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WEBINAR

SHAPING IRELAND'S FUTURE AT HOME AND IN THE WORLD  
A CONVERSATION WITH IRISH TAOISEACH MICHEÁL MARTIN

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Keynote Remarks:**

MICHEÁL MARTIN  
Taoiseach, Ireland

**Moderator:**

THOMAS WRIGHT  
Senior Fellow and Director, Center on the  
United States and Europe  
The Brookings Institution

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WRIGHT: Good morning, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Tom Wright. I'm the director for the Center on the United States and Europe, here at the Brookings Institution. We are delighted this afternoon to be joined by Taoiseach Micheál Martin, for an event called "Shaping Ireland's Future At Home and Abroad," which is part of our Batkin Leaders Forum. I have some regrets for my colleague, John Allen, who passes on his best wishes, Taoiseach, but is unable to join us this morning because of a technical difficulty, and apologies for the delay in getting started, to those watching.

But today, we are looking forward to a conversation in advance of Saint Patrick's Day, Taoiseach, as part of your virtual visit to the United States, and we certainly hope that, next year, we can resume these visits in person, and we look forward to hosting you, at Brookings, next year, for -- for an event and for a conversation, after, hopefully, the pandemic has ended.

Taoiseach Martin has dedicated 20 years of service in Ireland, including as minister of health, in a number of senior positions, and for the last year, he has led a historic three-party coalition in Ireland, dealing with significant challenges, resulting from the pandemic, from Brexit, continued tensions in Northern Ireland, and the challenges of reconciliation there, and, of course, the future of the European Union.

We are gathered here, this morning, at a time when we have a new administration, in the United States. President Biden, of course, is a long-term friend of Ireland, has visited on many occasions, and I know, Taoiseach, that you will be meeting with him, I think virtually, later this week, to sketch out the future of Ireland's relationship with the United States, in the next four years, and the role that the United States may play, not just in relation to Ireland, but also in terms of the post-Brexit European Union and U.S. policy toward Europe.

So, without further ado, I'd like to begin, but before I do that, I would just like to thank Alan and Jane Batkin for their continued support of this forum. And Taoiseach, with that, over to you, and then we will get started in the conversation, and please feel free, if you are watching, to submit your questions via YouTube or on Twitter. Thank you.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Thank you very much, indeed, Thomas, for your welcome, and my regards to John, as well. And I'm very pleased to join you and the Brookings Institution for today's

event, and I look forward to my conversation with you, later, Tom, and, of course, look forward to being in the U.S., next year, physically, once we emerge from COVID.

For more than a year, humanity has, together, fought a pandemic, the likes of which none of us have seen in our lifetimes. It has had profound impact, wherever it has struck, including in the United States and in Ireland. The fight is not yet over, far from it. The virus has shown that it can mutate to find new and better ways to infect us, becoming more virulent, more able to attack, and more able to spread.

But humanity, too, has shown its capacity to fight back. Through science, we have found new tests, new treatments, and most encouragingly, new vaccines, that can push the virus back and help us to recover. It will take time for all of the lessons of the past year to become clear, but one is already very obvious to me. Humanity, when it pulls together, can prevail, even against seemingly impossible odds. It is a principle that has always guided Irish foreign policy and my own personal beliefs. It is something to which the new Biden administration is committed.

For a small country, a commitment to share an endeavor and to effective multilateralism has always made sense. We need a world in which there are rules, not least to protect the weak from the strong. But the pandemic has made it clear, that it makes sense for big countries, too, we are all interconnected, we all depend on each other, we share a single planet, and we cannot solve global problems acting alone.

Ireland became an independent country almost a century ago. We did so on the shadow of a first World War, that had destroyed Europe, decimated a generation, and swept all orders away. It was a time when a new approach was emerging, and the League of Nations, the first worldwide international organization, was founded, in 1920. Even before Ireland was an independent country, even before the League, itself, was founded, the first Dáil, the parliament elected by the Irish people to seek independence, voted in April 1919 to seek membership of the League. We became members in 1923.

Since the very start, Irish foreign policy has been driven by a commitment to peace, through a rules-based order, and to effective institutions to protect them. Over decades, we have done what we can to strengthen and promote cooperation, whether through our peacekeeping and U.N. helmets, or committed membership of the European Union, or our role in promoting human rights,

disarmament, and nonproliferation. At the start of this year, we took up a seat for the fourth time, as an elected member of the U.N. Security Council. It is an honor for us to serve. Those of us who believe in the U.N. and all it stands for need to do what we can to defend and to strengthen it.

President Biden's assertion that the U.S. is back has given us great heart. The U.S. was central to the establishment of the United Nations. Its leadership is indispensable. Having its heft and ingenuity back at the table, to tackle global challenges, at scale, is a gamechanger. After the pandemic, the most pressing issue we face, globally, is climate change. The return of the United States to the Paris Climate Accord is, therefore, enormously significant. We know John Kerry well, in Ireland. He will make a dynamic contribution, a special presidential envoy for climate.

