

# The Resilience of Irish Neutrality

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## The Resilience of Irish Neutrality

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KAREN DEVINE, JUL 9 2024

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**The figures and tables for this chapter are available in the PDF version (see link above).**

Four out of five people in Ireland have consistently supported active neutrality as the cornerstone of Irish foreign, security and defence policies. Democracy, summarised as rule of the people, by the people, for the people – whereby citizens elect representatives to act on their behalf in accordance with their wishes – means that the Irish government should reflect these consistent, rational, public preferences for active neutrality in the conduct of foreign relations and activities. Yet, there is rarely an opportunity arising from international events that is not used by government party politicians in Ireland to claim that Irish neutrality needs to be looked at, debated, or abandoned.

This elite discourse first started in the 1960s, when the Irish government applied for membership of the EEC and was told by the European Commission and EEC member-state leaders to give up neutrality in favour of a European common defence and NATO membership. In response, the Irish government redefined its concept of neutrality to exclude the components of ‘active’, ‘positive’, neutrality and labelled this new concept ‘military neutrality’, comprising just one element – non-membership of a military alliance. In doing so, the Government entered into a ‘two-level game’ comprising two main strategic threads: a) lying to the people in Ireland about this redefinition of neutrality and consequent change in foreign policy orientations, and b) obscuring successive government ratifications of the policies, treaties and laws progressing European Union militarisation, because the people of Ireland rejected successive European Union treaties in referendums due to strong support for a concept of active, positive neutrality. This chapter describes the history, political context and reasons for the failure of the Irish government to fulfil the social contract on active, positive neutrality and the efforts of non-governmental players to expose, resist and reverse these developments.

Unlike the governments of Sweden and Finland, who have used the war in Ukraine as the foundation of their attempts to divest the last shreds of neutrality and officially join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the absence of public support, the Irish government has not yet followed that same path. Why? To address this question, this chapter proceeds as follows: (a) an explanation of the two-level game framework based on a working hypothesis; (b) an analysis of each actor’s preferences, drawing on a range of primary data; (c) reasons why each side has adopted their positions in the two-level game. The chapter concludes with a summary of the current state of play in the struggle over Ireland’s active neutrality and European Union militarism.

### Two-Level Game

Robert Putnam (1988) portrayed political leaders as positioned between two tables of (1) international negotiation and (2) domestic political forces. Putnam’s two-level game concept provides a framework of understanding for the political agents involved in the struggle over Irish neutrality. In the framework, governments take decisions at the supranational level of the Council of Ministers of the EU (level I) to legislate for, fund and implement measures that eradicate all tenants of neutrality in the pursuit of a common defence and an EU army, whilst those same governments face political pressures at the domestic level (Level II) from the population and NGOs to stop the

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eradication of neutrality.

Figure 4.1 shows the two sides of the game: on one side, the European Union (EU), NATO, the military industrial complex, that together seek to eradicate Irish neutrality, militarise the EU and project power through military force alongside the university agents, think tanks and mass media promoting these same interests and goals (herein referred to in shorthand as the 'militarists'); and on the other side, the majority of people in Ireland, NGOs, the President of Ireland and a number of independent politicians that support active neutrality (the 'neutralists'). Each side has distinctly different concepts of neutrality and discourses that will be explained next.

## Changes to Government Concepts of 'Military Neutrality'

The vast changes made by successive Irish governments under the radar of public opinion, in summary, include: (1) the reformulation and redefinition of neutrality, including its disassociation from peace policy, and policy reversals including (2) extension of EU political cooperation to military affairs. (3) Agreeing to the Western European Union (WEU)-EU merger. (4) WEU membership via the WEU-EU merger, and assumption of its mutual defence clause through the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and in doing so (5) changing the meaning of the government's concept of 'military neutrality' to mean 'membership of a military alliance' – the opposite meaning of the original 'non-membership of a military alliance' concept laid out in government white papers, etc., and a continued failure to inform the public of this fact. (6) Adopting offensive military operations dubbed oxymoronically as the 'sharp end of peacekeeping' through WEU Petersberg Tasks and NATO-led missions. (7) Joining the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence (PESCO), the adoption of NATO military goals, and major changes in practice by (8) supporting wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Ukraine. (9) Moving from a commitment to the UN itself to merely a commitment to the principles of its Charter, and all instigated under (10) a regime of meaningful silence on neutrality whilst substituting active, positive neutrality with a new foreign policy cornerstone of EU 'solidarity' (Devine 2008a; 2009; 2011). Similar changes to state discourses and foreign policy practices were carried out by successive Swedish and Finnish governments over the same time period in a coordinated process to eradicate neutrality (Devine 2011).

