



Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in Athlone:

# A VISION FOR INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE AND GLOBAL RECOGNITION



**Sinn Féin  
Vice President  
Michelle O'Neill  
– Designated  
First Minister**

Time For Change



The recent Sinn Féin Ard Fheis held in Athlone was not just a gathering of party members but a platform resonating with the pulse of change and progress.

First Minister for all, Michelle O'Neill, Vice President of Sinn Féin, echoed the sentiment of inclusive governance and the urgent need for the DUP to end its boycott of Stormont. Her speech resounded with a call for local ministers to resume their duties, emphasising the necessity of making local decisions for the collective good.

“Boycotting Stormont hampers our progress as a community. We need local ministers in place, actively participating and making crucial decisions that impact us all,” O'Neill emphasised.

The event was a vibrant showcase of democratic participation, with delegates presenting a breath-taking range of articulate contributions. Vice President Michelle O'Neill expressed her admiration for the depth and diversity of ideas put forth by the attendees, acknowledging their collective commitment to shaping a better future for all in Ireland.

What truly underscored the Ard Fheis's significance was the presence of esteemed dignitaries from Europe. O'Neill noted the attendance of ambassadors and leaders of political parties, highlighting their interest in Ireland's political landscape. Particularly moving were the contributions from the Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland and leaders from the Basque EH Bildu and Catalan ECR parties. Their discussions on the right to self-determination resonated deeply, underscoring the global relevance of Ireland's journey towards self-governance.

“In Europe, eyes are on Ireland. Our potential to lead governments in both the north and south will not just impact our nation but will resonate on a global stage,” The First Minister designate, Michelle

O'Neill remarked.

She emphasised Sinn Féin's commitment to a peaceful and progressive agenda, one that champions the rights of all communities and seeks to create a fair and equitable society. The prospect of Sinn Féin's leadership taking centre stage in Ireland holds promise not just for the nation but for the world at large.

“Leading with integrity and inclusivity is our aim. We stand poised to make a significant contribution, not only to Ireland but to the world, as a beacon of progressive governance,” O'Neill concluded.

The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in Athlone wasn't just a political congregation; it was a testament to the power of unity, collective vision, and the promise of a brighter, more equitable future for all.



**Sinn Féin President and Vice President Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O'Neill at SF Ard Fheis with Sinn Féin elected reps**

## Meetings in Lisbon

The Sinn Féin delegation held meetings with Portuguese Foreign Minister - João Cravinho, Portuguese Parliament President - Augusto Ernesto dos Santos, Irish Ambassador to Portugal - Alma Ní Choighligh, political parties including Socialist Party (PS), Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) and Partido Comunista Português (PCP) and briefed the Foreign Press Association.

The President of Sinn Féin was accompanied by her Chef de Cabinet Dawn Doyle.

The delegation was supported by Sinn Féin Representative to Europe – Martina Anderson.



Meeting with Portuguese Parliament President - Augusto Ernesto dos Santos



Meeting with Portuguese governing party Socialist Party (PS) plus Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) and Partido Comunista Português (PCP)



Meeting with Ireland's Ambassador to Portugal - Alma Ní Choighligh



Briefing Portuguese Foreign Press Association



President of Sinn Féin Mary Lou McDonald and Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Matt Carthy meeting in Lisbon with Portuguese Foreign Minister - João Cravinho

## NEUTRAL COUNTRIES CAN SERVE AS IMPARTIAL MEDIATORS IN INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES

Uachtarán Sinn Féin Mary Lou McDonald TD and Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Matt Carthy TD have visited Portugal where they attended meetings with the President of the Portuguese Parliament, political parties' parliamentary leads and the Portuguese Foreign Affairs Minister. They also briefed international media about political developments in Ireland at the Foreign Press Association in Lisbon.

During the exchanges Uachtarán Sinn Féin Mary Lou McDonald and Matt Carthy briefed leaders about ongoing change in Ireland, including positive discussions about the benefits of Irish unity for all communities and the need for preparations to begin for constitutional change on the island.

They also discussed how Portugal is tackling issues including health, housing policy, and delivering climate action.

They also outlined Sinn Féin's vision for Ireland's role in the international community including the importance of countries like Ireland who are militarily neutral and why the presence of neutral, non-militarily aligned countries within the European Union, such as Ireland, holds significant importance for the EU's global standing and its commitment to diplomacy and peace.

TD Mary Lou McDonald said neutrality is an essential aspect that should be explicitly addressed in EU treaties for several compelling reasons.

"The EU, as a supranational

organisation, seeks to project itself as a champion of peaceful conflict resolution and diplomacy on the global stage.

