

IRELAND

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Introduction

- Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland
 - Why did Ireland join the European Project ?
 - Ireland and the benefits of the European Integration
 - Ireland and Brexit
 - What neutrality does Ireland want?
 - Is Ireland a difficult partner?
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Ireland's Profile

- Capital: Dublin
- Currency: Euro
- The island of Ireland is divided in two parts: The Republic of Ireland with 26 counties and the Northern Ireland with 6 counties. The Northern Ireland is a part of the UK, along with the Great Britain, Scotland and Wales.
- The Republic of Ireland has negotiated an opt-out from Schengen, because it didn't want a hard border.
- In Eurozone since 1st January 1999



Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland

Size:

- Small size but with a strong economy
 - Population: 5.4 million
 - Geographical size: 69.945 km²
 - Ireland is the second largest island in Europe after Great Britain
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Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland

Place on the map

- On the northwestern edge of Europe and near major Atlantic shipping routes. West of Great Britain.
- These two countries have a very strong relationship, heavily economic dependent to the UK, due to their proximity and history.
- The sea borders of the Ireland are the North Atlantic to the west, the Celtic Sea to the south and the Irish Sea to the east.
- The Republic of Ireland shares the Ireland with the Northern Ireland, part of the UK.



Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland

History: a significant role on the shaping of the European Policy

- Independence a recent phenomenon
 - Ireland became a colony of England over several centuries
 - In 1801 with the Act of Union, Ireland was formally merged with Great Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.
 - 1845-1849: The Great Famine – a period of starvation and emigration. It had a revolutionary impact on Irish politics.
 - 1919-1921: the Irish Independence War
 - 1920: The island was partitioned in the northern and southern Ireland by the British Parliament.
 - 1921: After negotiations, the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed.
 - 1922: Irish Free State - an independent state
Northern Ireland - part of the UK
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History

- 1937: a new constitution
- 1949: the country was officially named the Republic of Ireland
- 1960-1998: conflict in the Northern Ireland, that was named “Troubles”. It was between the pro UK Protestants (wanted to remain part of the UK and pro-secession Catholic (wanted to unite with the Republic of Ireland).
- Decades of violence and over 3.600 deaths and a lot of injuries
- 1998: the Good Friday Agreement: ended the conflict – a power sharing government in Northern Ireland. People from the Northern Ireland earned the right to identify themselves as Irish or British or both.
- Tension between the two groups still exist and the Brexit affected it.



Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland

Economy:

- GDP: 562.39 billion for 2024
- High GDP per capita 211% EU average, approximately €108.000 second after Luxembourg.
- Unemployment: 4,3%
- Before joining, agriculture was very important.
- The period between their independence from the UK and joining the EU, the Republic of Ireland was considered a poor country with a lot of issues.
- Joining the European project improved a lot the condition.
- 1993-2007: Celtic Tiger, which is a massive economic growth
- Ireland is a debtor member state. During the Eurozone debt crisis, Ireland accepted a financial assistance package from the EU and the IMF 67,5 billion, which included a loan from the UK. The national debt is 40,9% of GDP.
- Ireland benefits from the Single Market.
- Agriculture still plays an important role in the GDP, but new majors such as high tech companies and pharmaceutical industries have increased the economy.

The economic Growth of Ireland

- Miraculously, Ireland jumped from being one of the poorest countries in Europe to one of the richest in only a matter of years.
 - Celtic Tiger: A dramatic economic growth with a high average annual GDP growth rate of 9.4%.
 - It's also called 'Boom' or 'Ireland's Economic Miracle'. First boom in late 1990s and second boom 2004.
 - The Celtic Tiger period was the result of decades of strategic changes:
 1. Since the 1950s Ireland stopped having a protectionist economy and started having an open one and accepting investments.
 2. A low corporate tax rate was the core of this strategy.
 3. Ireland invested in the education, free secondary schooling since 1967 – a strong educated skilled English workforce that attracted a lot of companies.
 4. Joining the European Economic Community in 1973 provided access to the Single Market and European Funds, which they were used to support the education.
 - These factors led to this massive economic growth.
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The Celtic Tiger

- It called Tiger as a reference to the Asian Tigers (like Singapore), which they had a similar economic growth. Celtic comes from Ireland's Celtic culture.
 - Unemployment was reduced from 15% to very low levels around 4-5%.
 - Foreign Investments: big companies, especially from the USA, moved their headquarters to Ireland, like Google, Apple and Intel. The low taxes and the very skilled workforce (English spoken) were the main reasons.
 - Also, during the Celtic Tiger period, the housing market was increased. Construction was one of the biggest industries in Ireland. This created a dangerous bubble, and it was one of the reasons that caused the crisis.
 - Although, this rapid economic expansion stopped with the Eurozone crisis, this period set a strong foundation for future economic policies.
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Factors shaping the European Policy of Ireland

