

Unions, Break-ups and Special Relationships:  
Aspects of Irish-German-UK Relations

Paul Carmichael, Gisela Holfter (eds.)

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

15

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Paul Carmichael, Gisela Holfter

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## Foreword

As a German Political Foundation we are firmly committed to promoting liberal, representative democracy, the rule of law, a social market economy, peace and freedom, transatlantic relations and European unification. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has a worldwide institutional presence through its foreign offices as well as a broad network of local partners and experts.

With our activities in the United Kingdom and Ireland we aim to strengthen the German-Irish-UK relationships. We were delighted to co-host the 18th International Conference in Irish-German Studies “Unions, Break-ups and Special Relationships – Aspects of the Irish-German-UK Relationships”, organised by the Centre for Irish-German Studies (CIGS) at the University of Limerick in 2021. This publication contains a selection of the contributions from the conference and additional papers: a range of different perspectives, issues and opportunities on the cultural and political relationships between Germany, Ireland and the UK.

I am very thankful to the authors and contributors of this publication for their informative analysis and valued opinion. I wish to particularly thank Gisela Holfter from the University of Limerick and Paul Carmichael from Ulster University for their commitment to this project without whom this publication would not have come to fruition.

I wish you a stimulating read!

Matthias Barner  
Director  
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung  
United Kingdom & Ireland





# Introductory Notes on Unions, Break-ups and Special Relationships – Aspects of Irish-German-UK Relations

*Paul Carmichael and Gisela Holfter*

How do we take stock of cultural and political relations? How do we learn about, and with, each other? There are several ways of course – the teaching of languages and culture, engagement with bilateral relations, the monitoring of perceptions, to name but a few. The focus of this book is a triangular relationship and is concerned with the aftermath of Brexit, specifically with regard to Germany, Ireland and the UK and facets of respective engagements with each other. It is based in the main on selected contributions presented at the 18th International Conference in Irish-German Studies, “Unions, Break-ups and Special Relationships – Aspects of the Irish-German-UK Relationships”, organised by Centre for Irish-German Studies (CIGS) at the University of Limerick in coordination with the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University, the Centre for European Studies, UL and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). It took place 4-5 November 2021 at the University of Limerick and focused on three aspects: first, a major feature was a discussion of the initial impact and ongoing repercussions of Brexit for British-German Relations and British Studies in Germany/German Studies in the UK as well as for Irish-German relations and German Studies in Ireland and Irish Studies in Germany. German unification from a cultural and political perspective also played a role and the question whether lessons can be learned from the German experience and whether – keeping in mind the vastly different situation in Ireland North and South – there are aspects of the German experience that could be of interest in the ‘Shared Ireland, Shared Island’ discussions. And finally, the engagement with Europe and the European Union in Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit was a focal point which also included different perspectives on the situation north and south of the Irish border vis-à-vis the EU and the European context of economic, legal, policy and cultural questions.

For this volume we decided to emphasise two parts and include additional papers to provide a more holistic overview. One part includes mapping the respective areas of German, Irish and British Studies in the different constituencies and an increased focus on respective bilateral relations. The second includes reflections on regarding Europe and its role in Ireland North and South after Brexit, (re-)unification in the past and in the future and the situation in Northern Ireland. The latter comes with a particular challenge. Unlike

the analysis and mapping of academic subjects over a period of several years, the political situation in Northern Ireland is in many aspects fast paced, and seems to be changing almost daily at times. That is a risk that all contemporary studies carry of course and while we are acutely aware of the fact that events in Northern Ireland have developed considerably since we held the conference in early November 2021, and that considerable changes will have taken place that render some of the assessment in part two to some extent historic by the time this book is published, we believe that the presented snapshot of the time remains valuable and important. The four contributions on Northern Ireland are also timely and multi-faceted additions and updates to the many recent publications on that topic over the last four years.<sup>1</sup>

A note on terminology used in this volume – many contributors used ‘Ireland’ and ‘Republic of Ireland’ (or only the Republic) interchangeably and the term ‘Republic’ specifically in order to differentiate between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Officially, the constitutional form of Ireland is that of a Republic, the name is ‘Ireland’, as set out in article 4 of the Irish Constitution. However, it has been common usage to refer to Ireland as the Republic of Ireland to avoid confusion, especially in the context of discussing the relationship between the two states North and South of the border on the island of Ireland and, accordingly, we decided to leave the terminology to each of our contributors. Similarly, the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, signed on 10 April 1998 (Good Friday), is at times referred to as Belfast Agreement<sup>2</sup> or as Good Friday Agreement<sup>3</sup> (and is at times only referred to with the abbreviation GFA).

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- 1 See for example recent publications such as Leslie Anne Crabtree-Lelourec, and Gráinne O’Keeffe-Vigneron (eds.), *Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement: Building a Shared Future from a Troubled Past?* Oxford, Bern etc: Peter Lang Group, 2021; Fergal Cochrane, *Breaking peace: Brexit and Northern Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020; John Mair et al. (eds.), *Brexit and Northern Ireland: Bordering on Confusion?* Goring: Bite-Sized Books, 2019; Etain Tannam, *Beyond the Good Friday Agreement: In the Midst of Brexit*. London: Routledge, 2019; Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. Richard Humphreys, *Beyond the Border: The Good Friday Agreement and Irish Unity after Brexit*. Dublin: Merrion, 2018; Mary C. Murphy, *Europe and Northern Ireland’s Future: Negotiating Brexit’s Unique Case*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018.
  - 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement> (accessed 13 July 2022).
  - 3 <https://www.dfa.ie/our-role-policies/northern-ireland/the-good-friday-agreement-and-today/> (accessed 13 July 2022).