"By having member states like Ireland, who adhere to a policy of military neutrality, the Union demonstrates its commitment to non-aggression and peace.

"Neutral countries can serve as impartial mediators in international disputes. Their absence of military alliances with major powers allows them to engage in diplomacy with neutrality and objectivity, which is invaluable when the EU is called upon to mediate conflicts or participate in peace negotiations."

Ireland has a long history of diplomacy and peacekeeping, making it an ideal candidate for such roles.

Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Matt Carthy added: "This visit to Portugal has been a welcome opportunity to set out Sinn Féin's vision for Ireland on the international stage and update Portuguese leaders on developments across Ireland.

"We outlined Sinn Féin's view of how Ireland's neutral role gives it a unique part to play within Europe.

"Having non-aligned countries is of benefit to the EU, enabling it to advocate for its values and interests more effectively, positioning itself as a leader in the promotion of multilateralism, human rights, and global peace."



# EU must change course on Palestine - or it will lose its credibility

BY MATT CARTHY

If anybody ever had a question about the absolute necessity for Ireland to maintain that independent foreign policy, those questions were answered the day that the presidents of European Commission and European Parliament landed in Tel Aviv and gave unequivocal support to Israel as it embarked on its ferocious illegal assault on Gaza. The response by many international leaders to the recent actions of Israel has been shameful. This is particularly and disappointingly true of the EU.

By their failure to consistently condemn the acts of flagrant Israeli aggression the European Union is losing any credibility to be a voice for peace, international law and the basic rules of humanity for as long as it refuses to take a stand. The contrast in the rapid and unequivocal, and it must be said correct, position of the EU in response to the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine is stark. But the position in respect of Russia and Ukraine is weakened when a different standard is permitted in respect of Israel and Palestine. The actions of Hamas on October 7th were horrendous and have been condemned by right-thinking people all over the world. But, history did not start on October 7th and the war crimes of that day provide no justification for the war crimes that Israel has committed every day since. The deliberate targeting and killing of civilians, including thousands of children;



**Matt Carthy Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs spokesperson**

the bombardment and destroying of civilian infrastructure, the forced displacement of almost 2 million people and the denial of fuel, food and water to a civilian population are gross violations of international law. That is before we even consider the multitude of international law breaches being inflicted on the people of Palestine by Israel for decades – occupation, apartheid, administrative detention, and the relentless attacks on innocent Palestinian populations; the list goes on. Action must be taken in response because Israel will not stop until the world says stop. If international leaders don't unite to take action then countries like Ireland must take a lead. But, if the EU doesn't change course then it will lose its credibility to ever again point the finger at other aggressive regimes or to declare itself to be a voice for peace and conflict resolution.



**Senator Paul Gavan, Sinn Féin**

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

As a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Europe's Human Rights Assembly, Sinn Féin Senator Paul Gavan, has worked to put the North of Ireland firmly on the agenda through a series of initiatives.

In the last 12 months Paul successfully secured a report from the Assembly on the impact of Brexit on human rights in Ireland.

The report, endorsed by more than a two to one majority of members of the assembly, was highly critical of the British government, regarding its stance on the Protocol, it's so-called Legacy Bill, and unilateral actions that undermine the Good Friday Agreement.

The report sent a clear message from the Assembly to the British government regarding the absolute need to respect human rights, respect the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, protect the Good Friday Agreement, and refrain from taking unilateral action.

The PACE Report states: "Brexit has already led to a diminution of the rights of Irish and EU citizens in NI and threatens to do so to an even greater extent in the future."

It also cites 'serious concerns' regarding the compatibility of the British government's so-called Legacy Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Paul also secured a clear message of concern from the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers regarding the 'Legacy Bill' via a parliamentary question.

The Icelandic Foreign Minister Þórháris Kolbrún Reykjavík Gylfadóttir, expressed "serious concerns" about it not following the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) stating it would not enable restitution for victims.

When the Bill became law, several European Human Rights Advocates including the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner Volker Türk and the Committee of Ministers told the British government that the 'Legacy Act' breaches international law.

In response to escalating concerns regarding human rights in the North, Paul has most recently secured a new report on the 'Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement' after tabling a motion for resolution, which is expected to be debated in 2024.

Speaking ahead of the appointment of a rapporteur Senator Paul Gavan said: "There is profound concern across PACE that Human Rights protections, that are an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement, are under sustained attack from the British Tories. This PACE report on the implementation of the GFA will be both timely and welcome."



