



Sinn Féin in the European Union: The Evolution of Self-Determination Policy after Brexit

El Sinn Féin en la Unión Europea: La evolución
de la política de autodeterminación tras el Brexit

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Abstract

The European Union is the most ambitious regional integration project in the world. Yet as the supranational entity has expanded so have the number of minority nationalist parties seeking independence from their respective member states. There is much discussion in the literature about whether these parties trend pro or anti-European. Sinn Féin is a Northern Irish republican party that has undergone an evolution in its EU policy. Brexit, and the related negotiations, have brought forth the issue of self-determination in Northern Ireland and the role of the European Union, twenty-years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement ended the Troubles. This paper traces Sinn Féin's EU policy from 1973 to the present and finds that the party has moved from opposition to critical engagement and, now, to a more positive partnership. Sinn Féin's EU policy in the Brexit era shows the long-term impacts of the Europeanisation of the peace process, offering an altered framework for self-determination in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: Europeanisation, self-determination, nationalism, Brexit, Northern Ireland

Resumen

La Unión Europea es el proyecto de integración regional más ambicioso en el mundo. Sin embargo, como la entidad supranacional se ha ampliado, el número de partidos

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nacionalistas buscando independizarse de sus respectivos Estados ha aumentado también. Hay mucha discusión en la literatura sobre si estos partidos nacionalistas tienden a ser proeuropeos o antieuropeos. Sinn Féin es un partido republicano de Irlanda del Norte cuyas políticas sobre la Unión Europea han evolucionado. El Brexit, y las negociaciones relacionadas a él, han resaltado la cuestión de la autodeterminación en Irlanda del Norte y el papel de la Unión Europea, veinte años después de la firma del Acuerdo de Viernes Santo y el fin del conflicto. Este artículo traza la política de Sinn Féin con respecto a la Unión Europea desde 1973 al presente, y encuentra que el partido se ha movido de la oposición al compromiso crítico y, ahora, a una asociación positiva. La política de Sinn Féin con respecto a la Unión Europea durante la era del Brexit demuestra los impactos a largo plazo de la europeización en el proceso de paz, y ofrece un marco distinto de autodeterminación para Irlanda del Norte.

Palabras clave: europeización, autodeterminación, nacionalismo, Brexit, Irlanda del Norte

Introduction

In 2012, the European Union (EU) won a Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts to promote peace on the continent. There has been no armed conflict between member states over the last 70 years, a notable accomplishment for a region decimated by two world wars. As it has expanded, the EU has sought to mitigate conflict beyond its borders, both on the continent, where accession is often used as a bargaining tool,¹ and outward, through the European External Action Service (EEAS). However, post-Cold War conflicts have increasingly been fought between state actors and non-state actors within a country, and within its own borders, the EU has no set recourse for this kind of asymmetric warfare.²

These internal conflicts are overwhelmingly grounded in the struggle for self-determination, a particularly thorny issue for the EU. The Troubles in Northern Ireland are perhaps the best-known example of a conflict within EU borders that has transitioned to peace. However, the tensions that defined that conflict remain central in the Northern Irish political arena. Brexit has called attention to those issues and raised questions about the EU, its role as a peace maker, and the effectiveness of advocating for self-determination within the EU.

1. This has been the case in the Balkans, Turkey, and Cyprus.

2. Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflicts, 1946-2008", *Journal of Peace Research* 46, n.º 4 (2009): 577, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309339112>.

While there is much discussion about nationalist parties within regions of the EU seeking independence, from Corsica to Flanders to Catalonia, it is crucial to include political parties with connections to violence, who underwent conflict transformation, to evaluate the effects of peace processes. Understanding how secessionist political parties conceive of, and interact with, the EU can create insight on how to effectively move parties from violent action to peaceful political engagement. From violent protests during recent elections in Catalonia³ to growing threats of separatist violence in the Western Balkans,⁴ where states are in the process of accession, violence and the role of EU membership remains a salient issue.

This working paper will trace the evolution of Sinn Féin's EU policy from the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland joining the European Economic Community (EEC) through Brexit and look at Sinn Féin's transformed EU policy in the present moment. This paper posits that Brexit has caused a unique re-examination of the EU's influence on Sinn Féin's quest for self-determination, grounded in the Europeanisation of the peace process twenty years ago. Though the EU does not interfere without consent in internal conflicts of its member states, it can offer an alternative to regions seeking self-determination, thus giving it further leverage to promote peace.

Europeanisation and Minority-Nationalist Parties

The European Union is the most ambitious undertaking of regional integration in existence, and as such, has been extensively studied. Europeanisation, an imperfect term to describe the integration process, comprises the emergence of a distinctly European polity and the adaption of national and sub-national political systems.⁵ This relationship is neither inherently convergent nor harmonious but rather is constantly in flux as EU capabilities expand.⁶

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3. Marco Trujillo, Jordi Rubio and Joan Faus, "Street Fires Erupt in Barcelona in Fourth Day of Catalan Protest", *Reuters*, October 17th, 2019, <https://reut.rs/3KR4w1J>.
 4. Luke McGee, "A Dangerous Crisis is Brewing in the Balkans. Will the West Do Anything to Stop Another War?", *CNN*, November 6th, 2021, <https://cnn.it/3YlrYHv>.
 5. Milada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
 6. Robert Ladrech, "Europeanisation and Political Parties: Towards a Framework for Analysis", *Party Politics* 8, n.º 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068802008004002>; Simon Hix and Christopher Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Peter Lynch, *Minority Nationalism and European Integration* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996); Tapio Raunio,

While much of the literature focuses on the state, the entity that compromises membership, there is a growing interest in the effects of Europeanisation on political parties.⁷ In part, because national parties operate as “carriers of European integration”,⁸ in various aspects of their political systems from policy to organization to competition to party-government relations.⁹ However, continued or further integration is not uniformly desired by national parties and various studies have examined Euroscepticism in Western Europe,¹⁰ Central and Eastern Europe,¹¹ party ideology,¹² and its sources.¹³

The Tension between Integration and Sovereignty

A key factor contributing to Euroscepticism is the tension between European integration and national sovereignty. Some sub-state actors have argued that the EU is rendering obsolete the state as the central political entity, opening up the possibility of a post-Westphalian order.¹⁴ Questions of sovereign-

“Why European Integration Increases Leadership Autonomy within Political Parties”, *Party Politics* 8, n.º 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068802008004003>; Johan Hellström, “Partisan Responses to Europe: The Role of Ideology for National Political Parties’ Positions on European Integration”, *Journal of European Public Policy* 15, n.º 2 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760701817690>; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, “A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus”, *British Journal of Political Science* 39, n.º 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000409>; Catherine de Vries and Erica Edwards, “Taking Europe to Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroscepticism”, *Party Politics* 15, n.º 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808097889>.

