



Country Issue: Ireland



The Relaunch of Europe

Mapping Member States' Reform Interests

Europa

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Institut für Europäische Politik (Institute for European Politics, IEP) is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany dedicated to the study of European integration.

Further information on the project can be found here:

www.relaunch-europe.eu

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Deadline for data collection: September 2017

Editorial deadline: June 2018

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THE RELAUNCH OF EUROPE

MAPPING MEMBER STATES' REFORM INTERESTS

The Relaunch of Europe. Mapping Member States' Reform Interests (RelaunchEU) is a project conducted by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) that surveys the implementation prospects for twelve concrete reform proposals. It covers the policy areas of Social Union, Economic and Monetary Union and Defence Union as well as asylum and migration policy and the EU's institutional set-up. Furthermore, it analyses the support for flexible integration and the positioning towards the five scenarios presented in the European Commission's »White Paper on the Future of Europe« of spring 2017. It covers the positions of national governments and of relevant progressive political parties, which received a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the previous European or national elections.¹

The study follows two main objectives: (1) It demonstrates the scope of action for prompt reforms of the EU in the selected policy areas while also taking into account which member states would, under certain conditions, be willing to implement the specific proposals. (2) It empirically determines which member states could belong to an avant-garde group willing to deepen integration.

Researchers from think tanks and research institutions in the member states of the EU-27 compiled information to determine the position of governments and progressive political parties towards the twelve reform proposals. This qualitative analysis reflects the country experts' views and is based on documents such as coalition agreements, government or party programmes, position papers, press releases, interviews, op-ed pieces, and official documents. It presents a snapshot of the discussions within the governments and parties. In order to keep the country issues short, internal debates and deviating opinions cannot be covered in detail. Positions are subject to change, especially following elections and the formation of new governments. The snapshot was taken at the end of September 2017. More recent developments could not be included. Notable exceptions are the country issues of Austria and Germany, which were updated following the latest coalition negotiations.

The study's results are published in English on the website www.relaunch-europe.eu. It presents maps for every actor and reform proposal, 27 country issues and an analytical paper. The paper compares the positions of all actors in all member states of the EU-27 on the twelve concrete reform proposals and presents five flagship-projects, which bear the chance for a relaunch of Europe.

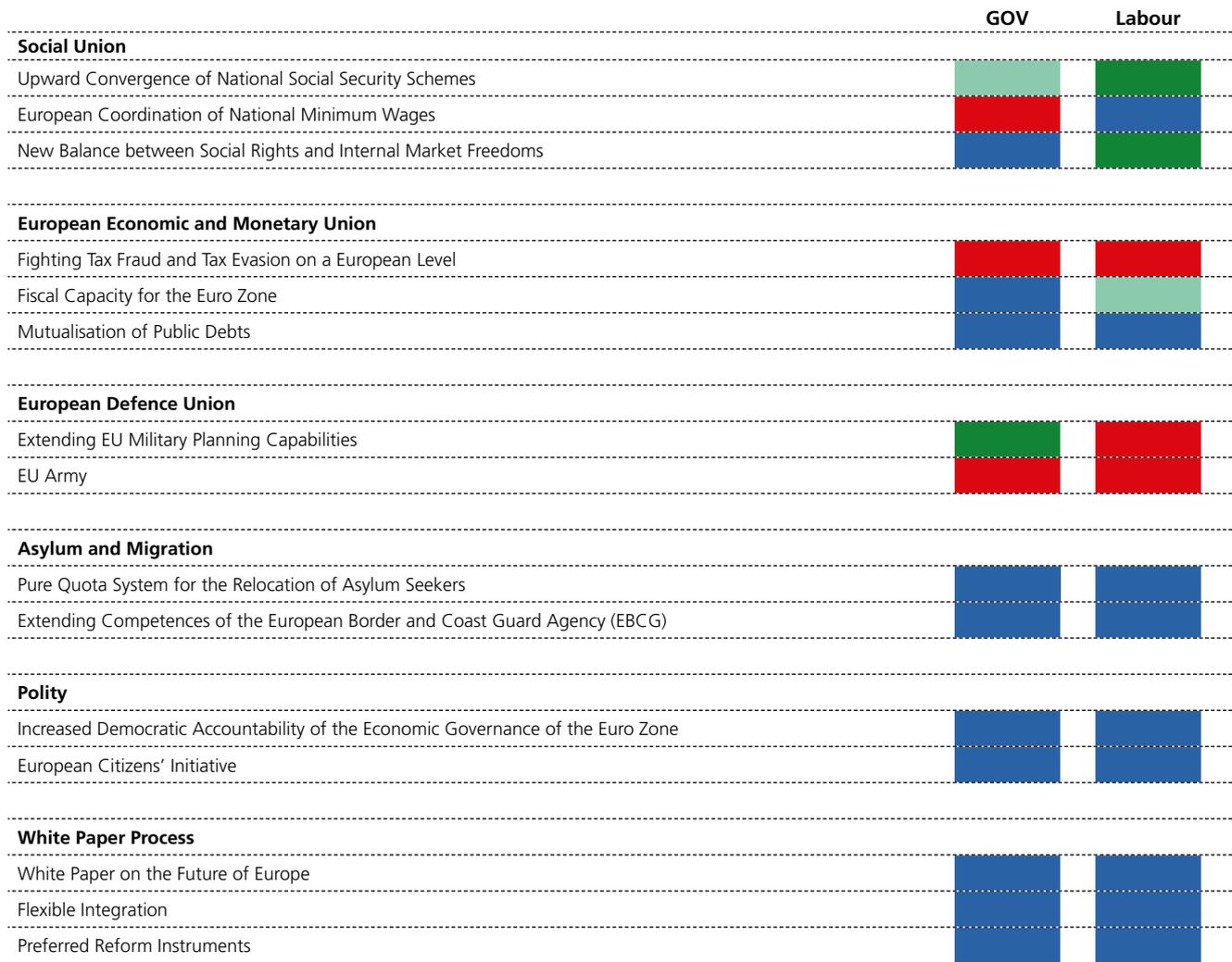
¹ If a party fulfills this criterion, but is not a relevant actor in the national public debate anymore, it was deleted from the sample based on the judgement of the projects' country expert.

