

**SUBMISSION TO TAINAISTE MICHAEL MARTIN'S**

**Consultative Forum on International Security Policy**

04/07/2023

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**Note**

This submission is set out in two sections- firstly a review of the process and methodology of the forum and secondly some points on Ireland's International Security Policy, our neutrality and the Tainaiste's position on the Triple Lock and Pesco.

## Section One- A Broken Forum

### 1.1 A Forum without Inclusion and Diversity in Representation

The forum provided little in the way of information on how it would achieve a meaningful diversity of participation during the event- either from panels or from those attending in the room. This failure of basic procedures for representative democracy, a surprising oversight given it was delivered by the state and with state funds, resulted in some stark and very visible outcomes during the forum. A quick review of the methodology publicly available for participation in any of the recent Citizen's Assemblies would act as a useful barometer for how far this forum strayed from the basics of public participation principles. Actively implemented failures such as these will inevitably damage public trust in state run consultations.

As representatives of among the most diverse constituencies in the country it was very notable that the room was primarily populated by men, white people, and lacked any strong representation of working class voices. A simple head count on the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> in Dublin Castle would suggest a male female divide of 79% to 21% (approximately) in attendance, while the programme for the Forum itself contains a 35% participation rate from women. There was no discernible participation by members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities or any of the communities in Ireland that have unique and important voices in this debate. Representation from the new communities of Ireland who have sought asylum here following the fallout of war and military action would also have been a valuable, if not essential, addition.

Despite some attempt to have at least one woman participate in each panel the prevalence of male voices was very noticeable. This is particularly unfortunate as overwhelmingly the impacts of war throughout the world are visited on innocent people who have the least options to travel and escape unrest, frequently women and children.

In a document published in 2018, the Women, Peace and Security Ireland's third National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions 2019 – 2024, it states that:

*'Our engagement in discussions on peace, security, conflict prevention, disarmament and peacebuilding will recognise not only the rights and needs of women and girls and their important roles as leaders, but also addresses the gender norms and inequalities that underpin violence, inequality and conflict. **This includes empowering women and girls to equitably and meaningfully participate in peace and security discussions, and supporting their protection and recovery from all conflict-related harms.** This is in line with our overarching focus on reaching the furthest behind first.'*

The Consultative Forum on International Security Policy did not honour this commitment.

There is no way for the authors of this submission to know who attended the forums in person although we are aware a number of people were not able to attend. However it is likely, and certainly seemed the case from the attendance on the day, that it is those with a specific interest in security and neutrality who applied to attend the forum on both sides of the debate. This self evidently will deliver a spectrum of thought on the issue but not capture the sentiment of the Irish people at large and it must not be taken as a signifier of such.

The creation of the panels was also undertaken in a non-transparent manner that has rightly led to some close scrutiny of the panellists. The repeated involvement of individuals from the Chatham House think tank is noteworthy. One of Chatham House's largest donor's is the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The interest in having the UK's nearest neighbour align militarily with their own aims is entirely understandable and why having Chatham House's Deputy Director speak not once but three times at the forum, including chairing a session, is an extraordinary decision by the department and the Tainaiste.

It may also be worth noting a general prevalence of military analysts and experts from the United Kingdom and a prevalence of experts from Scandinavian countries. Unfortunately as no methodology or even set of principles for the compilation of the panels has been provided it is difficult to ascertain why such a heavy focus in the programme was placed on this cohort of people.

## **1.2 A Forum without Lived Experience in the Room**

The panels were striking in the prevalence of voices that were male, Irish, Western European or American. Not one panel scheduled throughout the forum focused on the lived experience of those who have survived the decision making of Western powers visited upon them. Ireland has worked long and hard to improve our public and community decision making domestically by supporting our parliamentary democracy through participatory democratic models. While imperfect in their own way our engagement with citizen's assemblies and other consultative frameworks to include all voices impacted in decisions has immeasurably strengthened our democracy. It is deeply disappointing to witness government departments set these principles aside to push through a poorly concealed agenda in removing Ireland's triple lock and expanding our participation and funding for PESCO.