With respect to (4) and (5), Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Austria had formed a coalition and proposed the text of an alternative mutual defence clause in an attempt to avoid the inclusion of the WEU's mutual defence clause in amendments to the Treaty on European Union (Cowen 2003). The 'Big Three' (E3) of France, Germany and the UK rejected this proposal and inserted their own wording as Article 42 (7) TEU: 'If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power...'. This was the most significant moment in the two-level game, as thereafter, the Irish government rendered its original meaning of 'military neutrality' void by making Ireland part a new EU military alliance in 2009. The redefinition was covered up by the state and government in order to fit the square peg of the public's active neutrality preferences into the round hole of Irish Government decisions at the EU level, that include decisions to accede to the EU's collective defence structures and its ambitions for Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence, and adoption of the goal of EU member-state soldiers undertaking 'the most demanding military missions ... acting in accordance with a single set of forces', i.e. an EU army.

Elite silences in Sweden (Christiansson 2010, 32) and Ireland (Devine 2011) on the mutual defence clause insertion into the TEU through the Lisbon Treaty amendments are meaningful. The European Commission's Lisbon Treaty booklet, distributed to the Irish public during the two referendums in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty, was misleading in omitting any reference to Article 42.7's mutual defence clause – a remarkable silence given that the European Commission singled out the mutual defence clause as one of the most significant aspects of the Lisbon Treaty after it had been signed in December 2007. This is because it would 'allow the emergence of a true common European defence. It will introduce a mutual defence clause and a solidarity clause ...' (Barroso 2007). The EU's silence on the mutual defence clause is seen in the lack of awareness among the publics of EU member-states. The Eurobarometer 85.1 of 2016 shows only 12 per cent of European citizens claim to be aware of the mutual defence clause and to know what it is, driven by more males (17 per cent) than females (9 per cent).

A tension exists between the Irish elites' need to keep silent about the mutual defence clause and their desire to

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openly exploit it. For example, EU-funded spokesmen from the militarist side of the 'game' declared:

Even if neutrality is defined by some political leaders in Ireland as simply meaning an aversion to military alliances, Ireland's commitment to the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy renders such a definition obsolete ... the EU is now a *military* [as well as a political and economic] *alliance*. A new government needs to explain why this is a good thing (Burke 2010, emphasis added).

Yet the continued line in public from those same university-based EU spokespersons, along with successive Irish governments, is that Ireland is not a member of a military alliance. These facts narrow the militarists' definition of 'military neutrality' to non-membership of a military alliance, meaning NATO. Table 4.1 compares the public elements of active neutrality to the government's current concept of 'military neutrality' and explains the stark contrasts in definitions of active neutrality and 'military neutrality' held by opposing sides.

The next section situates each actor within the two-level game: Firstly, the 'neutralists' who are the majority of people in Ireland, NGOs, the President of Ireland and a number of independent politicians that support active neutrality. Secondly, the 'militarists' – the European Union (EU), NATO, the military industrial complex, university agents, think tanks and mass media.

## Active, Positive Neutrality and Majority Public Opinion

Table 4.2 summarises the results of nineteen opinion polls that asked about preferences on neutrality, military alliances and NATO from 1981 to 2023. It shows that roughly four in five people in Ireland consistently support active neutrality and just 13–15 per cent are willing to join NATO or reject neutrality. Both public attitudes in support of neutrality and the public's concept of active positive neutrality are stable over time and unlikely to change as they are based on the underlying values and identity of the mass public (Devine 2006; 2008b). The 1996 White Paper on Foreign Policy stated, 'the majority of the Irish people have always cherished Ireland's military neutrality and recognise the positive values that inspire it' (Ireland 1996: 118) and also recognised 'Ireland's foreign policy is about much more than self-interest. For many of us it is a statement of the kind of people we are' (Ireland 1996, 7). Yet, successive governments have regarded this consistent, values-driven public support for active neutrality as a barrier that needs to be overcome or bypassed.