Climate change is not only an existential threat, but a driver, also, of conflict and instability. Addressing this will be a key priority for Ireland, during our Security Council Membership. I also welcome U.S. reengagement with the U.N. Human Rights Council, with the WHO, and with the UNFPA. Decisions made in and by these bodies have impacts on the lives that real people live, especially in the most disadvantaged parts of the world. My message to President Biden, when we speak later this week, will be that Ireland not only appreciates the U.S.'s reengagement, but we are committed to working with him to make it count. I would also say to him that Ireland is committed to deepening the partnership between the United States and the European Union.

When the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union, Ireland did not, not even for a single moment, waiver in its commitment to its membership of the European Union. It is our home. We will continue to work within the European Union to shape its future, one that we hope will be outward-looking, progressive, and prosperous. We want an EU that works hand in hand with its oldest ally and friend, the United States, on the big challenges the world faces. The EU and the U.S. share history and values a commitment to democracy, human rights, and freedom. Our interests are frequently aligned, including on a fair and open approach to trade. We should be working together to ensure that our efforts to drive economic recovery can have a multiplier effect, supporting each other and the world, to gain back the ground lost to the pandemic, as quickly as we can.

We also need to focus on new and emerging areas of common interest, including disinformation that is corroding trust in our democracies and the growing cyberthreats we face. President

Biden and Secretary Blinken have made clear their interest in a renewed trans-Atlantic relationship. I know that it is genuinely reciprocated on the other side. Working together, we can have real global impact. Of course, Ireland's deep and historic bilateral relationship with the United States will always remain profoundly important to us. It is a relationship that continues to mature and develop, renewing itself with each generation.

In recent decades, we have seen particular growth in our economic ties, and our economic relationship has increasingly become one that delivers benefits to both sides, strongly integrated, and increasingly balanced. The United States is Ireland's most important economic partner, when it comes to trade and investment flows, and Irish investment in the United States is growing to the point where we are now the ninth largest source of FTI into the U.S. Beyond that, the U.S. has also been an unwavering supporter of the peace process in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It played an instrumental part in bringing about the Good Friday Agreement, the transformative document that underpins our peace. In the more than two decades since the agreement was signed, the United States has supported and encouraged its implementation, holding parties to account and helping them to make the tough decisions, when needed. Support has been bipartisan, and it has always been forthcoming.

A generation has grown up and come of age, in Northern Ireland, without knowing the daily violence and fear that marked out the three decades of the troubles that went before. However, peace is fragile, and we never take it for granted. The decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union created a whole new category of challenges that we've had to deal with, in recent years. Our shared membership of the European Union had helped to create the context, in which the Good Friday Agreement was secure. Changing that context removes an important problem. We worked hard to minimize and to mitigate its worst impacts, not least the risk of the return of a hard border to the island of Ireland. In this, we had strong backing from our partners in the European Union, but also critically, from our friends in the United States.

As a result, the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the U.K. includes a special protocol, in Ireland and Northern Ireland, to address the unique circumstances of the island. The protocol is specifically designed to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the achievements of the peace process. Crucially, it avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland. It is the only agreed and viable means

available to do so. It also protects the all-island economy and Ireland's place in the single market. The protocol will help us to minimize and mitigate the worst impacts of Brexit, but it cannot completely remove them.

The United Kingdom has decided to leave not only the European Union, but also its single market and customs union, and that means increased trade friction. What we are seeing now, the increased need for checks and controls, the form filling, and bureaucracy, is a direct consequence of that choice. Where we can find pragmatic ways to minimize that friction within the framework of the protocol, the European Union is ready to do so. I do not for a moment dismiss genuinely held difficulties and concerns, and I will support EU engagement with the United Kingdom to find agreed ways forward, where we can. In fact, the Withdrawal Agreement contains, within it, mechanisms specifically designed to deal with issues that arise, a joint committee and specialized committees. That is where teething problems should be worked through, so that we can find common solutions.

Unilateral action to disapply or not to implement aspects of the protocol does nothing but corrode trust, the only basis on which sustainable long-term solutions can be found. It exacerbates uncertainty and instability; two things Northern Ireland can well do without. The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union also removes a common space, in which Irish and British ministers and officials met to discuss all kinds of issues, from the environment to the economy to health. It challenges us -- it challenges us, now, to find new ways of ensuring that the closeness we have enjoyed with our nearest neighbors continues to flourish and grow in the years ahead.

I am strongly committed to strengthening our bilateral relationship with Great Britain, reflecting the extent of our shared history, interpersonal connections, along with our indispensable partnership, as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. I am glad that it is an ambition fully shared by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, with whom I look forward to working to reset and refresh our relationship, for a new era. I'm also committed to working on shared challenges we face on the island of Ireland, shaping relationships for the future. At home, every bit as much as in the world, we know that, ultimately, the most powerful driver of change and ambition is forging unity of purpose and of people, locally, regionally, nationally, and globally, often simultaneously.

