centuries. England's conversion to Protestantism coincided with its growth as an imperial power and when Irish chieftains finally acknowledged defeat in 1603, Britain embarked on an intensive policy of colonial plantation, particularly in the north of the country, which had been the centre of Gaelic resistance. These settlers, mainly English Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians, are the ancestors of today's unionist population in Northern Ireland. Ireland remained predominantly Catholic, however, and almost every generation witnessed a major rebellion against British rule. The slow democratisation of the British polity allowed an Irish nationalist parliamentary movement to develop while the physical force tradition continued to attract a substantial minority of adherents. When the separatist Sinn Féin party gained a majority of Irish seats in 1918, they declared the country independent and established a parliament in Dublin. To complement these political endeavors, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) conducted a war for independence against the British regime in Ireland.

Why then was Northern Ireland established? In deference to unionist preferences and London's strategic objectives, Ireland was partitioned in 1921 by a unilateral act of the British Parliament. Two new political regimes were created, the Irish Free State (now the Republic of Ireland), which was almost homogeneously nationalist, and Northern Ireland, which constituted less than 17% of the island of Ireland's territory but where unionists outnumbered nationalists by two to one. Northern Ireland possessed the formal features of a parliamentary democracy but, with an inbuilt unionist majority, was in reality a one-party state. The unionist regime enshrined anti-Catholic discrimination as official policy, establishing an apparatus of economic hegemony that excluded nationalists from political, social and economic power. Complementing this system of apartheid the state invoked a series of repressive laws enforced by a paramilitary police that was almost entirely Protestant in composition. When a combination of social and political forces during the 1960s brought forth a non-violent campaign to obtain basic civil rights, the Northern Ireland state could not accommodate it, as its very raison d'être was the maintenance of unionist supremacy in perpetuity. The violent response of state security forces and civilian irregulars to the civil rights campaign precipitated a social conflagration and an armed nationalist insurgency that propelled society downwards into a spiral of violence, euphemistically known as 'the Troubles', which would last for decades.[2]

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[2]   See D. Ó Beacháin. 2010. *Destiny of the Soldiers–Fianna Fáil, Irish Republicanism and the IRA, 1926–1973.* Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, pp. 249-370.

The biggest fallacy and source of confusion is, perhaps, the belief that religion is the root cause of conflict in Northern Ireland. Like all popular errors, the perception has a causal relationship with the truth. Unionists (those who wish for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom) are in general from a Protestant family or ancestral background, while nationalists (those who would like to see a united Ireland) are much more likely to be the descendants of those Catholics displaced during the colonial project. The fundamental issue, however, is not theological. Were it so, it would be impossible to understand how Catholics and Protestants are able to leave peaceably in the Republic of Ireland, in Britain, or indeed, in any part of the world. The conflict centres on the issue of power. For centuries, and with the support of the British Government in London, unionists exercised untrammelled power, firstly over the majority Irish Catholic population and, after partition, within Northern Ireland over the minority nationalist/republican community. In Northern Ireland today, the population is almost evenly divided between nationalists and unionists.[3]

Why Conflict Endured

Psychological and emotional factors (e.g. anger and mutual distrust) inhibited conflict resolution as unionists and nationalists fixated on fears generated by past events that sometimes led to pre-emptive aggression. Loss aversion was another key barrier to overcoming conflict as parties frequently attached much greater significance to a potential loss than to a potential gain, particularly when future gains (e.g. peace, prosperity) were uncertain

and in the long-term, while 'losses' (e.g. accepting legitimacy/position of opponents) were immediate and certain. This meant that the conflicting parties were often unwilling to take risks in situations where they could make serious gains. Protagonists often

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viewed gains simply as entitlements, but were slow to accept a loss. This frequently led to disagreements between parties over the value of concessions, reinforcing feelings of suspicion and mistrust, and further hindering efforts designed to transform the conflict dynamic.

Given the duration and intensity of the conflict it not surprising that the quest for 'justice' inhibited mediation efforts, as negotiating parties felt entitled to receive some sort of justice for past events. This expectation stemmed from the belief on both sides that it was they who had acted the most honourably in the past, and who had suffered the most. In such a scenario both parties were likely to believe that what to outside observers might seem like a fair deal gave their side less than it deserved and was too generous to their traditional foes.[4]

There has also been the phenomenon of reactive devaluation, a cognitive bias that

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[3]   In the 2017 elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, unionist and nationalist parties each won exactly 39 seats.

