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Island Values:
Historical and National Identity in Contemporary EU Discourse in Ireland
and the United Kingdom

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VT 2024

Kandidatuppsats i Europastudier med humanistisk profil

Thesis in Bachelor's Programme in European Studies with a Humanities Profile

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Abstract

This thesis examines the connection between Irish and British historical, national identity, and the two countries' current stance and attitude toward the European Union. It will examine ideas, aims and purposes that have defined Ireland's and the UK's respective relationship and attitudes towards the EU from the time of its foundation up until the UK's exit from the union. The thesis furthermore answers questions about how Ireland's and the UK's view on the European Union differ, and how these differentiating views reflect history and identity; both historical and national. After an illustration of the historical and political context, the thesis uses critical discourse analysis, national discourse theory, and theory of EU integration to draw conclusions about current stances toward the EU – in between the years of 2017 and 2022 – as they are manifested in the three Governmental publications “Brexit: Ireland's Priorities”, “Northern Ireland and Ireland, Position Paper”, and “The benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU”. Subsequently, the discourse in these publications are placed into discussions on: Northern Ireland history and the influence of the EU; the balancing of the EU membership and national identity; modernity in the Irish discourse on the EU; how shared history has led to the different outlooks of Ireland as more internationally inclined and the UK as hesitant to loosen their grip on self-governance; and lastly, how EU integration has been successful in Ireland because of its historical identity, and not equally as successful in the UK because of the inability to negotiate the strong national identity with an EU-identity. The thesis concludes that each countries' current stance is a reflection of history and identity.

Keywords: Historical identity, Ireland, the UK, National discourse, the European Union

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1. Introduction

It is fair to say that the British Isles and the EU have had a changeable and complex relationship ever since the UK and Ireland were admitted to the Union in 1973. One of the main reasons for this could be related to the ever-confounding question of whether they share identity with continental Europe or if they, in fact, never did.

The joint history of the British Isles have intrinsically come to bind the countries together; their geographical position – where they, together, are set apart from the rest of the EU, but also set apart from each other – have come to mean shared as well as opposing historical and social identities. Historical Britain was an imperial nation with unquestionable sovereignty on many levels, while its neighbour historical Ireland, with no such identity, was looking outward in order to survive a harsh past, as an island in need of hopes for a future, bordered by a former coloniser. Between them, we find a territory of conflicting values; Northern Ireland is, jurisdictionally, part of the United Kingdom, but rifts in the opinions of the people of Northern Ireland means that it is neither UK nor Ireland, neither Protestant nor Catholic, neither unionist nor nationalist. These separate and collective histories of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the UK have unmistakably shaped how each nation views itself today; they have shaped attitudes toward lands beyond the waters by which the Isles are bordered. Geographically, the closest foreign cooperative alliance is the European Union, toward which the two countries hold very different stances – which begs the question of how the historical and national identities of the UK and Ireland are presumed to have influenced the views, official and unofficial, of the EU today, as expressed by citizens, authorities, and governmental bodies of different kinds. That is, the question of how these different views of the European Union is a reflection of history and identity.

The following research questions will be examined and answered in this thesis:

- In what ways have historical and national identities shaped current EU views in Ireland and the UK?
- What ideas, aims and purposes have defined Ireland's and the UK's respective relationship and attitudes towards the EU from the time of its foundation up until the UK's exit from the union?

- Is it possible to find a concluding stance held today by each nation (toward the EU) by analysing chosen UK and Irish governmental documents from 2017-2022? What specific narratives can be found in the discourse in these documents, that relates to national identity as it is perceived and formulated by the UK and Irish governments?

Ireland has been a member of the EU since 1973, and remains at the heart of the Union. The UK started its membership in the same year as Ireland, but chose to leave in 2016 when Brexit was voted through by referendum. The Troubles—which ended with the Good Friday Agreement—have led to the people of Northern Ireland having an unequivocal right to double citizenship; subsequently having the identity of English with the right to also being Irish, which, in turn, gives them EU citizenship. Brexit did not change this fact.

The theme of identity will run through the whole of this thesis. Importantly, there are several identities which are at the centre of it: the European, or the EU-, identity, the British identity, and the Irish identity—all of which have national, social, and historical adjuncts—as well as the conflicting identities of Northern Ireland. Negotiating national identity is difficult enough as it is; negotiating national identity in relation to a significant international cooperative polity is even harder, and has indeed proved a struggle for the UK in particular. Differentiating views of the European Union and the ways in which Ireland and the UK, separately, are connected to it is part of this process of identity-searching, and the main element of interest in this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis aims to examine the way in which the European identity has, or has not, been integrated into the identities of the Irish and the British; it will also examine whether it is a necessity for Ireland to rid itself of its national identity for their EU membership to be successful.

The temporal scope of the analysis of this thesis is the time between the years of 2017 to 2022. Thus, the views expressed by the two countries', in the key material, are limited to these years, and is therefore the only time period taken into account in this analysis. Brexit took place in 2016 (followed by additional years of political discussion). The first two documents included in this analysis were then published in 2017: the first an Irish Government paper titled "Brexit: Ireland's Priorities"; the second a UK Government paper titled "Northern Ireland and Ireland: Position Paper". The third document included is a second UK Government paper published in 2022: "The Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU".

As stated above, this thesis will explore the historical and social identities that have shaped current EU views in Ireland and the UK, as they are pronounced and manifested in governmental documents published a few years into the Brexit process, where each government lists their priorities and outlines their plans of action for the near future in relation to each other and to the European Union. Moreover, this thesis will reflect on whether there is a difference in attitude towards the European Union in Ireland and the UK – attitudes that encompass themes, wording, aims of degree of cooperation, etc. – in these documents, and discuss how historical and national identities are presumed to influence these contemporary stances toward the EU.

2. Background, historical context and earlier research

There is no correct, or exact, answer to the question of to what degree the British Isles and Ireland are part of Europe. Politically, both nations have been diligent in their work towards bridging the English channel and being at one with the rest of the continent: Great Britain has in many cases been at the forefront of projects opened between European countries in order to affirm European economy and togetherness, and EU membership was sought in the later half of the 20th century (being admitted at the third try). It could be argued that Ireland, with its history of enthusiasm for the Union, has somewhat taken over the carrying of the torch, and have made it burn brighter than it ever did in the hands of the British.

Norman Davies writes that,

“The European Coal and Steel Community (1951–) [...] was designed to prevent the reappearance of a separate military-industrial base in each member country; and its first president was Jean Monnet. Its founding treaty, signed in May 1951, brought together ‘the Six’ — France, Germany, Italy, and Benelux.¹ They agreed to operate free trade in coal and steel, to abide by common regulations governing manufacture and competition, and, in the event of ‘manifest crisis’, to control prices and production. It was a manifest success. Britain did not participate”.²

¹ *Benelux*. Economic coalition between Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Britannica, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Benelux>.

² Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 1084.

This was the foundation upon which the EU we know today was built, and it was to be several decades until the Union saw enlargement, and the founding member nations were joined by others. At this time, Guy Mollet, Konrad Adenauer, Paul-Henri Spaak, and Charles de Gaulle were some of the pillars of the founding of the Union.

Ireland and the UK sought, and were admitted, membership in 1973 – however, the UK’s road to that decision had not been a smooth one; as Davies puts it: “Britain’s membership of the European movement proved a bone of contention that rankled for more than 40 years.”³ The UK chose not to participate in the treaty to sign the formation of the ESCS (European Coal and Steel Community) in 1951, or in the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Rome. The reservations concerning the forming European community were on Britain’s part to do with their still intact view of themselves as self-sufficient and sovereign⁴, since they had come out of the second world war triumphant and not in ruins as had been the case for many of the nations on the continent⁵, who were now eager to form alliances. There was also the question of the Commonwealth; the UK was still navigating a widespread territory and its commercial inclinations, which made them look toward the United States and to a membership in NATO.⁶

Imperialist traditions and tendencies to overlook continental European partnership were also at the heart of Britain’s indecisiveness, Kershaw writes: “Britain’s relative decline was also a consequence of political judgement largely fashioned by the country’s imperialist tradition, its former economic supremacy, and its preference for Atlanticist and Commonwealth rather than continental links”.⁷ Especially in post-war times, it seemed sensible from a British perspective to stay out rather than involving itself in continental rebuilding:

“Britain’s attachment to the Commonwealth - which attracted three-quarters of the country’s exports in 1956 - turned it away from continental markets. By the mid-1960s only a quarter of

³ Davies, *Europe: A History*, 1085.

