

Irish-German Diplomatic Relations (1929-2019)

Gisela Holfter (ed.)

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES
DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN
LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

13

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Gisela Holfter

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Address by Tánaiste Simon Coveney

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this publication that builds on two 2019 events marking the 90th anniversary of the establishment in 1929 of diplomatic relations between Germany and Ireland. I want to thank everyone for participating in these important events, particularly the distinguished academics and the Irish and German diplomats involved. We are particularly indebted to Dr. Gisela Holfter for her work and commitment to this project and for helping to design occasions worthy of the serious reflection and scholarship that this subject deserves.

Although the relationship and interaction between Ireland and Germany is much older than 90 years, stretching back more than a millennium to the time of the Celts and possibly before, the relationship came of age when Ireland gained its independence and, as a young country, stepped forward on the world stage. Important decisions were made by the fledgling Irish Government to work closely with Germany and German entities as it sought to modernise our country. These close working relations have been immeasurably strengthened particularly through our common membership of the European Union during the last five decades.

Germany today is of vital importance to Ireland. It is one of our biggest trading partners and sources of investment and tourism. Politically we have never been closer as we together protect and advance the interests of the European Union. In short, today we are closer partners and friends than at any other time in our history.

So, as we mark 90 years of our official bilateral relationship, we are determined, both Germany and Ireland, to build on what we have already achieved. That is why in 2018 I launched the strategy document which is intended to deepen and widen Ireland's footprint in Germany, which includes the opening of a new consulate in Frankfurt in August 2019. The course that we are embarked upon, underpinned by the development of our cultural profile in Germany, will further enrich our relationship and bring our two countries even closer together.

I wish the publication every success as we reflect on our past and look forward to the next 90 years and beyond, of relations between Ireland and Germany.

Address by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas

One of my first visits as Foreign Minister took me to Ireland in April 2018. On that occasion, my dear colleague Simon Coveney walked me to a very special place just a stone's throw from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Three Fates Fountain on St. Stephen's Green. This sculpture was erected in 1956 as a gift from the German people to thank Ireland for Operation Shamrock, the well-known humanitarian project by the Irish Red Cross that brought German children suffering from malnutrition in post-war Germany to Ireland, where they stayed with foster families for up to three years and were saved from starvation. Some of these children later on made Ireland their permanent home. It was very moving for me to meet one of them during my visit to the commemorative fountain.

This wonderful gesture of humanitarian assistance by Ireland is just one example of the close relationship between our two countries. Another is the Special European Council on 28 April 1990 in Dublin, which debated German reunification. It was also thanks to the Irish Presidency's determination that European leaders warmly welcomed German unification.

Today, we are standing at a crossroads in Europe's history yet again. Both the COVID-19 pandemic with its severe economic and social impact and the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU are confronting us with unprecedented challenges. We can only master these when we stand united. This unity includes protecting the integrity of the single market and full solidarity with Ireland in helping to preserve the Good Friday Agreement and its achievements, especially with a view to our common goal of ensuring peace and stability in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These are fundamental concerns – not only for Ireland, but for the entire European Union.

A strong European Union requires strong bilateral relations. And I am happy and proud to say that Irish-German bilateral relations have probably never been stronger than they are today. They have blossomed because so many people from both our countries were committed to this cause. German industry was part of Ireland's industrialisation, and Germany continues to be the second-most important foreign direct investor in Ireland. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of German tourists have fallen in love with Ireland, among them Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll. Many school and town twinings have been initiated, and Irish music and culture have become an integral and very popular part of life in Germany.

I would like to thank all those who have worked tirelessly to deepen this German-Irish friendship over the course of many years, including the Achill

Heinrich Böll Association, the Centre for Irish-German Studies in Limerick, St. Kilian's German School, the German-Irish Chamber of Commerce and the Goethe-Institut Dublin.

Permit me to thank the editor Dr. Gisela Holfter and all the contributors for bringing together an essential contribution revisiting German-Irish diplomatic relations.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh und vielen Dank!

*Foreword by H.E. Deike Potzel,
German Ambassador to Ireland*

Immer weiter!

Building on 90 years of German-Irish diplomatic relations

During my tenure over the past three years, I have had the privilege to build on a very strong German-Irish relationship based on trust, friendship, shared values and interests. Ireland and its people enjoy a very positive reputation in Germany; Germans are intrigued by the beauty of the Irish landscape, the way of life, the friendliness of the people, music, Irish arts and culture. More than 850,000 German tourists travelling to Ireland in 2019, more than 11,000 Germans who made Ireland their home, and a good few town twinnings are but a few proofs of the deep roots of friendship.