[4]   For some international examples of these phenomena, see D. Bar-Tal. 2001. 'Why does fear override hope in societies engulfed by intractable conflict, as it does in the Israeli society?' *Political Psychology,* 22.3: 601-627; B. Bland, B. Powell and L. Ross. 2012. 'Barriers to dispute resolution: Reflections on peacemaking and relationships between adversaries'. *Understanding social action, promoting human rights*, pp. 265-291.

occurs when a proposal is refused (or devalued) if it appears to have come from an antagonist or enemy, ignoring whether or not such a proposal is beneficial.[5] Protagonists in Northern Ireland prided themselves on their unwillingness to compromise on fundamental principles. The two most common unionist slogans have been 'No Surrender' and 'Not an Inch' (of territory). When the IRA was asked to decommission their explosives and weapons, graffiti appeared on Belfast walls declaring 'Not an ounce, not a bullet'. Such intransigence has made brokering agreements difficult, as protagonists have tended to view political developments in zero-sum terms, whereby any gain by the other side is seen as a loss to their own.

Finally, the relationship between political leaders and their followers/supporters, and the competing interests of different political actors within a single community, also acted as barriers to conflict resolution. Many political representatives, most notably the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader, Ian Paisley, publically announced their unwillingness to compromise, sometimes as a negotiating device or because of an inability to reach mutually beneficial settlements. This in turn induced their electorates to adopt similar trenchant positions, which further limited manoeuvrability in negotiations.[6] A popular aphorism coined by Ian Paisley, provided a salutary warning to those who might flirt with compromise: a bridge builder and a traitor were the same, he claimed, because they both go over to the other side.

Exiting the Violence

During the 'Troubles', academics and politicians sought to identify a middle way between the unionist wish to remain within the United Kingdom and the nationalist desire for a united Ireland. However, any solution that was not negotiated between all the major players and/or which was imposed at a time of war had little chance of success. By the 1990s, the British Army and the IRA had reached a stalemate whereby neither had defeated the other and neither could attain outright military victory. After several false starts, the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement was negotiated on 10 April 1998 and a second pact, designed to re-energise the peace process, was agreed at St Andrews in October 2006.

The 'solution', in a nutshell, is a three-stranded process, which centres first and foremost on power-sharing between unionists and nationalists within Northern Ireland (strand 1), combined with institutional links between Northern Ireland and Ireland (strand 2) and between Ireland and the United Kingdom (strand 3). A guarantee of equal rights and an open-ended constitutional future have also been at the heart of the peace agreements.

Though the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) is remarkably similar to that negotiated at Sunningdale in 1973, its chances for success were greater as the latest peace process attracted the support of both the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries, which had destroyed the power-sharing institutions established in 1974. The concept of ripeness, that conflicts reach a point where they are ready for resolution, is relevant here. William Zartman maintains that protagonists will only seek mediation once they have exhausted all their resources and recognise that they enjoy negligible chances of achieving victory. In such circumstances, the cost of maintaining

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5   See L. Ross. 1995. 'Reactive Devaluation in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution', in Kenneth J. Arrow, et al., (eds.), *Barriers to Conflict Resolution,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 27-42.

6   See G. Bachar and A. S. Weiner. 2014. 'Governments, publics, and enemies: Intragroup dynamics as barriers to conflict resolution', *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 7.2-3: 198-225.

the mutually hurting stalemate is so great for all parties that protagonists begin to entertain less maximalist approaches.[7]

Mediation

The fact that the 1990's peace process took place under the tutelage of two sovereign democratic governments, Ireland and the United Kingdom, was central to its ultimate success. A cooperative Anglo-Irish partnership had frequently been absent during previous decades. Indeed, for much of the time since the partition of Ireland in 1921, and throughout most of the Troubles, there had been no meeting of minds between the governments in London and Dublin as to what constituted the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland let alone unanimity on how to resolve the imbroglio. Moreover, for decades successive British Governments refused to countenance external mediation on the basis that this would infringe upon their sovereignty.

