

# UK UPDATE

## UK Update Issue 172

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The UK Update provides up-to-date information on UK-EU, and UK-Ireland relations, bringing together relevant statements and policy positions from key players in Ireland, the UK and the EU.

The Update is part of a wider communications programme covering the work of the IIEA's UK Project Group – including commentaries, speeches, texts and event reports – which are highlighted on the Institute's website. ([www.iiea.com](http://www.iiea.com))

## Introduction

Elections, Violence, Immigration. These three words sum up the themes of political discourse on the islands of Britain and Ireland today. While local and European elections will occur in Ireland within weeks, the rain-soaked announcement by Prime Minister Sunak that a UK General Election will be held on Thursday, 4 July 2024 has brought to an end the prolonged 'run up' phase as the present and prospective Prime Ministers, Rishi Sunak and Sir Keir Starmer, engage in highly personalised confrontations within and away from Westminster.

The failed assassination bid in Slovakia has highlighted the increasing menace of political violence across Europe. As stories multiply of abuse, harassment, and actual violence against those engaged in the democratic election processes of postering and canvassing here in Ireland, the RTÉ commentator, Áine Lawlor, has asked: "Is the year of elections degenerating into the year of aggression?" Demonstrations and picketing of politicians' homes are becoming everyday events. The Ceann Comhairle has considered it necessary to produce a significant Task Force report on safe participation in political life, while a UCD survey focuses on abuse in the political sphere. Concerns expressed by local councillors in Britain recall the murders of Jo Cox and David Amess.

At the centre of the election debates, and closely linked to the abuse/violence issue, is the increasingly controversial and divisive issue of immigration. Whether the headline concerns tents on Dublin's canal banks or the legality or practicality of the UK's Rwanda Asylum Plan, a recent opinion poll shows the strength of the public mood on immigration and asylum seekers with many voters favouring a more closed asylum policy and indicating that they are more likely to vote for a candidate who has voiced concerns about immigration.

## Section One: State of Play

### UK General Election, 4 July 2024

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has called an early UK general election for Thursday, 4 July 2024. He made the announcement in a rain-soaked speech outside 10 Downing Street, bidding to win a fifth term in office for the Conservatives. Parliament will be suspended on Friday, 24 May 2024, before it is formally shut down on Thursday, 30 May 2024 ahead of an official five-week election campaign.

The Prime Minister referred to the inflation figures as he announced the election date in Downing Street later in the day, in a sign he hopes to frame his campaign around a narrative of economic recovery after a period of rising living costs. He added that the fall in inflation, along with the UK's emergence from recession earlier this year, were «proof that the plan and priorities» he had set out were working.

In a TV statement shortly after the General Election announcement, Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer argued that Tory “chaos” had damaged the economy, and a vote for his party represented a chance to bring political stability. Sir Keir added that it was “time for change”, as he criticised the Conservatives’ management of public services, the NHS and record on tackling crime.

The Labour Party were not the only ones to criticise the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats’ Leader, Sir Ed Davey, said it would be a chance to “kick Rishi Sunak’s appalling Conservative government out of office”, whilst the Greens co-leader Carla Denyer said her party was aiming to elect at least four new MPs. The Reform UK leader Richard Tice said the Tories had “broken Britain” but Labour would “bankrupt Britain”, and only his party would offer “common sense policies that can now save Britain”.

In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin First Minister Michelle O’Neill spoke similarly to other party leaders, stating that it was “time for change”. According to Ms O’Neill, she saw the general election as an opportunity to “send a clear message that you want decisions about your life and your future to be made here in Ireland, and not in London”. Acting DUP leader Gavin Robinson also added fuel to the fire saying, “It has been clear for some time that this government is fast running out of steam. The general election will provide the people of Northern Ireland with a clear choice as to who they think is best placed to represent them and deliver the best outcomes for them”.

Read the full *BBC News* [article here](#).