Germans are well-liked in Ireland, too – even though we still struggle with our reputation of not having a very pronounced sense of humour. Still, it is wonderful to see many Irish tourists taking city breaks in Germany – and some staying for good as the more than 4,000 Irish permanently living in Berlin. We are important trading partners; we like to do business with each other. German companies have long since found a base and a home in Ireland. It is wonderful to see, too, that the number of Irish students learning German at secondary school level has increased over the past years thus laying the foundations for future bridges between our two countries. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Irish Ambassador to Germany, Nicholas O’Brien, his predecessor, former Ambassador Michael Collins, and all their staff for the excellent cooperation that they have made possible with the German Foreign Office and our Dublin embassy.

We are close and reliable friends to each other as has been markedly shown by one of the biggest challenges for European politics since the foundation of the European Union: Brexit.

This book will explain about the foundations of our bilateral relations. As a reader you will be invited to revisit decisive moments and the overall trajectory of our diplomatic relations. Thanks to the committed work of Dr. Gisela Holfter and all the contributors to this volume readers will enjoy a combination of academic input as well as first-hand accounts by former German and Irish Ambassadors. German diplomats like to quote former German Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl when describing the importance of their work: “We have to understand the past in order to understand the present and to create

the future”. Or as Søren Kierkegaard put it: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”.

Our historical backgrounds, albeit very different, explain one decisive commonality in our approach to foreign policy: the fundamental importance we both attach to the European Union. This is an observation many Irish politicians, diplomats and civil society representatives have shared with me over the past years. 12 Irish Young Professionals who had been invited on a field trip to Germany by the Federal Foreign Office in August 2019 told me afterwards that they realised that – as in Ireland – history is still very present in Germany, and hence very much linked to the way we look at current challenges.

Our two countries know that the European Union has been and continues to be a decisive peace project which will also help us to jointly shape our future and tackle joint challenges such as Brexit. In the course of the negotiations with the United Kingdom, both of our countries have continuously underlined that safeguarding peace on this island is a matter of peace and stability for the European Union as a whole. During their respective visits to Ireland, Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Heiko Maas underlined our solidarity with Ireland and our determination to protect the Good Friday Agreement.

Against the backdrop of Brexit, our two countries have set out on a journey to strengthen and deepen our relations. “Ireland in Germany – A Wider and Deeper Footprint”, a review published by the Irish government in April 2018 and Germany’s Like-minded Initiative set the stage for the Joint Action Plan signed by our Foreign Ministers in November 2018. As a result, projects in various fields have come to fruition – Ireland has stepped up its diplomatic presence in Germany for instance, and here in Ireland you might have seen the “Deutschmobil” touring the country to promote German as a Foreign Language. The Joint Vision Forum between our think tanks – the IIEA in Dublin and SWP in Berlin – discusses matters of joint interest with representatives of our Foreign Ministries. Regular consultations of Secretaries of State were established, Political Directors consult on a regular basis, joint civilian crisis management courses took place. Line Ministries are repeatedly in contact, too. The number of exchanges as well as bilateral visits has increased – with President Michael D. Higgins’ successful State Visit to Germany in July 2019 clearly being the highlight. Other visits by the German-Irish Friendship Group of the Bundestag as well as the visit of the CSU parliamentary group of the Bundestag helped to bring about another wonderful example of our friendship: financial support for the Achill Heinrich Böll Association.

We will continue to develop our relations in all fields. And we will continue to support each other in times of crisis as we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic: joint repatriation flights or processing Irish Covid-19 tests in German laboratories, German companies supplying medical equipment to Ireland, collaborations of German-Irish engineers – those are wonderful examples for a vivid and strong friendship.

All our bilateral efforts are embedded in our international cooperation which we will strengthen even more in the future, too. Most recently, Ireland joined Germany, France and over 60 other countries in the Alliance for Multilateralism in order to underline the importance of multilateral forums and cooperation around the globe. With Ireland having been elected to the United Nations Security Council for 2021/22, Germany – as a current non-permanent member of the UNSC – is very much looking forward to passing on the baton to our close European partner and friend.

Dear Readers,

Our close ties allow for a lot of optimism and enthusiasm with regard to the future of our relations. Together with our Irish counterparts, we are determined to build successfully on the past 90 years of diplomatic relations and to ensure that our shared future will also be marked by trust, friendship and success. For me, it has been and still is an enormous pleasure and privilege to be part of that journey. Do feel invited to join in. *Bígí Linn!* May our relations continue to prosper – *immer weiter!*

*Foreword by H.E. Dr. Nicholas O'Brien,
Irish Ambassador to Germany*

As I took up duty as Ambassador of Ireland to the Federal Republic of Germany in August 2019, I was very conscious of 2019 being the 90th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Germany, and the long line of colleagues who held the position previously. It is my ambition to build upon and further strengthen the enduring legacy which my predecessors have established in Germany. It is a solid and steadfast legacy of working tirelessly for Ireland, building its reputation and standing in Germany whether at the political, commercial, cultural or community levels.