⁴ Jeremy Black is of the same opinion. A feeling of sovereignty was not unreasonable, since Britain had not lived through defeat and repression, as many other European countries, Black writes in *A History of the British Isles* (2017), 268.

⁵ Kershaw writes that Britain had undoubtedly triumphed in wartime, and had suffered much less physical damage compared to large parts of the rest of Europe; coming out of the war, the country’s economic and political structures were left “largely intact”. *Roller-Coaster: Europe, 1950-2017*, 141.

⁶ Davies, *Europe: A History*, 1085.

⁷ Ian Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster: Europe, 1950-2017* (GB: Penguin Books, 2019), 142.

the United Kingdom's total trade was with the Commonwealth as its different members developed closer relations with other parts of Europe, Japan and the United States. Britain was not able, however, to benefit fully from the expanding intra-European trade. By the time Britain, slow to liberalize its external trade and its economy by now increasingly uncompetitive, realized the disadvantages of the route it had taken and decided that it did after all want to join the EEC, it had missed the boat".⁸

In 1961, Great Britain approached the Union for the first time and made efforts to join the EEC under Prime Minister Macmillan, and then again in 1967 under Wilson. In both attempts they were rebuffed by de Gaulle⁹, who was cautious of the relation to the US. It was at the third attempt, under Edward Heath in 1973 that the UK was admitted to the Union, together with Ireland and Denmark, and in 1975 the UK membership was confirmed by referendum.¹⁰

In the 1990's, a great effort was made to decentralise the power of the European Union; with the goal of affirming regions in member states in mind, such as Edinburgh, Milan, Barcelona, and Antwerp, so that "regional interests could be identified both within and between member states".¹¹ This led to some local autonomy in a great and wide-spread European project, when regions' competence was strengthened. Despite its membership, this trend did not take root in Britain, where the proposal was rebuffed "and local government diminished, the opposite trend prevailed".¹² This meant that where, on the continent, several local EU-connected points were drawn within its member states, in the UK power remained centred in London. It can be argued that this was partly due to the situation in Scotland, where the independence movement had awakened, which could have been a reason that stopped England from giving any measure of power to the north. Davies says that "an absolute majority of Scots expressed a preference for changing the country's status. They possess the power to destroy the United Kingdom, and thereby to deflate the English, as no one in Brussels could ever do. They may make Europeans of us yet".¹³ If Scotland was allowed direct power from the EU, then, it could mean that power was taken away from Britain itself, resulting in Scotland moving closer yet toward independence, which was arguably not what the English had in mind.

⁸ Kershaw, *Roller-Coaster: Europe, 1950-2017*, 143.

⁹ Davies, *Europe: A History*, 1085.

¹⁰ Davies, 1086.

¹¹ Davies, 1120.

¹² Davies, 1120.

¹³ Davies, 1134.

Moving backwards in time, the same independence movement was taking place in early 20th century Ireland. General dissent among the Irish led to the Easter Rising (Dublin 1916), which was an attempt to bring about an independent Irish Republic. Resolutely holding on to power, Britain responded by declaring martial law, introducing trials and executions, which “only served to radicalise Irish public opinion” and providing “martyrs for the nationalist cause”¹⁴, says Jeremy Black. The independence movement proved, however, not to have been quenched: in 1919 the new national assembly, together with nationalist Irish Volunteers (who would change their title to the IRA before long), declared independence. A war began when the British refused to accept the declaration, which would go on for two years. The war resulted in independent Irish governance (the new Irish Free State) of most of the island, as was decided in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921; it became “a self-governing Dominion within the British Empire”.¹⁵ The partition of Ireland and Northern Ireland created an independent Ireland with twenty-six counties (which would soon be named a republic) and a Northern Ireland with six counties, which remained “a constituent part of the UK”.¹⁶

In the 1930’s however, when the Governor-General of independent Ireland was appointed on the recommendation of Ireland’s Taoiseach¹⁷, the Protestant-Unionists in the north—the centre of which was Ulster—would not accept the governance and became Northern Ireland, remaining part of the UK. In this Protestant, self-governed state the Catholic minority suffered hardship and discrimination, which might partly have given the IRA new reasons to oppose the partition, leading the group to initiate a terrorist campaign which was defeated in both Ulster and the Irish Free State after a couple of years.¹⁸ It was not only the Catholic minority in the north who suffered discrimination because of religious disagreement; equally so did the Protestant minority in the south.¹⁹ Dissonances between north and south, Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists, and between the general population and the IRA were finally settled at the Good Friday Agreement (Belfast 1998), which brought long-awaited

¹⁴ Black, *A History of the British Isles*, 269.

¹⁵ Black, 269.

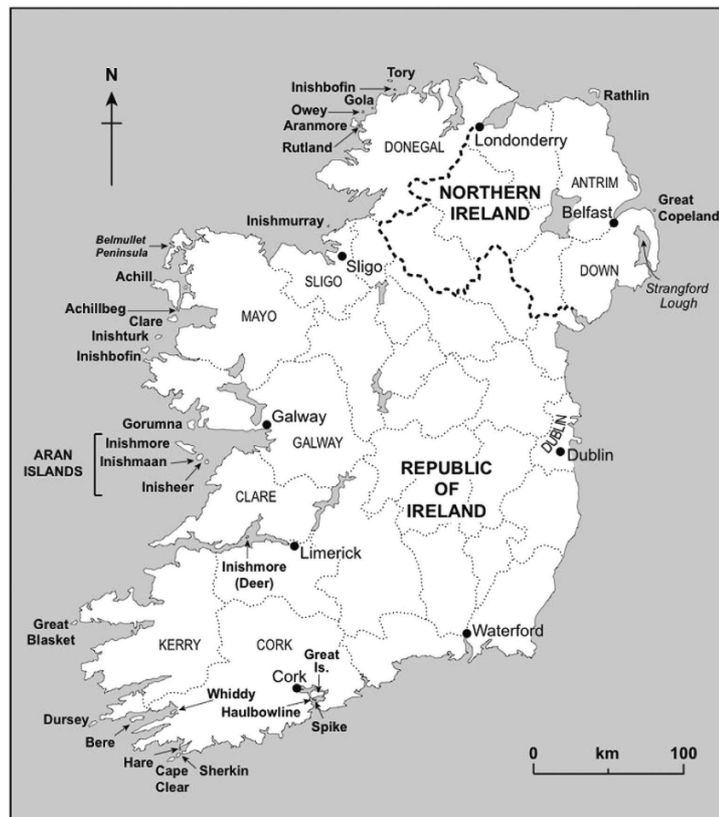
¹⁶ Thomas Wilson & Hastings Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford International Press, 2006), 127.

¹⁷ Taoiseach. Irish for ‘chief’, ‘leader’. Prime Minister and head of government of Ireland, <https://www.gov.ie/en/role/14142307-an-taoiseach/>, accessed April 18, 2024.

¹⁸ Black, *A History of the British Isles*, 270.

¹⁹ At this time Protestant unionists were a minority without belonging, in southern Ireland. Ed. Ian d’Alton & Ida Milne, *Protestant and Irish: The minority’s search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2019), 51.

peace and some stability. There was now a beginning of true functionality between Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the UK.



Map of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland²⁰

²⁰ Royle, 2008, ResearchGate, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Northern-Ireland-and-the-Republic-of-Ireland-showing-the-location-of-small_fig2_257246317. Accessed April 24, 2024.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland



Map of the UK, 2024²¹

Moving forward in time, the UK and Ireland were considering seeking EU membership, for which “the main criteria for entry” was, says Davies, “apart from being European was that applicants should have shed the nationalistic, imperialist, and totalitarian traditions of the past. Only time would tell whether the change was permanent”.²² Shedding of the past has never been easy; it proved to be even more difficult for Britain: before seeking membership in the European Union, as well as when that membership had been granted, the UK’s hesitation in lending their country’s funds and jurisdiction to solely one organisation has proved to be timeless. What with their separate relation to the United States and also to NATO, the UK has not been overly enthusiastic at the tables of the EU. However, they have been valued—perhaps as a somewhat loose, and powerful, cannon—in the Union as a link between France and Germany, and Denmark and Sweden, creating a full and stable circle in the north-west of Europe. In the case of Ireland, a referendum showed that the people of Ireland were somewhat more eager to look to a future in which they were bound to the EU;

²¹ United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Super Teacher Worksheets, <https://www.superteacherworksheets.com/united-kingdom.html>, accessed April 24, 2024.