### Taoiseach in Belfast

Taoiseach Simon Harris praised the early impacts of the return of the power sharing institutions at Stormont when he arrived in Belfast on Friday, 3 May 2024 on his first official visit to Northern Ireland. Mr Harris met with Stormont leaders for talks focused on areas of shared economic collaboration. Significantly, this visit came at a time when the Irish and British governments were engaged in a diplomatic dispute over the issue of immigration.

After the meeting with First and Deputy First Ministers, Michelle O’Neill and Emma Little-Pengelly, Mr Harris praised their leadership and stressed that cooperation between governments in Dublin and Belfast is essential to the success of the Island:

*It has been a really good engagement. I was eager to get here in the early stages of my tenure as Taoiseach because we now have institutions back up and running in the north. I am very grateful to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for the incredible leadership they are showing in the political environment in*

*terms of trying to deliver for people and I'm extraordinarily pleased the Irish Government is in a position to work, where appropriate, on a range of issues. I think we have an impressive list of areas where we are now actively co-operating and collaborating in.*

First Minister Michelle O'Neill said there were many areas of shared collaboration, over the planned new A5 road project, which the Irish Government will partially fund and showed appreciation for the Mr Harris' prompt visit after taking up his role as Taoiseach, she said: "I am very glad he has taken the opportunity to be here early in his tenure to talk about the areas of shared collaboration, partnership working, particularly around areas that the Irish Government have already identified, particularly around the Shared Island Fund."

Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly said she had raised concerns that relations between unionists and the Taoiseach's office had not always been good in the past but that now is the time to work on collaboration and to turn this relationship into a positive one:

*We highlighted the fact that perhaps relationships, particularly between unionism and the Taoiseach's office have not always been good in the last number of years. But we look forward to building a more positive relationship, an engagement which is based with respect to that stranded approach in respect with the internal issues of Northern Ireland are those for the government of Northern Ireland and for the United Kingdom.*

After his meeting with the First and Deputy First Ministers, Mr Harris visited the Northern Ireland parliament buildings where he was welcomed by Edwin Poots, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, before holding talks with Stormont party leaders. The Taoiseach shared a working lunch with business stakeholders before going to the Duncairn Arts Centre for discussions focused on the achievements in reconciliation and community development work of the 174 Trust, through disability, arts, women, and pre-school groups. The day concluded with a visit to Queen's University Belfast where Mr Harris met academics involved in ongoing all-island research, including on cancer care, sustainable energy, resilient food systems, and others co-funded by programmes resourced through the Government's Shared Island Fund.

Read the *RTÉ* article about the Taoiseach's visit to Belfast [here](#).

## Violence in Politics

The reality of violence in current politics, here and across Europe, was reflected in an [Irish Times](#) editorial, on Thursday, 16 May 2024.

The editorial reflected on the recent shooting of Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico and how Ireland has experienced political violence in recent times.

*Ireland has seen little of this sort of political violence since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 brought the Troubles to an end. But it would be foolish to assume that we are now in some way immune to it. There is no shortage of evidence that the tolerance, respect and on occasion affection that define the public's interaction with office holders is on the wane.*

*This week also saw reports that a Green Party councillor was attacked last week while she was out canvassing in Dublin's north inner city for next month's local elections. Another councillor, also a woman, was attacked in Hartstown in Dublin on the same day.*

[A study by University College Dublin](#) has reported on the results of a survey which highlighted the abuse and harassment of Irish politicians as a common occurrence. The report unpacked the impacts of this abuse on Oireachtas members and their political staff and emphasised the use of social media as key means of reaching them. *The Irish Times* reported on the study and its findings:

*[...] that high and sustained levels of abuse cause politicians to limit certain political activities such as canvassing, reduce their online presence and avoid contentious topics.*