7. Ladrech, “Europeanisation and Political Parties”.
8. Hix and Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union*, 15.
9. Ladrech, “Europeanisation and Political Parties”.
10. Paul Taggart, “A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems”, *European Journal of Political Research* 33, n.º 3 (1998), <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00387>.
11. Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, “Contemporary Euroscepticism in the Party Systems of the European Union Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe”, *European Journal of Political Research* 43, n.º 1 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00143.x>; Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, “The Two Sides of Euroscepticism Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe”, *European Union Politics* 3, n.º 3 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116502003003002>.
12. Mark Aspinwall, “Preferring Europe: Ideology and National Preferences on European Integration”, *European Union Politics* 3, n.º 1 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116502003001005>.
13. Hooghe and Marks, “A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration”.
14. James Anderson and James Goodman, “Regions, States and the European Union: Modernist Reaction or Postmodern Adaptation?”, *Review of International Political Economy* 2, n.º 4 (1995), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692299508434335>; Stephen Tierney, “Reframing Sovereignty?: Sub-State National Societies and Contemporary Challenges to the Nation-State”, *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 54, n.º 1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/iclq/54.1.161>; Michael Keating, “Plurinational Democracy in a Post-Sovereign Order”, *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* 53, n.º 4 (2002), <https://bit.ly/3kD53Ki>.

ty are of particular importance to ethno-regional parties,¹⁵ characterized by sub-national divisions and distinct cultural identities, which seek to mobilize for the interests of their territorial collectives.¹⁶ Typically, the goal is some form of self-determination or independence from the state.¹⁷ Though it is important to note that the demands can range from protectionist parties (soft demands) to secessionist parties (strong or radical demands).¹⁸

While the EU is aware of these demands and willing to mediate, the institution is wary of overstepping member state sovereignty to intervene in conflict without consent. As a supranational organization, the EU obtains power through the pooling of sovereignty of its member states, this allows for shared competences over areas such as the internal market. EU treaty law grants member states, on behalf of their people, the right to join the EU by which they then renounce some of their right to self-determine in exchange for consensus decision-making on certain areas.¹⁹ Essential state functions remain the sole responsibility of the state which, as defined in the Treaty on European Union, includes “ensuring the territorial integrity of the State, maintaining law and order and safeguarding national security”.²⁰ Intrastate asymmetric conflict has typically been understood to fall within those bounds.

Though the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has previously ruled that the United Nation’s right of peoples to self-determine applies to EU law, this was in the context of de-colonization and the European Union has continued to defer to states.²¹ In a letter to the President of the Catalan Government, then European Commission (EC) President José Manuel Barroso, framed Catalonia’s self-determination dispute as “a question of internal organisation related

15. It is important to note that a variety of terms are used to describe similar parties including ethno-regional, regional, minority, minority-nationalist.

16. Lieven de Winter and Huri Tursan, *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1998).

17. *Ibid.*, 210; Christopher Connolly, “Independence in Europe: Secession, Sovereignty, and the European Union”, *Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law* 24, n.º 1 (2013), <https://bit.ly/3ESciEP>.

18. Régis Dandoy, “Ethno-Regionalist Parties in Europe: A Typology”, *Perspectives on Federalism* 2, n.º 2 (2010), <https://bit.ly/3Ijn4hN>.

19. Mare Ushkovska, “European Union Integration and National Self-Determination”, *New England Journal of Public Policy* 31, n.º 2 (2019), <https://bit.ly/3ZEjpIT>.

20. European Union, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, Official Journal of the European Communities, C 326/13, October 26th, 2012, art. 4.2.

21. European Union General Court, *Council of the European Union v. Front Polisario*, December 21st, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3y54YIE>.

to the constitutional arrangements of a particular Member State".²² Similarly, of Northern Ireland during the Troubles, EC President Jacques Delors said the he did not think the Commission had "a duty to interfere in the internal problem of a country, of a province", but was ready to "follow with friendship and enormous interest".²³ This understanding of sovereignty leaves the EU with limited options, dependent on the member state's behest, for conflict resolution within its own borders.

One such option is framing the EU's role not as an actor, but a vital space for parties to articulate their demands and project nationalist claims-whether through embracing or criticizing the EU.²⁴ In particular, the 1979 shift to direct representation in the European Parliament (EP) gave smaller parties more visibility. However, the rate of EU policies and initiatives has "created a tendency for nationalist parties to trail behind developments in European integration, with parties continually cast as reactor in relation to European policy".²⁵

The EU Biases of Ethno-regional parties

There is extensive discussion in the literature on whether minority nationalist parties have pro or anti-EU tendencies. One argument is that fringe parties are Eurosceptic because they reflect historical cleavage. Marks and Wilson, drawing heavily from Lipset and Rokkan's theory of social cleavages, posit that the center-periphery relationship defines nationalist parties' strategies.²⁶ Views on European integration are integrated into those existing beliefs that oppose the center.²⁷ The underlying premise being that fringe parties, including ethno-regional parties, reject oversight and control on any level – both national and supranational.

22. Quoted in Dimitry Kochenov and Martijn van den Brink, "Secessions from EU Member States: The Imperative of Union's Neutrality", *European Papers* 1, n.º 1 (2016): 70, <https://bit.ly/3Zge7U9>.

23. Paul Hainsworth and Duncan Morrow, "Northern Ireland: European Region - European Problem?", *Etudes Irlandaises* 18, n.º 2 (1993): 136, <https://bit.ly/3JPowA1>.

24. Keating, "Plurinational Democracy in a Post-Sovereign Order"; Michael Keating, "European Integration and the Nationalities Question", *Politics & Society* 32, n.º 3 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329204267295>.

