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Ireland and the Big Game Changer

I. Introduction: Ireland in economic crisis

A game changer. That was how several Irish ministers described the agreement reached early on Friday 29th June to allow the European Stability Mechanism recapitalise eurozone banks directly, without adding to sovereign debt, once a single European bank supervisory system is put in place. Since some €64 billion has been added to Ireland's sovereign debt exactly because such direct recapitalisation was not previously permitted their reaction was understandable. The decision arose from Spain's dire need of financial help with its banks and the realisation that its state indebtedness could not be further increased. Ireland had been preparing for such an opportunity and seized it effectively by stitching in a commitment at the eurozone summit to examine its financial sector similarly, resulting ministers hope in an eventual reduction from 120% to 85% of its debt to GDP ratio. They argued plausibly that the move justified their strategy of dealing with the crisis in multilateral fashion as a fully participating member of the eurozone rather than acting unilaterally in breach of its rules or outside its remit. Their case had been made effectively during the Irish referendum campaign on the fiscal compact in May 2012, helping to secure a 60-40 majority in its favour.

The episode crystallised a number of relevant factors in Ireland's current national debate about the EU, how that has been changed by the financial and eurozone crises since 2008 and what are the prospects for the future development of European integration as seen by the country's political elites and citizens. A threefold crisis assailed its economic and political elites and citizens when the property bubble built up since 2002 exploded six years later. Its banking system collapsed through overexposure to loans from the cheap credit which coincided with the introduction of the euro. There was an immediate impact on state revenues when property-related windfall taxes collapsed under this pressure, exposing a yawning gap between current expenditure and revenues. And the country's economic competitiveness suffered from a runaway cost base which gave many of its private and public employees some of the highest incomes in Europe. A huge debt burden, both public and private, now hangs over the state, living standards are falling, unemployment is at 15% and emigration has once again become part of social reality after 15 years of in migration which brought the foreign born portion of the population to over 10%.

The intense and wrenching sense of economic failure brought on by the financial crisis in September 2008, when the Government guaranteed all deposits and debt in the Irish banking system to protect its liquidity, was reinforced when the problem turned out over the following year to have been rather one of solvency. By 2010 it was clear that help from Brussels, where all paths led for a solution, would be contingent on a larger question of protecting the eurozone from financial contagion and moral hazard. Ireland was held in full to its national bank guarantee despite the fact that most of its banks had collapsed or were nationalised. The flow of cheap wholesale risk capital mostly from German, French and British banks that financed the Celtic Tiger property and consumption bubble from 2002-8 was thereby protected in full. This stance was steadfastly maintained by the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary which carried out the rescue programme on Ireland's public finances in November 2010.

Not surprisingly these large financial, economic and political imbalances and asymmetries exercised Irish public debates on the causes of and solutions to the crisis. They contributed to the widespread sense of injustice felt by ordinary citizens internally and externally vis-à-vis the banks, regulatory institutions, business leaders, politicians and EU leaderships seen as responsible for the crisis. As its national and the European dimensions became inextricably entangled, Ireland's fate was felt to be bound up with that of the EU itself and in the political and media worlds we became more and more used to considering European political and institutional actors as part and parcel of the national public sphere.

Europeanisation and politicisation thereby went hand in hand – not necessarily harmoniously but often contentiously. The two processes opened up alternative perspectives on the future development of integration and Ireland's optimal part in it, not only in the economic and political arenas which necessarily and understandably dominate current debates but beyond them too. This essay surveys these changing perceptions and attitudes and the main characteristics of public policy debate in dealing with the crisis. It goes on to examine the principal criticisms and expectations made of the European response and, emerging from that, proposals to develop and enhance its legitimacy. These can be considered in a wider setting of developing political identities in the EU and how Ireland fits into them, the theme of the concluding section.

ÌI. Main characteristics of public and policy debates

Ireland's public debates on European integration can usefully be examined from foundational, strategic and tactical perspectives.

The foundational level relates to long-standing and abiding approaches towards Europe, which historically provided the setting for the development of Irish nationalism and the principal context in which it sought allies against Ireland's conquest by Britain from the sixteenth century onwards. After independence was partially achieved in the 1920s the new state sought to expand its constitutional and legal freedoms from Britain and adapted to the partition that left Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom. Ireland was one of the few new European states whose neutrality survived the Second World War; but the price of survival was political isolation in the 1950s, including from the early development of European integration, and an accompanying economic stagnation which paradoxically reinforced the state's over-dependence on British markets and preoccupation with its power.