Neutrality constitutes this general foreign policy profile or identity not just in Ireland, but for many other EU member state populations (Devine 2011, 356; Aunesluoma and Rainio-Niemi 2016, 60). Scientific modelling of Irish public opinion data shows values- and identity-based support for Irish neutrality; specifically, public attitudes to Irish neutrality, are structured along the dimensions of independence (*vis-à-vis* European integration) and identity (proud to be Irish) (Devine 2008b, 480). Eurobarometer polls have consistently shown that Ireland provides the largest proportion of people who a) regard membership of the EU as a 'good thing' and b) do not support a European defence – i.e. for the Irish people, being 'pro-European' means a rejection of EU militarism. For example, in the 2006 Eurobarometer survey (no. 66) Ireland comes top of the list of the member states in the proportion of people who hold a positive image of the EU, yet resides at the bottom of the same list as regards public support for a European common defence and security policy. Rather than being paradoxical, holding these top and bottom positions is compatible with the Irish public perception of the EEC/EU – as the militarist proponents intended – as solely a trade organisation. The former Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, together with the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael political parties, deliberately painted the EEC in this way, taking care to smother debate on the EEC's political designs or military plans in their campaigns for people to vote 'yes' in the referendum on Ireland's membership in 1973 (Devine 2006, 157).

This fundamental difference in preferences between the public and the government in relation to the incompatible positions of retaining active, positive neutrality versus promoting and participating in EU militarism is the foundation of the aforementioned two-level game. Research into public voting behaviour in the referenda on the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties in the 1990s, and the Nice Treaty in June 2001 and October 2002, has shown that a significant number of Irish citizens have repeatedly voted to reject such Treaties furthering EU militarisation due to the erosion of the core tenets of active Irish neutrality (Devine 2009). The most recent iteration of the two-level game has been

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created through the Taoiseach Micheál Martin telling the European Parliament in Strasbourg (O’Leary 2022), ‘we don’t need a referendum to join Nato. That’s a policy decision of government’ – whereas legally, it is a decision for the people through a free and fair referendum. This potential public veto is the most important factor explaining the resilience of Irish neutrality to date. The reasons why people in neutral states do not want to be part of NATO are an important part of understanding this resilience.

## Why do people in neutral states not wish to join NATO?

Looking from the perspective of neutrality supporters, there are several reasons to reject membership of NATO and by corollary, the aforementioned WEU-EU merged military alliance that is defined as the ‘European arm’ of NATO.

- The absence of control over the use of force and Ireland being automatically involved in war, e.g. ‘a fear that joining a military alliance would mean automatic involvement in wars, without having a say or control over such decisions’ (De Valera, Dáil Éireann, Vol.152: Col. 549– 51). This is a fear shared by other neutrals, including Sweden (von Sydow and Lindh veckobrev, in Eliasson 2004).
- NATO’s resort to illegal use of force, without a UN mandate (e.g. Kosovo, Serbia, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.) and NATO’s commission of war crimes and failure to cooperate with investigations or cases brought in relation to war crimes and NATO states’ refusal to be held accountable for NATO actions (ICTY 2000; ECHR 52207/99).
- Escalation of military activities despite public mass opposition and disapproval (Kreps 2010, 197).
- NATO’s lead members (the ‘P3’ of the United States, France and the United Kingdom) undermining of the financial and operational bases for UN peacekeeping (Williams 2020, 482–3; Williams 2018). NATO countries have long disregarded UN command and control mechanisms, and have deployed very few uniformed peacekeepers to UN missions during the twenty-first century (Bellamy and Williams 2009).
- NATO’s opposition to disarmament and demands for increased spending on arms procurement, in the context of its continued existence and expansion eastwards despite promises not to. For example, Ireland led the creation and ratification of the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in 2017, as part of a neutral’s nuclear free zone parameters. NATO declared ratification of the Treaty as fundamentally incompatible with NATO membership (NATO 2023, Netherlands 2017), rejects the Treaty (North Atlantic Council 2017, NATO 2020) and pressured member-states not to sign it (Pimenta Lopes 2017). And, the European Union failed to adopt a position on the treaty (Devine 2020).

These are just some of the reasons why there is such staunch public opposition to NATO membership in Ireland, and these reasons are a resilience factor of Irish neutrality. The role of NGOs in supporting and reflecting the active neutrality preferences of public opinion is outlined next.

## Active, Positive Neutrality and NGOs

The NGO sector’s ability to challenge the hegemonic discourses of the state and its agents – including businesses, trade unions, media, think tanks and the majority of the political establishment – makes it an important actor within the two-level game system. ‘I am here to be as objective as possible but I will say that the achievement of the “No” side was significant. It notched up a notable vote and saw a substantial increase after a substantial stable period’, said Richard Sinnott in a presentation to the Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Ireland’s Future in the European Union on 18 November 2008. He was describing the results of the activities of NGO protagonists behind the referendum campaign that resulted in a second public rejection of an EU treaty due to the public’s desire to retain neutrality. Normatively, non-governmental organisations are a vital cog in the political machinery of direct democracy in Ireland and play a significant role in providing information to the public through pamphlets, public meetings and press conferences on areas of politics that are very tightly controlled by a tiny elite within governing political parties.