Anglo-Irish initiatives on Northern Ireland were also frequently inhibited by electoral cycles. Instability in Britain throughout 1974, for example, undoubtedly affected the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement to which a recently elected Irish Government with a clear majority had been committed. Electoral cycles (and many would argue the personalities too) were in almost perfect harmony during the summer of 1997 with the election of Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern as British and Irish prime ministers respectively. The security their electoral mandates gave these two leaders allowed them to devote a decade of their time, energy and focus to seeing the peace process through a myriad of obstacles that followed the GFA. Within a month of Fianna Fáil's return to power with Ahern at the helm, the IRA ceasefire was reinstated and nine months later, the Belfast Agreement had been negotiated.

The British and Irish governments did much of the running throughout the peace process and proved vital in maintaining momentum when relationships broke down within Northern Ireland. Both administrations played a full role in the negotiations, allowing each side of the conflict in Northern Ireland to believe that they had an external guarantor that represented their interests. Crucially, Dublin and London appointed a political figure from outside the region, former US Senator George Mitchell, to chair the negotiations. The goodwill and interventions of the Clinton administration in the US, along with the prospect of EU funding to underpin aspects of the peace process also provided favourable conditions for a settlement.

While external mediation proved an integral part of the negotiating process that led to the Good Friday Agreement it doesn't always assist conflict management. Though it is ostensibly designed to facilitate reconciliation, third party mediation can be a barrier to establishing a sustainable peace process. Wendy Betts, for example, has examined how the motives, roles and number of mediators exacerbated the quarrel over Nagorno-Karabakh and argues that a cohesive approach to conflict resolution is impossible when different third parties pursue their own agendas.[8] Conflict among mediators must be solved before any other conflict resolution takes place.

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[7] For an application of Zartman's theory to Northern Ireland, see E. Connolly and J. Doyle. 2015. 'Ripe moments for Exiting Political Violence: an Analysis of the Northern Ireland Case', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 26: 147-162.

[8] W. Betts, 1999. 'Third party mediation: an obstacle to peace in Nagorno Karabakh'. *SAIS Review* 19.2: 161-183.

Favourable International Context

Nobody wants to be on the wrong side of history and the peace process chimed with the prevailing optimistic zeitgeist of the early and mid-1990s. Communism had collapsed throughout Europe during the dying months of the 1980s, culminating in the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War.[9] Nelson Mandala was freed from prison in South Africa and apartheid quickly replaced by majority rule. Initially, the Oslo peace accords in the Middle East also generated optimism before quickly becoming a parable of what can go wrong in a peace process. Moreover, the establishment of legislatures in Scotland and Wales, following referenda in those countries, made devolution within Northern Ireland easier for unionists to digest. No longer did it necessarily signify that Northern Ireland was a place apart requiring exceptional treatment but, rather, it could be presented as part of an ongoing process of decentralisation within the United Kingdom.

Inclusivity and Legitimacy

In addition to the on-going support of the Irish and British governments, the peace process includes all major parties in Northern Ireland, including the late converts of the DUP, and this inclusivity has been an essential reason for its success. Moreover, as part of the Good Friday Agreement, all prisoners whose militant organisations had signed up to the peace process were quickly released. Previous initiatives had been opposed by the IRA, the organisation responsible for the majority of fatalities during the conflict, and this rejection put a ceiling on expectations.

Until the mid-1990s, it had been assumed that any power-sharing system of government within Northern Ireland would be between 'moderate' nationalists and unionists, in other words the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). However, while the power-sharing executive was initially based on these two factions, the more 'radical' DUP and Sinn Féin eclipsed the SDLP and UUP and for the last decade have formed the bedrock of Northern Ireland's power-sharing administration. Indeed, the first power-sharing government formed after the St Andrew's Agreement was led by erstwhile fundamentalist Ian Paisley and the former IRA military commander, Martin McGuinness.

This reversal of fortunes was largely due to the changed context created by the peace process. The SDLP had defined itself first and foremost as a party that pursued its objectives through exclusively peaceful means and eschewed support for the IRA. As the peace process advanced and militarism faded, nationalist voters switched to Sinn Féin believing that they could more vigorously agitate for an agenda it largely shared with the SDLP. But whereas Sinn Féin thrived electorally as a result of moving to the centre, unionist voters rewarded the DUP for excoriating UUP leader, David Trimble, as he engaged with his republican opponents. Once the UUP and DUP switched places in the hierarchy of parties, however, they also traded political stances. Now potentially in the driving seat during any forthcoming negotiations, the DUP were at pains to appear reasonable so as not to provide the two governments with an opportunity to undermine them.