²² Davies, *Europe: A History*, 1086-1087.

83% voted for membership in 1972²³, after which they officially became a member in 1973 alongside Britain.²⁴

During the period in which both the UK and Ireland were members, Ireland was doubly benefited since EU laws, policies and regulations were in place throughout the Isles, which only made Ireland's connection to the Union stronger, given the island's geographical position; this was because of its direct connection to continental Europe through Northern Ireland and the UK, bridging the English Channel and connecting the isles to the heart of the EU – EU regulations being common throughout this stretch of land and water. It does not do, however, to make it out as if Ireland's ties to the European Union depended on UK-EU relations: since Ireland joined as a member state it has worked with great enthusiasm, and with the support of the Irish²⁵, to implement and uphold EU policies and regulations with wonderful results for the country's economy, welfare, and social integration. Furthermore, Irish representatives have been at the front of several of the most successful periods of later EU development: they have held EU Presidency seven times, out of which the one in 2004 “oversaw the Union's largest-ever enlargement, with the accession of ten new Member States”²⁶; two of the six Secretaries-General of the European Commission have been Irish; it was also an Irish commissioner who initiated the Erasmus Programme for higher education student exchange; another Irish commissioner oversaw the first extensive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy. All of which points to a mutually beneficial partnership.

Moreover, the EU membership proved an enormous support in stabilising the conflict in Northern Ireland: “the ethnonational and political conflict [...] which has the border as central motif in the discourses among Irish nationalists and republicans, who see it as a marker of British imperialism, and among unionists and loyalists, who see it as a sign of British sovereignty”.²⁷ EU funds and peace projects gave Ireland the assistance needed in order to end conflict and introduce peace and security. It is perhaps not a stretch to state that it was fortunate the UK waited to exit the Union until 2016, and not to do it in the late 1990's or

²³ European Commission, “Ireland in the EU”, https://ireland.representation.ec.europa.eu/about-us/irelands-eu-membership_en, retrieved May 1 2024.

²⁴ Denmark was also admitted.

²⁵ *European Movement Ireland* reports that an overwhelming 88 percent of the Irish population enthusiastically supports the membership. July 3, 2023. <https://www.europeanmovement.ie/press-release-emireland-eu-poll-2023/> Retained April 25 2024.

²⁶ Irish Government, *Brexit: Ireland's Priorities*, 18.

²⁷ Wilson & Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland*, 127.

early 2000's, when swells from the border conflict in Northern Ireland were still very much present, making the support of the EU vital to the stabilisation of Ireland-Northern Ireland and Ireland-UK relations.

Today, Ireland is striving to certify their bond to the European Union, asserting themselves as a modern European country which shares values and visions with its 26 partners; the UK has chosen a different path in Brexit, and the prolonged process of leaving the EU, wishing to place more money with the English people and strengthen the independence of the country, hoping still that UK-EU relations will continue to be strong.

2.1 Earlier research

Research on Northern Ireland and its relation to the EU in light of Brexit has been done by Murphy in her publication titled *Northern Ireland and the European Union: The dynamics of a changing relationship* (2014), where she examines the meeting point between Northern Ireland politics and European integration. Hayward's work on Northern Ireland's EU relations is extensive and in-depth; publications from 2010 and onward discuss the merging of Irish nationalism and EU integration (2010), and how the Irish border played a pivotal role when the UK left the EU (2020). Markus Thiel has written about EU integration and collective identities in his publication *Limits of Transnationalism: Collective identities and EU integration* (2011). Marley Morris and Josh Emden have reported on *Scenarios for the future UK-EU relationship* in their report "Brexit and the UK's Environmental Ambitions", published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (2018). Adam Cygan has written about how the UK is changing their regulations from having been EU-connected to being more UK-centred in De-Europeanisation of UK regulatory governance and the future UK-EU trade relationship (2020). Finally, Michael Holmes and Kathryn Simpson have written about the relationship between Ireland and the EU in their Palgrave MacMillan publication *Nationalism in Internationalism: Ireland's Relationship with the European Union* (2023).

3. Method, methodologies and theory

In order to best interpret the information in the chosen material, discourse analysis was the most suitable method of analysis. This led to the choosing of critical discourse analysis – a

methodology within the discourse discipline. Here follows an overview of discourse analysis, followed by an explanation of critical discourse analysis, and how the two are applied.

3.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis investigates how language and expressions are used to describe and contextualise certain events, happenings, processes, or questions debated on a societal level. That is: how and in which fashion is language used in text and in speech in different contexts.²⁸ The analysis deals with the ways in which content and form looks, in which contexts, and how that relates to cultural and socio-political circumstances. Foucault was first in using discourse analysis as a method. He did this in the 1960's and 70's, when he "showed how questions of power, knowledge and discourse can be the main focus with the help of discourse analysis".²⁹ Discourse analysis is a qualitative method, and therefore suits my material well since they are, mainly, official documents. Any form of qualitative method is used to gather information—text as well as speech, but also semiotic, and visual, etc—and to interpret this information.

Where discourse analysis is used, language and patterns of wording are analysed within a particular social context in different areas of society³⁰, to find out how and why our construction of our social reality looks the way that it does, since it is the individuals of society who creates that reality by fundamentally being part of the discourse. Discourse analysis, then, is useful when studying how a society or a group, over a period of time, has changed their view of a specific question or situation; and to map how identity has been created in relation to this.³¹ Van Dijk has, importantly, been at the forefront of research within discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis since the 1960s, and has written extensively and in-depth on discourse, society and cognition in his work.³²

²⁸ Hasa, "Difference Between Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis", Pedia, 2017. <https://pediaa.com/difference-between-content-analysis-and-discourse-analysis/>, accessed May 8, 2024.

²⁹ Kristina Boréus & Göran Bergström, *Textens mening och makt: Metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2018), 258. All translations made by the author.

³⁰ Marianne Winther Jørgensen & Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalys som teori och metod* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2000), 7.

³¹ Boréus & Bergström, 269.

³² Discourses. Teun A. van Dijk. <https://discourses.org/>, accessed May 19, 2024.

3.1.1 Critical discourse analysis

Jørgensen & Phillips explain that a standpoint within critical discourse analysis is that “social and cultural processes and structures partly have a linguistic-discursive character”.³³ This means that conversations around certain topics or events in a particular country or society adds to the social collective regard of the topic or event; in turn, behavioural patterns as well as patterns of expression are created based on what has been absorbed of the public debate, which subsequently lead to certain political and cultural decisions being made. In other words, a country or society is built upon the social identity that has been created over long periods of time, and continues to be created by the people living in that country; this process is what we call discourse.

The difference between discourse studies (discourse analysis) and critical discourse studies is given to us by Reindorf, who says that the latter “does not study a linguistic unit per se (such as sentence structure, metaphors, pronouns, and so forth) but rather social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi/inter/trans-disciplinary and multi-method approach”.³⁴ Yet another advantage of using critical discourse analysis for this particular thesis is that power as a concept is in focus in critical discourse analysis, “as it often analyses the language use of those in power”³⁵, which is suitable for the three official documents chosen as primary material.

3.2 Theory

3.2.1 Nationalism and discourse

A definition of national discourse is that: “the nation state is perceived as a territory with boundaries, in which a people lives, the majority of which make out a cultural and linguistic entity with the right to be self-governing”.³⁶ Jørgensen & Phillips provides a definition of the concept of nationalism that outlines the question of interest: the Irish have, ever since being

³³ Jørgensen & Phillips, 67.

³⁴ Rheindorf, quoted in Ruth Wodak, “Discourse and European Integration”, in *European Integration Theory*, eds. Antje Wiener, Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 153.