Ireland applied to join the EEC in 1962 when the UK did, expressing that dependence; but increasingly through the following decades political elites aimed to reduce it by developing and modernising in a larger European context. Ireland's policy towards European integration has been driven since the 1960s by a prolonged effort to escape from continuing over-dependence and over-reliance on Britain. Accession to the European community in the 1970s was experienced as a liberation from postcolonial constraints by policy-makers and as a broadening horizon by the mass public, underlying the generally positive attitudes which find Irish people among the most convinced they are beneficiaries of EEC/EU membership and that it is a good thing. This appeared to affirm the national project of independence and was harnessed by political elites as fully compatible with Irish nationalism. Ireland's decisions to join the European Monetary System in 1979 without Britain, to support the opening of negotiations on the single European market in 1984 despite British opposition, and above all to join the euro by accepting the Maastricht treaty on economic and monetary union in 1992 notwithstanding British non-participation in the currency confirmed the long term political strategy of reducing over-dependence. Economically there was a diversification away from British markets, reinforced by the 1990s boom, in which international investment played a large role, attracted to Ireland by its full membership of the EU including the single currency, low taxation and access to European and world markets.

Adopting such a positive attitude to integration required a deep change in the political elites' attitudes to state sovereignty, which had been strengthened by the struggle for independence and neutrality. Much of Ireland's debate on European integration is between those who argue that pooling sovereignty enhances real independence of action and sovereigntists who deny this and argue that the state cannot develop without the ability to determine much more of national policy than Brussels allows. Explicitly or implicitly this debate concerns relations with the UK – would an Ireland positioned less within the EU's inner core not then gravitate back towards an increasingly Eurosceptic Britain, thereby undermining the basic thrust of policy since the 1960s? Or maybe this is the better way now that Ireland and Britain share a lot more policy on open markets, liberal economics and legal culture on top of the undoubted transformation of their relationship following the power-sharing Northern Ireland settlement?

There is less disagreement about the large contribution membership of the EEC/EU has made to Ireland's social and economic development through the Common Agricultural Policy, regional, cohesion and social funds or by modernising its human rights agenda through gender and labour legislation. But sovereigntism survives too among Catholics who say that has been pushed too far, on abortion for example, although such voices have been fundamentally weakened by clerical scandals and rapid secularisation in the last ten years. A similar disagreement divides those who say integration is a rational and effective way to manage the globalisation of which Ireland is one of the principal exemplars from those who believe it reinforces the state's capitulation to international capital in its neoliberal manifestation.

Having established its position as a small state within an expanding union in the 1970s and 1980s Irish policy was geared to take advantage of an additional role as a developing state anxious to benefit from the structural funds it helped create. Its relative success in doing so in the 1990s accomplished a transition away from peripheral "Mediterranean" status, marked in 1997 by the passing out of average UK incomes. This was one of the relatively few fields in which the state took a positive initiative; in other respects its policy was normally reactive rather than innovative, whether on enlargement, policy or institutional development. Because of its economic success in that decade Ireland became a model for development and modernisation, based on the neoliberal verities of the time, which were enthusiastically adopted and showed up in the A.T. Kearney/*Foreign Policy* globalisation rankings of the early 2000s, with Ireland at or near the top of the worldwide lists of open economies.

Within the EU, Ireland has been a friend of the community method and the Commission, wary of any large state *directoire* and anxious to impose restrictive rules on trends towards two-tier or multi-speed variability and flexibility. More policy and political energy is devoted to institutional and inter-governmental channels than to the European Parliament, reflecting Ireland's strong centralised executive government structure. There is a conscious effort to avoid being obstructive. A series of successful EU presidencies, notably in 1990, 1996 and 2004, established Ireland's political credentials within the European governance system – as will be recalled from January next when another Irish presidency begins. Certain primary interests are fore grounded, including low corporate taxation, maintaining the Common Agricultural Policy and the Single Market and benefiting (though much less so now) from the structural funds, as well as sustaining the open response to globalisation responsible for Ireland's economic success.

