

Press release

British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) November 2023 Joint Communiqué

From [Department of Foreign Affairs \(/en/organisation/department-of-foreign-affairs/\)](/en/organisation/department-of-foreign-affairs/)

Published on 28 November 2023

Last updated on 17 January 2024

A meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) took place at Farmleigh in Dublin on 28 November 2023.

The Government of Ireland was represented by the Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin, and the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris.

The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was represented by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP; the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, the Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP; the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Steve Baker MP; and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, The Lord Caine.

The Conference was established under Strand Three of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement “to promote bilateral cooperation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of the UK and Irish Governments”.

The Conference discussed:

Political Stability

The Government of Ireland and the UK Government agreed on the critical

importance of restoring the Northern Ireland Assembly, Executive and North South Ministerial Council to full operation and reviewed the progress made in discussions to that end. They agreed that the restoration of these institutions on a sustainable basis is essential for the people of Northern Ireland who deserve stable, locally-elected and accountable government. The Government of Ireland and the UK Government discussed the impact for the people of Northern Ireland of the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Conference agreed to continue close co-operation in accordance with the three stranded approach established in the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement.

Security Co-operation

The Conference examined the current security situation in both jurisdictions. They welcomed the excellent ongoing cooperation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána in tackling terrorism, paramilitarism and associated criminality.

The Government of Ireland and the UK Government discussed the ongoing work of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) in assessing the progress being made to end paramilitarism definitively. Both Governments agreed on the central importance of effective policing and criminal justice efforts to tackle paramilitary activity, as well as measures to address serious socio-economic issues in affected communities. The Government of Ireland and the UK Government acknowledged the IRC's analysis that additional steps are required to ensure that the issue of paramilitarism is not allowed to be perpetuated for this and future generations. The Conference discussed the IRC's recommendations on potential mechanisms to support the transition of paramilitary groups to disbandment. Both Governments agreed that the IRC's recommendation for the appointment of an Independent Person to engage and report in detail on the question of the possible establishment of a formal process of comprehensive group transition had the potential to make a positive contribution, and agreed to continue to engage on this recommendation.

Legacy

The Government of Ireland and the UK Government discussed the recent enactment of the UK Government's legislation on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government reiterated its serious concerns in regard to the legislation including in relation to the Act's compatibility with the European

Convention on Human Rights, given the centrality of the Convention to the Good Friday Agreement. The UK Government set out the next steps in the implementation of the legislation by the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery, and raised its serious concerns that an interstate case brought by Ireland would undermine the Commission's opportunity to deliver better outcomes for victims before it is even fully established.

The Governments also discussed approaches and issues of concern in respect to a number of individual cases, including the Omagh bombing, Pat Finucane and the Dublin/Monaghan bombing.

Rights and Citizenship Matters

The Government of Ireland and the UK Government reaffirmed their commitment to the identity, citizenship and rights provisions of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement.

The Conference discussed the importance of the Common Travel Area, an arrangement which both Governments are committed to protecting. The Conference also discussed the potential implications of the UK Government's Electronic Travel Authorisation scheme for visitors to the UK, including on the all-Ireland tourism sector. It noted that the scheme's roll out has begun on a phased basis, and recalled that those legally resident in Ireland will not need an ETA when travelling to the UK from within the Common Travel Area.

British-Irish Cooperation

The Government of Ireland and the UK Government discussed bilateral cooperation in a range of sectors with a particular focus on collaboration in Research and Innovation. Both Governments reviewed the strong existing landscape of research and innovation cooperation and examined opportunities for building further on these relationships. The Conference agreed particularly that there should be a focus on the rollout of the first research co-centres in the important thematic areas of climate and sustainable and resilient food systems. It was also agreed that our Horizon Europe National Contact points should be encouraged to work together closely to identify potential calls in the Work Programmes where our research and innovation communities are well-placed to coordinate or jointly participate in a project application. Finally, it was agreed that consideration would be given to

building on the existing relationships between funders in the UK and Ireland and promoting funder-to-funder dialogue.

Both Governments recognised the importance of bilateral trade for both countries and agreed to work together to ensure a smooth trading relationship over the coming months including through the introduction of the UK's new Border Target Operating Model/import controls.

Future Meetings

It was agreed that the Conference would meet again in Spring 2024.

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