25. Lynch, *Minority Nationalism and European Integration*, 184.

26. Gary Marks and Carole Wilson, "The Past in the Present: A Cleavage Theory of Party Response to European Integration", *British Journal of Political Science* 30, n.º 3 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400000181>; Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

27. Marks and Wilson, "The Past in the Present", 439.

Other studies make the opposite argument: that minority nationalist parties have trended pro-EU. European integration is still incorporated into existing platforms, but positively, in an attempt to “increase the legitimacy and validity of their movements”, such as the Scottish Nationalist Party’s ‘Independence in Europe’ platform.²⁸ The EU is seen as a sanctioned actor that can give “legitimacy to parties which might have controversial positions in the domestic political landscape”.²⁹ This is particularly relevant for parties with strong secessionist demands. A few minority nationalist parties have formed a European-level party (the European Free Alliance) to promote cross-border advocacy of their goals within the EU.³⁰

There is a substantial body of work that adopts a more nuanced approach to this debate, accounting for internal dynamics as well. Elias presents four possible categories of EU bias for any type of political party: euro-enthusiast, euro-reject, euro-skeptic, or euro-pragmatist.³¹ A party’s categorization is based not just on their view of Europeanisation, but also party ideology and the dynamics of party competition. Both euro-enthusiasts and euro-pragmatists support the EU, but these labels acknowledge different motivations. Similarly, Kopecký and Mudde highlight a distinction between diffuse and specific support for the EU: the former being support for the ideas of European integration while the latter is support for the EU itself.³²

Lynch suggests a similar grouping approach, outlining three potential positions that minority nationalist parties have towards the EU: incompatible (it undermines national sovereignty and political and economic autonomy), compatible (the EU and these groups have together contributed to the demise of the centralized nation state), and regarding the EU as an external support system which shares sovereignty in vital areas.³³ Lynch acknowledges that this not a static space as parties are located in a nexus of continuous change and adopt various, evolving linkage strategies to align with their views.

Chaney, in studying trends of minority national party manifestos in the

28. Seth Jolly, “The Europhile Fringe?: Regionalist Party Support for European Integration”, *European Union Politics* 8, n.º 1 (2007): 113, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116507073290>.

29. Maria Spirova, “European Integration and Minority Politics: Ethnic Parties at the EP Elections”, *East European Politics* 28, n.º 1 (2012): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2011.649357>.

30. Lieven de Winter and Margarita Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro, “European Integration and Ethnoregionalist Parties”, *Party Politics*, 8 n.º 4 (2002), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068802008004007>.

31. Anwen Elias, *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2009).

32. Kopecký and Mudde, “The Two Sides of Euroscepticism”.

33. Lynch, *Minority Nationalism and European Integration*, 17.

UK, echoes the centralism of pragmatism within party strategy, finding a shift in the UK towards “instrumental Europeanism”.³⁴ Parties have shifted from viewing the EU as the path to obtain autonomy to viewing the EU “as part of their efforts to attract electoral support and thus fulfill their constitutional goals”.³⁵ The EU is no longer seen as the principle route to autonomy but, whether acting as a foil or a partner, it remains an active space from which to advocate.

Finally, Wyn Jones pushing back on claim of a post-Westphalian order, notes that there are clear limitations to the existing framework of Europeanisation that does not recognize how embedded European institutions, and the accompanying nation-state framework, have become.³⁶ This is perhaps most notable in the reaction to the push for a ‘Europe of the Regions’ in the 1980s and 1990s, which offered a promising alternative institutional framework that emphasized transnational cooperation but failed to transform the existing system.³⁷ Formal structures for sub-state regions have yet to gain meaningful traction within the EU.³⁸

The Political History of Sinn Féin

Since the partition of Ireland in 1921, the central goal of Sinn Féin, which translates to “we, ourselves” has been the reunification of the island of Ireland. This irredentist claim is central to Sinn Féin’s campaigns in each of its political arenas, which include the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Parliament of the United Kingdom,³⁹ the Dáil Éireann,⁴⁰ and the EP.

34. Paul Chaney, “Instrumental Europeans?: Minority Nationalist Parties’ Discourse on the European Union: The Case of UK Meso-Elections 1998-2011”, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 15, n.º 4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/15705854.2014.900987>.

35. *Ibid.*, 465.

36. Richard Wyn Jones, “From Utopia to Reality: Plaid Cymru and Europe”, *Nations and Nationalism* 15, n.º 1 (2009): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00368.x>.

37. Anwen Elias, “Introduction: Whatever Happened to the Europe of Regions? Revisiting the Regional Dimension of European Politics”, *Regional and Federal Studies* 18, n.º 5 (2008): 483, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597560802351655>.

38. Judith Sijstermans and Coree Brown Swan, “Shares of Solidarity: Comparing Scottish and Flemish Responses to Catalonia”, *Regional & Federal Studies* 32, n.º 2 (2022): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1881064>.

39. Sinn Féin MPs follow a long-standing policy of abstentionism in Westminster.

40. Lower House of the Irish Parliament.

Sinn Féin has undergone a substantial evolution from political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a republican paramilitary, to an established governing party in devolved government. Its modern iteration came out of the provisional Sinn Féin faction of a 1970 organizational split. In the 1980s, the party began to focus more on winning political representation, developing in conjunction with the IRA, an ‘armalite and ballot box’ strategy, seeking simultaneous military and electoral influence.⁴¹ The 1981 special election of hunger striker Bobby Sands as a Member of Parliament (MP) for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the party’s first MP in Westminster since partition, marked an electoral turning point and “broadened the battlefield” of IRA influence.⁴² Throughout the latter half of the conflict, Sinn Féin also ran candidates for local office in Northern Ireland and for the Dáil Éireann with limited success.

The 1990s saw a recalibration of the political problem by the British government, which affected Republican openness to negotiations, notably Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke’s speech that “the British government has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland”,⁴³ as well as the Downing Street Declaration. There was also dialogue within the nationalist community through the Hume-Adams talks. Following these new dialogues, the IRA called its first cessation of military action in 1994, a turning point that marked the beginning of the end of most large-scale violence in the conflict.⁴⁴

Any negotiations for peace were dependent on the cooperation of the British and Irish governments, but the process was also buoyed by international support, in particular from US President Bill Clinton who nominated George Mitchell as Special Envoy in 1995. Multi-party negotiations got under way, but they excluded Sinn Féin until the IRA, which had renewed military activity, called a second ceasefire. With a ceasefire in September 1997, Sinn Féin signed onto the Mitchell Principles which affirmed a commitment by negotiating parties to peacefully resolve political issues, disarm paramilitary organizations, and renounce violence, and joined negotiations.

41. Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland: Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3:75.

42. *Ibid.*, 3:73.

43. P. J. McLoughlin, “‘The First Major Step in the Peace Process’?: Exploring the Impact of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on Irish Republican Thinking”, *Irish Political Studies* 29, n.º 1 (2014): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2013.875895>.