³⁵ Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and European Integration*, 154.

³⁶ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*, 155.

colonised by the British, expressed the will to be an independent nation; with the Northern Ireland conflict in mind, the national discourse simmering underneath the surface in Ireland needed to rise and break with the discourse of the British and the unionist/loyalist discourse in Northern Ireland in order to eventually gain independence.

This definition by Jørgensen & Phillips' relates to the way that Craig Calhoun describes nationalism. He means that nationalism is "discursive formation"³⁷; an ongoing societal conversation that keeps developing and leading us on. Included in this theory of nationalism as a discourse are, according to Calhoun, several features which mark this nationalist discourse – such as territory and population boundaries, popular participation in collective affairs, shared culture, language and values, common descent, and historical ties to a particular territory – among others. Moreover, Özkrimli writes that Calhoun means that a nation is "a particular way of thinking about what it means to be a people. The nationalist discourse helps to make nations".³⁸ Furthermore, Özkrimli considers the formation of nations and national identities over time: "Long-existing cultural patterns may have contributed to the formation of national identities, but the meaning and form of these patterns have been transformed in the modern era".³⁹

On the nationalist thesis, Özkrimli writes that,

The nationalists believe that humanity is divided into distinct, objectively identifiable nations. Human beings can fulfil themselves and flourish only if they belong to a national community, the membership of which overrides all other forms of belonging. The nation is the sole depository of sovereignty and the only source of political power and legitimacy.⁴⁰

This definition of nationalist theory as nationalist discourse is particularly fitting for this analysis and is the perspective from which the chosen material will be viewed and discussed later on.

³⁷ Özkrimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 200.

³⁸ Calhoun in Umut Özkrimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 201.

³⁹ Özkrimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 202.

⁴⁰ Özkrimli, 53.

3.2.2 Theory of EU Integration

In Diez and Wiener's introduction chapter to theory of integration, we are given the definition of integration as a concept by Ernst Haas, who "defined integration as the process 'whereby political actors in several, distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states'"'.⁴¹ Diez and Wiener elaborates on this, saying that "European integration theory is thus the field of systematic reflection on the process of intensifying political cooperation in Europe and the development of common political institutions, as well as its outcome. It also includes the theorization of changing constructions of identities and interests of social actors in the context of this process".⁴² The theory is used by researchers and persons "concerned with questions of democratic reform"⁴³ and in relation to this, the "form of democracy that is appropriate for a polity beyond the nation state".⁴⁴ Due to the ways in which this could be applicable in this thesis, theory of EU integration was chosen; since the EU is the sovereign polity beyond the nation states in Europe.

Ruth Wodak means that "European Studies have started to incorporate methodologies of qualitative and quantitative DS which transcend traditional content-analysis, while analysing quality media and policy papers or speeches and other genres in the political field."⁴⁵ Wodak continues to explain that "investigating European integration from a DS (discourse studies) or CDS (critical discourse studies) point of view allows relating the micro-level of the production, reproduction, and dissemination of discourses of inclusion and exclusion across many fields and genres to the macro-strategies of top-down imposed policies and strategies in systematic ways", quoting her own and Fairclough's work from 2010.

⁴¹ Ernst Haas 1958: 16, in *European Integration Theory*, eds. Antje Wiener, Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse, 2019.

⁴² Thomas Diez & Antje Wiener. "Introducing the Mosaic of Integration Theory", in *European Integration Theory*, eds. Antje Wiener, Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.

⁴³ Diez & Wiener (2019), 5.

⁴⁴ Diez & Wiener (2019), 5.

⁴⁵ Wodak, *Discourse and European Integration*, 158.

4. Material

The material consists of three main documents, all of which are governmental publications; one published by the Government in Ireland, and two published by the Government in the UK: “Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities”, Irish Government Publication; “Northern Ireland and Ireland: Position Paper”, HM Government UK; “The Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU”, HM Government UK.

It is important to note that there are many more policy papers and official governmental documents on the topic of Brexit, the UK, Ireland, and the EU, given the recent and much debated nature of these questions. Even so, only three were chosen, given the research questions and limited scope of this thesis. The papers were chosen because of their publication dates (which were in between 2017 and 2022), their to-the-point structure, and because of the fact that the first UK document stated that it had taken the document from the Irish Government into consideration; in other words, they are interlinked and are focussing on the same issues, in light of the two countries relation to each other, to the Northern Ireland conflict, and to the EU. Their multi-level focus on the specific question of interest for this thesis was the main reason for their being chosen. Because of their being official policy papers they are also accessible to the public via the governments’ webpages and publications on the internet. I felt it necessary to include two UK papers since they together presented me with the information and the perspective that I found in one and the same Irish Governmental paper.

In addition to this there are polls, surveys and news articles included in the material, so as to supplement the views presented in the governmental papers.

5. Key points and Wording in Documents, Ireland and the UK

5.1 Ireland's priorities

In “Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities” the Irish Government states that Brexit presents challenges in several areas of socio-politics, such as the economic and diplomatic area, and within the peace and prosperity area, and that in light of this they have taken care to prepare for the exit process, involving representatives from both north and south in order to gain knowledge of widespread concerns and real life experiences. By way of undertaking this analysis, the Irish Government could confirm that “membership of the EU has underpinned Ireland’s national values, created a prospering economy, and helped Ireland in its transition into a modern society”⁴⁶, which may lead one to what Gerard Delanty says about the impact of modernity on Europe: “Modernity brought about a major transformation in the moral and political horizons of European societies”.⁴⁷ A widening of political horizons, then, is mirrored in Ireland’s view of itself since the country joined the EU.

Ireland makes it abundantly clear that they want to remain a definite member of the European Union, stating that its “unequivocal conclusion” is that it is for the best of Ireland’s future to remain a fully committed member of the EU, “notwithstanding the departure of UK”.⁴⁸ Thus, the UK leaving the Union does not, and will not, influence Ireland’s position as an enthusiastic member state.

One of the very first things that is brought to attention in the Irish Government’s paper is the impact Brexit might have on the Northern Ireland Peace Process (“Brexit could damage the Northern Ireland Peace Process”), making it clear that this question is of vital importance. They start by wanting, throughout and following the UK’s exit process, ‘to protect all provisions of the Good Friday Agreement’, which included the Principle of consent: the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is in the hands of the people. There is an agreed-upon mechanism to allow for change in the future; should a majority of the people

⁴⁶ Irish Government, *Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities* (2017), 2.

⁴⁷ Gerard Delanty, *Formations of European Modernity: A Historical and Political Sociology of Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 242.

⁴⁸ Irish Government, *Brexit Ireland’s Priorities*, 2.

decide by referendum to opt for a united Ireland, this decision will be accepted by both the British and Irish governments.⁴⁹

The next standpoint is ‘to maintain EU support for the Peace Process’. The Irish Government writes that British and Irish common membership of the EU was of great importance in the securing of peace and solidarity in Northern Ireland and along the border. Furthermore, this part of the document states that the political and financial support lent by the EU has assisted the ongoing reconciliation in Northern Ireland at every turn, particularly in the form of the funding programmes PEACE and INTERREG.⁵⁰ Ireland “is determined”⁵¹ to work with EU partners and with the UK to avoid changes that could damage political, social, and security structures that are in place.

The Irish Government’s third standpoint in making sure Brexit will not damage the Northern Ireland Peace Process is to ‘avoid a hard border on the island’ – which is vitally important to the national interest of Ireland. In the past – during the Troubles in particular – the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland was highly tensioned; a heavily militant area whose hostility went both ways. If a hard border is resurrected, or a new one comes into existence, this could be fatal for the clearing of borders on the island; a work that has been achieved by Ireland and the EU in collaboration with the UK.

The final goal concerning Northern Ireland affairs in light of Brexit is making sure support is continued for ‘north-south cooperation’, a section which highlights the fact that the people of Northern Ireland have a right to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, which means that in practicality “almost all of the 1.8 million residents of Northern Ireland are entitled to Irish, and therefore EU, citizenship regardless of Brexit.”⁵² It is stated that Ireland’s government will work to ensure that the role and contribution of the EU can continue and be built upon in Northern Ireland “in a way which reflects the core values of the EU, itself the world’s most successful peace project”.⁵³

⁴⁹ Irish Government, 6.