IRELAND

Following the Irish general election in 2016, the pro-EU liberal-conservative *Fine Gael* (Family/Tribe of the Irish) formed a minority coalition with eight independent members of parliament. It is supported in parliament by the second-largest

republican *Fianna Fáil* (Soldiers of Destiny) under the terms of a »confidence and supply agreement«. The progressive *Páirtí an Lucht Oibre* (Irish Labour Party), former coalition partner of *Fine Gael*, saw its vote share drop to only 6.6 % in 2016.

Support of the Irish Government and Labour for Deepening EU Integration



Legend

- support for
- support under conditions
- against
- neutral

- GOV** National Government
- Labour** Irish Labour Party

- 1 – Scenario 1: »Carrying on«
- 2 – Scenario 2: »Nothing but the single market«
- 3 – Scenario 3: »Those who want more do more«
- 4 – Scenario 4: »Doing less more efficiently«
- 5 – Scenario 5: »Doing much more together«

SOCIAL UNION

The Irish government welcomes the opportunity to re-evaluate the current social and economic EU acquis as initiated by the European Commission's proposals on the European Pillar of Social Rights. It anticipates that this initiative would enable more cooperation in social dialogue, health and safety, and equal opportunities. The government, however, has raised concerns about the implementation of the Commission's proposal including measures taken towards the **upward convergence of national social security schemes** within the EU, especially concerning education and skills, conditions of employment, as well as social protection. The government fears a collision regarding areas of national competency, a dilution of national competitiveness, and other costs. These reservations are partly driven by uncertainties caused by the British decision to leave the EU and its impact on the Irish economy. The government is, therefore, against the establishment of enforceable individual rights and prefers the establishment of a set of principles which could be achieved by EU soft or hard law instruments. While both the government and the Labour Party state that social measures should apply to all member states, their positions concerning upward social convergence in Europe differ substantially. Labour calls for an EU that must be as much a social union as an economic union aiming at an upward convergence or »a race to the top« across all member states. It firmly demands to give real effect to all elements contained in Art. 9 TFEU such as the promotion of high levels of employment and education, adequate social protection, and the fight against social exclusion. According to the party, even more fundamental and common action needs to be taken by the EU and implementing social provisions should be an obligation. As it considers the setting of a minimum wage a national, not an EU competency, the government opposes the **European coordination of national minimum wages**. Ireland has one of the highest minimum wages in the EU and established an independent statutory body, the Low Pay Commission, which advises responsible ministers with setting the national minimum wage. It considers this approach to be a best practice example. Therefore, it is sceptical of European coordination on the issue of national minimum wages, particularly given that living standards and economic circumstances vary widely across member states. The Labour Party supports the concept of a »living wage«, but is indecisive concerning EU plans to pursue a minimum wage agenda. The government strongly supports measures in developing a fairer and deeper European single market for the benefit of consumers and businesses. Although it is indecisive concerning a **new balance of social rights and internal market freedoms**, its priority is to maintain and strengthen Irish competitiveness especially against the background of potential threats posed by Brexit. This suggests that the government may harbour some concerns regarding an enhanced social Europe. On the contrary, the Labour Party is very much in favour of strengthening social rights and their legal status in the EU. A more social Europe is a

central plank of their support for the EU integration project. The party is concerned about threats to existing labour, consumer, and environmental standards. However, the focus of most recent discussions concerning the single market has been almost wholly in the context of Brexit.