*This is clearly corrosive to politics and the health of our democracy. For this reason, the publication of the report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life, which included the survey, is timely and welcome. Chaired by former Garda Commissioner Nóirín O’Sullivan, the taskforce has made recommendations around supporting and protecting public representatives including a more coordinated response from the Garda.*

*It also wants social media companies to take action over harmful content aimed at politicians. The call is presumably made with little expectation of success given the firms’ track record. But it is clear that these platforms are at the heart of the problem. They are both a vector for hate at an individual and often anonymous level, but also a vital tool for those pulling the strings behind the scenes, both domestically and from abroad.*

## Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life

The Ceann Comhairle, Deputy Séan Ó Feargháil, and the Cathaoirleach, Senator Jerry Buttimer, established the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life in May 2023.

The Task Force was chaired by Nóirín O’Sullivan, Former Garda Commissioner and United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Safety and Security and comprised of sixteen members drawn from the Houses of the Oireachtas and invited experts.

According to the Oireachtas Website, the role of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life and its compositions are as follows:

*The Task Force has completed its consideration of this matter and has made proposals on how to safeguard and support participation and promote civil discourse in political life. The report contains 16 actionable recommendations pertaining to research requirements, security and safety, strategy co-ordination to address drivers of abuse, the role of political parties and social media.*

[The Task Force’s report](#) stated the following six major conclusions:

- 1) *The Task Force concludes that, given the prevalence of abuse in political life and its impact on the democratic process, leadership, coordination, and a sustained effort among all relevant stakeholders is required to address abuse in political life. The Task Force recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas lead through the establishment of a Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group to implement the recommendations of the Task Force Report.*
- 2) *The Task Force concludes that politicians and political candidates must be supported to safely participate at every level in the democratic process. Key supports are provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities and political parties. Increasingly threats to physical security are a key consideration for those participating in political life which must be responded to in a coordinated way between the various organs of State.*

- 3) *The Task Force recognises that political parties play a key role in the Irish political system and in fostering a culture that upholds democratic values, including equality, diversity and respect among its membership. Party leaders have collective responsibility to demonstrate leadership in their commitment to promote these principles and to ensure civil and respectful discourse in political debate.*
- 4) *The Task Force concludes that political parties should have internal codes of conduct that prohibit abuse, with sanctions for those that do not comply.*
- 5) *The Task Force further recognises the unique responsibility of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, individually and collectively, in setting the tone of debate and discourse through their interactions in Dáil and Seanad Éireann and in wider political debate, including online.*
- 6) *The Task Force notes that guidance is available for parliaments and political parties in the form of Toolkits developed by OSCE and other organisations to support democratic processes and to address abuse.*

The full report by the Task Force, including recommendation can be read [here](#).

## 100 Days of Stormont

100 days after a return to government in Northern Ireland, RTÉ reported on the call for further action from Stormont Party representatives. According to the report, SDLP MLA and leader of the opposition, Matthew O'Toole, said that the people of Northern Ireland expect delivery on promises and not just good relations between the minister and parties in power. In discussion about delivery, Mr O'Toole said that the third Opposition Day<sup>1</sup> at Stormont would focus on this. According to RTÉ:

*One hundred days following the resumption of devolved government in Northern Ireland, the Stormont Executive has been challenged to deliver. Stormont opposition leader and SDLP MLA Matthew O'Toole said while "good vibes" between ministers in the multi-party coalition are welcome, the public "rightly expect delivery". The Executive was reformed at the end of January following almost two years of political instability.*

*On the third Opposition Day at Stormont, the official opposition is set to propose a summer recess deadline for the publication of the Executive's programme for government. They are also set to propose a timeline for the establishment of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency and support for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector, which faces an immediate sustainability crisis. Mr O'Toole described the third Opposition Day as "being about delivery".*

Mr O'Toole reflected on a recent statement by First Minister Michelle O'Neill, saying that she would "not be in a rush", however, he emphasised the need for rushing to improve public services where needed:

*The vast majority of people are glad that devolved government has returned and that ministers appear to be, for the most part, working well together [...] The First Minister recently told us that we shouldn't 'be in a rush' but the truth is that people across our communities are in a rush - a rush to be seen by a doctor, a rush to get a home that meets their needs, a rush to get a good job and a good school to support their family.*

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<sup>1</sup> where there is an opposition, in each session of the Assembly ten days shall be allotted for opposition business. (<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/news-and-media/assembly-explained/norther-ireland-assembly-opposition/>)

The Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) Party's leader, Jim Allister used the 100 day milestone to criticise the DUP and the UUP over their involvement in recognising the Irish Sea border, he stated: "The only bright spot for unionism in the last 100 days is the pan-unionist alignment between Reform UK and TUV [which is] cementing relations across the United Kingdom."

Read the full *RTÉ* article [here](#).

## Rwanda Ruling in NI High Court

On Monday, 13 May 2024, in the Belfast High Court, it was ruled certain provisions of the UK Illegal Migration Act should not be applied in Northern Ireland because they undermine human rights protections guaranteed under post-Brexit arrangements. Mr Justice Humphreys stated that aspects of the Act were incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Windsor Framework recently agreed by the UK and EU includes a condition that there can be no curtailment of the rights provisions contained within the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998.

The Illegal Migration Act provides new powers for the British government to detain and remove asylum seekers it deems to have arrived illegally to the UK. The key element of this new law is the scheme to send asylum seekers to Rwanda. Mr Justice Humphreys' judgment arose from two challenges against the Act that focused on the peace process human rights protections guaranteed by the Windsor Framework. He concluded that several elements of the Act cause a "significant" diminution of the rights of asylum seekers residing in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement:

*I have found that there is a relevant diminution of right in each of the areas relied upon by the applicants. The applicants' primary submission therefore succeeds. Each of the statutory provisions under consideration infringes the protection afforded to RSE (Rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity) in the Good Friday Agreement.*

In an immediate response, a Downing Street spokesman indicated that the UK government would challenge the High Court ruling on the Act, but insisted the timetable for sending asylum seekers to Rwanda would not be affected, he said:

*This judgment doesn't affect our operational plans to send illegal migrants to Rwanda or the lawfulness of our Safety of Rwanda Act. We continue to work on the timetable that the prime minister had previously set out. [The government has] consistently been clear that the commitment to the Good Friday Agreement should be interpreted as they were always intended and not expanded to cover issues like illegal migration. We will take all steps to defend that position including through appeal...*

In the Dáil, Taoiseach Simon Harris noted the Belfast judgment and said the Attorney General was studying it, [he stated](#): "We are studying this judgement carefully. We understand the UK government are likely to appeal the decision."

The Minister for Finance Michael McGrath commented on the situation, saying that the relatively new judgement will be looked at in Dublin and that discussion will take place involving government in Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Britain. He emphasised that an increase flow of asylum seekers to the Island is of concern to the Irish government.

*This is a very new judgment and it's one that will be carefully considered by the Irish Government. I anticipate there will be contact very shortly at a political and diplomatic level in relation to it. Anything that results*

*in Northern Ireland, as part of the overall island of Ireland, becoming more attractive than Great Britain when it comes to asylum seekers seeking somewhere to make their claim, does raise concerns, because if an increased number comes to Northern Ireland, that makes it more likely that there will be an increase in the flow of asylum seekers on the island, from Northern Ireland, to the Republic.*

Read the full RTÉ article [here](#).

