



**20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT.
Stock-taking, opportunities and threats in light of Brexit.**

**Sabino Arana Foundation - Mandobide 6 – 3.a 48007 Bilbao
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On 22 May 1998, as a result of two referendums posing different questions, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland ratified the so-called Good Friday Agreement, which had been signed by the British and Irish governments on 10 April that same year. The agreement, which had previously been negotiated and accepted by the majority of Northern Irish political parties, although it was rejected by the leading party at the time (the DUP), was signed by the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and the Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. A key element in the difficult negotiations between representatives of unionist and republican communities was the mediation and involvement of the United States administration, through then President Bill Clinton's special envoy, George Mitchell. The support provided by a number of different social organisations, all fully dedicated to bringing about the much-desired peace, was also instrumental in the success of the process.

The agreement constituted an historical landmark and marked the end of a cycle of sectarian violence initiated in 1968, which had ravaged Northern Ireland for decades, resulting in 3,600 deaths and 30,000 people either wounded, imprisoned or forced to flee the country.

On this 20th anniversary of the agreement, which is also known as the Belfast Agreement, the Institute of European Democrats (IED) in collaboration with the Sabino Arana Foundation, and with the financial support of the European Parliament, would like to take the opportunity to assess its evolution, and to do so have organised this seminar, which aims to analyse the internal situation of Northern Irish society from both a regional perspective and within the context of the European Union, and explore possible future scenarios.

Some of the issues that will be dealt with during the seminar include: the situation of victims and their recognition; the social reintegration of former prisoners and OTRs and their incorporation into the job market; the end of discrimination and the process of integrating the Catholic and Protestant communities, with the participation of new generations who have never known or suffered violence; the convergence of the different narratives regarding the conflict; how foreign economic aid, especially from the EU, has helped improve the situation; the demographic evolution of Northern Ireland, which may determine the future of the country; and the danger posed by the political deadlock in Stormont, a crisis which has lasted for over 14 months.

Furthermore, the current Brexit negotiations may also result in a hardening of the border between the two Irelands, threatening the stability and achievements obtained over the last 20 years. It is important to note that most of the Northern Irish population would prefer to stay within the EU, with 56% of voters supporting the remain campaign in the Brexit referendum.

The issue of the Brexit negotiations and possible future scenarios which may derive from them will also be analysed during the seminar.