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[9]   See for example M. Cox. 1997. 'Bringing in the 'international': the IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War'. *International Affairs* 73.4: 671-693 and M. Cox. 1998. 'Northern Ireland: The War that came in from the Cold'. *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 9: 73-84.

The peace process received an early boost when aspects of the Good Friday Agreement were approved in a referendum by 71% in Northern Ireland and by 95% in the Republic of Ireland. Having the vote in both parts of Ireland on the same day was also significant, simultaneously undermining the positions of dissident republicans and recalcitrant unionists.

Decommissioning, Demilitarization and Policing

Decommissioning IRA weapons was central to the peace process and imbued with symbolism for both sides. But as Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern realised, getting the republican movement to sign up to the principle of majority consent within Northern Ireland being a prerequisite for a united Ireland was far more significant in the long term than dispensing with its armoury. Weapons were easy to procure and decommissioned weapons could be easily replaced. Far more difficult to acquire was the degree of trust and cooperation necessary to push the use of military means to the periphery.

Unionists could not understand why the IRA (whom they assumed, at least for public consumption, was the same as Sinn Féin) should wish to hold on to their weapons if they had renounced the use of force for political ends once and for all. Either the IRA commitment to non-violence was insincere, or they wished to use the threat of force as leverage during the negotiations, which would give them an unfair advantage.

Republicans preferred to focus on the British armed forces in Northern Ireland and sought a demilitarisation of society. This suggested a parity of responsibility between the British army and the IRA to put weapons aside, rather than a unilateral decommissioning of weapons held by republicans. As a minority within Northern Ireland, republicans were inclined to view IRA weapons as primarily defensive and argue that with a successful peace process the need for armaments would wither away. In the past, the IRA had never destroyed their weapons, let alone handed them over. Rather they had, as in 1923 and 1962, dumped arms. Unilaterally destroying weapons smacked of surrender and would be very difficult to sell to many IRA members, particularly those of the younger generation. For the Sinn Féin leadership, decommissioning was not just about what was desirable but what they could sell to the IRA and their own party grassroots. The overriding objective was to keep the republican movement intact; otherwise, the governments might find themselves some years hence negotiating with a new splinter group that had eclipsed the current leadership.

Making decommissioning a precondition for Sinn Féin's participation in negotiations, as the British Government under Major initially tried to do, risked derailing the peace process. Opposing protagonists engaged in a circular argument whereby the IRA used the British Army presence to justify a leisurely approach to decommissioning, whereas this in turn was cited as a reason for maintaining a substantial military force in Northern Ireland. Armed conflict, Sinn Féin argued, was a product and not the cause of the deep divisions in society and only maintaining a sustainable and inclusive government could help banish the gun from Irish politics.

Ultimately, the process of decommissioning would have to be internationalised to be successful. An Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), composed of military and diplomatic figures from Finland and North America, and chaired by Canadian General John de Chastelain, was established to oversee the process. Former President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, and African National Congress leader Cyril Ramaphosa, were appointed to inspect IRA weapons dumps in order to facilitate the decommissioning of firearms,

ammunition and explosives. The IRA finally completed decommissioning their military arsenal on 26 September 2005. British army demilitarization – the removal of British troops from Northern Ireland, the destruction of much of the British army military infrastructure such as bases and watchtowers – also continued apace until September 2007. However, while the decommissioning of weapons was a process that took several years to negotiate, the dismantling of sectarian mindsets will take much longer.

Allied to decommissioning and demilitarization was the task of making policing acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland.[10] As Tony Blair's Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, noted 'the IRA couldn't police the community any more, yet they wouldn't let the police do so either'.[11] Chris Patten, a former senior Conservative Party figure and the last Governor of Hong Kong, was entrusted with the task of chairing the commission to review the future of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and his report on 9 September 1999 advocated a radical overhaul of the composition, ethos, training and structure of the police.[12] The report recommended that the RUC be given a more neutral name - the Northern Ireland Police Service - and that half of all new recruits would be drawn from the nationalist community with the aim of eventually reaching parity. The police force could not be drawn exclusively from the unionist community so that, as in the past, one side of the conflict was, at government expense, policing the other. Patten and his

supporters were guided by the objective of depoliticising the police and sought to facilitate a move away from policing during a state of armed conflict to a form of community policing with a strong emphasis on impartiality and human rights.