⁵⁰ Wilson and Donnan have given elaborate anthropological insights into the implementation and results of these EU-funded programmes. “Transnational and Global Ireland”, Ch. 7, pp. 137-162.

⁵¹ Irish Government, 6.

⁵² Irish Government, *Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities*, 6.

⁵³ Irish Government, 6.

The second question that is brought up in the paper is that Brexit could lead to difficulties in trade and economy, more precisely, that “Brexit could impede trade and the economy”.⁵⁴ Trade and economy per se are not directly related to the discussion on history and identity, however, there are sentences that signal the standpoint of Ireland. The subheading “Maintain close trade between UK and EU/Ireland”⁵⁵, signals that the EU and Ireland are still one and the same, and that Ireland identifies itself more closely with the union than with the UK. Furthermore, the Irish Government alludes to history by stating that “a large share of our trade has always been with the UK”, this “as a result of Ireland’s history, geography and culture”.⁵⁶ Ireland wants the closest possible trading relationship between the EU and the UK, which again signals that they have been stuck in their ties to the UK throughout their shared history, but that they now want to make it clear that they are part of the EU.

The final concern listed as an ‘Ireland Priority’ in the governmental paper is the risk of negative impact of Brexit on Ireland’s position in the European Union. The paper states that “Brexit could weaken the EU and/or Irish influence in it”⁵⁷, alluding to the future of the EU and Ireland’s vision of that future. In order for this not to happen, Ireland’s government wants to ‘strengthen existing alliances in EU and build new ones’⁵⁸; they want to preserve and develop the relationships between themselves and other member states, saying that common values and principles are part of how to best form the future: “Our core values – democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality and tolerance – are more important than ever: they are vital to withstanding the many challenges we face and are central to our future peace and prosperity”.⁵⁹ To make sure that Brexit does not influence Ireland’s position in the EU in a detrimental way, they want to ‘promote better awareness of EU role, values and achievements’⁶⁰ at home. Ireland has reason to build awareness around the positive impact of the EU membership as well as its own contribution to it – Ireland has held the EU Presidency seven times and has had two Secretaries-General⁶¹, as well as been among the leaders in some of the most important periods of expansion.

⁵⁴ Irish Government, 3.

⁵⁵ Irish Government, 11.

⁵⁶ Irish Government, 10.

⁵⁷ Irish Government, 3.

⁵⁸ Irish Government, 3.

⁵⁹ Irish Government, 16.

⁶⁰ Irish Government, 3.

⁶¹ Irish Government, 18.

It seems that the EU, to Ireland, is everything that the UK is not, nor have been, in their intertwined history, which is an interesting comparison since the EU and the UK are the two sovereign powers that have had influence on Ireland. EU membership has brought enormous benefits and has the support of the Irish people. In their paper, the Irish Government writes that the EU “has brought peace, justice and prosperity to the continent and it remains an indispensable source of stability in this turbulent world”.⁶²

The Irish Government emphasises words such as ‘open’ and ‘welcoming’ in the statement: “To succeed as an open economy and a welcoming society, Ireland must remain at the heart of Europe”⁶³, which could be argued to signal general open-mindedness, perhaps first and foremost toward other member nations. On this point, the UK takes a different stance: one of the benefits listed in their second document analysed down below is that they have been able to take control of their borders since Brexit was officiated, saying that they now will not allow passage into Britain for Europeans with a criminal record, but instead will only admit those who will benefit the country.

Furthermore, the Irish Government lends another full paragraph to shared European values: “The EU has also been the cornerstone of much of the social progress which Ireland has experienced over the last generation. The social dimension of the EU – respect for human rights, worker’s rights, and equality – reflects a distinctly European set of values which we share here in Ireland”.⁶⁴ Ireland means, then, that their European values make them not only Irish, but Europeans. Moreover, the paper conveys that the EU membership allows for Ireland to address shared and global issues such as international peace and security, climate change, and migration in an integrated way: “as members of a union with other like-minded democracies who share our values and interests, we have a much more powerful voice and much greater influence on the global stage”.⁶⁵

Listed last in the part about how not to let Brexit diminish Ireland’s role in the EU, the Irish Government wants to ‘maintain strong UK-Ireland and UK-EU relations’⁶⁶; Ireland will participate in EU-UK negotiations as one of 27 Member States, disappointed by Brexit “but

⁶² Irish Government, 16.

⁶³ Irish Government, 18.

⁶⁴ Irish Gov., 18.

⁶⁵ Irish Gov., 18.

⁶⁶ Irish Gov., 19.

unequivocally on the side of the negotiating table with our 26 partners”.⁶⁷ This conveys a sense of decisiveness on Ireland’s part, as they establish themselves on the side of the EU, negotiating EU interests in the Brexit process. In relation to this it is also stated in the paper that Britain’s decision to leave is additionally regrettable since the Irish will lose an ally on many issues because of their geographical location and historical connection, which leads to the two countries having shared interests on many levels. However, the Irish Government continues to say that Ireland has many allies within the EU across the policy spectrum, and those alliances will be strengthened and deepened through their EU membership continuing to be strong. It is made clear in the paper that Ireland values its historical connection to the UK and the ways in which that history shaped different but also similar national identities: they want to maintain a strong relationship with Britain post-Brexit, where the historical relationship and the linkages and ties between the two countries will be recognised.⁶⁸

The Irish Government concludes the paper by stating that they “will continue to underline its [the EU’s] core values, celebrate its political, economic and social achievements, and work to ensure that all our citizens understand that our future peace and prosperity is best preserved and promoted through the European Union and our membership of it”.⁶⁹ The Irish sentiments that come through in this paper, which by its publication adds to the Irish discourse, are the importance of values—and the importance of strengthening alliances with parties that share those same values—, future, and ideology – all of which carry an immaterial tinge.

5.2 The UK: position on Northern Ireland and Ireland in light of Brexit

The first UK Government publication, “Northern Ireland and Ireland, Position Paper”, was published in 2017, and seems by all accounts to be signalling their position in relations to Northern Ireland and Ireland. Where Ireland began their paper stating that Brexit presented challenges, Britain intended for their paper to address “the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland and Ireland in light of the UK’s withdrawal from, and new partnership with, the European Union”.⁷⁰ Following this statement, the UK is also “open to dialogue on Northern

⁶⁷ Irish Gov., 18.

⁶⁸ Irish Gov., 18.

⁶⁹ Irish Gov., 18.

⁷⁰ HM Government, *Northern Ireland and Ireland, Position Paper* (2017), 1.

Ireland and Ireland issues between the UK and EU negotiating teams”⁷¹, which means that the UK might be aiming for a discussion where the EU is involved – it might also mean, however, that the UK is simply addressing Ireland as a part of the EU.

Firstly, the UK Government agrees with the Irish concerning upholding the Belfast (“Good Friday”) Agreement in all its parts. An interesting note to comment on at this point is the difference in way of referencing the Good Friday Agreement, and how it could be a reflection of history and identity; where Ireland solely names it the Good Friday Agreement, Britain names it after the place where it was signed, as the Belfast (“Good Friday”) Agreement. This might be because the UK wants to stress that Belfast is in Northern Ireland, which in turn is part of the UK, in order to establish sovereignty. For the Irish part, the majority of the population in the Republic of Ireland are Catholic, which might influence their preference of calling it the Good Friday Agreement.

The UK Government summarises the Belfast Agreement as follows. The Belfast Agreement:

“confirmed the permanent birthright of the people of Northern Ireland, irrespective of Northern Ireland’s constitutional status: to identify themselves and be accepted as British or Irish or both, as they may so choose; to equal treatment irrespective of their choice; and to hold both British and Irish citizenship”.⁷²

In the paper the UK is in agreement with Ireland when it comes to the safekeeping of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in its entirety, that is, retain the permanent birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to hold both UK and Irish citizenship, and furthermore to make sure that the peace process is stable: “The peace process must be safeguarded under EU surveillance throughout the exit process”.⁷³

Next, the UK Government means that the governments involved – the UK, the EU, and Ireland – should affirm the ongoing joint support of the UK government, the Irish government, and the EU for the Northern Ireland peace process; that the continuing upholding of the citizenship rights set out in the Belfast Agreement should be formally

⁷¹ HM Government, 1.