44. Neil Jarman, “From War to Peace?: Changing Patterns of Violence in Northern Ireland, 1990-2003”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, n.º 3 (2004): 422, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550490509739>.

While absent from negotiations, the EU made an important contribution to the Irish peace process by providing a common framework for the British and Irish governments to act within, as well as extensive funding throughout the post-conflict period.⁴⁵ The two countries saw themselves as partners in the European Union and their EU membership guaranteed that whether Northern Ireland remained a part of the UK or reunited with the Republic of Ireland, the region would remain within the EU. Additionally, the EU had provided support for numerous years prior through the creation of networks and later, funds.⁴⁶ The PEACE programme, which is in its fifth iteration and has contributed over €1.5 billion to Northern Ireland.⁴⁷

The eventual outcome of negotiations, the Belfast Agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) (1998), is made up of a multi-party agreement between Northern Irish political parties and an international agreement between the British and Irish governments. Strand 1 established the Northern Ireland Assembly, which would require cross-community voting on key issues, and the Northern Ireland Executive, a power-sharing executive. The Agreement also clearly defined self-determination on the island:

...that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.⁴⁸

The agreement thus recognizes the right of the people of Ireland to self-determine but ties it to the agreement of both parts of the island as well as the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Power sharing came into effect in December 1999 with the formal return of devolved government to Northern Ireland, with Sinn Féin winning 18 seats, though government has been suspended numerous times since due

45. Duncan Morrow and Jonny Byrne, "Playing Jenga?: Northern Ireland after Brexit", *Political Insight* 7, n.º 2 (2016): 30-1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905816666147>.

46. Giada Lagana, *The European Union and the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

47. Marek Kołodziejewski, "Northern Ireland PEACE Programme", *European Parliament*, accessed March 3rd, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3ogJdds>.

48. British-Irish Council, *British-Irish Agreement*, April 10th, 1998, art. 1(ii), <https://bit.ly/2kRfKd0>.

to breakdown in power-sharing arrangements.⁴⁹ Unlike the return to governing, the demobilization of sectarian paramilitaries was a much slower process and a 2015 report found that individual members of groups continued to perpetuate violence.⁵⁰

In 2007, five years into the existence of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Sinn Féin overtook the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) to become the largest nationalist party and thus a governing party in the executive. Since 2007, Sinn Féin has governed through power-sharing with the largest unionist party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). In 2022, Sinn Féin became the largest party in the Assembly, winning more seats than the DUP for the first time. Sinn Féin has also steadily increased its seats in Westminster, where it now has seven MPs, and in the the Dáil Éireann, winning an unprecedented 37 seats in the most recent elections.

In 2004, Sinn Féin got its first Member of the European Parliament (MEP) elected, Bairbre de Brún for Northern Ireland, who held the seat until 2012 and was succeeded by Martina Anderson until Northern Ireland left the EU as a part of Brexit in January 2020. Sinn Féin has also won EP seats in the Republic of Ireland beginning with Mary Lou McDonald, now party president, in 2004.⁵¹ The number of Irish Sinn Féin MEPs has fluctuated in subsequent elections and now stands at just one: Chris MacManus, who replaced Matt Carthy in March 2020.

Sinn Féin has evolved from the political arm of a paramilitary group to an established political party, winning representation in all four arenas that the party runs in as well as governing in Northern Ireland. The party's central goal of self-determination has remained, as have sectarian tensions, yet party messaging and strategy on how to achieve reunification have evolved immensely post-conflict most notably within the EU.

49. Nicholas Whyte, "Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 1998", ARK, October 14th, 2002, <https://bit.ly/41F4VdQ>.

50. O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, 3:280.

51. Martyn Frampton, "Sinn Féin and the European Arena: 'Ourselves Alone' or 'Critical Engagement'?", *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 16 (2005): 235, <https://bit.ly/3EU4faz>.

Table 1
Political Timeline of Sinn Féin

| Year | Event |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1921 | Partition of Ireland |
| 1970 | Sinn Féin (SF) splits into two factions |
| Early 1980s | SF develops 'armalite and ballot box' strategy |
| 1981 | Election of hunger striker Bobby Sands as MP |
| Late 1980s | Hume-Adams talks |
| 1994 | First IRA cessation of military activity |
| 1995 | Multiparty negotiations begin |
| 1997 | SF signs onto the Mitchell Principles |
| 1998 | SF signs the Good Friday Agreement |
| 1999 | SF wins 18 seats in new devolved government in Northern Ireland (NI) |
| 2004 | The first SF MEP is elected in both NI and the Republic of Ireland |
| 2007 | SF becomes a governing party in the NI executive |
| 2022 | SF becomes largest party in the NI Assembly |

Tracing Sinn Féin's EU Policy

Post conflict, Sinn Féin has sought to distance itself from past connections to violence and further establish itself as a traditional political party, now running candidates from the local level up to a European-wide stage on a platform of reunification. Political parties naturally evolve within and in reaction to their political realities. Sinn Féin's EU strategy is a noteworthy example of this, moving from outright rejection to critical engagement. After an initial rejectionist policy, Sinn Féin has largely remained as a consistent, critical participant in the European project for the past twenty years. Brexit has profoundly changed that position, unintentionally creating more positive incentive for seeking EU involvement, particularly in Irish reunification. Sinn Féin's goal of self-determination thus cannot be divorced from the process of Europeanisation.

The different eras of policy can be divided into three sections: pre-peace agreement, pre-Brexit, and post-Brexit. In the first two time periods, the party underwent a gradual evolution from firm rejectionist of the EU to critica-

lly engaged, while post-referendum, there was a shift towards a more positive understanding of the EU's role in Sinn Féin's goal of self-determination.

Previous works have detailed Sinn Féin's transformation from strong opposition to critical engagement.⁵² These accounts were written a year or so after the election of Sinn Féin's first MEP, which marked a turning point for the party's EU involvement, but do not account for the past 15 years.