No African, Asian, Middle Eastern or Southern American voices were featured- regions which have essential experience to understand the full impact of Western military alliances. These are also regions where Ireland often has built strong aid and trade relationships which would be impacted by any engagement in military alliances. As representatives of Dublin Central, this is a particularly

egregious omission as our constituents include many people who have become refugees and asylum seekers from these regions whose communities have been shattered by Western military actions and whose journeys to safety and asylum have been made ever more dangerous and life-threatening due to Europe's increasing militarisation of its borders. It is therefore completely unfair, exclusionary and biased to purport that this forum was inclusive or fully representative.

To accuse an event operated by the state of being racially biased or of having failed to fulfil the principles of inclusion and diversity is a serious matter- but in this case it is difficult to argue against.

### **1.3 A Forum with an Absence of Reliable Fact Checking**

Throughout the event panellists were encouraged to debate each other but at no time was any effort made to fact check or provide further or supporting material within the room. The format of the forum itself made fact checking or even questioning some of the more outrageous statements made by panellists impossible. For example, one panellist, Dan O'Brien said that "The USA has never tried to influence Ireland's policy towards Palestine". This is easily and obviously a false statement but there was no opportunity to rebut the point beyond a ripple of incredulous laughter from the room. The manner in which debate takes place and how much trust the public can place in those debates is incredibly important. There is a reason that Citizens Assemblies are carefully curated, participation diligently set out to be diverse and representative, the chair appointed to be independent and presentations and submissions tightly managed. None of this oversight has been in evidence at the Forum on International Security Policy. Participants were allowed if not encouraged to make statements that were wholly unsupported by evidence or experience.

That this standard of debate has been allowed to enter public discourse does a great disservice to the ongoing fight against disinformation and misinformation.

### **1.4 A Forum with a Broken Model for Debate- Slido**

Although relatively minor in the problematic aspects of the forums structure it is nevertheless worth noting that the chat and questioning system used during the debates was significantly flawed. The discussions used a system called Slido. This allowed participants in the room to submit questions to the panellists. It also allowed participants to see other contributions and 'upvote' them- making them more likely to be asked. However this format of questioning is only objective and reliable if the participants can be reliably assessed as unbiased. Without that principle it simply deepens an existing slant or bias within the debate. And so it was at the forum.

Even more concerning- when this methodological failure was raised with organisers on the day they did not accept the inbuilt bias and refused to address it. Organisers stated that the panel chair could see all contributions and was free to ask any questions. Though the 'top' four or five upvoted questions were displayed prominently on screen over the panel during debates.

## Conclusion on the Forum Process and Methodology

As set out in the points above the Tainaiste Michael Martin's Forum on International Security Policy was deeply flawed in conception, methodology, process and administration. As a result no findings from the forum can claim legitimacy as rooted in participatory democracy. It is imperative that the report that will result from this forum addresses the failures outlined above.

## Section Two- A Broken Debate

### 2.1 No Debate of Ireland's Legacy in Humanitarian Work and Peace

The Department of Foreign Affairs currently provides this statement on Ireland's neutrality on its website:

*'Ireland's policy of military neutrality has long been an important strand of our independent foreign policy and is characterised by **non-membership of military alliances** or common or mutual defence arrangements. Our neutrality informs our active approach towards peace support operations and crisis management, our contributions to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, our work for human rights and development, and our efforts to promote disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. It enables us to engage more effectively in our efforts to **promote peace and development** through the United Nations, the European Union and our own bilateral actions. Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is **well understood by EU partners** and codified in the Protocol attached to the Lisbon Treaty.'*

The issues of humanitarian and development work and neutrality are deeply intertwined and yet the relationship went almost entirely ignored throughout these deliberations. This forum was supposedly a collaboration between the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs but the mandate of foreign affairs, let alone Irish Aid, was barely heard from and almost entirely subsumed within discussions of the role of defence. Any fully balanced conversation must include more consideration of the wider mandate and complexity of relationships managed through Ireland's foreign affairs. Arguably, the reason why our defence forces are smaller than comparable sized other nations, is because of the strength of our wider foreign affairs work. Therefore to look at it in isolation misses the point entirely.