⁷² HM Gov., 3.

⁷³ HM Gov., 4.

recognised; and that the EU and the UK should agree to the continuation of the funding of the PEACE programmes to Northern Ireland and border counties of Ireland.⁷⁴

It seems that the Irish government and the UK government are both on the same page concerning the Irish and double citizenship: “As long as Ireland remains a member of the EU, Irish citizenship also confers EU citizenship, with all the rights that go with this. This is as true for the people of Northern Ireland who are Irish citizens – or who hold both British and Irish citizenship – as it is for Irish citizens in Ireland”.⁷⁵ The UK states that these rights are not to be affected by Brexit.

Moving through the document, another point raised in the UK paper is the wish to avoid ‘a hard border for the movement of goods’⁷⁶, a point which Ireland also raised, however, Ireland does not particularly emphasise avoiding a hard border ‘for the benefits of goods’, but rather focuses on the continuing of free movement for the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland so as to keep the border invisible. Standing out from the economic line of argument is that the UK government notes that the importance of trade between Ireland and the UK is to be taken account of, and that the UK will “aim to avoid economic harm to Ireland as an EU member state”.⁷⁷

There is a mention of observers having “proposed that the UK should impose a customs border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain following our exit from the EU”.⁷⁸ To which the answer is given that “the UK has been clear that avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland is one of our top priorities”⁷⁹, continuing to say that the UK thinks, however, that a border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain is the wrong way to achieve this. Here, they are not addressing the mentioned suggestion – it is unclear what border is at focus here. Politically, it is understandable why the UK are expressing themselves as such, since they are, very reasonably, taking care not to let anything come between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. A border between Northern Ireland and Wales/England would not serve the UK in any way.

⁷⁴ HM Gov., 4.

⁷⁵ HM Gov., 5.

⁷⁶ HM Gov., 12.

⁷⁷ HM Gov., 16.

⁷⁸ HM Gov., 18.

⁷⁹ HM Gov., 18.

It is clearly stated that the paper is according to the European Commission’s directives and with the European Council’s negotiating guidelines; the Irish government’s priorities paper has also been taken into account. Moreover, there is an emphasis on shared objectives between the UK, the Irish Government, and the EU. Throughout the paper there is an evident support of the Northern Ireland peace process, but with a very present material focus, on elements such as goods and energy.

5.3 The UK: their benefits of Brexit

In the foreword of “Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU” the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson writes that Brexit allows for the UK to take back control, make their own laws, and manage the country’s own money; in leaving the EU, the UK “will achieve great things”.⁸⁰ The PM continues to say that the exit grants freedom and an opportunity to “build back better than ever before”⁸¹; it will make the people of Britain more prosperous; Britain will keep what works (from the EU membership) and change what doesn’t; finally, it will also lead them to “firmly planting the British flag on the world stage once again”.⁸²

The paper proceeds to list the achievements that have been made since leaving the EU. Among these achievements are the following. The UK has: ended free movement and taken back control of borders – only “skilled workers”⁸³ and the “best global talents”⁸⁴ who speak English are allowed passage; restored control over the UK’s own lawmaking – laws “are now made in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London, not Brussels”⁸⁵, which additionally means that “UK judges, sitting in UK courts, now determine the law of the land in the UK, with judgements issued in English, not French”⁸⁶; “reintroduced our iconic blue passports”⁸⁷; and enabled “businesses to use a crown stamp symbol on pint glasses”⁸⁸. It is furthermore stated

⁸⁰ HM Government, *The Benefits of Brexit: How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU* (2022), 3.

⁸¹ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 3.

⁸² HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 3.

⁸³ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 5.

⁸⁴ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 5.

⁸⁵ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 5.

⁸⁶ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 5.

⁸⁷ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 6.

⁸⁸ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 7.

in the document that as an independent country, the UK “can go further and faster than the EU”⁸⁹ when it comes to global and political issues, and that the exit from the union “has given us [the UK] an unprecedented opportunity to forge new alliances and strengthen our partnerships around the world”.⁹⁰

According to popular opinion, these factors seem to please a significant part of the population in the UK, and Brexit is not to be considered a regret; there is a balance between those who would vote to stay out and those who would vote to re-join. John Curtice reports that a poll taken in 2023 revealed a drop in Britons who would vote to re-join the EU at the time of the poll; 56 percent said they would vote to re-join, while 44 percent said they would vote to stay out.⁹¹

6. Discussion and analysis: Irish and British discourse – in governmental documents – on the EU, in light of history and nationhood

What do these governmental publications then, as representing currently held views in each country, divulge about the ideas, aims and purposes that can be said to have defined Ireland’s and the UK’s respective relationship and attitudes towards the EU? What can be concluded about the EU stance held today by each nation?

Firstly, talking about Irish history in relation to this, and historical, national Irish identity, one needs to approach the subject from two different angles, which are something of a contradiction; transnational Irish history as a given, and a strong Catholic and rural societal system.⁹² The first perspective means that the Irish diaspora, and its expanse, has led to a wide spread of ‘Irishness’, Irishness being planted in Europe, Britain, and the United States. “Wider contexts have always been vital to our understanding of modern Ireland”.⁹³ In other

⁸⁹ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 15.

⁹⁰ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 17.

⁹¹ John Curtice. “Have voters cooled on the prospect of re-joining the EU?”, UK in a Changing Europe, Dec. 19, 2023.

<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/have-voters-cooled-on-the-prospect-of-re-joining-the-eu/>, accessed April 25, 2024.

⁹² Niall Whelehan, *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 7.

⁹³ Whelehan, *Transnational Perspectives on Modern Irish History*, 7.

words, there has been a sense with the Irish of knowing the world. This “knowledge” of the world beyond the sea could then be presumed to have led to the Irish always having a tendency of being politically open and optimistic toward shared governance. In the latter case – Catholic and rural – is the other side of Ireland’s history; religion and strong traditions, which could be argued to tether people to their roots and cautious of shared governance, have run parallel with the Irish tendency of moving away from their homeland.

Approaching modern Ireland from a historical perspective, with transnationalism in mind “appears ideally suited to further explore themes such as migration, famine, nationalism, unionism and religion that historians have long recognized to be of central importance to Ireland’s past and present”.⁹⁴ This is a history which has led to the insights and statements found in “Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities”, such as the notion that “Ireland must remain at the heart of Europe” in order to “succeed as an open economy and a welcoming society”.⁹⁵

6.1 Viewing the importance of the EU in the case of Northern Ireland, in light of history

British and Irish common membership of the EU was of great importance in the securing of peace and solidarity in Northern Ireland and along the border. What is particularly interesting, and problematic, with the separation of Ireland and Northern Ireland is that the territories are geographically closer to each other than Northern Ireland and Wales and England (the rest of the UK); the border is drawn over the same landmass. It becomes further complicated if one looks again at the definition of nationalism provided by Jørgensen and Phillips: a territory “in which a people lives, the majority of which make out a cultural and linguistic entity”; the majority of the population in Northern Ireland are Protestants, but there is also a minority of Catholics; i. e. part of the population identifies with the Republic, more so than the rest of Northern Irelanders — is it right, then, to say that the people of Northern Ireland are one and the same people? Wilson and Donnan’s explanation does not seem to support it:

⁹⁴ Whelehan, 7.

⁹⁵ HM Gov., *Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities*, 18.