Pre-Peace to Pre-Brexit

Sinn Féin was vehemently opposed to the UK and the Republic of Ireland joining the EEC in 1973. Leading up to the Republic of Ireland's referendum on membership, Sinn Féin campaigned for a "no" vote against what it saw as an imperial power whose goal was to further exploit.⁵³ As a former General Secretary of Sinn Féin explained, the party was "very perplexed at the idea of surrendering sovereignty to an even bigger entity than Britain".⁵⁴ Though the referendum passed, Sinn Féin ran no candidates in the first few EP elections as part of its rejectionist stance. The party's platform, as outlined in manifestos, called for withdrawal from the EEC, opposition to EEC economic policies which "re-emphasized partition", and "for a national sovereignty, for a Free Ireland in a Free Europe".⁵⁵ Likewise, the party campaigned against any move to expand the EEC and its capabilities further, such as the Maastricht treaty.⁵⁶

This refusal to engage ended in the 1990s and was replaced by a period of critical engagement. This shift coincided with a few events: Ireland ratifying the Maastricht Treaty by referendum, Sinn Féin abstentionist candidates failing to gain traction, and the beginnings of the peace process.⁵⁷ In 1993, at its ard fheis,⁵⁸ members moved for the party to develop a Europe policy.⁵⁹ This move towards more active engagement also coincided with calls for in-

52. John Doyle, "Republican Policies in Practical Politics: Placing Contemporary Sinn Féin in a European Context", *IBIS*, working paper 45, 2005; Frampton, "Sinn Féin and the European Arena".

53. Sinn Féin, "Why Sinn Féin Says No to the Common Market", *Repsol Pamphlet 6* (1972), <https://bit.ly/3y9b2cl>.

54. Mitchell McLaughlin, interviewed by author, February 28th, 2020.

55. Sinn Féin, *One Island, One People: The Only Alternative* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 1984), 9.

56. Martina Anderson, interviewed by author, March 10th, 2020.

57. Jane O'Mahony, "Ireland's EU Referendum Experience", *Irish Political Studies* 24, n.º 4 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07907180903274727>.

58. Annual party conference.

59. Frampton, "Sinn Féin and the European Arena", 246.

ternational involvement in the peace process.⁶⁰ The party went so far as to establish an office in Brussels to explain to the EU, “the need for the international community to play a more active and political role in regard to Ireland if a just and lasting peace is to be achieved”.⁶¹

Despite welcoming international involvement in the peace process, the party’s skeptical posture continued post-conflict as all political parties in Northern Ireland recalibrated to the new political environment. The party’s 1999 manifesto recognized the EU as a “key terrain for political struggle” and categorized its engagement as one “in a critical manner”.⁶² Sinn Féin still had no representation in the EP though Northern Ireland and the border region of the Republic of Ireland began to receive substantial EU funding, €667 million between 1995 – 1999, as a part of the PEACE programme.⁶³ Yet, despite the EU’s support for peace, Sinn Féin continued to oppose any form of EU expansion – campaigning for “No” votes on referendums for the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Treaty of Nice.⁶⁴

Sinn Féin’s 2004 EU manifesto, titled “an Ireland of equals in a Europe of equals”, called for the EU to “take a role in ensuring the speedy end to all occupations and enforced partitions” around the world “but especially at home”.⁶⁵ The party saw its “just call for an end to the British military occupation of a part of our island and for Irish reunification” as the next logical step for the EU after “endor[sing] the peace process in our country”.⁶⁶ Sinn Féin won seats in the EP for the first time in the 2004 elections, one each in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The party joined the European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) political group, which consisted of other leftist parties who sought EU reform.

Once in office, Sinn Féin MEPs continued to critique the institution and the party campaigned for a “no” vote on the Treaty establishing an EU constitu-

60. Gerry Adams, “Speech by Gerry Adams to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, 13 April 2013”, CAIN, accessed March 3rd, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3kSBJ2e>; Sinn Féin, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 1994).

61. Susannah Dibble, *Sinn Féin in the EU: The Evolution of Self-Determination Policy Post Brexit* (Bruges: United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Studies, 2020), 9.

62. Sinn Féin, *A New Opportunity for Peace* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 1999), 2.

63. Kenneth Bush and Kenneth Houston, “The Story of Peace: Learning from EU Peace Funding in Northern Ireland and the Border Region”, *INCORE*, accessed March 3rd, 2023, 32, <https://bit.ly/3UzGqej>.

64. Séan Crowe, “Sinn Féin calls for NO vote in Amsterdam Treaty”, *Sinn Féin*, May 13th, 1998, <https://bit.ly/3yoe5y4>; Sinn Féin, “Sinn Féin Nice Treaty Referendum Manifesto: Vote No to the Treaty of Nice”, *Sinn Féin*, 2001, <http://bit.ly/3S0kCaW>.

65. Sinn Féin, *An Island of Equals in a Europe of Equals: Sinn Féin EU Election Manifesto 2004* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2004), 6.

66. *Ibid.*, 14.

tion, criticizing it as a step towards a superstate that further took away from national sovereignty.⁶⁷ Though even while campaigning for a “no” vote, the party stressed that voting “no” to the treaty did not mean voting “no” to the existence of the EU and it would remain a member regardless – a far cry from past calls to leave the EEC entirely.⁶⁸ Sinn Féin also continued to call for EU support in Irish reunification, launching a document in 2006 on the topic, and hosting an “international inquiry into Irish unity in Brussels which considered the role the EU could play in the reunification of Ireland”.⁶⁹ In office, Sinn Féin’s platform broadened beyond reunification to identify more specific left leaning policy concerns within the EU such as economic governance and the eradication of poverty.⁷⁰

Sinn Féin’s 2009 and 2014 EP manifestos further built on the 2004 manifesto, stating that “Ireland’s place is in the European Union – but the European Union needs to change”⁷¹ and also to “build support in Europe for Irish reunification”.⁷² The 2014 manifesto listed Irish unity as one of its top ten key priorities in the EU.⁷³ Sinn Féin also commended the EP for passing a resolution that supported furthering the Northern Irish peace process.⁷⁴ In both of these elections, Sinn Féin sent back representatives and its work in the EU continued to expand, though calls for Irish reunification were consistent, the party developed policy on all levels from youth unemployment to the Common Agricultural Policy.

Brexit Referendum Leadup

Sinn Féin was one of the last parties in Northern Ireland to declare its campaign intentions for the Brexit referendum, in this case for the “Remain” vote. There have been suggestions that certain segments of Sinn Féin’s constituen-

67. Mary Lou McDonald, “Debate on Statement by Mr. Barroso, President-Elect of the Commission”, *European Parliament*, November 17th, 2004, <https://bit.ly/3mmLZjO>; Sinn Féin, *Sinn Féin Response to the Draft EU Constitution* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2003); Sinn Féin, *An Island of Equals in a Europe of Equals*; Sinn Féin, *Sinn Féin Document on the EU Constitution* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2005).