The links between Ireland and Germany, whilst established diplomatically in October 1929, are much older. There is clear evidence of trading and other links between Irish and Germanic tribes, stretching back many millennia to pre-Christian times. These links evolved during the early Christian period, especially from the 7th century onwards, when many Irish monks left their seats of learning on the western shores of Europe, their monastic settlements in Ireland, to spread the gospels and Christian learning once more in mainland Europe.

A large number of these Irish missionaries are now venerated as saints in Germany, such as St. Trudpert in Münstertal, St. Alto in Altomünster and St. Ailill of Cologne. Of course, when thinking of Irish missionaries in Germany, the three Irish martyrs St. Killian, St. Colonat and St. Totnan of Würzburg are the most celebrated and the ones who spring to mind most readily. Indeed, the manner in which they are celebrated annually in Würzburg, in Bavaria, is so strong that three Irish presidents, President Hillery, President McAleese and most recently, President Higgins visited Würzburg Cathedral and paid their respects to the relics of the three Irish martyrs. It is also a source of immense pride that an Irish Celtic cross, donated by the Irish State in 1989 on the 1,300th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Irish missionaries, stands proudly in Würzburg. I recently viewed the early Irish manuscripts which are held at the Library Manuscripts Centre at the Julius-Maximilian University in Würzburg. They are to be treasured and they underline why Würzburg is often called “the most Irish town on mainland Europe”.

Whilst there are clearly cities and regions in Germany that have strong links to Ireland and these should rightfully be celebrated, I am very conscious of the federal nature of Germany and the 16 States that comprise the nation. As I visit each of them to both promote Ireland and to better learn the individual nature of each State, I am moved by the esteem in which Ireland is held. I

am also heartened by the 19 twin-town relationships that exist between Ireland and Germany. I encourage and welcome these twinnings and the understanding between communities that they engender and foster.

In the Embassy's work in developing a better understanding and even stronger relationship between Ireland and Germany, we are deepening our footprint and engagement. Last year we opened a career Consulate General in Frankfurt am Main. We have recently appointed a Cultural Officer at the Embassy to enhance our cultural links. Indeed, this appointment is the first of its kind in any Irish Embassy and is a reflection of the value which we place on cultural links with Germany.

We also celebrate German culture in Ireland, most notably Heinrich Böll whose *Irisches Tagebuch* published in 1957 was instrumental in forming positive German attitudes towards Ireland. This year, I was delighted to establish, in the spirit of Heinrich Böll, the St. Patrick's Day award to recognise those actors in Germany who, through their work, have positively promoted the image of Ireland amongst the German public. Unfortunately due to the pandemic restrictions, it was not possible to confer the award this year but it is my intention to do so when possible.

An important dimension of our bilateral relationship is the level and number of high level political exchanges and engagements between Ireland and Germany. Although the pandemic restrictions have curtailed these exchanges at the physical level for now, they continue very strongly in the digital realm and will undoubtedly be fully restored following the lifting of restrictions.

Bilateral trade levels are strong and encouraging. Four State agencies, Bord Bia, IDA Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Enterprise Ireland have offices in Germany and are expanding their footprint.

During the State Visit of President Higgins to Germany in 2019, he extended an invitation to President Steinmeier to visit Ireland and we would hope that we will be able to reciprocate the generous hospitality shown to President Higgins over the course of his State Visit to Germany.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the strong support and solidarity of my counterpart in Dublin, Ambassador Deike Potzel. She, alongside her embassy team, has been exemplary in how bilateral relations should be developed and encouraged. I always feel when calling upon Ambassador Potzel that I will hear the voice of a friend on the other end of the line.

The German Embassy in Dublin also celebrated 90 years since its establishment, in September this year. Perhaps foretelling the warmth that would mark the German-Ireland bilateral diplomatic relationship, it is fitting that the archives record that when the first German Ambassador to Ireland, Herr

Georg von Dehn-Schmidt, set out to present his credentials, he did so on what was recorded as an unseasonably warm and sunny September day.

And long may the sun continue to shine on German-Irish relations. Relations are built not just by embassies but also by our four highly dedicated Honorary Consuls in Germany and I would like to acknowledge their work in promoting Ireland and protecting Irish interests in Germany.

