

nonetheless probably continues as the most accurate predictor. Yes, not all Catholics are pro-unity, but demographics, combined with electoral trends, detail a distinct decline in support for the constitutional status quo.

The current popularity of the issue is another indicator that the threshold is close to being met. We are seeing an almost daily intervention on the issue of Irish unity from people representing a variety of backgrounds. The debate is live.

In summation, a holistic approach is required to establish whether the threshold is met or not. No single indicator is accurate in itself as factors beyond the constitutional question impact on the evidence. We can state categorically, however, that political unionism no longer commands an electoral majority.

b. The Secretary of State has discretion to call a vote even if the threshold is not met.

Sensitive issues in relation to identity and culture must be comprehensively addressed, as should the role of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement.

b. What policy matters would need to be addressed in preparation for any referendum?

There are a number of outstanding policy issues that would need to be resolved in advance of any referendum. Uncertainty and chaos must be avoided at all costs. We would need to have certainty in relation to the processes that would be initiated in the event of a successful referendum on Irish unity. These should be discussed and adopted by an all-

The Good Friday Agreement charges the government with responsibility for the north to act with rigorous impartiality. It also states that, "it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination".⁹

It is clear that the Good Friday Agreement envisioned a situation whereby the London government would remain neutral in any referendum campaign.

There is absent any such direction or restriction for the Dublin government. In fact, there is a constitutional obligation for the Dublin government to seek Irish unity as per the Good Friday Agreement. Bunreacht na hÉireann states, "It is the firm will of the Irish Nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island."¹⁰ In recent times the Irish government has adopted positions on constitutional referendums.

This is an issue that should be considered by a citizens' assembly or forum in advance of the referendum being called and may be subject to negotiations between London and Dublin in the process of calling the referendums.

d. How long should the campaign run for?

A number of months, but the date should be set well in advance – a number of years, to allow for the most detailed and considered debate possible.

e. What roles should the British and Irish governments play in these referendums?

Facilitators (also see 5C)

f. Are there any issues around who should lead the respective campaigns? & g. Are there any issues around the dissemination of public information, campaign finance and general regulation of campaign activity that we should consider?

The referendum campaigns should be conducted to the highest possible standard of best practice in relation to