68. Mary Lou McDonald’s speech at a conference on the EU Constitution, 2005.

69. Sinn Féin, *Putting Ireland First* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2014), 9. See also Sinn Féin, *European Union Can Help Bring about Irish Unity-Bairbre de Brín* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2006).

70. Sinn Féin, *Sinn Féin Response to the Draft EU Constitution*.

71. Sinn Féin, *Putting Ireland First*, 11.

72. Sinn Féin, *European Election Manifesto 2009* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2009), 3.

73. Sinn Féin, *Putting Ireland First*, 6.

74. Martina Anderson, “Anderson Welcomes Passing of EU Resolution”, *Sinn Féin*, November 13th, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3zV6w2p>; Martina Anderson, “EU Has Played Major Role in Supporting Peace Process”, *Sinn Féin*, November 10th, 2014, <https://bit.ly/4079Qsx>.

cy saw the vote as a British, and more specifically English, problem, that did not substantially affect Irish voters.⁷⁵ When the party finally did engage, its actions centered around vague statements by current MEPs and party leadership about the EU's "huge contribution" and "benefits" and a warning that "withdrawal would be disastrous".⁷⁶ The statements were broad, but the party tried to maintain a balanced narrative that it supported EU membership, "but that support d[id] not translate to unconditional approval for the EU's direction".⁷⁷ Though removed from its earlier calls for complete withdrawal, the party had been an active, and vocal, critic of the EU. Campaigning for Brexit, while not erasing these criticisms, did refocus on the positives of EU memberships and according to Sinn Féin leadership, "strengthened the relationship with the European Union".⁷⁸ In fact, within Sinn Féin, the decision to campaign for remain was unopposed.⁷⁹ EU membership was important for its "potential to provide a bridge towards the greater integration of Ireland, north and south" a key benefit that the party did not want to forego despite other criticisms.⁸⁰

While the "leave" vote won overall, the majority of votes cast in Northern Ireland were to remain.⁸¹ This dynamic placed Sinn Féin's pro-EU position on even more familiar ground: a British government that was going against Northern Irish dissent. Sinn Féin thus found itself in an unexpected alliance with the European Union, which had been much quicker to grasp the potentially disastrous consequences of Brexit for Irish peace.

Post Brexit Referendum

The repercussions of the unexpected success of the "Leave" vote and resulting Brexit negotiations have had the greatest impact on Northern Irish-EU rela-

75. Jonathan Evershed and Mary Murphy, "An Bhfuil Ár Lá Tagtha?: Sinn Féin, Special Status and the Politics of Brexit", *The British Journal of Political and International Relations* 24, n.º 2 (2022): 247, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481211026153>.

76. Morrow and Byrne, "Playing Jenga?", 30-1. See also Martina Anderson, "Europe Makes a Genuine Improvement to People's Daily Lives", *Sinn Féin*, November 28th, 2014, <https://bit.ly/3KC2T6o>; Martin McGuinness, "EU Withdrawal Would Have Disastrous Impact on the North", *Sinn Féin*, April 21st, 2015, <https://bit.ly/3nmyl6A>; Michelle O'Neill, "Ireland's Future Is within the European Union", *Sinn Féin*, 2015.

77. Lynn Boylan, "Open Letter to the Irish Times", *Sinn Féin*, May 23rd, 2019, parr. 5, <https://bit.ly/3MF22Va>.

78. Mitchell McLaughlin, interviewed by author, February 28th, 2020.

79. Evershed and Murphy, "An Bhfuil Ár Lá Tagtha?", 247.

80. Gerry Adams, "Adams Demands Separate Vote for North in the Event of Tory Election Win", *Sinn Féin*, May 4th, 2015, parr. 25, <https://bit.ly/3zW95S4>.

81. BBC News, "EU Referendum: Results", *BBC News*, June 23rd, 2016, <https://bbc.in/2l6nt3A>.

tions since the signing of the GFA, highlighting the legacy of the Europeanisation of the peace process. In response, Sinn Féin has shifted its political strategy towards the EU. Though still critical of the institution, the party, throughout the negotiation period, emphasized the EU's understanding and support of Northern Ireland, highlighted the cost of leaving the EU, and endeavored to positively link self-determination to EU membership. While Brexit officially occurred on January 31, 2020, the transition period lasted through the end of 2020 as both sides negotiated a deal. For Sinn Féin, the European Union will continue to be a viable electoral arena through the Republic of Ireland.

While the decision to leave the European Union was made by voters in the United Kingdom, the referendum was of obvious importance to the EU who, like Sinn Féin, wanted the UK to remain a member. Within the EU, the Republic of Ireland, as a member state, border country to the UK, and a signatory to the Good Friday Agreement, stands to be disproportionately affected by Brexit. To ensure its best interests, the Irish government campaigned in Northern Ireland for a "Remain" vote and, after that loss, won reassurance from the EU that it "will stand fully behind" the Republic of Ireland in negotiations.⁸²

Due to Sinn Féin's policy of abstentionism in Westminster and the numerous breakdowns of Northern Ireland devolved government, most recently for three crucial years of Brexit negotiations, the EU, and specifically the EP, has offered a consistent, sympathetic platform, for Sinn Féin to advocate for its interests. Prior to the referendum, the EU was notably quicker than the British government to grasp the unique difficulties that Brexit could present for Northern Ireland. The British government, including then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Teresa Villiers, dismissed any concerns as "highly irresponsible".⁸³ The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in Westminster condemned the British government for its "unclear and inconsistent communication" and "lamentable lack of engagement" on the Northern Ireland Protocol.⁸⁴

82. Patrick Wintour, "Irish Leader to Campaign in UK for Remain Vote", *The Guardian*, May 13th, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3JbqE5I>; Rory Carroll, "Barnier Pledges EU Support for Backstop in Event of No-Deal Brexit", *The Guardian*, April 8th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2WVU4d8>.

83. Edward Burke, "Who Will Speak for Northern Ireland?: The Looming Danger of an Ulster Brexit", *The RUSI Journal* 161, n.º 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1174477>; Morrow and Byrne, "Playing Jenga?", 30-1; Matt O'Toole, "Ireland an Afterthought during Brexit Campaign When I Was Cameron Adviser", *The Irish Times*, October 4th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2Aya0do>; Belfast Telegraph, "Claims Brexit Could Threaten Peace Process Are Scaremongering, Says Villiers", *Belfast Telegraph*, April 17th, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3YocxhQ>.