# Swedish MPs visit Ireland

Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District council Cllr Patricia Logue welcomed Swedish MPs Håkan Svenneling, Hanna Gunnarsson and Madeleine Svenneling to the North west to discuss the challenges facing this border constituency as a result of Brexit. The visit included meetings with a range of stakeholders including political representatives from north and south, community groups and human rights organisations.

Speaking after the visit Mayor Logue stated: "Twenty-five years on from the Good Friday Agreement, it's important that the international community recognises what has been achieved and the importance of the EU's role in upholding the rights of citizens here by protecting of the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts and ensuring Brexit does not lead to any hardening of the border."

Cllr Logue continued: "Brexit has also accelerated discussions about constitutional change on this island, the people living here voted overwhelmingly to remain part of the European Union and in places like Derry and Strabane our economy hinges on the right to free movement of people and goods. The solution to the problems presented by Brexit are obvious to more and more people living here, to regain our European identity as part of a new, united Ireland."

"It was particularly encouraging for the delegation to hear a range of views from across the political spectrum, to witness first hand the relationship we have with our neighbouring council in Donegal and to hear from community organisations who have been left devastated by the loss of European funding."

The Mayor concluded: "I sincerely hope that the delegation found this fact finding visit useful and that they use their influence within the international community to be an advocate for peace, prosperity and hope for the people of Ireland."

*As well as meeting with the Mayor of Derry and Strabane, the Swedish MPs Håkan Svenneling, Hanna Gunnarsson, Linda Sneider and Madeleine Nyvall met the speaker of the Stormont Assembly, all of the main political parties, MP John Finucane, the Inishowen Cathaoirleach and leas-Chathaoirleach as well as the leas-Chathaoirleach of Letterkenny, TDs, in Leinster House and community groups and human rights advocates across Belfast and Derry.*



Mayor of Derry City and Strabane District council Cllr Patricia Logue, with Councillors Ryan McCready, Christopher Jackson, and Swedish MPs.

## BRITAIN'S FLAWED LEGACY ACT

Parliamentarians across Europe have asked their Foreign Affairs Ministers what measures they and their EU Colleagues will be recommending because of the British government breaching international human rights obligations.

The British government is in clear breach of its article 2 obligations as outlined in the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement Protocol.

Article 2 clearly outlines that there should be no diminution of the rights outlined in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), because of Brexit. Victims' Rights are contained in the GFA Rights



and Opportunities Chapter of the GFA.

Since its departure from the EU, the British government has eroded victims' rights, as vividly illustrated by the provisions within the Legacy Act which have been condemned by every political party in Ireland and all human rights advocations national

and internationally, including the UN Human Rights Commissioner.

The British government Legacy Act has stirred a tempest of concern across Europe, triggering a flurry of debates, discussions, and widespread apprehension.

This legislative proposal, aimed at shielding British soldiers from prosecution over historical offenses committed during overseas military operations, has ignited a firestorm of international scrutiny and condemnation.

At its core, the proposed act seeks to erect a legal barrier safeguarding

veterans from prosecution for actions carried out during conflicts abroad.

The European reaction to this proposed legislation has been swift and resounding.

The European Union, along with several international human rights organisations, has vehemently opposed this legislation, asserting that it undermines Britain's international legal obligations and weakens the global commitment to justice and accountability.

The intensity of the reaction from European nations reflects a deep-seated concern for the sanctity of international law and the protection of human rights.



## SELF-DETERMINATION AND UNITY REFERENDA ARE IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Declan Kearney - Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin MLA Declan Kearney has set out the outstanding challenges for the next phase of the peace process while presenting the party's new policy document, 'A New Ireland for All'.

Speaking recently at the party's Ard Fheis in Athlone, the party's National Chairperson said:

"Twenty-five years after the Good Friday Agreement, it is time to begin the next phase of our peace process. The challenge facing us all today is to make the political process work, and plan for the next 25 years; to tackle sectarianism and achieve reconciliation.

"Significant new voices from within the diversity of Protestant and unionist identities are now discussing constitutional change.

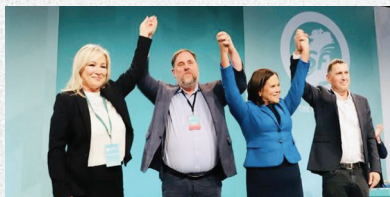
"Understanding and engaging with Protestant identities and culture is one of the most important conversations which needs to occur as we manage this change.

"Republicans carry a major responsibility to engage with Protestants and unionists to better understand their current concerns. Those reservations are real.

"Our political landscape is complicated due to the legacy of colonialism, and sectarian segregation. Housing and education reflect the structural reality of sectarianism.