Tossed into the maelstrom of financial and debt crises over the last four years these foundational values have taken a battering from a more affected, attentive and informed public and been reconfigured in response. They have been recast into three major axes of strategic and tactical argument on the role Ireland should play and the optimal direction of policy. In the general election of February 2011 Europe's role loomed large following the €85 billion rescue package mounted by the European Commission/European Central Bank/International Monetary Fund Troika the previous November. The main opposition parties demanded that its terms on debt repayments and write downs be renegotiated and pledged to do so if victorious. After they won the election decisively and formed a coalition between the centre right Fine Gael party and the Labour Party the new government faced into the second axis of argument on whether to adopt multilateral or unilateral strategies in pursuing that renegotiation. The outgoing Fianna Fail party with only one third of its former seats refused to abandon the multilateral approach it had used in office, leaving the unilateralist case in opposition to be made mainly by a larger contingent of sovereigntist Sinn Fein and left-wing members of the Dail (parliament). The third axis of debate concerns whether and when Ireland can expect to return to the markets for its state funding requirements and not continue to rely on the Troika programme. Each of these three arguments also figured prominently in the public debates during the referendum campaign on the fiscal compact treaty in May this year.

The first axis of argument broke the normal pattern whereby international questions rarely become domestic political issues. In contrast to the outbreak of social turmoil and conflict elsewhere caused by the crisis public anger was expressed electorally. Civil society in Ireland has been more quiescent for historical, sociological and political-structural reasons, but this may change with circumstances. Greater awareness and more direct personal exposure to the issues involved close the information gap between policy-makers, political elites and the voting public which normally applies in foreign and European policy, narrowing the elites' ability to control them. Political parties in Ireland as elsewhere normally police the domestic/foreign boundary and prefer to keep their post-election coalition bargaining options open by insulating them rather than making them into competitive issues. That is changing now under the force of events and the impact of Europeanisation.

Renegotiation of the terms and condition in the Troika rescue package on a multilateral basis was a thankless task if opportunities did not open up in the wider systemic crisis of the euro from which Ireland could take advantage. Waiting for those tested an expectant electorate's patience over the new government's first year in office. It accepted the major parameters of the agreement negotiated by the outgoing Fianna Fáil-Green coalition as a sovereign decision which must be adhered to. But it sought to reduce the high, indeed punitive, interest rates paid on the loans and tried to convince the ECB that certain bondholders, notably in Anglo Irish Bank (the main property lender) should not be paid in full. More broadly, it participated in the debates on financing generalised bank recapitalisation and whether and how to create a deeper banking and fiscal union, including using the ECB as a bank of last resort, integrating economic policy and creating a Eurobond system.

The debates on the Greek rescue plan and wider eurozone problems in October and November 2011 crystallised these issues, as often happens in periods of high tension. They were clarified further by the qualitatively larger Spanish and Italian financing problems six months later. Asked why he was permitting unsecured but senior bondholders of Anglo Irish Bank to be repaid €700 million, the Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, said in the Dáil last November: "It is the choice between two evils, as far as I am concerned, and the decision we are taking is the lesser of two evils ... It is more in the interests of the Irish people to grit our teeth and allow Anglo Irish Bank to pay the bond than to default, because default takes us over the edge of the cliff." He and the government supported a much stronger role for the European Central Bank, saying it needed to generate a "wall of money" to prevent contagion spreading to Spain and Italy. The government wanted to ensure it had "no association with the Greek problem whatsoever". It should be seen as a separate economy with different values, positioned closer to the northern European states than the southern Mediterranean ones, in the post-crisis period and keen to re-establish its reputation as a state willing to pay its debts rather than default on them unilaterally. The smart way to proceed was to anticipate developments in the crisis that could be turned to Ireland's advantage as a small but communautaire state, like a wren on an eagle's head.

Hence the strategic justification felt when the Euro Area summit on 29th June agreed "to break the vicious circle between banks and sovereigns" and stitched in the following sentences to its statement: "The Eurogroup will examine the situation of the Irish financial sector with the view of further improving the sustainability of the well-performing adjustment programme. Similar cases will be treated equally". Mr Noonan picked up immediately the following month on the emerging debate among European finance ministers about imposing losses on senior bank bond-holders in the euro zone, in the wake of Spain's financial crisis. This was part and parcel of the third axis of strategic policy debate, on whether and when Ireland can expect to return to the markets for its state funding requirements in 2014 and not continue to rely on the Troika programme or require another bailout. The government regards that as an essential part of restoring its financial and fiscal sovereignty, in line with that programme's own timetable. It would also be a gesture of confidence for the overall EU approach, in which Ireland would become a rare success story, on the large assumption that markets are ready to fund this affordably.