Table 4.3 lists the most active NGOs in the realm of foreign policy and neutrality. There are several coordinated and autonomous local chapters and affiliated groups within many of the organisations listed, as well as transnational movements at the higher level for cooperation, support and exchange; for example, International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, World Beyond War, and Human Rights Watch. Members are from across the

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political spectrum – most are internationalist in their views, well-travelled and highly educated. These organisations are issue-based and are not seeking to organise into a political party or obtain power within the political system (Lacey 2013, 129–135). Most activists – who come from all sectors of society, including students, private sector workers, the unemployed, trade unionists, retired civil servants, self-employed farmers, refugees, artists and musicians – carry out voluntary work for several NGOs. This is especially visible during significant political events such as referendum campaigns and in response to bespoke initiatives such as the government-organised ‘Forum on International Security Policy’ that was designed to produce a report demanding that Ireland join NATO and abolish the Triple Lock (a requirement for UN, parliamentary and government approval for Irish troops (12 or more) to engage in military operations) and all last vestiges of active neutrality.

## Active, Positive Neutrality and the President of Ireland

In addition to NGOs, another non-governmental (but state) political actor, in the form of the President of Ireland, plays a role in the two-level game. The President is elected directly by the people and has two main roles: Firstly, the guardian of the constitution, and secondly the representative of the Irish state through mainly ceremonial duties. Although executive authority in Ireland is expressly vested in the government, the government is obliged to keep the President informed on matters of domestic and foreign policy. In that context, President Michael D Higgins (2011–) has given voice to concerns over various governmental attempts to eliminate facets of neutrality and commit Ireland to further EU militarism. For example, in 2018, a journalist noted:

What might be interpreted as a public warning about neutrality to the Taoiseach, who is also the minister for defence, the President stated the government has a duty to explain why it signed up as a member of PESCO (Permanent Structured Co-operation), the EU’s security and defence operation (McCarthy 2018).

Continuing this line of questioning in June 2023, Higgins reflected public support for active, positive neutrality in an interview (Whyte 2023) in which he questioned the selection of speakers at the government’s four-day International Security Forum event – the composition of which was mostly made up of ‘the admirals, the generals, the air force, the rest of it’, as well as ‘the formerly neutral countries who are now joining Nato’ – and asked why there was no representation from still-neutral countries such as Austria and Malta. The President is correct in his observation of the biased selection of the invitees – indeed, aside from the military and other speakers from outside Ireland, every invited lecturer from a university in Ireland is either EU funded or a known government party affiliate. Just one speaker from the NGO called Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA) was permitted to contribute on the subject of neutrality. The President was critical, too, of the European Union for its increasing military posturing, citing French president Emmanuel Macron’s comments that ‘the future of Europe is as the most reliable pillar in Nato’ (Whyte 2023).

## Militarism and its agents

The university is now part of an unholy alliance that largely serves dominant state, military industrial complex and business policies, while decoupling vital aspects of academic knowledge production from democratic values and projects (Giroux 2007). The cohort of so-called Jean Monnet lecturers, who act as EU spokespersons in universities, are paid directly by the European Union to be its ‘intellectual ambassadors’ (Weiler 2014) and are the main non-governmental agents dedicated to eradicating neutrality and overriding democratic processes and public policy preferences in Ireland. Wieler (2014) explains how such individuals carry ‘ideological baggage’ that contradicts their ‘higher calling...as scholars ... committed to dispassionate critical enquiry without partisan political bias’, and as a result, it is not possible to reconcile a Jean Monnet lecturer’s ‘instinct to defend [the EU] when [it] is criticized’ with the pursuit of truth ‘even if it is uncomfortable to the institutions, the funders of the Jean Monnet Programme’.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the public information of one example of a Jean Monnet university professor’s biographical roles, funding, lobbying, and discourses on behalf of the government, the European Union and the military industrial complex. Six roles are shown in black circles whilst the red arrows reflect the interconnected funding and discourses. This United States-born individual started out affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