Irish Nobel Peace Prize Winner John Hume, in accepting the prize in 1998, jointly, with

David Trimble, described the Good Friday Agreement, which he had helped to craft, as an opportunity to shape the future on the island for the first time, through real unity of purpose. I was reminded of this recently, when I heard President Biden, in his Inaugural Address, also speak profoundly of unity, describing it as that most elusive of things in a democracy, but the key to overcoming common challenges. President Biden spoke of the -- the way of unity, to see each other, not as adversaries, but as neighbors, and he said, let us listen to one another, hear one another, see one another, show respect to one another.

President Biden's words resonate for those of us on the island of Ireland who know the potential power of this approach. It is hard work. Our peace process continues to this day, to need ongoing care and resolute commitment on the journey to a full societal reconciliation. We need to keep listening, keep hearing, keep showing respect. And we face undoubted challenges on the island, new difficulties raised by Brexit and its out-workings, enduring difficulties from the legacy of the troubles, the recorded tensions of power-sharing in Northern Ireland, and corrosive mistrust, at times, at community level.

All of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are operating again. This is vital, but clearly, we have not yet realized the goals, set in the agreement, of achieving reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust. We cannot build the prosperous, promising future we all want for our children and grandchildren without better connection and understanding between the different political traditions, that are destined to share the island, come what may.

Reconciliation is fundamental for our future on the island of Ireland. That is why my government has launched our Shared Island Initiative. It puts the task of harnessing the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to foster reconciliation, back at the top of our agenda and across the whole of government. At its heart is our vision of working with all communities and traditions on the island, to build consensus around a shared future, to build the unity of purpose, that I spoke of earlier. We want to work in an ambitious partnership with the Executive of Northern Ireland and with the British government to address the major challenges we face together on the island. These include economic and societal recovery from the pandemic, working through the consequences of Brexit, just to transition to a carbon neutral future. We also want to fully take up the opportunities of our shared island, by cooperating North

and South to grow the all-island economy and deliver better public services for our people. And as part of the Shared Island Initiative, we are initiating a program of inclusive civic dialogue and commissioning research, so that we support deeper reflection on our shared future.

Through the Good Friday Agreement, with the support and good counsel of the United States of America, we definitively resolved how we decide on the constitutional future for the island, founded on the principle of consent. Everyone on the island has the right to advocate for the constitutional future they wish to see for Northern Ireland, whether they aspire to a united Ireland, to remain a part of the United Kingdom, or whether they do not identify with either tradition. I affirm that right, as Taoiseach, but we do not need to be defined solely by these issues. These constitutional provisions do not stand apart from the rest of the Good Friday Agreement, and the commitment to strive, in Northern Ireland, North, South, on the island, and East, West, or as we play a part in the wider world, to build a better future. I am sure that with the continuing vital support and engagement of our friends and partners in the United States, we will keep making progress. Thank you very much, indeed.

MR. WRIGHT: Taoiseach, thank you very much for (audio skip). Taoiseach, thank you very much for those remarks. We will now wait just about 30 seconds or so to give you the opportunity to take a seat and to have a conversation. My own sort of perspective on what you said, I think we -- we learned quite a lot, in terms of the Shared Island Initiative, the challenges of reconciliation in Ireland, but also, at the beginning, on the pandemic, and that's where I'd like to start, in a moment.

Just as a reminder, to those watching, you can submit questions, that we will pose to the Taoiseach, in about half an hour or so. There are two ways for you to do that. The first is for you to email [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu), or on Twitter, using #USEurope.

So, Taoiseach, thank you very much, and thank you for your remarks, and I'm looking forward to the conversation. Let me start, if I may, with COVID-19 and with the pandemic, particularly with the role of the European Union. You used to be a minister of health. You know, health is one of those very few areas that the EU had very little to do with, prior to the pandemic. It was sort of in the competency of national governments. Early on, we saw a lot of chaos around Europe, with competition for critical medical supplies and the closing of borders. More recently, we have seen a common European approach on vaccines, but the EU has lagged behind the United States and the United



Kingdom on distribution of vaccines. So, my question is, what lessons do you take from this experience, and how can the EU institute reforms to prepare for the next pandemic or the next major public health challenge, to rectify those mistakes? And as I said, we saw both -- both it be nationalized, at the beginning, and more unified, later on. Thank you. And, Taoiseach, you're on mute, sorry. We're having lots of technical issues this morning, so.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Do you --?

MR. WRIGHT: I think you're -- you're -- yes, you are off mute, now, so.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Am I okay, now, Thomas?

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Okay. Could I, first of all, say I was Minister of Health, actually, back -- 2000 to 2004, during the SARS crisis --

MR. WRIGHT: Through SARS.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: -- if you recall SARS, and at that stage, Europe had very little coordination on public health, at all, and, in fact, was nowhere near any sort of collective approach on vaccines or medicines. So, move on quickly to now, and I've been struck by the coordination on the vaccine front, it's a world of a difference between 20 years ago, and so, I stand back from the immediate situation, say, you know what, Europe has created a model around vaccine procurement, in terms of the idea of 27 member states working collectively, using its collective purchasing power to assist and facilitate the development of vaccines, in the first instance, and then the distribution of vaccines.