84. United Kingdom Parliament, "Unfettered Access: Customs Arrangements in Northern Ireland after Brexit", *UK Parliament*, July 14th, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3EX25Hf>.

Conversely, the EU has experience with many of the key points of tensions specific to Northern Ireland, including maintaining a border between an EU member state and a non-member state, reunifying a country within the EU,⁸⁵ and overseeing the continued implementation of peace agreements. After the referendum, the EP commissioned a study on the GFA and the challenges posed by UK withdrawal.⁸⁶ The EC's Head of the UK Task Force Michel Barnier has repeatedly spoken on the difficulties for Northern Ireland as the "part of the UK most impacted by Brexit".⁸⁷

Brexit has pushed Sinn Féin to articulate the benefits of EU membership for Northern Ireland, including in its fight for self-determination. In contrast to Vote Leave's campaign to "Vote Leave, Take Control", Sinn Féin has endeavored to communicate the benefits that Northern Ireland loses by leaving the EU, including funding, open borders, and citizenship rights.⁸⁸ The party sees Brexit as threat to peace in Northern Ireland and to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement which covers all of the aforementioned issues.

The EU has contributed extensive funding towards peace in Northern Ireland. The region has received over €1.5 billion through the EU's PEACE programme which former Sinn Féin MEP Martin Anderson said, "has made a huge impact in terms of building and strengthening communities and promoting reconciliation".⁸⁹ In 2017, Sinn Féin published a paper on how to fight the negative economic impact of Brexit including granting Northern Ireland special status and continuing EU funding.⁹⁰ The party has also warned that loss of these funding streams would "cripple the North", which already has a weak regional economy compared to the rest of the UK.⁹¹ While Sinn Féin has campaigned for, and secured, an EU commitment

85. German reunification was an enlarged continuation of former West Germany within the EEC.

86. David Phinnemore and Katy Hayward, "UK Withdrawal ('Brexit') and the Good Friday Agreement", *European Parliament*, November 2017, <https://bit.ly/3INS0h8>.

87. Michel Barnier, "Speech by Michel Barnier at the William J. Clinton Leadership Institute", *European Commission*, January 27th, 2020, 3, <https://bit.ly/3JekxOo>.

88. Vote Leave, "Why Vote Leave", *Vote Leave*, accessed March 3rd, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3KUs1ac>; Sinn Féin, *Fighting for Ireland, All Ireland in Europe* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2019); Sinn Féin, *Inclusive and Strategic Growth: Developing a New Economic Strategy for the North of Ireland* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2019).

89. Martina Anderson, "Brexit Could Undermine Progress Made in Peace Process", *Sinn Féin*, March 9th, 2017, parr. 6, <https://bit.ly/43s2hsO>.

90. Sinn Féin, *How Ireland and the EU Can Fight the Economic Impact of Brexit North and South* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2017).

91. Martina Anderson, "Anderson Welcomes Adoption of €270 Million PEACE IV Funding", *Sinn Féin*, November 30th, 2015, parr. 6, <https://bit.ly/3UvrJtm>; John FitzGerald, "Northern Ireland's Economy Is Threatened by More than Brexit", *The Irish Times*, September 6th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3J9xwk6>.

to main Interreg and PEACE funding through 2027, there is no guarantee beyond that, though the party has expressed its interest.⁹²

As previously mentioned, the Irish border has emerged as one of the largest stumbling blocks in Brexit negotiations. Sinn Féin Vice President Michelle O’Neill has said that EU membership created “seamless trade” and employment in “key sectors” across an open border.⁹³ The party has called for continued “freedom of movement” and “seamless all-island commerce” after Brexit.⁹⁴ Though Sinn Féin, and many other parties, successfully pushed to avoid a hard border on the island, as detailed in the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland in the Withdrawal Agreement Bill, there will be an Irish sea border, meaning goods that cross from the UK to Northern Ireland must go through customs checks. Sinn Féin has demanded that the EU ensure “the full and timely implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement”, specifically the Irish protocol ensures avoidance of a hard border.⁹⁵

Sinn Féin has also raised concerns that Brexit will deprive Irish citizens of their rights. The Good Friday Agreement grants Northern Irelanders the right to choose Irish, British, or dual citizenship. Former MEP Martina Anderson spoke before the EP and warned that Brexit would deny those with Irish citizenship in Northern Ireland their right to representation in the EU.⁹⁶ Earlier on in the Brexit negotiations period, Sinn Féin advocated for a special Ireland North Consistency to be established in the EP, giving the North two MEPs after Brexit. Sinn Féin submitted a report to the EU Constituency Commission making its case.⁹⁷ However, instead, the EP gave the two additional seats to the Republic of Ireland.⁹⁸

While consistently a plank of Sinn Féin’s platform, Brexit brought the issue of self-determination back to the forefront of the party’s EU work. Though

92. Sinn Féin, *Inclusive and Strategic Growth*.

93. Michelle O’Neill, “Sinn Féin Opposed to Stormont Veto on the Backstop”, *Sinn Féin*, September 18th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3UvNskR>.

94. Sinn Féin, *Fighting for Ireland*.

95. Chris MacManus, “EU Must Stand Firm as Brits Continue to Disregard Agreement”, *Sinn Féin*, April 24th, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3XpYc4d>.

96. Martina Anderson, “One-Minute Speeches on Matters of Political Importance”, *European Parliament*, September 10th, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3IYKHTK>.

97. Sinn Féin, *Review of European Parliament Consistencies: Sinn Féin Submission to the Constituency Commission* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 2018).

98. European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland, “Ireland Officially Gains Two New MEPs”, *European Parliament*, January 31st, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3YuRLx1>.

self-determination refers to the right of a people to nationally self-determine, Sinn Féin's goal of self-determination is intertwined with its right to determine EU membership. Supranational institutions, like the EU, require a form of collective determination that asks members to give up some sovereignty to join. The 'Leave' campaign framed Brexit as a way to protect, and gain back, the UK's sovereignty as an independent country; Sinn Féin's support for EU membership, and the right to choose that membership, was linked to its goal for a united Ireland.⁹⁹ Documented grievances aside, for Sinn Féin "the relationship with Europe is much more positive, and less kind of dominating, than the relationship with Britain".¹⁰⁰

Sinn Féin has repeatedly called on the EU to respect Northern Ireland's Brexit vote as a means to support the Good Friday Agreement. In the European Parliament, MEP Martina Anderson called for the EU to support, stand up for, and respect the Northern Irish vote to "Remain" as a way to protect the peace agreement, a document which defines the right to self-determination in the north.¹⁰¹ Sinn Féin also hosted a European Parliament conference titled "Post Brexit: Towards A United Ireland?" that sought to explore with a European audience what the future could look like.¹⁰² Sinn Féin's 2019 European manifesto was titled "all Ireland in Europe" and while it cited the consistent need for EU reform, it also held the position that Northern Ireland should not be "dragged out" and pointed to the need to build support for a unified Ireland in Europe.¹⁰³

99. Chris Grayling, "We Must Vote Leave to Protect Our Sovereignty and Democracy from Further EU Integration", *Vote Leave*, May 31st, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3T6pCvq>.