The clear fact of the matter is that there were, and are, two populations divided by religion, ethnic and national identity, history, traditions, customs and political ideologies. These populations, identified in various ways and at different times as Protestant, British, unionist and loyalist, on the one hand, and as Catholic, Irish, nationalist and republican, on the other – identifications that do not always and everywhere neatly map on to each other – have learned to live together, in relative tolerance, for hundreds of years. This tolerance masks some diametrically opposed positions in public and private life, divisions which resulted in an armed conflict that raged from 1969 to 1994, with violence continuing within and between these two ‘communities’ up to today.⁹⁶

There is, additionally, something to be said about the part of the Northern Ireland population who does not claim to belong to either of the above mentioned sides: the people who are in between the British and Irish identity. Among the strong voices of sure nationalists and equally certain unionists, this is a group who is nonetheless seen in survey work. In an article reporting on surveys undertaken in Northern Ireland, on whether they predict a united Ireland or a Northern Ireland that remains part of the UK, Shawn Pogatchnik writes that

“Among key swing voters in any referendum — those who identify as neither British unionist nor Irish nationalist — the proportion of those saying Brexit has made them favor Irish unity has risen 5 points to 43 percent in only the past year. And on the key question of identity, those who consider themselves British and unionist has slid to a new low, Irish nationalist to a new high in this decade-old survey, which is conducted jointly by Ulster University and Queen’s University Belfast.”⁹⁷

It can be assumed, then, that people without strong connection to either nation state disapprove of Brexit and would rather be part of Ireland – still an EU member. Returning to the question of whether the people of Northern Ireland are one and the same people, the above survey may indicate that the gap between Protestants and Catholics, Unionists or Nationalists, is becoming smaller due to Brexit. The survey shows that the number of British unionists have diminished, while the number of Irish nationalists have risen. To emphasise the article’s phrasing of ‘who *consider* themselves’ as one thing or the other: to consider oneself as something or another is at the heart of Northern Ireland history, as we have seen.

⁹⁶ Wilson & Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland*, 29-30.

⁹⁷ Shawn Pogatchnik, “A united Ireland looks more likely thanks to Brexit, new study finds”, *Politico*, April 13, 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/united-ireland-look-more-likely-brexit-study-uk-belfast/>, accessed 25 April, 2024.

The history of Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as Nationalism and Unionism, have created current national identities. In both the Irish and British papers, each government shows that they are aware of this fact, and that they intend to honour it by maintaining the right of Northern Ireland citizens to hold both Irish and UK citizenship. Consequently, both governments are making sure that those citizens who wish to be an EU citizen have the ability and the free opportunity of being so, in light of the reported increase in Northern Irish citizens who are leaning toward a united Ireland and a membership in the EU.

Continuing to focus on Northern Ireland, the Irish Government states in the paper that it is imperative to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and that the disappearance of such a border is owed to the support of the EU. Furthermore, this current stance on Ireland's side to continue working with the EU in Northern Ireland is further pronounced in their stating that EU support is vital and must continue – Brexit can not be allowed to damage the support of the EU in the ongoing peace process or the funded peace programmes in place. The programmes and funding that Ireland speaks directly to the EU about, and the welcoming of this support, and subsequently that Ireland, in remaining a fully committed EU-member, want to make sure this support stays in place.

6.2 National discourse in Ireland: Balancing EU membership and national identity

Adding to the concept of discourse in this discussion, the term national discourse is interesting in this context, since Ireland only has grown in areas such as national identity and soft power, since they became independent from the UK. Very clearly, the national discourse in Ireland is emphasising the self-value of the nation, and at the same time it equally strongly emphasises the feeling of gratitude for the EU membership and the principles and values Ireland shares with the other EU member states. Risse discusses the meaning of EU membership in Diaz and Wiener, where he says that member countries “are no longer simply European states. They are EU states in the sense that their statehood is defined by their EU membership”⁹⁸ and it furthermore “implies the voluntary acceptance of a particular political

⁹⁸ Thomas Risse, “Social Constructivism and European Integration”, in *European Integration Theory*, eds. Antje Wiener, Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 134.

order as legitimate and entails the recognition of a set of rules and obligations as binding”.⁹⁹ This relates back to the Davies’ citation in “Background and Historical Context”¹⁰⁰: that EU membership equals embracing a European identity of togetherness by shedding past nationalist tendencies – which can be assumed had the goal of member states prioritising collaboration and togetherness in their political agenda. In the Irish Government paper, there are several indicators of Ireland expressing how its statehood is defined by their membership in the European Union, and how, at the same time, Ireland so strongly emphasises its independence, consequently enforcing its nationalism. This does not, however, diminish their wish to tie on to the EU with the same enthusiasm.

It is stated in the paper that it is for the best of Ireland’s future to remain a member of the EU, and that Ireland wants to continue to build upon the support of the EU in Northern Ireland in a way that reflects the core values of the EU; still holding their national identity, they also want to incorporate the pillars of the EU into their share of responsibility in Northern Ireland. These two factors, then, are articulated as not cancelling each other out, rather, Ireland wants them to merge and be parallel.

6.3 Modernity & the emphasis on modern Ireland

The mentioning of modern Ireland, and the concept of modern Ireland, is raised in the Irish Government paper, where it is stated that the EU membership helped Ireland in its “transition to a modern society”.¹⁰¹ Thus, one could argue that the Irish government’s view of what is modern, and the qualities that lend a nation its modernity, is embedded within the EU. The publication emphasises once again this argument on page 11, where it is stated that Ireland’s membership in the European Union is “the bedrock of our modern society”. The core theme that can be derived from this is that part of Ireland’s social identity is viewing the EU as a fundamental part of modernity and the modern western world, and by extension, that the membership makes Ireland a modern society. A parallel could be drawn to the way society functioned – and to what extent it did not function – previous to Ireland’s membership of the EU: it was a territory under foreign governance, split in two by a civil war, struggling to

⁹⁹ Risse, 134.

¹⁰⁰ See ch. 2, 10.

¹⁰¹ Irish Gov., *Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities*, 3.

connect with the international market. It is not unreasonable then, for Ireland to view itself as having come into its role of a functioning, modern society since becoming an EU member state – which is shown by the Irish Government in their paper, where they state that “membership of the EU has underpinned Ireland’s national values, created a prospering economy, and helped Ireland in its transition into a modern society”.¹⁰²

Connecting nationalism and modernity can be done with the assistance of Özkrimli, who says that according to Calhoun “the nationalist discourse helps to make nations” which leads him, Özkrimli, on to the conclusion that this too explains the modernity of nations. The Irish discourse on EU relations, as formulated in the official paper, puts emphasis on Ireland’s national title being equivalent to the EU. In light of the UK exit process, the paper makes several distinctions between the UK and the EU – not between the UK and Ireland, but always using the title signalling belonging to the EU. This is done while also reflecting on the shared history of themselves and Britain; “as a result of Ireland’s history, geography and culture, a large share of our trade has always been with the UK”. In the Irish discourse, then, there is a distinction made between a past where they were tied to the UK, and the modern now where they have distinguished themselves as a modern nation by way of their EU membership.

6.4 Unity and diversity: Shared history with Ireland has still led to a different national identity in the UK

The Irish diaspora and the British empire had in common the expansion of population onto other nations; both countries and their peoples have known many homelands, being used to stretching their identity to a wider world. It seems that this experience has resulted in different approaches; where it has tied the Irish more closely together with other nations and states, it has made the UK more inclined towards independence and self-sufficiency. In the case of the UK one might draw the conclusion that the goal of leaving the European Union was to rebuild a strong Britain and reclaim the strong British national identity that has been created continuously since the time of the empire.

¹⁰² Irish Gov., *Brexit Ireland’s Priorities*, 2.

According to Thomas Risse, “the dominant outlook in most EU member states” is “‘Country first, but Europe, too’”.¹⁰³ He continues to explain that it is also true that “people do not perceive this as contradictory. Moreover and more importantly, the real cleavage in mass public opinion is between those who exclusively identify with their nation (exclusive nationalists), on the one hand, and those perceiving themselves as attached to both their nation and Europe (inclusive nationalists), on the other hand.”¹⁰⁴ Risse further explains that “the European polity does not require a ‘demos’ that replaces a national with a European identity, but one in which national and European identities coexist and complement each other. This is a significant empirical finding that speaks directly to the debate on the future of the union.”¹⁰⁵ Risse’s explanation is manifested in the example of Ireland and the UK; clearly, Ireland has succeeded in developing an inclusive nationalist identity with the Irish population, while one might argue that the reason for the UK eventually leaving the union is because of its inability to fully reconcile its, arguably, strong national identity with its European identity.