There are undoubtably lessons to be learned from it, particularly around the manufacturing and production side, which has -- has been problematic, but also the authorization process. I mean, we're four weeks, essentially, behind the United Kingdom because the United Kingdom decided, on an emergency provision, to authorize its vaccines. Europe, through the EMA, went through the due diligence, if you like, and took a different approach. And both are arguably, you know, okay because we are in the middle of an emergency of a global pandemic, but that -- that's one factor.

The other factor is production and manufacturing within Europe. The third factor is Europe has been open. Europe has been -- has kept the supply chains open. European sites are being allowed to export their vaccines around the world, and that's an important factor to bear in mind, as well.

But, overall, I -- I'm -- I -- we do need, obviously, to develop a stronger flow and higher volumes of vaccines, but I think, on the vaccine front, Europe has done well.

What would I change for the future? I think you've summed it up, at the beginning. Health was never a core competency of the European Union. We need to reflect on that. You can't do it all at once. I think we should focus on public health, and I think we should develop a stronger core European competency in public health, not necessarily, obviously, running each member states and health service, but rather on key issues around public health, so that there would be common research, a more streamlined authorization process around medicines and vaccines, and better coordination of public health officials across Europe. We need to get more efficient and put the best brains in Europe together, on a more regular basis, on issues that have a global dimension to them.

MR. WRIGHT: Just in -- just looking back, and just one more, you know, question on this, the EU, I think, spent \$2.7 billion on vaccines, the U.S. spent over \$18 billion. You know, the Commission doesn't have the power to raise money. It's not a government. You know, it's sort of answerable to the member states. Is -- you know, should Europe have had its own sort of version of warp speed, or basically, you know, throw all caution to the wind, and, you know, went for it, including with -- including with this sort of funding and sort of breaking down of bureaucratic barriers?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: In short, yes, but again, the challenges in Europe, Europe is not like the United States, in terms of structure. It's not a Federal sort of state, to be frank. It's made up of 27 member states, and it takes a long time to get consensus. I can recall the July meeting, where we made history by collectively agreeing on a €1.9 trillion -- €1.8 trillion recovery fund, using our collective strength to borrow on the markets. That was a first. That's in addition to the member states own recovery funds, but that took, you know, some hard meetings and some very tough discussion, and perhaps it's a signal of more collective action into the future, but certainly, you know, I've read all the various sort of analysis of the vaccine purchasing situation, and it's on the manufacturing side, it seems to me, that Europe should have perhaps concentrated more.

It did well, I think, in terms of helping the development of vaccines, I mean, you know, Pfizer-BioNTech, BioNTech, a pretty good, small BioNTech company, which came up with the technology, partnering with Pfizer, and likewise other companies across Europe, likewise, but it's where

the challenges for us has been, in getting the vaccines manufactured and getting them delivered, and particularly with the AstraZeneca vaccine, that has proved particularly problematic for Europe.

AstraZeneca has not been in a position to fulfill its contracts. It is saying that its yields from its European plants has been quite low, or for the plants that were, you know, were earmarked to send vaccines to Europe, but I think what -- we will learn lessons from this pandemic, and Europe will have to learn lessons, and I think, on big ticket items, like this, you know, the purchase of a vaccine, working together to get vaccines, PPE. There is changing thinking within Europe, around creating a greater degree of self-reliance on the essentials that are required to deal with global emergencies, such as this.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Moving onto Northern Ireland and particularly the role of the United States, you know, last year, the United States, both in the form of the Trump administration and the Biden campaign, at the time, made a number of fairly crucial interventions, you know, to uphold the protocol to protect the Good Friday Agreement, but since then, and since the trade agreement, the agreement between Britain and the EU, the protocol has come under pressure, in lots of different ways. We saw the EU declare Article 16, something that was revoked very quickly, on the advice of your government and the U.K. government, but we've also seen the DUP Leader, Arlene Foster, call for the protocol to be ditched, and there were various problems in its implementation.

And so, my question is, as you talk to American, you know, leaders, President Biden and congressional leaders, this week, I think one question they will have is, what should they be looking for, over the next sort of year or two, in terms of protecting the protocol and the Good Friday Agreement? What -- what can the United States do? What are some of the different ways in which that is coming under pressure, and what is your government, you know, likely to do to try to ensure that this is a success, given some of the problems that, you know, have emerged, over the last couple of months?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Well, I think what we -- what we take from the election of President Biden, his Inaugural Address, and his whole approach to multilateralism. Already, we can see a deep commitment to multilateralism. He supports the WHO and the Paris Accord. And multilateralism is about rules-based organizations, as I spoke about, just -- earlier, and so, I think it's important that the principles and values that underpin multilateralism continue to be articulated, if I may say so, by the president and by the new administration, and the read across to Brexit, there, is it's an international

agreement, arrived at between the European Union and the United Kingdom. We are members of the European Union in Ireland.

I think, as part of that thrust towards multilateralism, the importance of adhering to international agreements can be understated, and the avoidance of unilateral approaches to those agreements is one that should be encouraged to -- you know, encouraging people to avoid taking unilateral approaches to the agreements, and I think that's where the United States can -- can play a constructive role because I believe, passionately, that the trans-Atlantic relationship between the U.S. and Europe is a very important one, but also between the U.S. and the United Kingdom. We all share, all three share, basic values, in terms of freedom of speech, parliamentary democracies, and that we should all work consistently together to nurture those values, that which we have in common, and avoid the type of friction that can occur through unilateralism, and that's one key message that I will be saying.