"The failure to implement the Good Friday Agreement and its Bill of Rights, is at the heart of that intractability.

"Our new policy document, 'A New Ireland for All' sets out the outstanding challenges to end sectarian segregation and tackle sectarian attitudes, and to achieve reconciliation within the context of constitutional and political change.



"Eradicating sectarian segregation, and breaking the cycle of sectarianism, need to be embedded within all public policy processes. That means the function of government institutions in the north, and on a north/south basis should be repurposed to deliver on that objective.

"The democratic logic for managing change is now inescapable. It is why the Irish government, and those who will govern Britain in the future, should begin to plan and prepare the transition to unity.

"The moment has arrived to establish a Citizens' Assembly on reunification.

"Self-determination and unity referenda are in the national interest: To open a truly democratic debate about our collective future on this island which addresses the economic and social priorities of workers and families in the 26 counties; shapes an all-Ireland economic model to serve the needs of the many and for the first time, an opportunity to design a citizen centred, rights-based Republic which celebrates our national diversity."



## The GFA focus on self-determination and democracy serves as an example for Catalonia

by Catalan Jordi-Solé I Ferrando

President d'Esquerra Republicana Oriol Junqueras ERC and Jordi Solé MEP were on a fact finding mission to Ireland meeting with Chair of SF Declan Kearney and former President of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams.

The following are extracts from an article written by MEP Jordi Solé ERC about what they heard and what they learned when they were in Ireland.

"The Good Friday Peace Agreement, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, stands as a powerful symbol of diplomacy, peace, and the importance of democratic strength.

Gerry Adams, a key figure in the Agreement's creation, highlighted the significance of Sinn Féin's role during our meeting in Belfast.

He emphasised that the democratic strength of each negotiating party plays a pivotal role in shaping the outcome of political discussions. In essence, the Agreement's terms could have been different if Sinn Féin had held more political weight at the time.

The Agreement recognised the legitimacy of both perspectives within the north of Ireland – reunification and continued union with Britain. It called for peaceful coexistence and, significantly, outlined the potential for a self-determination referendum on the island's reunification.

While 25 years of peace have helped heal deep wounds and promote economic progress, the Agreement's implementation faces challenges. The failure to form a government in the north of Ireland after 20 months underscores the need for continued reconciliation.

During our visit, we met Belfast's Lord Mayor Ryan Murphy and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Alex Maskey, who emphasised their responsibility to represent all citizens, regardless of their political affiliations. This commitment to reconciliation echoes the symbolism of the Irish flag's white stripe, representing peace between Catholics and Protestants.

The visit also took us to the Roddy McCorley Republican Heritage Centre and memorial sites in both Republican and Unionist neighbourhoods. These places of remembrance serve as a reminder of the past while working towards reconciliation, as outlined in the Agreement.

Gerry Adams emphasised that the past and present do not have to determine the future.

The prospect of a reunited Ireland remains open, with the winds of change becoming more pronounced, especially with the potential for a Sinn Féin victory in the Republic of Ireland's upcoming election.

The GFA focus on self-determination and democracy serves as an example for Catalonia, highlighting the importance of these principles in overcoming political conflicts.

In the event of a shift in preference among citizens in the north of Ireland the Agreement provides a clear mechanism for change, reinforcing the significance of democracy and agreement.

The Good Friday Agreement's legacy underscores the role of democratic strength and peaceful coexistence in resolving conflicts. It serves as a model for addressing political disputes, and its principles continue to guide the path towards reconciliation and self-determination, both in Ireland and beyond.

## BASQUE PARLIAMENT SHOWS SUPPORT FOR THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT AND PROPOSES OFFICIAL VISIT TO IRELAND

On a session of the European Affairs and External Action Committee held on the 10th November 2023, the Basque Parliament unequivocally endorsed the Good Friday Agreement, expressing deep satisfaction with its role in laying the foundation for a peace process that has successfully fostered stability and coexistence in the north of Ireland.

In a motion introduced by EH Bildu and supported by most parties represented in the House (EAJ-PNV, EH Bildu, PSE-EE and Elkarrekin Podemos-IU, which hold 68 out of 75 seats in the parliament).

The commission has vehemently rejected attempts to stall the implementation of the principles outlined in the agreement and called for the restoration of institutional normality in the north of Ireland. Moreover, it has commended the positive efforts of the European Commission in negotiating agreements concerning the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland.

In a proactive move, the Basque Parliament has proposed an official visit by a delegation from the European Affairs and External Action Committee to Ireland.