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Washington DC (1989–1991) (UCD 2015), a think tank that lists major funding from defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin (Smith 2020). Politically, as a self-declared party member since his youth (Tonra 1984), Ben Tonra occupied a position on the National Executive of the Fine Gael political party (Finlan 1988) – the party working for decades to eradicate neutrality and to join Ireland into NATO and the W/EU military alliance (Brennock 2003). Academically, he published a redefinition of active neutrality as ‘Ireland’s non- membership of existing military alliances’ in order to make the claim that ‘this policy of military neutrality has never been presented as precluding a defence element to European Union’ (Tonra 1994). Tonra’s claim is untrue because the EEC made it clear at every opportunity that neutrality precludes a European common defence. This can be seen from Jean Monnet himself, who placed ‘advocates of a neutrality’ in opposition to ‘The Paris Agreements setting up the Western European Union...a traditional military alliance...[that] opened the door into NATO’ (1978: 398), and in repeated European Commission official pronouncements on neutrality precluding participation in any purported EU common defence (European Commission 1967: 19, 1992a: 13; 1992b: 21, 23). These facts are referenced extensively in the academic literature (Maher, 1986: 140) and by the Government of Ireland (1996: 119–120; 143–144).

There followed a European Union award of a Jean Monnet Professorship (1999–2006) under the EU-funded Dublin European Institute (UCD) and then an *ad personam* Jean Monnet Chair in European Foreign, Security and Defence Policy in 2003 (UCD 2024). Further monies were accrued through Irish Government and EU-funded think-tanks, as a ‘project leader’ on security and defence for the ‘Institute of [International and] European Affairs’ (UCD Centre for War Studies 2010). In that capacity, Tonra told the Irish parliament, ‘we must, as individuals, stop using the word “neutrality”, which has nothing to do with our foreign policy’ (Tonra 2008). In terms of work for the military- industrial complex, Tonra is a director of the Irish Defence and Security Association (IDSA), a registered arms industry lobbyist since 2021, and spoke at the ‘National Security Summit Ireland’ sponsored by arms corporation Lockheed Martin in 2022 (Cooke 2022). Tonra also established a consultancy called The Azure Forum that paid the IDSA ‘to produce a report on the Irish defence industry’ (Cooke 2022; Azure Forum 2024). The Azure Forum was appointed to the Commission on the Irish Defence Forces that issued a report demanding a 50 per cent increase in defence spending, with a view to trebling the budget thereafter (Commission on the Defence Forces 2022: 114). The IDSA met with the Minister for Defence to procure loans for military-industrial complex companies and obtain European Defence Agency (EDA) co-funding (The Ditch 2023). Thereafter, the Department of Defence facilitated the arrangement of a meeting between the EDA chief executive Jiří Šedivý and the IDSA in September 2023 (Doyle 2024). This illustrative example of one academic reflects links between the universities and the vested interests of the military-industrial complex, the European Union/NATO and governments and think tanks that together serve to undermine and deny public policy preferences for neutrality. Such action occurs not just in Ireland, but also in other former or currently neutral states such as Sweden, Finland, and Austria.

The blanket of Jean Monnet lecturer propaganda is carried through think tanks funded by the EU and its member-state governments, and saturates the mass corporate media. NATO prefers the use of third parties such as think tanks and academics to promote its agenda, rather than official statements (Babst 2009, 6). Take, for example, the proliferation of think tank reports on the Ukraine crisis since Russia’s invasion in February 2022 – the EU currently lists over eight hundred such reports on its website (Council of the European Union, July 2023). That’s a rate of 47 reports published per month. In Ireland, new EU-funded think tanks have sprung up, such as Azure Forum – described as ‘a dedicated – first of its kind – peace, security and defence policy think tank based in Ireland’ (Azure Forum 2023). This adds to long-standing groups such as the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the European Movement Ireland. The crossover of personnel between think tanks, positions in universities, government/state bodies, and the European Union lays bare the power of militarism to control discourses through its funding of agents within the system, and makes it all the more remarkable how ordinary people in Ireland resist such anti-neutrality propaganda.

Moving to the media, the two trends pertinent for understanding the media’s impact within the two-level game are (1) declining public consumption of media and (2) declining trust in what the media is saying. A 2022 survey found that ‘overall news consumption has declined considerably in many countries while trust has fallen back almost everywhere’ (Newman 2022). Forty-seven per cent of people in Poland, 46 per cent in USA and UK, and 56 per cent in Brazil actively avoid the news (Eddy and Fletcher 2022). Further, the media coverage of the Ukraine conflict has driven markedly increased news avoidance in places such as the UK, Brazil and Germany and a majority in surveyed

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states felt the media have not explained the wider implications of the Ukraine conflict or provided a different range of perspectives (Eddy and Fletcher 2022, 35–36). The link between lack of trust in the news media and increased news avoidance is clear, as 29 per cent of respondents who actively avoid the news do so because they think it cannot be trusted – while just a tiny minority think the media is free from undue political or government influence (Newmann 2022, 13–16).