Domestic Politics

- A parliamentary republic of 26 counties
- President “*Uachtarán*” is the head of the state – Catharine Connoly (October 24th)
- Prime Minister “*Taoiseach*“ is the head of the Government - Micheál Martin from the Fianna Fail party (January 23rd)
- Coalition Governments are common due to the proportional representation system



Domestic Politics

- The Parliament “Oireachtas” has two houses: the Dail and the Seanad Eireann.
- The main political parties in the Republic of Ireland :
 1. **Fianna Fáil:** center to center-right , the dominant one, aims to secure in peace and agreement the unity of Ireland, pro Europe – **Renew Europe (European Parliament)**
 2. **Fine Gael:** center-right, liberal-conservative, Christian-democratic, pro Europe - **European People’s Party EPP (European Parliament)**
 3. **Sinn Féin:** Irish republican and democratic socialist – **the Left (European Parliament)**
- The current government: a coalition of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael (the ruling parties) and several Independents.
- A core principle of the Irish politics is neutrality.
- The constitutional limitation in Ireland (and it's the only member-state this applies to) is that the country has to hold a referendum when there are new European Treaties.

Why did Ireland join the European Community?

- Joined in January 1st 1973, first enlargement of the European integration, along with the UK and Denmark. After a referendum in May 1972, 83% said yes
- Reasons:
 1. Access to the Single Market
 2. Support for its farmers through the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)
 3. The economy would have been seriously damaged' by UK accession without Ireland
- Although, Europe had doubts. Irish politicians and diplomats were promoting a lot the idea of joining, thinking it will benefit Ireland
- They were right. It was one of the best steps for the country.





Ireland benefits from the European integration

- Ireland is a true EU success story.
 - From a poor country to one of the richest in the European Union due to the European funds - over €40 billion in EU funds from 1973 until 2018.
 - Ireland became a more equal society with a huge respect for the human rights.
 - After joining, Ireland made stronger their diplomacy.
 - The EEC/EU helped politically and financially not only with Northern Ireland but with the economic crisis in 2008.
 - Ireland is a net contributor to the EU budget and that's a sign of economic success. Now helps fund European projects for poorer member states.
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Ireland and Brexit

- After the referendum on 23rd June 2016 of the British voters, a massive change happened in the European Union.
- Brexit changed the normality and affected deeply Ireland, due to their strong relationship and the border on the Northern Ireland.
- To prevent a hard border, in the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement it was included a Protocol on Northern Ireland. This protocol commits the UK and the EU to maintain an open border in Ireland.
- Due to the sensitive past of the ‘Troubles’, the UK and the Irish governments took into consideration the sensitive past and their history.
- The Brexit didn’t affect the repayment of the UK bailout to Ireland (3,2 billion pounds).
- The Northern Ireland Protocol faced some obstacles, which they were faced by the Windsor Framework on March 2023 – to make trade smoother.





The impact of Brexit

- Businesses have to face customs costs and delays.
 - The Good Friday Agreement was threatened.
 - Tension was increased in the Northern Ireland.
 - Companies that wanted access to the European Union left from London to Dublin such as the Bank of America and made Dublin the new EU headquarters. Ireland gained from these actions.
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What neutrality does Ireland want?

- Ireland wants a military neutrality but supports peacekeeping operations. It isn't part of military alliances like the NATO. However, Ireland maintains that it is not politically neutral and participates in various EU defense structures within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) frameworks.
 - Part of CSDP since 2003 to missions in Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, Libya and many more, focusing peacekeeping strategies.
 - Most recently, in June 2025, Ireland signed up to the EU's €150 billion SAFE (Security Action for Europe) under the ReArm Europe Plan, an initiative that encourages member states to spend and procure defence equipment.
 - President Connolly advocates for the Irish neutrality and the Triple Lock
 - Triple Lock: preserves the Irish neutrality and sovereignty. The Irish forces can only be deployed, if the government, Dáil Éireann approve it and if there is a UN mandate.
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Is Ireland a difficult partner?

- In conclusion, Ireland isn't a difficult partner. Even before joining, Ireland had a very strong pro-Europe stance.
 - In a poll on May 2025 by the European Movement Ireland, the result was 82% of people in the Republic of Ireland wants to stay the EU.
 - Some differences exist like the re arming process of Europe due to the Ukraine crisis and the fact that Ireland doesn't want a federal Europe, but they don't affect negatively the opinion of Irish.
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Thank you!
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