Finally, I take this opportunity to warmly thank Dr. Gisela Holfter for her untiring work in examining, documenting and presenting an overview of the first 90 years of diplomatic relations between Ireland and Germany. I have every confidence that, based on past relations, our shared European identity and common membership of the European Union, Ireland and Germany will remain steadfast friends and partners over the years ahead.

Remarks on Irish-German Diplomatic Relations Past and Present

Gisela Holfter

Relationships between countries are shaped by numerous factors. However, diplomatic links have a special position: they form and represent the relationship to an unusual degree and allow us to analyse the official history of engagement and its context. In order to establish official diplomatic relations, a nation generally has to be independent, a status that eluded Ireland for a long time. Milestones here were the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the subsequent evolution of rights within the Commonwealth. The following years saw increasing attempts to build up links to other nations. Germany's Department of Foreign Affairs on the other hand was long established but experienced major upheaval following World War I and was strongly focused on relations with the victorious war allies, especially Great Britain, and saw Ireland mainly in this context. Still, on both sides there existed genuine interest in each other and in the establishment of reciprocal diplomatic links. Overall, mutual interest and positive engagement with each other has been a hallmark of Irish-German relations and has grown even stronger in the last decades.

Not only historians and academics are needed for the assessment and contextualisation of diplomatic relations, but also the diplomats themselves and their reflections on their experiences, especially with regard to recent times. Accordingly this volume combines both approaches, as will be discussed in greater detail below. But firstly, a look at the actual events which give rise to the anniversary of 90 years we are commemorating, and who was involved.

Let us begin the story on Tuesday, 2 September 1930, the day when diplomatic relations between Ireland and Germany were finally fully established. There had been great anticipation and the day had been planned in minute detail and with considerable fanfare. The day before, the *Irish Independent* informed its readers of the preparations and even the precise route the first fully fledged German envoy was to take on the way to present his credentials:

Herr von Dehn, German Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to the Free State, will present his credentials to his Excellency the Governor-General on to-morrow, at 12 o'clock. At 10.40 a.m. a mounted escort, including trumpeters, will take up their position in front of the German Consulate-General at 58 Northumberland Rd. As the Minister leaves the Consulate-General the General Salute will be sounded. The German Minister will be

accompanied by the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs. The party will proceed to the Viceregal Lodge by the following route – Northumberland Rd., Mount St. Bridge, Lower Mount St., Merrion Sq. (North), Clare St., Leinster St., Nassau St., College Green Westmoreland St., O’Connell St., North Frederick St., Blessington St., North. Circular Rd., Main Road to Phoenix Park via Gough Monument to Phoenix Gate, Viceregal Lodge.

The drive of the Lodge will be lined with infantry, who will present arms as the Minister passes. After the presentation of credentials a gun salute of 15 guns will be fired in Phoenix Park. The route of the return journey will be as follows: Main Road of Park to Parkgate St., Northern Quays to Grattan Bridge, Parliament St., Dame St., College Green, Nassau St., to Consulate-General, Northumberland Rd.

On arrival at the Consulate-General the General Salute will again be sounded. At 4 p.m. the German Minister will be received by the Minister for External Affairs in the Council Chamber, Government Buildings. On his arrival at the entrance to Government Buildings a military guard of honour will present arms.¹

The grand event thus properly advertised went without a hitch. In addition to the soundtrack of military salutes there was a visual component that ensured the event “created considerable interest”. It was reported that “Flags flew from public buildings, and miniature Free State and German flags fluttered from the radiator of the new Minister’s car.”²

The presenting of credentials to the Governor-General James McNeill (who officially represented the British monarch until 1931) by Georg von Dehn-Schmidt marked the final point of the setting up of official diplomatic relations between Ireland and Germany. It had been a rather lengthy affair to conclude: while von Dehn-Schmidt’s appointment had seemed secure from the autumn of 1929, his actual appointment reveals a lot about the Irish strategic approach to international relations and mastery of manoeuvring in a highly charged political atmosphere.

The Irish side had been considerably quicker off the mark than their German counterparts, with Daniel Binchy, the Irish representative, arriving in Germany in early October 1929. He presented his credentials to Hindenburg on 27 October 1929 (a week after his Irish colleague in Paris was accredited). In contrast to von Dehn-Schmidt’s grandiose experience this was a rather low-key affair. Binchy, who had studied and obtained a PhD in Munich and been appointed professor in Law and Legal History in Dublin, had been somewhat frustrated by delays and came to the conclusion that his official accreditation was not particularly high on the agenda of the German side,

1 *Irish Independent*, 1 September 1930, p. 6.

2 *Evening Herald*, 2 September 1930, p. 6.