

Submitted as feedback to the Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland Interim Report – 29 November 2020

Hi Conor,

Congratulations to you and the team on your thoughtful paper on unity referenda on the island of Ireland.

You asked for feedback on your thoughts, and having read the Executive Summary a few things spring to mind:

Things missed:

The importance of the EU in framing the range of options for unity, both in detailed appraisal of Treaty implications and the way in which Northern Ireland might join the Republic – while the EU is a champion of devolved institutions, if Northern Ireland is coming under Ireland's membership, this may limit the potential for confederal or federal unity, especially if post-Brexit links to GB are retained

The importance of other international bodies, especially in agreeing to terms in advance (e.g. FIFA, if the Northern Ireland football team is to be retained)

The definition of identity – is this individual or collective? If the former, then guarantees on British passports and citizenship might satisfy it, if the latter, then having political and cultural space to celebrate identity collectively becomes important (e.g. the NI football team, Remembrance Days, the 12th etc.)

Whether Informed Consent is possible under any scenario other than the max model you allude to in #33(2) – there is a massive difference between a unitary state with no devolved institutions and one where regional identity has political and cultural form, and entrusting this to politicians to thrash out leaves enormous uncertainties that could swing voters either way

Preferred options:

Personally I would prefer a unitary state with common fiscal rules, a common currency and devolved institutions for Northern Ireland, where weighted majority voluntary coalitions would be accountable for maintaining the NHS, Education and the PSNI, GB would retain responsibility for civil service pensions, and further subvention would taper over a period of ten years, with the Queen and Irish President having Canada-style ceremonial roles as joint Head of Stormont.

Best of luck,

Éamonn Toland