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

Both the government and the Labour Party have expressed strong reservations about the **fight against tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level**. As the country's corporate tax rate is at 12.5 %, it is considered instrumental in allowing Ireland to attract a large amount of FDI and to be non-negotiable by both actors. However, its corporation tax regime has been challenged by the European Commission's 2016 Apple Tax ruling, which concluded that the company's tax rate of between 0.005 % and 1 % based on European profits was illegal. Nevertheless, Ireland favours global tax reforms and transparency measures over EU ones. It believes that applying different rules within the EU as what is being applied globally may lead to double taxation and increased uncertainty for multinational enterprises (MNEs). Thus, the Irish government opposes EU measures arising from the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) principles. Furthermore, there are severe reservations about the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB), which may considerably narrow the tax base in Ireland. At the same time, the government as well as Labour strongly oppose a Europe-wide minimum corporate tax rate, which may impact negatively on Irish competitiveness. Both insist that EU measures must respect Irish sovereignty in relation to taxation rights and the setting of tax rates. As a member of the euro zone, Ireland has supported measures to deepen the EMU – such as the existing economic governance framework, which includes the macroeconomic imbalances procedure and plans for a banking union. However, the government's position on a **new fiscal capacity for the euro zone** is indecisive at best. It would not be strongly supportive of new fiscal instruments that may require national funding contributions and result in the potential loss of sovereignty posed to it. The Labour Party believes that existing fiscal rules have been interpreted and implemented by the European Commission in an overly restrictive way, particularly in relation to social investment. Therefore, Labour is in favour of greater flexibility as far as budgetary rules in the Stability and Growth Pact are concerned. Furthermore, the party demands that social criteria relating to job creation, poverty reduction and homelessness play a more prominent role in the economic governance system of the EU. Irish public indebtedness is high and much of this is a legacy of the financial crisis. Public debt remains a key challenge, although a manageable one according to the Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland (2017). During the worst period of the financial crisis in Ireland, there was some support for the **mutualisation of public debts**. Since then, neither the government nor Labour has been vocal on this issue.

EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION

Ireland has a long tradition of military neutrality and considers the United Nations (UN) to be a key actor in maintaining international peace and security. Nevertheless, Ireland participates in both the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which it views as an important means to pursue collective security goals. Accordingly, the government supports the **extension of EU military planning capabilities** in order to maximize the efficiency of civil and military missions and to develop a comprehensive approach in EU conflict management operations in accordance with UN mandates. The EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) has successfully increased the efficiency of EU missions in recent years – a contribution which is recognised by the government. However, the government wishes to remain fully in control in relation to which defence projects the country decides to participate in. In general, defence policy is a member state prerogative. In contrast, Labour is opposed to the MPCC. Its extension poses a threat to Irish neutrality, which the party does not want to see diluted by enhanced defence cooperation underpinned by institutions and financial support at the EU level, such as the European Defence Fund. Although the government supports continued engagement with CSDP operations and the European Defence Agency (EDA), it is in line with Labour in rejecting the establishment of an **EU army**. Again, the main reason behind this opposition is Ireland's neutral status. However, the government is in favour of initiatives to strengthen the EU's capacity to act as an international peace-provider, particularly when this is in support of the UN.

ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

Due to its geographic location, Ireland has not been at the forefront in dealing with the influx of asylum seekers. Nevertheless, the government and Labour are generally supportive of joint EU efforts in the area of asylum and migration, though they have not yet taken a clear stance on either the further deepening of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) or the **establishment of a pure quota system for the relocation of asylum seekers** in order to reform the Dublin system. Ireland however, has voluntarily opted in to the two EU relocation decisions and has agreed to accept up to 4,000 persons overall under the EU relocation and resettlement programmes. Furthermore, the Labour Party's manifesto does call for the EU to strengthen its response to the migration crisis and to provide further relocation and resettlement of refugees. The EU regulation, which established the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)**, constitutes a development of provisions of the Schengen acquis. Ireland, however, is not a member of the Schengen Area. Regulations on the further integration of the control of the Area's external borders do not apply to the country, unless it decides to opt-in on specific activities.

