



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on May 22, 2023

Ireland Considers Ditching Neutrality to Enter NATO

The Republic of Ireland is set to discuss a new partnership framework with NATO, and at the Irish Parliament (Dáil Eireann) on May 18, Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheál Martin declared a [milestone shift](#) away from the country's long-standing neutrality stance.

Since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022, Ireland has faced criticism for insisting on its nonaligned position, with NATO claiming that the deep-sea infrastructure surrounding Ireland was susceptible to Russian assaults. NATO's intelligence chief, Assistant Secretary-General David Cattler, opined that Russia may strike at undersea infrastructure "in an effort to disrupt western life and gain leverage against those nations that are providing support to Ukraine."

Documents have divulged the nature of Ireland's faltering defense infrastructure, with the clandestine role played by Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF) in defending Irish skies owing to the lack of a functional Irish air force. Moreover, external circumstances such as a soaring cost of living have worsened the dwindling manpower situation of the Irish Defense Forces.

Little wonder that NATO has expressed concerns that the Irish navy is presently without [able seamen and operational ships](#) protecting crucial deep-sea cables supporting the global internet.

In light of Ireland's current situation, Martin articulated his opinion that Irish neutrality would not defend the country from hostile actors, and stressed the importance of Ireland boosting its ties with the EU and NATO.

Notwithstanding [meager public support](#) for Ireland joining NATO, Dublin has long been inclined toward becoming a member, with the country already participating in NATO cyberdefense projects and EU Battlegroups.

Although Martin did not insist that Ireland should join a European army, he said that there was a need to question the country's "triple lock" protocol, which mandates that the UN sign off on the mobilization of any Irish military personnel overseas. NATO supporters claim that such a requirement involving the UN would provide Russia an opportunity to veto any Irish military actions.

Politically, opposition to NATO hails from both the Left and the Right in the country, due to a lingering sense of grievance with working with the British Army over past atrocities in Ireland.

Meanwhile, the country's largest opposition party, Sinn Féin, provoked [criticism](#) among its grassroots for a recent policy decision to abandon plans to back off from any EU or NATO defense agreements, as the party is hoping to enter government at the next general election.



Keith Harrison/iStock/Getty Images Plus
Newtown Cove, Ireland



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This week also witnessed EU and NATO officials gathering in the Irish port city of Cork for the yearly gathering of the Chiefs of European Navies (CHENS) for talks on future naval policies, with the Irish government organizing a national summit to tilt the country toward more NATO involvement.

Ireland's Defense Forces portrayed the meeting as an "informal, independent and non-political forum" discussing disruptive technologies and their use in maritime safety and security.

The European Military Staff, NATO's Allied Maritime Command, and the U.S. Navy deployed in Europe have been invited as observers.

Presently, Ireland chairs the presidency of the CHENS conference, having previously helmed it in 2001.

On a separate note, the Irish government also recently engendered global backlash for efforts to use hate-speech legislation against populists, even though the republic is one of the few European nations currently without a significant right-leaning political force with parliamentary representation.

The [new bill](#) limiting free speech is poised to become enshrined in Irish law if no major obstacles come in the way. Under the bill, simply having material regarded as "hateful" by the state could lead to imprisonment for accused people if the state suspects the material is meant for distribution.

The legislation, purported to protect those with "protected characteristics" from "hate," has already passed through the Dáil Éireann, Ireland's lower house, and is undergoing debate in the upper house, the Seanad Éireann.

Notably, merely 14 of the Dáil's 160 members [voted in opposition to the bill](#) before it headed to the Seanad.

There has been little public awareness about the proposed law, also called the "Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022," with mainstream Irish media mainly overlooking it.

However, a prominent commentator in ring-wing circles, [Keith Woods](#), shone a spotlight on the legislation by tweeting out a screenshot of one of its more disturbing segments.

Woods alluded to the fact that, under this bill, the "burden of proof is shifted to the accused," who are expected to prove they did not plan to disseminate whatever "hateful" material was in their possession. He regarded this clause as so radical that "even the Trotskyist People Before Profit [a far-left Irish party] opposed it as a flagrant violation of civil liberties."

While there were efforts to get rid of the alarming segment of the proposed legislation, a tweet by the advocacy group [Free Speech Ireland](#) stated that a suggested amendment from People Before Profit to entail the UN Convention on Human Rights protections on Free Speech had been shot down.

Another amendment, which requested "to excise the section allowing for the prosecution of individuals possessing offensive material without communicating it," was also defeated, the tweet concluded.

After Tesla's Elon Musk saw Woods' tweet, he [retweeted](#) the post, cautioning, "This is a massive attack against freedom of speech."

Canadian psychologist and author Jordan Peterson likened Ireland's proposed bill to [his own country's C-11 bill](#), which was recently passed.

Ireland also [announced plans](#) to conduct a referendum this November to amend the constitution by eradicating a clause in which women are described as the nation's primary homemakers, in efforts to



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make the country's constitution gender-neutral.

Article 41.2 of the constitution — known colloquially as “the women’s place in the home” — which stipulates that “the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved,” is the target of the proposed amendment. The constitution specifies that “mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labor to the neglect of their duties in the home.” Nonetheless, the clause has been regarded as generally symbolic and has never been invoked.

This proposed referendum is the latest move by the Irish state to undermine the constitutional legacy of Catholicism. Catholic advocacy groups have protested strongly against the planned vote.



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