I think, also, to the friends of Ireland, and to the speaker, to the president, the consistent and continuing support for peace in Ireland is important, and I think all are aware, particularly the United Kingdom, are aware of President Biden's deep and genuine commitment to peace in the island of Ireland and to the Good Friday Agreement, and hence, his desire that nothing would happen that would underpin that carefully constructed edifice, that involved so many parties, over 20 years ago, and I think that's where -- that's the nature of the discussion we'll be having with our friends on the Hill, this week, and with the president, as well.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. I'd like to come back to Northern Ireland in a moment, but just given what you said, you know, in January, I think, in remarks in Dublin, you said, absent Britain, Ireland can become a bridge between the United States and the EU to help rebuild the Atlantic alliance. So, I'd love your sort of thoughts on that, just elaborating, but also, do you think the U.S. has a role in building a bridge between the EU and U.K.? And some of our audience members have sort of asked the question, are you worried about the deteriorating, you know, relations between the EU and U.K.? It certainly feels like there hasn't been a sort of a reset, after the agreement, a couple of months ago, between the EU and U.K. So, how worried are you about that, and, you know, how does Ireland sort of fit in, in that triangle between, you know, the EU, the U.K., and the United States?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Well, on the first part, in terms of the bridge dimension, I think on

-- on the evolution of economic and trade policy, I think we can be. You referenced, earlier, the impact of the pandemic on how self-reliant or how -- you know, how cohesive is the European Union, and some of the debate within Europe, now, is moving towards a concept that we call strategic autonomy, which could have certain protectionist elements to it, which we would not be in favor of, in Ireland, to be frank, and therefore, I think, you know, we -- we're very interested in a free trade global environment, in the context of that multilateral approach. We're an open small-end economy, and, you know, we have significant global investment in Ireland, U.S. investment in Ireland, and we also invest, significantly, into the United States. Over 650 companies now create 110,000 jobs in the U.S., and so, we welcome the recent meeting between President Biden and the President of Commission Ursula von der Leyen, for example, where they took an initial step in removing tariffs, as a gesture, you know, of a new start and resetting the relationship, and so, we would like to be part of that conversation, both within Europe, by the way, encountering any protectionist origins within Europe, and also fair play for all companies and global companies, as well, because I think that works best, and certainly works best for the global situation and for small counties, like Ireland.

I do believe that the relationship with the European Union and United Kingdom, you know, will take time to evolve, and there's a political dimension to this, and there always has been a political dimension to this because, domestic politics in Britain, there's been one narrative, that has been NTEU, almost from the time that Britain joined the European Union, and it has, at different, different times, paid dividends to those who have, if you like, engaged in EU bashing, for the sake of appealing to the domestic electoral base, and I think that still is a feature in British politics, to date, and I think that needs to -- we need to move beyond that now, and I think the U.S. can play a very constructive role because the U.S. and the United Kingdom have a strong relationship, but that relationship needs to be, you know, nurtured towards having a sustainable, constructive, long-term, sensible relationship with the European Union, and I know that the U.S. will press upon the U.K. the logic of that. That's what I would like to see. I don't see the kind of sort of petty disputes that are emerging, quite at the moment is how I would describe some of this, in terms of what's going on.

So, it's -- might be playing well, in short-termism, in terms of domestic politics, but it doesn't really, in my view, add to what -- to the meat of should be going on, which is creating proper

alignment between the EU and the U.K. It makes sense. I mean, we all -- we're all now experiencing some of the friction, in terms of trade, not just in the context of the North, but just generally, and there are many British companies going through a lot of difficulties, right now, in terms of exporting to Europe, in terms of all the form filling, in terms of all the customs clearance, and, you know, that will continue to manifest itself, and there will be a need for continuing constructive engagement between EU authorities and the United Kingdom, to iron out a lot of these issues over time, and that can only happen where there's trust between both sides, in terms of adherence to agreements and proper respectful engagement, and I think the U.S. can play a constructive role in nudging both the EU and the U.K. in that direction, and it takes both sides to engage, and in -- within the European Union, there also has to be a readiness to look at the big picture and look at the -- the overall geopolitical situation, and if you look at it from a geopolitical perspective, it makes no sense for the U.K. and the EU to be having petty disputes about issues that could easily be resolved with a bit of imagination and common sense, and likewise, the U.S., Europe, and the U.K. need to be aligned.