III. Criticisms and public expectations of the EU

The government's parliamentary and political critics reject these arguments, saying Greece's. Spain's and Italy's willingness to bargain robustly with the EU/IMF is the better way, showing greater courage and leadership. Repaying loans in full is unfair and unethical because they were originally lent as a risk and have since been profited on in secondary trading. This feeling is by no means confined to those on the left, since former Fine Gael Taoiseach and EU ambassador to Washington John Bruton wrote to Commission president Barroso saying German and French banks were also to blame alongside irresponsible Irish borrowers. Critics do not agree that it would be as perilous as the Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Michael Noonan are convinced it is to defy the ECB by taking unilateral action. Nor (less credibly) do they think a multilateral approach can produce longer term relaxation of the debt burden,

Ireland's experience as a referendum state adds another distinctive dimension to its EU profile. There have been 11 referendums on EC/EU treaties, beginning with accession in 1972 and then on each successive treaty since the Irish Supreme Court decided in 1987 that the Single European Act required a referendum because its foreign policy provisions were inconsistent with the Irish constitution. The test established by that case was whether state sovereignty is affected by a transfer of powers over and above the original accession terms. Since then governments have decided politically it is more prudent to hold referendums than rely on parliamentary ratification. This means they are more alert to the domestic political consequences of integration than most other governments; and since the defeats in the first referendums on the Nice and Lisbon treaties (2001 and 2008) more cautious about accepting treaty change. The experience tells the political elite it is necessary to campaign vigorously and persistently over the long term if referendums are to be passed. Political communication is put at a premium and they must be able and willing to argue their case. But political parties are not well geared to fight referendum campaigns. If in government they have been frustrated by court restrictions on state involvement and requiring balanced broadcasting; if in opposition they resent the expenditure required and are ill-equipped to fight such a campaign on the doorsteps. May's referendum was a better experience for the parties favouring the fiscal compact treaty, in that they campaigned vigorously and successfully, not having had the time or opportunity to generate the extensive civil society support needed to pass Nice and Lisbon a second time.

The electorate clearly feels it is safer to be an integral part of the European Union than not in troubled economic times, as shown in the decisive swing towards the Yes side in the second Lisbon referendum of October 2009 and then in the 60/40 passage of the fiscal compact treaty in May 2012 on a 50.6% turnout. That conviction persisted, notwithstanding the bailout shock and sharply reduced living standards. Three *Irish Times* Ipsos/mrbi opinion polls, in July and October 2011, found a persistent 68/65/67 per cent saying it is better to be part of the European Union against 22/25/23 per cent not, with 10 per cent don't know on each occasion. This feeling was held even by classes and party supporters normally most hostile to treaty change and people maintained the position even though in the July poll they thought by 53 per cent to 31 per cent that the government had not done enough to try to negotiate better terms with the EU/IMF and by 50 per cent to 38 per cent that Ireland had surrendered its sovereignty by accepting the bailout. Revealingly, only 25 per cent were satisfied, while 54 per cent were dissatisfied, with how European leaders were running the EU in October 2011.

These attitudes were born out in a flash Eurobarometer survey after the 2012 referendum which gives a useful and up to date overview of public opinion on European integration. 43% of voters expressed a fairly good knowledge of the treaty, 23% a good one, 25% were only vaguely aware of what it was about and 9% knew nothing at all. Asked about their reasons for voting in favour of the treaty, voters cited reasons mainly linked to the economic situation of the country: economic necessity (24%), instability attached to the "No" vote (23%) and access to funding and future bailouts (22%). Results show that 77% of respondents in favour of the Treaty think Irish membership of the EU is a good thing as do most of those who have a good knowledge of the EU and of the issues at stake. A big majority of those voting in favour of the Treaty declared they also voted in favour of Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Respondents who voted against the Treaty cite in the first place reasons related to their opposition to government (28%) and their distrust of politicians (24%). The next reasons are related to the lack of information and understanding (20%) and to the opposition to referendum (19%).