If the preservation of this strong British identity indeed was the goal of Brexit, it seems as if that goal was achieved, according to the second UK Government paper (“How the UK is taking advantage of leaving the EU”, which describes the ways in which Brexit was beneficial), where it is stated that the UK will be strengthened by the country’s new freedom to control their democracy, borders, money, and lawmaking. Moreover, it is stated that all of these factors will result in “a Britain that is truly global once again”.¹⁰⁶ It could be argued that this might be the UK alluding to the British empire, which would, naturally, be a reference to one of the most impactful makings of the British national identity. This would therefore be an efficient way of arguing that Brexit is a step toward that same sovereignty, as well as a well suited addition to the British national discourse.

The UK Government states that the nation has come to have more and better control of their country and their borders since Brexit was concluded. There is emphasis on territory, and how that territory is important; in order to be able to care for that territory it was necessary to exit the Union. This emphasis, then, is part of the British discourse in the document where it

¹⁰³ Thomas Risse, “Social Constructivism and European Integration”, in *European Integration Theory*, eds. Antje Wiener & Thomas Diez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 152.

¹⁰⁴ Risse, in Wiener & Diaz, 152.

¹⁰⁵ Risse, 152.

¹⁰⁶ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, Introduction, 4.

appears; a part which is directly related to the standpoint of national discourse where the nation is a territory with boundaries, wherein a common people lives, who share culture and language, among other factors.¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, a conclusion here could be that territory is of great importance in the current UK national discourse, which makes it close to impossible to share that territory with the other member states of the EU, which is included in an EU membership. In relation to this, Northern Ireland is still the territory of the UK, and the Government states clearly in document number one that it agrees with all points raised by the Irish Government: to protect the Northern Ireland peace process and to maintain EU support for that process during as well as after the UK has completed their exit from the union; they also agree that the right of Northern Ireland citizens to hold both UK and Irish citizenship must be preserved.

In the case of Ireland, Whelehan writes that “Irishness is not simply territorial”¹⁰⁸, which is reflected in the way that the Irish Government speaks about their EU-relation in their paper.

6.5 EU-integration and themes of national identity

In their paper, the Irish Government writes that the EU membership allows for Ireland to address shared and global issues such as international peace and security, climate change, and migration in an integrated way; the Irish Government believes that building a stronger EU is theirs, and everyone’s, best chance at handling such global issues in the best way possible. In the words of the paper: “As members of a union with other like-minded democracies who share our values and interests, we have a much more powerful voice and much greater influence on the global stage”¹⁰⁹; in being integrated into the EU, Ireland has more influence in global politics. As per the UK documents, Britain views this matter differently: according to the UK Government they will now, free of the EU restraints, be able to “plant the British flag firmly on the world stage”¹¹⁰, which can be interpreted as the opposite way of achieving what Ireland aims to achieve in being part of the EU: distanced from political partners in Europe. The UK Government writes that they will be able to work faster on global issues such as the ones listed above, now that they have left the union.

¹⁰⁷ Jørgensen & Phillips, *Diskursanalys som teori och metod*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Whelehan, *Transnational Perspectives on Irish History*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ Irish Gov., *Brexit: Ireland’s Priorities*, 18.

¹¹⁰ HM Gov., *The Benefits of Brexit*, 3.

Despite the loss of the UK as a fellow EU member state, the Irish Government means that Ireland has many allies within the EU across the policy spectrum, and those alliances will be strengthened and deepened through their EU membership continuing to be strong. It could be concluded that this is a marker of the confidence that Ireland has gained through their integration into the union. Moreover, there is a difference in discourse in the papers when it comes to sentiment. The sentiments that come through in the Irish Government paper (which by its publication adds to the Irish discourse) are the importance of values—and strengthen alliances with parties that share those same values—, future, and ideology – all of which carry an immaterial tinge. The discursive choices of the UK Government are slightly more material and protective, to a degree which Ireland’s are not.

Provided with the definition of EU integration theory in chapter three, where Ernst Haas means that EU integration is manifested in political actors who shift their “loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre”¹¹¹ which is sovereign to the nation state. Here, Ireland is the political actor who has shifted its political loyalty toward the EU. It is clear that Ireland fully embraces their integration into the European Union: the Government aims to promote better awareness of EU role, values and achievements among the Irish population – the narrative that is being built is centred around how Ireland and the EU are intrinsically connected in this way: Irish interests equals EU interests, Irish values equals EU values, and Irish identity also equals EU identity.

Drawing a parallel to Wilson and Donnan’s discussion on processes of Europeanization – which they mean is in direct correlation to the togetherness of local, regional, national and supranational political levels¹¹² –, they state that Europeanization, the peace process and secularization have “stimulated a more liberal, cosmopolitan and diverse society, a society more open to a multiplicity of identities that is a far cry from an Ireland that appeared to be stalled in a dominant Catholic and rural past”.¹¹³ Ireland has historically had greater need for international economic assistance, because of periods of famine and colonisation – whereas it could be argued that the UK has not had the same need, as a country at the front of an empire. This historical characteristic could be one of the reasons for which the UK was so unwilling

¹¹¹ Haas, in *European Integration Theory* (2019), 3.

¹¹² Wilson & Donnan, *The Anthropology of Ireland*, 39.

¹¹³ Wilson & Donnan, 91.

to partake in the EU integration process. Ireland's inclination, however, to turn to other nations for trade alliances and political alliances, have clearly helped with their integration into the EU. Additionally, by talking about processes of Europeanization in relation to Ireland's Catholic and rural past, Wilson and Donnan present another marker of time before the EU membership and the time after having been integrated into the EU. The factors from the material that have been commented upon are evidence of Ireland's integration into the EU; a process that is still ongoing, with great encouragement from the Irish Government.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has found that the historical and national identities of the UK and Ireland have influenced the views, official and unofficial, of the EU today, as expressed by citizens, authorities, and governmental bodies of different kinds, in that Ireland is more EU-affirming and EU-welcoming, and that the UK is more EU-cautious and EU-distanced. The historical and national identities, as they are perceived and formulated by respective government, that have shaped current EU views in Ireland and the UK are those of the UK as a sovereign and independent state with a history of having the upper hand in jurisdictional power, and have therefore struggled to hand over that jurisdictional power while in their EU integrational years; the historical and national identities are those of Ireland as a country that had to fight for their nationhood and independence, and gaining that independence have consistently moved, politically and value-wise, toward the EU – which have made their integration process into the union as well as the process of implementing EU policy and principles a successful project.

Ideas, aims and purposes, as manifested in the governmental papers included, shows that currently held views in the UK are in fact influenced by history; symbolic matters are more important than the novel regulations of the EU. Equally so do ideas, aims and purposes, as manifested in the Irish governmental paper included show that currently held views in Ireland are influenced by history; overseas connection and like-minded alliances are vital to Ireland because of its isolated position of the past, which is why Ireland values the ability given by the EU membership to build a modern society with economic and social prosperity.

The UK struggled with negotiating their national identity and their potential EU-identity throughout their membership in the union because of their history as self-governing, which is manifested in the governmental documents included in this thesis; they express a relief of being free of EU-bonds and regulations, and of their having once again the chance of rebuilding the Great Britain of the past, whose current government is equipped to work faster and more efficiently than the EU on the global political stage. Where the UK emphasises the capability of its own nation, Ireland emphasises the importance of collaboration and the power of bringing the world the shared values and visions of all of the EU member states.

All of the above factors have contributed to the historical and national identities of Ireland and the UK, shaping their respective relationship and attitudes towards the EU, which has in turn resulted in the current stance held today by each nation.

7.1 Limitations of thesis

Firstly, the temporal scope of the thesis is a limited period of time to consider in order to gain a full conception of a contemporary and current stance toward the EU in Ireland and the UK; in order for there to have been a flawless investigation one would have to consider a great deal of additional material. The methodologies section could include further discussion on ways of applications, and further details on the ways in which they are to be used in the discussion chapter. Additional polls and surveys could have been included in order to gain a more complete visual of whether the opinions that are brought to light in the governments' documents reflect the opinions of their peoples.

7.2 Further research

Further research could be done on material such as the many more polls and surveys executed during the time scope of this thesis in order to examine in depth whether there are nuances in the EU-membership discourse in Ireland and the UK depending on geographical location; whether particular areas or parts of each country have a different opinion than others. In addition to the historical and national identities that have been studied in this thesis, another

dimension could be added to the research by including an examination of the social identities that are created in relation to the historical and national perspectives.

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