## Chris Heaton-Harris to leave Parliament

Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris has said he will not stand in the next general election. In [an announcement on X](#), he shared that it had been an “honour and a privilege to serve” and that he had already announced his intention to stand down in a letter to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Mr Heaton-Harris has been the Northern Ireland Secretary since September 2022, and was first elected as an MP in 2010. He was appointed the Conservatives’ chief whip in 2022 by Boris Johnson and later that year, Liz Truss appointed him as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

In his letter to Prime Minister Sunak, which was published on Saturday 18 May, before the announcement of a snap election on Thursday, 4 July 2024, Mr Heaton-Harris said reflected on his work in Northern Ireland, which he sees as a success:

*Working with you I helped negotiate and deliver the Windsor Framework, which both solved many of the major practical issues created by the Northern Ireland Protocol, put in place as we left the EU, and helped reset our countries’ relationship with our European neighbours. Then, after long and detailed negotiations within Northern Ireland, we produced the command paper Safeguarding the Union which resulted in the return of Stormont and devolved government to serve the people of Northern Ireland. I strongly believe the conditions now exist for Northern Ireland to thrive.*

Mr Heaton-Harris added that he wanted to remain as Northern Ireland Secretary until the next election as “there are still a number of pieces of unfinished business I wish to complete and I love the people, place and job”.

Read the *BBC* article on about Mr Heaton-Harris’ decision [here](#).

## Section Two: The Evolving Debate

### Prime Minister Sunak Security Speech, 13 May 2024

Addressing the Policy Exchange think tank on Monday, 13 May 2024, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak set out to place security and defence at the centre of the Tory Party election campaign, pledging to increase defence expenditure significantly over the coming decade. His lengthy address was notable insofar as the official Downing Street text included no less than nine redactions because of ‘political content’.

A key section of [the speech](#) dealt with present and emerging threats as seen in the following extract:

*I’m convinced that the next few years will be some of the most dangerous yet the most transformational our country has ever known. So, the question we face today is this: Who has the clear plan and bold ideas to deliver a secure future for you and your family? The dangers that threaten our country are real. They are increasing in number. An axis of authoritarian states like Russia, Iran, North Korea, and China is working together to undermine us and our values. War has returned to Europe, with our NATO allies warning that if*

*Putin succeeds in Ukraine, they might be next. War rages, too, in the Middle East as Israel defends itself not only against the terrorists of Hamas but a barrage of missiles fired – for the first time – directly from Iran.*

*These are not faraway problems. Iranian proxies are firing on British ships in the Red Sea, disrupting goods destined for our high streets. Here at home, China has conducted cyber targeting of our democratically elected MPs. Russia has poisoned people with chemical weapons. And when Putin cut off the gas supplies it had a devastating impact on people's lives and threatened our energy security.*

*Countries like Russia are weaponising immigration for their own ends, and criminal gangs keep finding new routes across European borders. Illegal migration is placing an intolerable strain on our security and our sense of fairness, and unless we act now and act boldly this problem is only going to grow.*

*Extremists are also exploiting these global conflicts to divide us. People are abusing our liberal democratic values – the freedom of speech and right of protest - to intimidate, threaten and assault others, to sing antisemitic chants on our streets and our university campuses, and to weaponise the evils of anti-Semitism or anti-Muslim hatred in a divisive, ideological attempt to set Briton against Briton.*

*And from gender activists hijacking children's sex education to cancel culture, vocal and aggressive fringe groups are trying to impose their views on the rest of us. They're trying to make it morally unacceptable to believe something different and undermine people's confidence and pride in our own history and identity. (Scottish nationalists are even trying to tear our United Kingdom apart – Sentence redacted from official text.)*

The speech produced an immediate response from the Scottish National Party which called on the Prime Minister to apologise for “comparing North Korea, Iran and Russia with those people in Scotland who believe in independence.» The SNP's Westminster leader, Stephen Flynn said the Prime Minister had equated almost half of the Scottish public to “war criminal Vladimir Putin”. Mr Flynn went on to attack the Prime Minister, saying: “We know that his sorry time in office is rapidly coming to a conclusion. Is this really how he wants to be remembered?”

Read more on the SNP's response in *the Herald* article [here](#).

## **Keir Starmer: Labour's First Steps**

The UK Labour Party has commenced its long General Election campaign with the party leader, Sir Keir Starmer setting out what Labour's immediate priorities would be if it wins this year's general election.