In Ireland, the media employs three strategies of political gaslighting to destabilise and disorient public opinion on political issues and to shut down opposition to the war in Ukraine, promote militarism and eradicate neutrality: (1) propaganda, i.e. fear-mongering using unfounded threats; (2) code words, ‘word play’ and meaningful silences; (3) disinformation, e.g. false reports of opinion poll data and/or biased survey question wording. One example of the latter: a RedC poll asked respondents their view on a statement ‘Ireland should join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to boost its security’ – made in relation to the war in Ukraine – and a newspaper report on the poll made the claim that ‘48 per cent of people believe Ireland should join NATO to boost its security’ (Brennan 2022). Firstly, the question did not ask the respondents their own personal opinion on the question, ‘do you want Ireland to join NATO?’. Secondly, the statement’s built-in implication that joining NATO boosts security is unfounded and arguably biased, given many claim the opposite is true – that NATO is an alliance that creates insecurity (Swomley 1949). The newspaper report also claimed the ‘poll shows 46% in favour of Irish troops serving in [a] European army’, specifically that respondents ‘say they would vote yes in a referendum on the issue’ (Brennan 2022). However, no respondent was asked about their vote in any referendum, let alone a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on Irish troops serving in a European army – the question concerned an unknown person’s opinion about a referendum on the question of troops serving in a European army.

Journalists reporting an Irish Times IPSOS poll claimed that 63 per cent of those surveyed were willing for Ireland to join NATO, shown in false pie chart graphics based on only those in favour of a change (Leahy 2022). The true figure of 15 per cent of all respondents was never provided either over social media or in print. All five opinion polls taken after the Ukraine war were manipulated or misreported in order to convey false levels of public support for NATO membership and EU militarism as part of a mass gaslighting and disinformation campaign designed to overcome public neutrality preferences.

## **Militarism and Government campaigns: The Consultative Forum on International Security Policy**

In view of the perceived need by the government to justify the abandonment of neutrality against public wishes, it decided to host a so-called Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, with ‘the invasion of Ukraine by Russia ... the context for the creation of the Consultative Forum’ (mentioned seventeen times in the Consultative Forum Programme), in order ‘to build a deeper public understanding of the evolving nature of threats facing the State ... and to examine the security options available’ (Ireland 2023a; 2023b). The author of the report, written for the government, claimed, ‘I believe that this was an admirably open and transparent process where unfettered debate was encouraged’ (Richardson 2023). Conversely, a government party parliamentarian summarised it as ‘a senior political force in government, side-stepping the participative democracy process we have (citizens assemblies) to hand pick speakers on a highly divisive subject and calling it a public debate’ (Hourican 2023a); ‘a deeply undemocratic forum’ (Hourican 2023b); and ‘an engine of disinformation’ (Hourican 2023c). NGOs and neutrality supporters organised and attended their own forums, coinciding with the location and dates of the government forum, and made their presence felt.

Despite the report admitting that there is no public appetite for changing neutrality, the government proposed legislation on 22 November 2023 to dismantle the Triple Lock. The government introduced the Triple Lock as a ‘safeguard of neutrality’ to persuade the people of Ireland to reverse their decisions to reject both the Nice and Lisbon Treaties in referendums held in 2001 and 2008 due to the eradication of neutrality in the Treaties. The Government’s Referendum Commission, headed by government appointee, Frank Clarke – who had actively campaigned for the Nice Treaty in 2001/2002 in support of the government campaign (de Breadun 2002) – informed the public that:

The European Council has agreed that protocols will be added to a later EU Treaty to give full effect in EU law to

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these decisions ... an EU Treaty and any protocol to it becomes part of EU law and is enforceable. ... IRISH GOVERNMENT DECLARATION ... At the meeting of the European Council at which this decision was made, Ireland made a declaration in relation to military neutrality ... this declaration will be associated with the instrument of ratification if Ireland does ratify the Lisbon Treaty (Referendum Commission 2009, 23).