MR. WRIGHT: You mention, Taoiseach, about Ireland being a small, open economy, that benefits from trade with the U.S., with the U.S. also benefiting from trade with Ireland. The Biden administration has made it fairly clear that it doesn't intend to return to a period of support for unfettered globalization. The president and his top teams speak about foreign policy for the middle-class. There's a recognition, I think, that the TTIP, the trans-Atlantic free trade negotiations, are likely to be revived. So, what do you think of sort of a trans-Atlantic economic agenda, that fits within that foreign policy for middle-class framework, maybe takes on board some of the concerns about unfettered globalization? What do you think that could look like, and what are the implications, you know, for Ireland, given Ireland's sort of, you know, economic model and openness?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Well, everything in life is about balance, and I do not accept -- you know, the globalization was an area we've been going through. It's a bit of a retrenchment, at the moment, but that can reemerge again. Technology changed the world, you know? It flattened the world, too, to use Tom Frieden's -- Freedman's approach, but, so, there are some things that, in my view, are irreversible, too, particularly on the services side. So, I would move towards a more open approach, and less obviously towards a protectionist approach.

I mean, today, we all woke up to the news of strength, and two young lads from Limerick, or maybe it was Tipperary, in Ireland, and I think the largest company ever to merge in Silicon Valley, the most valuable, now I think worth \$90 billion U.S. dollars, that's Irish brains. Yeah, I remember when they won the Young Scientists Competition, it's an accomplishment we run in Ireland, the Young Scientists Competition, they run that as leading certificate students, high school students, and then they went to the U.S., to Silicon Valley, and, of course, you have got great culture in Silicon Valley, which is about entrepreneurship creativity, and these two young guys, together, created an online payment system that's so global, so strong, has attracted so much interest.

That, to me, is what it's about. It's about sharing creativity, sharing a value around genuine entrepreneurship, allowing people to flourish with their brains and with their creativity, and not putting barriers in their way. And then, we had a very good success story today, as well, in terms of, you know, the Oscar nominations, and so on, like that, in the animation field, and that's the future I like. We believe in the global world. Companies bring solutions to the problems of humankind. What Ireland is offering, and I think what the world has to say, is we have to allow space for companies, no matter where they come from, to bring ideas to the market, that solve problems, like those two, I think, Turkish migrants to Germany, created the MRR technology, that is behind the Pfizer-BioNTech.

So, I'm against barriers, as much as we possibly can. There has to be balance, in relation to this, of course, and we've got to look after our own populations in the midst of all of this, but we do enrich ourselves by opening up, that's the point. I mean, the great story of the United States, to me, is migration, historically, if you think about it, and, you know, you get a full flowering of different ideas, different perspectives, and that adds value to economics, to business, to solutions, to the arts, to culture. Maybe I wandered a bit there, but that's kind of where I see it, and so, I'm not saying goodbye to the open trade approach just yet, and I think we will argue for it, and, you know, we have many multinational companies in Ireland, many American companies in Ireland, and I remember, as an enterprise minister, meeting those companies, and the first thing they would say to me is, the Irish workforce in Galway, or in Clarke, or in Dublin have added value to our company. You know, we're a global company, with an integrated supply chain, and we need brains, and we need good research, and we need good innovation. Your people in Ireland are adding value to our global output and to our global proposition. And, you

know, I think that's -- that's the approach that I will be arguing for, and I think that we need to continue to keep an eye on that.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Just returning to Northern Ireland, we -- we asked our audience for questions. I would say, by far, the most common question, well over 60 or 70% of the questions are all a variant on the following, which is a referendum on Irish unification becoming a serious topic on the Irish and European agenda, post-Brexit. I know you spoke a lot in your remarks about reconciliation on this Shared Island, you know, Initiative. So, I was wondering if you could, in addition to answering that, sort of talk a little bit about some of the real sort of thorny problems of reconciliation that would need to sort of precede or accompany any sort of major, you know, constitutional change, but obviously, given everything that's happening, not just with Ireland but also with Scotland, in a very different way. It seems like there's more flux, you know, after Brexit, maybe than there was before.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Yeah, well, as you picked up from my earlier remarks, I'm very focused on reconciliation, on fully utilizing the Good Friday Agreement. My regret, in relation to the Good Friday Agreement, so far, is that its institutions haven't been fully utilized, and we've had too many starts, stops. The Executive has been collapsed for the previous three years. I welcomed its restoration last year. But there have been too much of that -- there has been too much of that, and I think that we need real reconciliation between the two traditions, working together with purpose.

I think the North is changing. I think there's a central ground emerging, in Northern Ireland. I think Brexit does create a new dynamic, of that there is no doubt. I think the earlier talks of a border pull in the immediacy of Brexit was a mistake, and I think is divisive, and puts people back into trenches, literally, too early. And my view is that I want to develop a shared dialogue, in terms of how we share the island of Ireland, into the future, irrespective of one's constitutional preferences, as I said earlier. I think the genius of the Good Friday Agreement was it meant that we didn't have to have every discussion, every single day, about the constitutional position, but rather we could work on a lot more, in terms of the North-South agenda, in terms of the agenda between two communities in the North, and between the East-West agenda.

And so, in terms of the Shared Island Initiative, I have secured a €0.5 billion fund to fund projects and cross border projects, both on the environmental front, such as the Greenway, such as the



development of the Ulster Canal, and all island research help, that we're going to fund from that, to get the universities and the institutes on the island collaborating on research, on mutual issues of value to the entire island, be it cybersecurity, be it climate, be it energy, for example, and I want to give them a lot more heft to the North-South agenda, and I want a real unity of purpose, and people working together on the island, irrespective of their constitutional preferences.