The party leader announced a ‘pledge card’ listing six key policies, highlighting delivery of “economic stability” and provision of 40,000 more hospital appointments each week if elected. While the pledges appeared more modest in scale than the party's five “national missions” announced last year, Sir Keir said they were the “first steps” towards Labour's bigger plans, which includes making the UK the fastest-growing major economy by the end of a first Labour term in government and achieving clean power by 2030. He insisted that the party had a “big, bold plan” but that these are the first steps.

The six “first steps” as reported by *BBC News* are:

- *Sticking to tough spending rules in order to deliver economic stability;*
- *Setting up Great British Energy, a publicly owned clean power energy company;*

- *Cutting NHS waiting lists by providing 40,000 more appointments each week - funded by tackling tax avoidance and non-dom loopholes;*
- *Launching a border security command to stop the gangs arranging small boat crossings;*
- *Providing more neighbourhood police officers to reduce antisocial behaviour and introduced new penalties for offenders;*
- *Recruiting 6,500 teachers, paid for through ending tax breaks for private schools.*

Read the full BBC News article on the Labour Party's first steps [here](#).

The priority list made no reference to Northern Ireland, but Sir Keir is on record [in a podcast with the Irish Times](#), ruling out calling a referendum on Irish reunification if he becomes Prime Minister:

*I don't think we're anywhere near that kind of question. It's absolutely hypothetical. It's not even on the horizon [...] If I know anything about Northern Ireland, it's that you don't sit in London imposing things on Northern Ireland if you do not have the support of the political parties or the communities.*

## Irish Times on Rwanda Policy Debate

On Friday, 3 May 2024, *The Irish Times* published an Editorial on the continuing debate on the implications of the UK Rwanda Asylum Plan on relations between Dublin and London. The article notes that the UK government has little evidence on the success of the Rwanda plan and that cooperation between government in Northern Ireland, Britain and Ireland is essential to tackling immigration tensions.

*The only evidence that the UK Conservative government can cite to support claims that its inhumane and misguided Rwanda policy is working is the alleged increased flows of asylum seekers to Ireland via Northern Ireland. It is an issue that is playing well with the Tory press, and the right-wing of the party.*

*The Government must not be distracted by the short-term electoral machinations of the Conservative Party. As well as dealing in an efficient and humane way with the migrants who are arriving, a priority is to ensure migration does not become a source of tension between Dublin and the newly-formed Stormont administration.*

*Last weekend, Michelle O'Neill, the Northern Ireland First Minister, said that no member of the Government had been in contact with her office about increased flows of migrants crossing the Border. There was element of political point-scoring in this as O'Neill made the comments at the launch of Sinn Féin's local and European election campaign.*

*However, it is important that Dublin and Belfast work closely together to manage migration. The meeting on Friday between Taoiseach Simon Harris and O'Neill as well as Emma Little-Pengelly, the Deputy First Minister, at the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, addressed some of the issues concerned and it will be an important forum in the future to develop a coherent policy on migration.*

The editorial points out that an open border was a key part of the Brexit negotiations however the management of migration between North and South of the border when it comes to asylum seekers can thus become hard to control. It is stated that cooperation, and a migration deal, between the UK and the EU will be essential to finding a solution to this, but that in the face of a general election in July in the UK and a general election within the next year in Ireland, uncertainty lies ahead for migration as a multilateral issue.