The purpose of this visit is to verify the degree of compliance with the Good Friday Agreement, emphasising the commitment of the Basque Parliament to ensuring the continued success and adherence to the principles of this historic peace accord.

Oihana Etxebarrieta, EH Bildu MP and promoter of the motion, has expressed satisfaction for the support received for the initiative by different parties.

She stressed its importance and commended the follow-up done by the Basque Parliament over the years regarding the Good Friday Agreement and its implementation.



# Bringing the debate of Irish Unity to Brussels

By Emma Rainey - Brussels

Launched in May 2023, BXL-Irish Unity is a non-partisan civic volunteer group drawn from the Irish diaspora from across the island of Ireland, who are based in Brussels. The initiative comprises people from diverse backgrounds working in the EU institutions, and the private and non-profit sectors. Those involved in BXL-Irish Unity represent a spectrum of people on the topic - meaning that some members support Irish unity while others are more "unity curious". What unites us is the belief that discussions on Ireland's future need to be taken beyond the national level to the EU as the member states and institutions would play an important role in facilitating the unification of Ireland if that was the outcome of a referendum.

In September this year, the group hosted its first public event where Shona Murray, the EU correspondent at Euronews, shared her insights on the evolving context of Irish unity in the aftermath



of Brexit. The informal networking event attracted people from a variety of professional backgrounds and age groups who showed great enthusiasm for the work we're doing.

For the past few months, we have also been working with Irish political parties and MEPs to help address the democratic deficit left in the wake of Brexit by advocating for increased representation of Northern Ireland in the European Parliament through observer status. BXL-Irish Unity activities also include promoting diaspora voices as central to the debate on Irish unity as well as advocating to extend the franchise to Irish citizens abroad in the event of a referendum. We believe Irish citizens in Europe offer valuable perspectives and

insights on what a new Ireland could look like; therefore, their participation in a citizen's assembly is crucial.

For 2024, we have several plans in the works to collaborate with like-minded organisations, including Ireland's Future and the New Ireland Commission.

We will also focus some of our efforts on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, working closely with Sinn Féin and other political parties to monitor the divergence of British policy away from the ECHR.

We will also continue our community-building efforts in Brussels and work towards engaging people in the North of Ireland who are interested in re-joining the EU.

You can find more information about BXL-Irish Unity at:

<https://bxl-irishunity.com/>

Follow us on Twitter:

[@BXLirishunity](https://twitter.com/BXLirishunity)



## DID YOU KNOW ABOUT IRELAND?



Mícheál Mac Donncha

Ireland was profoundly influenced by the two great revolutions of the late 18th century - the American and the French. And their influence is still felt today. In the late 18th century Ireland was under the British crown, governed by British officials in Dublin Castle. It had a parliament without an executive, which represented the elite who controlled the country, aristocrats, and landlords of the Protestant religion. Only property-owning members of this British State religion could stand for election or vote. The colonial elite had dispossessed the native, mostly Catholic, Gaelic natives of Ireland in the wars of the 17th century. Lavish wealth based on ownership of huge estates of land existed side by side with abject rural poverty and squalor in the cities and towns. In this respect Ireland was like pre-revolutionary France. There was also the rise of a merchant class and of skilled urban workers. When the American Revolution happened it proved a rallying point for those who wanted to free Irish trade and commerce from the restrictions imposed by the British government. The rebelling American colonies had much support in Ireland, and with Britain at war with them, pressure was successfully applied to grant more powers to the Irish Parliament and ease trade restrictions. However, this did nothing to change the colonial, sectarian, and class basis of government in Ireland. Then came the French Revolution and under its influence the Society of United Irishmen was founded in 1791. It sought to unite Irish people of all religions, abolish sectarianism, and achieve Irish political independence. When the British government suppressed the United Irish Society, it turned to revolutionary France for military aid to free Ireland. Its leader Theobald Wolfe Tone went to Paris and secured the support of the Directory. French military expeditions were sent by sea to Ireland in 1796 and 1798, the first failing to land and those in 1798 too small to be decisive. Despite these setbacks the United Irishmen rose in rebellion in 1798 with the objective of an Irish Republic. Catholics and Protestants fought side by side for Irish freedom. This first Irish Revolution was brutally suppressed by the British government and many thousands were killed. 225 years ago in November 1798 Wolfe Tone was captured, tried and jailed in Dublin and died in custody. At his trial he said: "From my earliest youth I have regarded the connection between Great Britain and Ireland as the curse of the Irish nation, and felt convinced that, whilst it lasted, this country could never be free nor happy."



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