People, Not Territories, Have Rights

A major barrier to conflict resolution has been the unwillingness of protagonists to recognise or acknowledge the basic rights of the other side.[13] Frequently, conflicting parties, such as those in the Caucasus or the Balkans, are looking for separation and, whether negotiated or unilateral, a parting of ways has been the final outcome. When, as in Northern Ireland, a divorce is impossible because of the relatively equal size of the protagonists some form of power sharing to deliberate on how society is governed is an easier – as opposed to an easy – sell. A vital component of the peace process, and the agreements that underpin it, has been the notion of a shared political future, where the other side's presence is tolerable. As denial of civil rights had fuelled the Troubles during the late 1960s, a peaceful transition from protracted conflict required parity of esteem for both nationalists and unionists within Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement guarantees equality of political, civil, social and cultural rights. Consent was designed to be a two-way street so that neither unionists nor nationalists would be able to achieve much in Northern Ireland without first securing the agreement of their former adversaries with whom they now shared government power.

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[10] See J. Doyle. 2010. *Policing the narrow ground: Lessons from the transformation of policing in Northern Ireland.* Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.

[11] J. Powell. 2008. *Great hatred, little room: Making peace in Northern Ireland.* London: Random House, p. 275.

[12] HMSO. 1999. A New Beginning: *Policing In Northern Ireland: The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing For Northern Ireland* [Patten Report].

[13] See R. Nagar and I. Maoz. 2014. '(Non) acknowledgment of rights as a barrier to conflict resolution: Predicting Jewish Israeli attitudes towards the Palestinian demand for national self-determination'. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict,* 72-3, pp.150-164.

While nationalists of all hues, bar the electorally insignificant dissident republicans, were united in favour of the general thrust of the peace process, unionism endured multiple schisms and this continually acted as a brake on momentum. Sinn Féin had prepared supporters for compromise and the party leadership united behind Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. David Trimble, by contrast had not done the groundwork within the UUP and was beset by internal sniping, sabotage and attempted coups, as his party struggled to accept governing with Sinn Féin.

Ultimately, Sinn Féin accepted a formula in which self-determination incorporated the hated 'loyalist veto', now repackaged as unionist consent. Reaching consensus on defining the political unit that might benefit from self-determination was a major breakthrough. The Good Friday Agreement included the unwieldy formula that it was for the Irish people alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination but reiterated that majority consent from Northern Ireland's electorate was a prerequisite. The birth-right of all of Northern Ireland's people to identify themselves as Irish, British or both was recognised and this right could not be affected by any change to the constitutional status of the North. Significantly, the Government in Dublin agreed to reformulate Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution so that it moderated what was perceived to be a 'territorial claim' on Northern Ireland. The revised constitutional provision shifted the emphasis away from the rights to territory towards the rights of people.[14]

Finally, neither the Belfast nor St Andrews Agreements was presented as a final settlement. Rather, the peace process allows for an open-ended constitutional development. The GFA acknowledged that a majority of people on the island of Ireland wished for a united Ireland, and that this included a substantial section within Northern Ireland, but emphasised that a majority in the six counties, freely exercised and legitimate, supported the status quo. In deference to nationalist aspirations, it was affirmed that should a majority within Northern Ireland opt for a united Ireland it would be a binding obligation for both governments to introduce legislation to give effect to that wish. Had the GFA been presented as an end in itself, without leaving open the possibility of a united Ireland at some point in the future, it is most unlikely that it would have been accepted by nationalists within Northern Ireland or, indeed, by the Irish Government.

The Trouble with Brexit

When Ireland and the UK joined the EEC in 1973 there was a hope that common membership of this supranational community would, over time, erode borders and reduce animosities within Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. With Brexit, many of the old certainties and assumptions, on which the peace process was predicated evaporated overnight. Brexit immediately raised several important questions regarding Northern Ireland's status within the UK and its relationship with the rest of the island. As the EU treaties of Rome, Maastricht and Lisbon underpinned the foundations of the GFA and its successor pacts, many feared that Brexit would undermine the work of reconciliation and destabilise the region.