That's where the focus for me is, and there will not be a referendum in the lifetime of this government, and it's not particularly strong on the European Union agenda, in terms of, you know, the constitutional question, but what Europe will do, it will support, very strongly, efforts towards fulfilling the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement, and to that end, Europe contributed peace money again, this year, in that multiannual framework, and even though it's 120 million, because of all the governments having to match it, we're now close to a billion on the Peace and Reconciliation Fund, for now, and for the next number of years. So, we have -- we have a strong platform now, to put flesh on the bone, really, of people to people relationships, and I'm very taken by the late Shane Allen's approach, you know, when he speaks of his neighbors, and sort of from the Protestant Unionist tradition, who he said had been around his place for about 400 years, and he says, at the end of his book, "It's about time we learn to share this patch of ground together." That's the kind of sort of -- that really infuses, you know, that gets me going, and I think we have a bit of a distance to go yet, to achieve that.

The other dimension I'd quickly add is I think we didn't maximize the Good Friday Agreement enough to develop investment programs around disadvantage in Northern Ireland, and particular communities are -- you know, where there is significant early school leaving, particularly in certain loyalists communities and some nationalist communities. That, to me, is what politics is really about, giving every young person on this island an opportunity to gain an education, not just to finish at 14, or 15, or 16, to have an opportunity to go onto an apprenticeship, to go onto further education, to go onto third level education, and I would like both governments, the British and Irish in government, and the Northern Ireland Executive to concentrate on that issue, with a comprehensive program to deal with education and disadvantage in the North, once and for all, that would make its own contribution, I think, over the medium-term, in improving relations all around.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Taoiseach, there's a U.N. flag behind you, in addition to the

Irish, European, and U.S. flag, and of course, Ireland, just recently, started as a two-year member of the U.N. Security Council. You know, the last time Ireland was on the Security Council, I think, was in 2000, 2002, or around that sort of period, and since then, of course, the world has changed pretty fundamentally, and it looks like, to a lot of observers, that U.S.-China rivalry is really sort of setting the stage for world politics, more generally, which has big implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of the U.N. Security Council.

President Biden has spoken about closer relations with democracies. He's sort of pitted democracy as a model against autocracy, and said democracies need to be conscious of this authoritarian challenge. Could you just reflect on that a little bit? I mean, does Ireland sort of share in that diagnosis, and how do you see, you know, your role in the U.N. Security Council, with this sort of U.S.-China rivalry under way?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: I would agree very much with President Biden's views, and this is something that I'm passionate about, myself. I think democracies have to work together. I think we have to work with our -- with our societies, particularly with our younger people, in terms of inculcating the values of democracies, of freedom of speech, of ideas. I worry about the growth of authoritarianism. We have a -- you know, we see that, even within the European continent, even within the European Union. Some member states have shown trends that are deeply troubling, in terms of what we would perceive to be the undermining of basic tenets of the parliamentary democracy, separation of powers, and so forth.

So, that is very much where we're coming from, as I say, a small country, that has always, from the time of our independence, believed in international rules-based organizations and the democratic way of doing things. And so, on the U.N. Security Council, that will be a theme. But also, we see climate security as a key agenda for us. We believe, now, that that climate -- the climate issue will increasingly, potentially, become a source of instability and insecurity across the world, in conflict, and I think it has an added dimension to it now, which basically needs -- means, sorry, that there has to be more origin to tension to the issues of climate, and the government I lead, for example, is -- will be passing very significant legislation, that will mark a milestone, in terms of Ireland's approach to climate and in moving in a new direction on climate, and we intend to do that in partnership with our European Union colleagues, and -- but that growth in authoritarianism and its link to certain social media platforms or the manipulation

of social media is something that we need to address.

It's something that I'm also concerned about because what is happening on many social media platforms and commentary on politics is a growing intolerance of other perspectives and a damning of a person for having a particular viewpoint, and which I think is very -- a very worrying trend, and it just undermines the whole idea of encouraging people to speak their minds, and that's a worry.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Taoiseach, you mentioned climate change, and that was actually -- my last sort of question was going to be on climate change, but we have COP26 coming up in Glasgow, later this year. The EU Commission has proposed, I think, a reduction, you know, a further sort of target for reductions, I think, of 55%. It's currently, I think, around 40%.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Right.

MR. WRIGHT: You know, is that -- is that the type of target that Ireland would embrace, and how do you see sort of the EU vote sort of working together on Glasgow, but also with the rest of the world? Like, what are your sort of hopes and concerns about how this is going to unfold? These meetings tend to be, you know, fairly difficult. Obviously, there's increasing sort of geopolitics around climate, itself, and how to tackle that.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Yeah.