100. Mitchell McLaughlin, interviewed by author, February 28th, 2020.

101. Martina Anderson, "Preparation of the European Council Meeting of 21 and 22 March 2019 and UK's Withdrawal from the EU (Debate)", *European Parliament*, March 13th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3SXHet6>; Martina Anderson, "Disenfranchisement of Voting Rights in the EU (Debate)", *European Parliament*, October 2nd, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3ZxN3QH>; Martina Anderson, "State of Play of Negotiations with the United Kingdom (Debate)", *European Parliament*, October 3rd, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3yk8850>; Martina Anderson, "One-Minute Speeches on Matters of Political Importance", *European Parliament*, April 26th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3SXDY0W>; Martina Anderson, "Negotiations with the United Kingdom Following Its Notification that It Intends to Withdraw from the European Union (Debate)", *European Parliament*, April 5th, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3F73OKn>; Martina Anderson, "Outcome of the Referendum in the United Kingdom (Debate)", *European Parliament*, June 28th, 2016, <https://bit.ly/3L67X4U>.

102. Sinn Féin, *Inclusive and Strategic Growth*.

103. Sinn Féin, *Fighting for Ireland*, 6.

For voters who might not feel strongly about reunification on the island of Ireland but do feel strongly about the benefits of EU membership, Sinn Féin has highlighted re-unification as a practical way to regain EU membership.¹⁰⁴ The European Council, came to the conclusion in ‘EU/CO XT 20010/17’ that “in accordance with international law, the entire territory of such a united Ireland would thus be part of the European Union”.¹⁰⁵ Thus, if Ireland, under the requirements outlined by the GFA, re-united, then the entire isle of Ireland would automatically acquire membership as one entity. This differs from the often-cited case of Scottish independence where the EU has said that if Scotland becomes a country, independent of the UK, then it would not automatically become a separate EU member state but would have to re-apply for membership and go through the ascension process.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Sinn Féin has argued Irish unity is the solution to Brexit. Generally, as a way “back into the EU for citizens in the North”, but also as a way to solve technical problems, arguing that “resolving the issue of partition, resolves the issue of the border and the fiendishly complicated trading arrangements that they’re going to have to make”.¹⁰⁷ Reuniting Ireland is not just a republican goal, but a practical answer to the complication caused by Brexit and a way to maintain the existing peace.

104. Gerry Adams, “Brexit Is Bad for Ireland”, *Sinn Féin*, January 31st, 2020, <http://bit.ly/3HZy4HI>; Mary Lou McDonald, “Ireland and the EU after Brexit: A View from Sinn Féin”, *SoundCloud*, January 31st, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3ZycP7f>.

105. European Council, *Special Meeting of the European Council (Art. 50)*, April 29th, 2017, EU/CO XT 20010/17.

106. Anthony Salamone, “What Would It Take for Scotland to Rejoin the EU as an Independent State?”, *EUROPP*, February 5th, 2020, <https://bit.ly/41V3Xu0>; Martina Anderson, “The UK’s Withdrawal from the EU (Debate)”, *European Parliament*, September 18th, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3YEvzRu>.

107. Mitchell McLaughlin, interviewed by author, February 28th, 2020. See also Adams, “Brexit is Bad for Ireland”.

Table 2
Summary of Sinn Féin's EU Policy

| Policy Era | EU Stance | Campaign Position | EP Engagement | Rhetoric/ Platform |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-Peace Agreement | EU rejectionist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote no on Republic of Ireland membership referendum • Vote against expansion moves such as Maastricht Treaty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ran no candidates in EP elections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform called for withdrawal |
| Pre-Brexit | Critical engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote no for referendums on Treaty of Amsterdam, the Treaty of Nice, the Treaty establishing an EU constitution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Won seats in EP • Joined GUE/NGL political group in the EP • Established office in Brussels | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed platform on EU issues • Called on EU to support reunification of Ireland |
| Post-Brexit | A benefit of a United Ireland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote remain • Campaigned to avoid a hard border | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted EP conference on a United Ireland, post Brexit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Called on EU to respect NI's vote in Brexit as part of the GFA |

Conclusion

Brexit has become a reworking of the peace process or, at the very least, a test of the agreement's stability without the structure of European integration. Though Brexit is the disintegration of the UK as an EU member state, it is also a shift in the relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, which disproportionately affects Northern Ireland.

While it is a challenge for Sinn Féin to balance continued criticism of the EU with praise for its Brexit stance, it is not incongruous. Sinn Féin has affirmed in recent years that it wants to stay within the system and seek the necessary change from within. The EU has not changed its stance on intervening in internal conflict or supporting self-determination efforts, but its support of Northern Ireland during Brexit has reframed the issue for Sinn Féin. Brexit has created a binary that did not exist before: Northern Ireland can be in the UK, or it can be in the EU, upon reunification with the Republic of Ireland.

As opposed to earlier efforts to promote Irish unification within the European Union, Brexit clearly reoriented and refocused Sinn Féin's political

strategy to lay out the capabilities and benefits of EU partnership more explicitly, the cost to Northern Ireland of leaving the EU, and re-framing self-determination as both an EU issue and a solution to EU issues. Brexit, perhaps conversely, has created new connections between remaining in the EU and pursuing self-determination. For Sinn Féin, there is no united Ireland that is not a part of the European Union.

More broadly, the case of Sinn Féin and Brexit illustrates the need for any discussion of the EU-tendencies of ethno-regional parties to include an examination of the Europeanization of peace processes within the EU's borders as an influential factor on how related minority-nationalist political parties conceive of the EU. For the EU to continue its efforts to maintain peace on the continent, in a context where intrastate conflict is increasingly the norm, it will have to contend with the far-reaching legacies of peace processes.

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