Consent is at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, particularly the principle that there could be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland

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[14] D. Ó Beacháin. 2002. 'Ireland Amends Its Constitution' in Mark Rehn (ed.) *Great Events of the 20th Century*. Pasadena: Salem Press. Vol. 8: 3120-3122.

without a majority agreeing to such a change. Brexit now threatened to fundamentally alter Northern Ireland's status against the explicit wishes of the majority that had indicated a wish to stay within the EU. As the people of Northern Ireland are by birth-right entitled to be Irish citizens it is unclear how their rights as EU citizens can be protected post-Brexit. Many fear that the reintroduction of a physical border between the north and south of Ireland could have a negative impact on the peace process. Similarly, Britain's intention to leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will almost certainly undermine many areas of human rights law in Northern Ireland. Brexit will also deprive Northern Ireland and Ireland's border region generally of EU funding for programmes supporting the peace process.[15]

Following its failure to win the snap election of June 2017, the ruling Conservative Party entered into a pact with the DUP, the only party within Northern Ireland to have supported Brexit during the referendum campaign. So long as the British Government depends on the DUP for its survival, it weakens London's ability to be 'rigorously impartial' in its dealings with Northern Ireland, as required by the Good Friday Agreement. Brexit has introduced profound uncertainty into Anglo-Irish relations. It will take many years before the full effects are felt and can be properly assessed.

Conclusion

Though it has occasionally faltered, the Northern Ireland peace process has endured for two decades. Nevertheless, is it a model that can be exported? Confidence in Ireland's credentials in the sphere of conflict resolution must be tempered by an understanding that the origins of conflict and the obstacles to resolution defy uniformity. And while Ireland's experience provides a unique perspective on conflict management, one must be wary of being prescriptive. During its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2012, the Irish Government repeatedly asserted that it would not offer a set of formulas or blueprints that could be exported to the post-Soviet protracted conflicts.[16] Rather, it hoped that by sharing the experience of the peace process it could assist others engaged in similar conflict resolution efforts.

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It is difficult to be optimistic about a comprehensive settlement that will satisfy all parties to the conflict in Ukraine. That there is a stalemate within Ukraine and between Moscow and Kyiv is undeniable but whether it is mutually hurting to the degree likely to push the protagonists to a transformational settlement (as opposed to the current ceasefire agreement) is debatable. It is a challenge to get accurate information about the political preferences of people living in Crimea or in the parts of Luhansk and Donetsk currently outside the control of the Ukrainian government,[17] and as the conflict appears to have 'frozen',

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[15] See J. Doyle and and E. Connolly. 2017. 'Brexit and the Northern Irish Question' in Federico Fabbrini (ed.), *The Law & Politics of Brexit.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[16] See D. Ó Beacháin. 2012. "Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE—A Mid-Term Review." *Irish Studies in International Affairs:* 89-109.

international interest has waned. More than anything else, the absence of two sovereign democratic partners that have a common interest in ameliorating the situation, as existed between Ireland and Britain, inhibits conflict resolution.

While external mediation or facilitation is not, by itself, enough to produce a peace process, the Irish experience suggests it is difficult to cultivate one without it. International involvement proved vital, for example, in providing a mechanism whereby the disposal of weapons belonging to non-state actors could be verified and conducted in a manner that minimised the stigma of surrender. The negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement were chaired by a senior US politician while Irish diplomacy and diasporans kept Ireland higher up the list of the US priorities than would otherwise have been the case. International actors can also prove vital in providing economic aid and political support to underpin what is agreed.

Finally, while political elites negotiate settlements, it is important that the supporters of these elites and the electorate generally, be prepared for the necessary compromises. Otherwise even the best-crafted deal may flounder. When symbols or names are contentious, it is sometimes advisable to depoliticise them as much as possible. After all, a territory without a flag is more important than a flag without a territory.

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[17] A notable exception is J. O'Loughlin, G. Toal, and V. Kolosov. 2017. "The rise and fall of "Novorossiya": examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33.2: 124-144.