The wording was laid out in such a way as to have voters believe the Triple Lock would be in a legally-binding EU Treaty protocol if they vote yes in the second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, and the government's campaign was fought on this basis. As stated in Dail Eireann, 'the triple lock became a central guarantee to secure the support of Irish voters for the ratification of the Lisbon treaty in 2009'. (Carthy 2024). The European Council (Presidency of the EU Council 2009a, 4 and 2) outlined the wording:

The participation of contingents of the Irish Defence Forces in overseas operations, including those carried out under the European common security and defence policy requires (a) the authorisation of the operation by the Security Council or the General Assembly of the United Nations, (b) the agreement of the Irish Government, and (c) the approval of Dáil Éireann, in accordance with Irish law ... (that was to be included in) ... the [Lisbon Treaty] Protocol ... to give full Treaty status to the clarifications set out in the Decision to meet the concerns of the Irish people.

The Triple Lock wording was never included in the Protocol (European Council, 2013), and as a result, has no legal protection. To hide this fact, it took the format of a 'National Declaration', with the EU declaring, 'In the event of Ireland's ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, this [National Declaration by Ireland] will be associated with Ireland's instrument of ratification' (Presidency of the EU Council 2009b, 22-23). To dismantle the only legal barrier to sending Irish troops on high intensity NATO and EU military missions without a UN mandate, the government only needs to push amending legislation through the national parliament, in wilful disregard of public policy preferences, but, in doing so, the government will ensure that Nice and Lisbon Treaty ratifications are politically invalidated, provoking a democratic crisis of historical proportions.

## **Why are Irish Government leaders intent on securing membership of NATO?**

This politically reckless and anti-democratic behaviour begs the question of what is driving government leaders to push legislation through the Irish parliament to destroy the remaining foundations of neutrality. One working hypothesis concerns the age-old problem of corruption. This issue has dogged the politics of neutrality for centuries in Ireland. In 1790 Wolfe Tone stated in his manifesto for Irish neutrality:

Your innocence is yet, I trust, untainted by the rank leaven of corruption. Ye have no interests to bias your judgment but the interest of Ireland ... direct your councils to ... the establishment of the welfare, and glory and independence of Ireland for ever and ever (Tone in Devine 2013, 377).

In 1811, Irish nationalist leader Daniel O'Connell (1971, 53) conferred thanks on statesmen who 'had, with the purest patriotism, refused everything that power could give; they had rejected all the allurements of office, rather than sacrifice, or even postpone the assertion of principle'. Historically, Irish leaders have resisted the vested interests biasing judgment and betraying the interests of the Irish electorate. But, the current crop of government leaders are being promised well-paid posts in the European Union in return for popular betrayal. The current leader of Fianna Fail, Micheál Martin, is said to be 'the next Irish nominee for European Commissioner if he chooses. He has a longer shot at bigger jobs, including president of the European Council or EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs' (Howlin 2023). His own party's elected representatives have admitted they believe he is destined for an EU role in Brussels (O'Connell 2023). This view is widely held outside of the party also: 'There is a view held by some long-time Martin observers that he will resign this time next year and depart for Brussels, where he has been spoken of as a possible successor to Charles Michel as President of the European Council' (Leahy 2023). There is, evidently, contemporary precedence for ministers jettisoning neutrality for the EU's agenda and shortly thereafter occupying a position of EU Commissioner or EU ambassador (Devine 2011).

## **External elite influence in neutral states promoting NATO and EU militarism and warfare**

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Transparency International defines corruption as 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gains'. The relationships between government and arms industry corruption – and government incentives for launching invasions and wars, including proxy wars – are commonsensical for most people. According to Feinstein et al. (2011, 14), 'trade in weapons constitutes a mere fraction of total world trade, according to one estimate it accounts for a remarkable 40 per cent of corruption'. Arms corruption exists systematically between governments and arms dealers (Perlo-Freeman 2023). Three militarist protagonists – Angela Merkel (as Chancellor of Germany), Nicholas Sarkozy, (as President of France) and Jose Manuel Barroso (as President of the European Commission) – drove the Lisbon Treaty's finalisation of the WEU-EU merger, incorporating a renamed European Defence Agency for arms procurement, and enabling legislation for PESCO and a new Rapid Deployment Capacity EU standing army.

As France's president from 2007–2012, Sarkozy was implicated in a number of cases and in March 2021 was found guilty of corruption and influence-peddling to fund his 2016 presidential campaign. He was sentenced to three years in prison, two of them suspended (Willsher 2021). Another case involves claims that Muammar Gaddafi's Libyan government gave Sarkozy 50 million euros for his 2007 presidential campaign. Barroso's meetings with Ferrostaal to purchase two submarines, when he was Portuguese Prime Minister, were set up by a Portuguese intermediary who was convicted by a Munich court in 2014 (overturned on appeal in 2015) of collecting roughly €1.6 million as a consultancy fee (Perlo-Freeman 2017). This was one of dozens of suspicious brokerage and consulting payments made 'to decision-makers in the Portuguese government, ministries or navy' (Schmitt 2010). An ineffective Portuguese investigation was closed in 2014 with no convictions (World Peace Foundation 2022).

