

A SECURITY AND DEFENCE DIMENSION?

Irish unification, no matter what form it takes, will have security and defence implications. It is difficult to imagine that a United Ireland could continue with the South being a neutral country and the North being in NATO, except, perhaps for a while in the case of a confederal Ireland. With unification, it is logical that future defence would be organised on an all-Ireland basis. This raises questions that could affect the outcome of the proposed referendums on the future of Ireland. Would the South join NATO as the price to be paid for unification? Would the North be prepared to leave NATO in favour of Irish military neutrality? A confederal Ireland could continue as at present, at least until the EU moves from its Common Security and Defence Policy towards Common Defence. The UK's strategic interests need to be factored in.

Referendums have been lost in Ireland due to a failure to take into account voters' concerns on issues that were not properly debated in advance. Nice 1 and Lisbon 1 are examples where defence aspects were the catalysts for rejecting the Government's proposals. Leaving security and defence until after the unification referendums are held, could risk rejection in either one or both jurisdictions, especially if combined with fears of economic consequences. This leaves the option of addressing security and defence contemporaneously with the unification referendums, or in advance. In the case of the South a referendum will be politically necessary, anyway, if our current policy of military neutrality, were to be changed.

The security and defence dimension, and how it could affect options on unification, requires further study.