Overall 60% of Irish voters had a good objective knowledge of EU affairs and 64% thought EU membership a good thing, 20% neither good nor bad, while 11% said it was a bad thing and 5% did not know. These figures are down on previous polls. And there was a pronounced class distribution in the Yes and No supporters, with upper middle and middle class voters much more likely to vote Yes and working class ones much more likely to vote No. Ireland here shows itself in line with class trends in attitudes to integration throughout the EU, which analysts relate to an emerging pattern whereby the more mobile, interacting and better educated groups are the winners of integration whereas less transactional classes are the comparative losers. But only two constituencies voted against the treaty, so despite this cleavage there is a definite national mood at play. And it should be recalled that Ryanair is an Irish company, now Europe's largest. Research shows that the new mobility it has brought to the continent's less well off people has a discernibly positive effect on their attitudes towards more integration in selected spheres. Such issues play into the constellation of Irish attitudes to integration. Ryanair helped bring 30,000 Irish football fans to Poland and Ukraine for the European cup this year where their good humour and lusty singing skills caught the continent's imagination, not least in the now famous banner: "Angela Merkel thinks we're at work."

A European Parliament Eurobarometer survey of voter attitudes towards issues debated in the eurozone crisis in March 2012 is also revealing. It shows Irish voters were more in favour than the European average of Eurobonds and a financial transaction tax designed to make those responsible for the crisis pay more towards its cost. This is despite the government's reluctance to accept a FTT not including Britain for reasons of competitiveness. Other surveys show Irish voters strongly favour keeping the euro, but are less enthusiastic about enlargement and a common defence and foreign policy than most other EU national publics. Explicit identification with Europe is also low as measured by the running Eurobarometer question on whether people see themselves as European, national or both. The national only figure for Ireland in 2011 was 59%, the second highest EU figure after the UK.

Such surveys nevertheless show Irish voters are comparatively well engaged with European issues and have a relatively good knowledge of them, based on the direct experience of the last four years crisis in which they are intimately entangled through political argument, daily media exposure and periodic elections and referendums. Arguably voters and public opinion are better attuned to changing EU economic and political realities than their cautious political leaderships. Only gradually have political leaders been willing or able to formulate visions to develop the EU and the eurozone out of crisis, despite their realisation that this is a dynamic process which seems bound to culminate in closer integration, probably distinguishing between a deepening eurozone and a looser 27 member EU.

At the June summit the Council president Van Rompuy got approval to develop his plan for "a specific and time-bound road map for the achievement of a genuine economic and monetary union" involving "'four essential building blocks' for the future EMU: an integrated financial framework, an integrated budgetary framework, an integrated economic policy framework and strengthened democratic legitimacy and accountability". This seems bound to involve another referendum in Ireland and probably in a number of other member-states – including even Germany. Emerging proposals for simultaneous transnational election of the presidents of the Commission and Council and a possible merger of them are part of this increasing politicisation. Ireland has a comparative advantage as a referendum state in supporting such ideas if the will is there among political leaders. But they are uncertain about popular support, reluctant to argue too far ahead and like leaders elsewhere jealous of losing political control in their national political space.

A deeper euro zone would pose a particularly difficult choice for Ireland given the closer relationship politically with the UK following the Belfast Agreement. It has been symbolically sealed by Queen Elizabeth's visit last year to the Republic and her handshake with Northern Ireland's deputy First Minister, a former IRA leader, in June. Economically Ireland's domestic-owned economy remains close to the UK, which is cultivating closer relations with Dublin and selected other European states in an effort to offset its increasing marginality through the eurozone crisis. As the Conservative Northern Ireland Secretary Owen Patterson put it in a recent address on British–Irish relations in Dublin: "The UK remains the largest market for Irish goods, while Ireland is the UK's fifth largest export market. Until recently we exported more to the Republic of Ireland than to Brazil, Russia, India and China combined. As the Taoiseach pointed out in March something like £1 billion worth of trade takes place between our two countries every week."