It was alleged by one speaker that being Irish has not positively impacted on peace-keeping missions based primarily on anecdotal evidence. This statement went unchallenged on the day. However, in the humanitarian and development sector, there is a strong record of Irish development workers and volunteers having a significant advantage in furthering their work and maintaining safety because of our military non-alignment and strong humanitarian record. This work is part of the long-term work of making a safer world for all, de-escalating conflicts before there is loss of life and displacement of people and developing the social conditions necessary for global peace and prosperity. Again, separating it from the role of the defence forces is extremely limiting to the discussion and debate.

## 2.2 The Overreach of the Department of Defence

Cyber security was mentioned many times throughout the forum. Cyber security currently belongs within the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications which is a better fit than the Department of Defence due to the need to understand emerging technologies and threats. While the Department of Defence can play a role in this the distinct role of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications should have been considered and incorporated into the format of the forum. Given the emphasis and credibility given to cyber threats throughout the forum, it is hard to see why the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications was not given a leading role in organising and coordinating it. It is imperative that they are given a leading role in the subsequent identification of actions and priorities in the ensuing report and any actions emerging.

While climate change was tangentially referenced in the discussion the protection of our energy infrastructure was referenced multiple times throughout by a number of panellists. The absence of serious engagement with security requirements for digital and cable based technology was evidenced in panels such as the session on the Global Security Environment. There was a dearth of experts in energy development in general and certainly no decision makers in the energy sector around this issue. Sessions such as New and Emerging Threats: Maritime Security and Critical Infrastructure contained little discussion of technological design and innovation in this field.

## 2.3 Climate Change as a Buzzword

The biggest and most serious threat to Ireland's security and global stability at this point is climate change. Yet, a serious discussion of how to manage this threat at the global level was completely missing from the forum. Militaries of the world are among the biggest polluters and contributors to Greenhouse gases. The best way that militaries can respond to climate change and the security threat posed by it is through demilitarisation and de-weaponisation of the world. Ireland's leading role in negotiating the nuclear non-proliferation treaty did much more to contribute to global safety and security than any number of military alliances could do, particularly given the requisite increase in military spending involved.

The other important role for the defence forces in responding to climate change is the increased number of humanitarian crises within and beyond our border that we expect to see over the coming decades. Dedicating defence force training and development to humanitarian response would be valuable, particularly in light of the type of challenges we expect climate change to present to us.

Again, a full response to this involves careful cross-departmental engagement with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, among others.

## 2.4 A Vision for Ireland Internationally- Search and rescue

What was noticeably missing from the forum was any vision for Ireland as an independent actor globally with a unique and worthwhile contribution to make to peace and humanitarianism. In previous decades a more peaceful, equal and sustainable world has been the overarching goal of Ireland's foreign policy. We know that building lasting peace is not possible without building a more equal and inclusive society. It is in this role that Ireland has a strong and respected voice on the world stage.

In 2017, Operation Sophia moved naval services away from search and rescue towards securitisation and intervention in the Mediterranean. This was noted as a huge loss for many members of the defence forces, who described the humanitarian work in the Mediterranean as some of the proudest work of their lives<sup>1</sup>. They said that it helped them recruit people to the work<sup>2</sup> and were haunted by the fact that they would no longer be saving lives as they previously had done. This work, once again, firmly within the humanitarian sphere should resume immediately. It does not help our security to be participating in EU missions which are deliberately allowing innocent people to die on our shared borders.

## 2.5 Internal Culture of Ireland's Defence Forces

The issues of pay and conditions, harassment, sexual harassment and bullying within the Defence Forces were largely unaddressed during the forum. These are essential issues to address in order to protect people within the ranks and ensure that the Defence Forces are fulfilling their most basic obligations as employers.

## 2.6 A Failure to Interrogate the Triple Lock Mechanism

It is clear from the design of the panels and the subject and tone of the debate that a key target of the Consultative forum is to undermine Ireland's commitment to the triple lock mechanism and our policy of upholding the principles of the United Nations on multilateralism and peacekeeping.