Foreign bribery payments were legal in Germany until the implementation of the OECD's Bribery Convention in February 1999. Bypassing German Political Contributions Law, the CDU *spendenaffäre* was part of a broader pattern of secret political finance arrangements that had supported Chancellor Helmut Kohl's 16 years in office. Wolfgang Schäuble, CDU chairman, had been forced to admit to taking a 100,000 marks donation in his Bonn office from weapons lobbyist Karl-Heinz Schreiber on 22 September 1994. Six months after taking that bribe, Schäuble went to Dublin to announce that the four neutral countries in the European Union – Ireland, Austria, Finland and Sweden – would have to join NATO eventually, saying the EU would only have a real security policy when it became the European arm of NATO (Reuters 1995). Angela Merkel, who was party secretary throughout this time, was elected new chairperson of the CDU on 10 April 2000, one month after Wolfgang Thierse, the President of the Bundestag, fined the CDU a record sum of DM 41 million for faulty reports and party financing violations. As chancellor of Germany from 2005 to 2021, Merkel brought Schäuble back into her government cabinet as Finance Minister and together with Sarkozy and Barroso, they campaigned hard to militarise the EU.

All three EU leadership figures, Barroso, Merkel and Sarkozy, personally intervened in Ireland after the failed Lisbon Treaty referendum (Irish Examiner 2008a; 2008b; Hall 2008) using threats and intimidation to pressure the people of Ireland to vote yes in a rerun. Their collective efforts have enabled secondary legislation for the procurement of weapons using 'off-books funds' and designated middlemen (a member-state-appointed beneficiary 'procurement agent') (Council of the EU 2023: 20), whilst avoiding internal and international anti-corruption measures that will be used to support the proposed EU standing army. Public access to documentation related to the file is prohibited and requests to access the documents have been refused. These developments arguably show that the 'grave implications' of 'unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex (a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions)' as voiced by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961), are evident in this case-study on the resilience of Irish Neutrality.

## Conclusion

Ireland's neutrality has been deeply rooted in Irish society and in decades of foreign and defence policy. The long-standing public attachment to active, positive neutrality, the consistency in the concept that accords with international law and the values of identity and independence underpin public support for neutrality. Despite this, top-down pressures exerted by elites within the Irish government, EU-linked institutions and beyond attempt to undermine the widely-held consensus on neutrality. A majority of the Irish population does not wish to join NATO for numerous reasons, including due to a lack of control over decisions and automatic involvement in wars; being wary of the conduct of NATO interventions; fears of illegal acts undertaken; a lack of political and legal recourse to arrest any

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notions of impunity; and the lack of responsiveness to public opinion against conflict escalation. However, as seen in this chapter, the government continues to work hard to stymie public support for active, positive neutrality, has not acted in accordance with democratic norms and has broken the social contract by failing to represent public preferences for neutrality. Three main drivers of these government failures are (1) differences in identification: the public in Ireland identify with their community and its needs, whilst government leaders identify with the European Union elite and its ambitions; (2) elite pursuit of material incentives of power and office at the European Union level in exchange for eradicating neutrality; (3) corruption, both legal and illegal. The two-level game framework enables a fuller and more realistic picture of the resilience of Irish neutrality. Ultimately, given the requirement of a referendum and the need to secure public approval of NATO membership, the government strategies for obtaining official, rather than *de facto*, informal membership have failed thus far. Finally, given the dynamics of oppression outlined in this chapter, the possibility that students, academics, and the general public can access critical evidence-based research on the topic of neutrality is highly constrained.

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**Karen Devine** is a former Chevening, Government of Ireland and Fulbright Scholar. She has authored a number of journal articles on Irish neutrality, and more broadly, the foreign, security, and defence policies of small states within the European Union. Her research interests include the influence of gender dynamics, public opinion and NGOs in international relations and she combines quantitative and poststructuralist approaches to understanding values and national identity as dynamics in public attitudes to foreign policy and the use of force. She teaches Irish Foreign Policy, European Union politics and policy, Gender and Politics and research methods at Dublin City University. She has published articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *International Political Science Review*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, *Swiss Political Science Review*, *New Zealand International Review*, *Irish Political Studies*, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, and writes articles for numerous non-governmental organisation publications focusing on European Union politics and Irish neutrality.

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