MR. WRIGHT: So, how do -- what's your view of Glasgow and also of sort of the EU's ambitions on it?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Well, first of all, we embrace the European ambition, and we would have supported it enthusiastically, at the last Council meeting on climate change. It took 23 hours to complete the meeting, Thomas, so, you can get the challenges, and that was around the principles of the targets. There's a lot of work to be done yet, in terms of the working out of the, you know, the burden sharing and so on, amongst them, member states, and we have a long way to go, ourselves, as a country, and I have to be straight up about that, and I think we have to catch up, but we have very ambitious domestic targets, as well. Renewable energy is going to be a key part of that. So, you can see offshore wind is going to be a big thing in Ireland, in the coming decade. And so, we're delighted with President Biden's announcement, in terms of the Paris Accord. I mean, that has given the world a fill up, really, in terms of the climate agenda, and John Kerry's appointment, and so, I think that, in itself, is --

represents the turning of a corner, again, in terms of dealing with the climate issue. I think we have to refine our policies and do a bit more detailed work on concepts around just transition. We have technologies that not everybody is starting from the same basepoint, that others will have more challenges than some, and we've got to try and bring people along with us, in the debate, because the idea of just transition, and even at a microlevel in Ireland, you know, we're experiencing that, as well. Very often, the just transition, the investment that comes along with that is slow and doesn't materialize as quickly as, for example, the closure of certain plants, fossil emission plants, for example, and energy plants, and so, I do think, you know, those are the kind of detailed sort of policy work that I would like to see more of, and -- but I think the key issue is blocks, like Europe, and global powers, like Europe and the U.S., can make a real contribution to this, and Europe is heading in the right direction. So, the European Recovery and Resilience Fund, for example, the €1.8 trillion I spoke about earlier, its two things are a green recovery and digital transformation, and we will mirror that, in terms of our national economic recovery plan, as we emerge from COVID-19, and I think across most member states you will see that, as well.

MR. WRIGHT: Thank you. Just one final question, actually, just going back full circle with COVID-19, because I think it would be of interest to a lot of people watching and -- on either side of the Atlantic, but in terms of continued travel restrictions and all of these precautions, which are understandably in place, will you -- are you sort of talking to the U.S. government, at the moment, in terms of, you know, what the timeframe is, in terms of how those restrictions will be eased, on either side, and what's your -- I know it's too early to tell, in terms of the public health situation, but what are your broad expectations and hopes, in terms of how this will sort of evolve and maybe be loosened on sort of trans-Atlantic travel, over the next sort of six months or so?

TAOISEACH MARTIN: It is too early to say it, to be frank, and we will not be talking about travel, this week, or we're not really engaging in that type of discussion. There is a lot of caution now, as you know, because of the -- the new variants that have been here since the new year, and even across some member states in Europe, the case numbers are going back up again, and some countries are adopting severe restrictions. Ireland is in it, in severe restrictions, more at the moment, because we had a third wave at the beginning of the year.

Thankfully, and thanks to the Irish people for responding magnificently to those restrictions, the numbers have come significantly down, still at a high level, but have come down, and I think where this evolves, really, is the rollout of the vaccination program, in tandem with keeping the variants at bay, the BR117 variant, the U.K. variant, is much more transmissible and more deadly than the previous iterations of the virus. So, you know, we've got to keep a really vigilant eye on that, as we roll out the vaccination program. The good news, even though we're not to the same volume as yourselves, is that we've decided on vaccinating those who are most vulnerable to the -- the virus, now, that means our senior citizens, those in nursing homes, our frontline healthcare workers, and the impact of the vaccines has been quite dramatic, in terms of reducing the incidence of cases amongst those who've been vaccinated and the cohorts of those vaccinated, and also severeness and mortality.

So, that's very good news, and we're now progressing to all those over 70. We're making progress. We've had challenges, as you've -- had talked about earlier, in terms of the European, you know, the manufacturing, production of vaccines, particularly AstraZeneca, and with that said, you know, when you stand back from this, the world has managed to develop very good vaccines, with four of them that we -- we're using in Europe now, when J&J come onstream, and in about 10 months, which was quite an extraordinary collaboration between governments, researchers, and in industry, and when you stand back from it, compared to what have -- would have happened 10 years ago, it's remarkable. It's a great victory of science. So, I think we will get there. Everybody's impatient. Everybody wants the vaccines now, and that's perfectly understandable, but until we get into an even keel, over the next while, I think it's probably too early yet to be talking about travel, but obviously, these issues come on the agenda, at some stage.

MR. WRIGHT: Taoiseach, thank you so much. Thank you for participating in our Batkin Leadership Forum. Thank you for your remarks and for engaging in the Q&A, for an hour with us. We very much for -- look forward to welcoming you in person, the next time you're able to visit the United States, and we wished, of course, your government and the people of Ireland well, in the next few months, in exiting the pandemic and on the vaccination front, and we also, on behalf of all my colleagues at Brookings, would like to wish you a slightly early Saint Patrick's Day, Happy Saint Patrick's Day.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: Thank you very much, today, Thomas, and Happy Saint Patrick's

Day to you and all at the Brookings Institute. I really enjoyed the conversation, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you, and I do hope we can get across soon --

MR. WRIGHT: Yeah.

TAOISEACH MARTIN: -- to the United States, once we emerge from this pandemic.

Thank you very much, indeed, and for all you do.

MR. WRIGHT: Great. Thank you.

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