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<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/naval-service-and-sailors-lament-ending-of-operation-sophia-1.3845980>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30938235.html>



The programme for government signed in 2020 by Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and the Green Party was explicit in the framing of Foreign and International Policy and stated that this government would:

- *Champion support for multilateralism and a fair, rules-based international order at a time when multilateralism has been weakened.*
- *Ensure that Ireland leverages its position within the UN to promote international co-operation in the management of climate related security challenges and to build on our strength of conflict resolution.*
- *Support the institutions of the UN in their critical work including in support of democratisation, human rights, conflict resolution, disarmament, global health, climate action, trade, nutrition, sustainable food production and education, the rule of law, peacekeeping and the protection of women in peacekeeping and specifically the Women, Peace and Security agenda.*
- *Work to ensure the sustainable management of debt for developing countries.*
- *Continue to work towards the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals aimed at ending poverty, reducing inequality and tackling climate change.*
- *Deepen Ireland's relationships with Small Island Developing States, some of which face existential threats from climate change.*
- *Strongly advocate for democracy and democratic values, the rule of law, multilateralism, climate action and free trade.*
- *Continue to ensure that all requests for overflights or landing by military or state aircraft are guided by Ireland's policy of military neutrality.*
- *Continue to provide multi-annual funding for humanitarian action and work to develop flexible approaches where humanitarian and development needs meet.*
- *Ensure that all Irish aid is spent in a way that is in full compliance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.*

Few, if any, of the above commitments were extensively explored at the Consultative Forum but more importantly there was no mention of this important commitment from the PFG:

***The Government will ensure that all overseas operations will be carried out in line with our position of military neutrality and will be subject to a triple lock of UN, Government and Dáil Eireann approval.***

***Ireland's participation in PESCO projects will be maintained on an 'opt-in' basis, with contributions being entirely voluntary. Any projects undertaken within PESCO will be approved by Cabinet and Dáil Éireann.***

***The Government will not partake in projects which are not compatible with our policy of active military neutrality and non-membership of military alliances.***

***Within the context of the European Peace Facility Ireland will not be part of decision making or funding for lethal force weapons for non-peacekeeping purposes.***

There is no political mandate for the current government to deviate from our commitment to the triple lock.

### Pro-active and engaged neutrality, multilateralism and humanitarian led policy

The Green Party is founded on the principle of pacifism and we strongly believe that this should be the guiding principle of Ireland's foreign affairs policy. Pacifism is not and should not be passive however, and Ireland has a very important role to play in leading and guiding the work of peace-keeping, peace-building, conflict resolution and global justice. We are and will remain deeply opposed to NATO membership and instead believe in international cooperation led by the United Nations. We believe the triple lock is essential for peace-keeping missions.

We have seen in recent times that the sale of energy has become a weapon of war and believe that the transition away from fossil fuels is an essential part of our security and protection against resource wars. Climate change is ultimately the greatest threat to our security and renewable energy is the great peace project of our time. A military-led closed borders solution to the destabilisation caused by climate change would be significantly more costly than supporting energy security through renewables for our neighbours in the global community.

Investing in high quality journalism is important to bring about a better, more nuanced and critical understanding of what is going on in the world and the complexity of the challenges that we need to respond to through international diplomacy.

Search and rescue must resume at the borders of Europe and humanitarianism should be an essential, core and guiding principle to our work to secure our borders.

Continuing the work of women, peace and security under UN resolution 1325 should be central to Ireland's work on global security. This should include women's full and equal participation in any discussions on peace and security, support for the daily work of peace-building that is often shouldered primarily by women and pursuing both the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and prosecutions through the international criminal courts. Despite sexual violence being a constant theme of every conflict since ancient times, the international criminal court has failed to make a single conviction for war rape. The proliferation of this is well documented and detailed in Christina Lamb's 2020 book "Our Bodies, Their Battlefields: What War Does to Women" as well as many other sources. There is an enormous body of work to be done, that can be best led by non-military aligned countries such as Ireland, to bring full recognition to this crime and pursue accountability and justice.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we do not believe that the design, formulation and execution of the forum hold any legitimacy and any report emerging from this forum should take account of the serious flaws in the process and not seek to advance any policy changes on the back of it.

We believe that Ireland's long-standing policies of military non-alignment and neutrality should be enhanced and strengthened in order to better equip us to deal with the complexity of security challenges and instability threats across the globe.