It is prudent to maintain these links in a period of wider turbulence for both states. Scenarios of change include a deeper eurozone including Ireland with a loosening UK relationship, possibly exacerbated by a referendum there on renegotiated membership or withdrawal. By then the UK will be embroiled with an internal debate about Scottish independence alongside that on relations with the EU. Ireland's choices could be profoundly influenced by the outcome as the UK decides where to position itself in a reconfigured Europe. So the strategic impulse that originally attracted Ireland towards EEC/EU membership in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of reducing dependence on the UK resurfaces now that the euro is facing an existential crisis requiring deeper integration to save the euro. Ireland will find it more difficult to marry its EU and UK policies in this setting. Conceivably the policy landscape could be dramatically altered by Scottish independence (within the EU) in coming years, driven partly by growing Scottish disenchantment with an increasingly Eurosceptic and Conservative-dominated England. That would raise the question of Irish unification more urgently than has been the case under the consent and stability norms under which the Belfast Agreement has bedded down since 1998 – notwithstanding existing lack of enthusiasm for it on cost grounds in Ireland North and South. Even more speculatively one can ask how long a geopolitically reduced England would want to remain outside a deeper European Union. Alternatively, the confident British Eurosceptic predictions of the euro's demise, if they come true, would also throw such scenarios into rapid meltdown.

IV. Conclusion: Contextualising Ireland's views on the European project

The various European nations approach and interpret integration through their own national imaginaries. Ireland's history and culture put continental Europe centre stage. Its nationalism has always had a European vocation as the source of inspiration and allies against domination by its more powerful and larger neighbour Britain. Whether concerning the foundational stories of Ireland's origins, the early medieval Christian missionaries who influenced so much of European monasticism, the later religious trauma of imposed Protestantism and resistant Catholicism during and after the Reformation, the prolonged search by Irish political leaders for Spanish, French or other support to overthrow British power from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, or in its abundant literary imagination Europe is a central political reality embedded in Irish culture.

From the 1960s official Irish nationalism gradually transformed Irish identity from what had become an introverted essentialism with Britain as its Other into an engaged Europeanism. In contrast to the union of Britain and Ireland the unification of Europe was seen as an enabling cultural force. It validated and enriched Irish nationalism because European unity was based on voluntary association not imperial power. In this sense Ireland exemplifies a constructivist account of integration, in that self and other are mutually constitutive yet still with plural meanings. This value structure has elements of an ideology and is therefore subject to political contestation and historical revision; but it expresses sufficient of Ireland's values and experience to have gained popular traction and legitimacy.

It is important to distinguish sovereignty from nationalism in understanding Ireland's approach. Pooling legal sovereignty is required to do integration, whether inter-governmentally, confederally or federally, a point that is well understood by the Irish political parties which support the project – as by those which oppose it. Abandoning nationalism is a much more demanding condition – indeed an unacceptable one – for a country which sees it as a liberating force from imperialism and therefore as a means of realising the international. Imperial and anti-imperial nationalism are quite distinct forces in European history. It therefore makes much more sense to talk of a post-sovereign than of a post-national Europe in the Irish imaginary of a refounded project. Official and popular Ireland is more at home with a confederal inter-governmentalism than with a fully fledged federalism substituting European for national identifications and political structures. This, it suspects, would be tantamount to another empire. The raw power politics that emerged in the last two years of scrambling to save the euro created that impression – and not only through media simplifications, although visions of a lurid German neo-imperialism resonate there too, echoing British Euro-scepticism, but actually coming from a different experience.

Most Irish voters do not want to revert to a separatist sovereignty and see the need for transnational politics and governance to manage and regulate capitalist globalisation. But, as in other EU Member States, it is a selective commitment. Politics and governance begin at home but no longer end there; yet this home is where political democracy and identity are still mostly to be found. They have been extended gradually but now face a qualitative shift if the euro is to survive. There is a contradiction between systemic integration of global markets and integration of the existing socio-political structures in the EU. Ireland's choice would be for a third way between inter-governmentalism and federalism. Its natural preference is for a "demoi-cracy" or entangled post-sovereign Europe which properly understands the distinction between using federal methods and creating a federal super state. This is probably the next stage of integration, with enough centralised yet participative governance to carry out those functions, along with deeper links between national and European political identities.

Europe needs to make that jump and Ireland is so far willing to go with it, as is clear from its political discourse and public opinion. They recognise the need for smart politics and bargaining to achieve central influence as a small prosperous state no longer reconciled to peripherality. There has been a reluctance to formulate the visions required for a new generation 67 years on from 1945 – as elsewhere. But the ingredients of cultural, political and economic openness, mobility and engagement which must contribute to that vision are amply present in contemporary Ireland. There too is the necessary fear of failure, which could well reverse the modernisation and European interdependence so important for Ireland's development over the last two generations. That would be a much bigger game changer.

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