POLITY

Neither the government nor the Labour Party has a clear position on reform proposals that **increase the democratic accountability of the economic governance of the euro zone**. With regard to the government, it would most likely have strong reservations especially concerning proposals to a further deepening of the EMU, fearing a significant loss of national economic sovereignty. Furthermore, EU treaty change may be required to give effect to such proposals and this would necessitate an EU referendum in Ireland, making broad public support imperative. Similarly, both actors have not officially taken a clear stance on the reform of the **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)**, nor has it been a subject of public discourse in Ireland. The government has, however, produced information and advice for Irish citizens who may be interested in contributing to, or wish to organise an ECI in Ireland.

WHITE PAPER PROCESS

The government has welcomed the publication of the **»White Paper on the Future of Europe«**, but, just like the Labour Party, it has not articulated a clear preference for any single scenario. As the on-going Brexit negotiations are the source of a great deal of concern and uncertainty for Ireland, the debate about the 5 scenarios is somewhat secondary to the more intense discussions around the outcome of the Brexit negotiations. Nevertheless, both the government and Labour emphasise the need to nurture public engagement in all member states and, especially, the need for a careful analysis of the implications of each scenario. A key challenge for the Irish government might be the extent to which the scenarios involve treaty change, as two EU treaties have already been rejected by referenda in Ireland. As a result of Brexit, Ireland will lose an important ally in the EU. Therefore, the government does not regard **flexible integration** to be in Ireland's best interest. In the case of the emergence of a multi-speed Europe, larger member states might be able to exert excessive influence to the detriment of smaller ones such as Ireland. Thus, the overall coherence of the EU may be damaged, too. Nevertheless, the government has acknowledged that **»variable geometry«** is already a reality, as e.g. Ireland is not a Schengen member. In the event that a two-speed Europe emerges, the Irish government would favour Ireland being in the vanguard. Labour has not yet taken a clear stance on flexible integration, but has expressed similar concerns to that of the Irish government in the past. The party has also emphasized the need for solidarity, equality and a sense of community to be at the centre of the EU, suggesting unease with the idea of flexible integration.

Legend

Actors Covered by the Study in each EU Member State

- *National Government*: including its members from one or more political parties, the Head of State or Government, relevant executive ministers and administration.
 - *Progressive Parties*: They include all parties that are represented either in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) or that are members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and have gained a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the last national or European elections. They also include La République en Marche (REM) in France.
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Concrete Reform Options in Different Policy Areas

Social Union

1. *Upward Convergence of National Social Security Schemes* to provide Europe-wide protection against social risks and to ensure a decent standard of living for EU citizens.
 2. *European Coordination of National Minimum Wages* to ensure a decent income within the EU to prevent in-work poverty, to promote social convergence and to avoid social dumping across the EU.
 3. *New Balance of Social Rights and Internal Market Freedoms* to compensate the current precedence of internal market freedoms over national social rights.
-

European Economic and Monetary Union

4. *Fighting Tax Fraud and Tax Evasion on a European Level* for a fair allocation of tax burdens among natural and judicial persons.
 5. *Fiscal Capacity for the Euro Zone* to provide stabilisation against economic shocks through public expenditure in the euro zone.
 6. *Mutualisation of Public Debts* to tackle the problem of a sharp increase in public debts in some member states as a result of the euro zone crisis.
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European Defence Union

7. *Extending EU Military Planning Capabilities* also for executive military missions and operations.
 8. *EU Army* establishing a permanent multinational military force under European command.
-

Asylum and Migration

9. *Pure Quota System for the Relocation of Asylum Seekers* which would replace the Dublin system.
 10. *More Competences for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)* expanding the current EBCG tasks in terms of »shared responsibility« between the EBCG and national authorities.
-

Polity

11. *Increase Democratic Accountability of the Economic Governance of the Euro Zone* to make its institutions more responsive to EU citizens.
 12. *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)*: revision of the ECI regulation to make the instrument more citizen-friendly and effective in order to strengthen the participative democracy in the EU.
-

White Paper Process

13. *The White Paper on the Future of Europe* by the European Commission presents five possible scenarios for the future course of European integration.
14. *Flexible Integration*: limiting the application of certain rules to certain EU member states.
15. *Preferred Reform Instrument*: Treaty reform, reforms inside or outside the Treaties.

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Imprint

© 2018

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Publisher: International Policy Analysis,
Hiroshimastraße 28, D-10785 Berlin, Germany
www.fes.de/ipa
Orders/Contact: info.ipa@fes.de

Study conducted by:
Institut für Europäische Politik
Bundesallee 23, 10717 Berlin, Germany
www.iep-berlin.de/en

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ISBN: 978-3-96250-127-3

Front cover image: [AboutLife/shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)
Design concept: www.stetzer.net
Realisation/Typesetting: pertext, Berlin
Print: www.druckerei-brandt.de

August 2018