*The stakes are considerable. The Government and all Opposition parties, including Sinn Féin, made an open border between the North and the Republic a red line in Brexit negotiations. With the full backing of the EU, the Government prevailed. But it is not possible to keep an open border and control migration at the same time.*

*By its nature, migration can only be solved through cooperation. The EU Migration Pact, which the Government has signed up to, may not be perfect, but it is a considerable improvement on the current system. However, the absence of a migration deal between the UK and EU will pose significant problems for this country.*

*UK local election results would suggest that the Tories face a drubbing at the general election sometime later this year. If the British Labour Party forms the next government, it has to be hoped that it takes a much more constructive approach to relations with the EU, particularly in relation to migration.*

*There will also be an election in this country within the next year. Sinn Féin has said that it will opt out of parts of the EU Migration Pact as it covers what is a sovereign issue. If it forms part of the next government, it would be well advised to look at the example of the UK. Migration is indeed a sovereign issue, but not one that can be addressed on a unilateral basis.*

You can read the editorial piece [here](#).

## UK Political Leadership

The current political scene in the United Kingdom is notable for the rapid turnover in key leadership positions representing an element of instability and uncertainty as the nation enters an already highly charged General Election campaign.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is the third holder of that office in the present parliamentary term, following his fellow Tories Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. Their legacies of scandal, economic disaster and a deeply divided party have led to the near certainty of a Labour Party victory in the coming election, presaged by the results of the March local and mayoral elections.

In Scotland, the veteran John Swinny was elected First Minister on 7 May following the resignation of Humza Yousaf after just a year in office. Yousaf succeeded Nicola Sturgeon whose nine-year tenure of the office came to an end in March 2023 in circumstances of internal division and defections within the Scottish National Party and suspicion of corruption. Mr Yousaf's departure followed the collapse of the Bute House Agreement between the SNP and the Green Party which had provided a secure majority in the Scottish Parliament.

In Wales, the Labour Party administration saw Mark Drakeford retire as First Minister in March 2024 after a six-year term, where he was succeeded by Vaughan Gething. Within weeks the new First Minister has come under severe pressure from a donations scandal and has been forced to reject fresh allegations that he may have committed perjury in statements made to the UK Covid inquiry concerning deleted messages. Furthermore, *Plaid Cymru* has dramatically ended its co-operation deal with Labour in Wales with the Plaid leader Rhun ap Iorwerth saying he was proud of what the deal had achieved but was "deeply concerned" about the donations issue. The Labour Party now faces serious difficulty in relation to government business in the Senedd.

Northern Ireland has seen the Stormont institutions, the Assembly, and the Executive, restored after the two-year refusal by the DUP to operate the Good Friday power sharing arrangements. First Minister Michelle O'Neill of Sinn

Féin and Deputy First Minister Emma Little Pengelly of the DUP have so far worked constructively together. However, the veto powers inherent in the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement remain in place.

Meanwhile, in Dublin, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar's resignation in March 2024 was unexpected and his successor, Simon Harris, has less than a year to establish his position before a General Election at the latest in March 2025.

## The Three Davids

Recent speeches this week by UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy and David Miliband, described as Labour's non-resident foreign policy guru, all received serious attention.

According to the *Guardian*, each speech was seen to have a specific personal purpose from the current and former politicians:

*Lord Cameron may have been trying to show how to make the best of the mess he bequeathed Britain through his Brexit referendum. Lammy, at the right-wing Hudson Institute, and in an article in the Foreign Affairs journal, was seeking to reassure Republicans of his Atlanticist credentials and that the special relationship would survive a Trump-Starmer partnership. And Miliband was seeking to inject some urgency into Labour's somewhat fuzzy plan for post-Brexit cooperation on foreign and security policy.*

David Cameron's main points concerned the UK as a leader in cooperation, particularly with the EU. Mr Miliband focused on a proposal for security partnership between the UK and Europe, stating that it should be: "one that is expansively defined, covering defence, climate, terrorism, pandemics, and even clean technology. The immediate step would be a high-level non-binding political declaration between EU leaders and a UK Prime Minister, setting objectives for a fully-fledged set of mutual commitments." In a similar fashion, David Lammy spoke to a US Republican crowd, stating his admiration for America, but also the vital importance of Europe's security to the Labour Party, which is why a security deal with the EU would be essential going forward and would "[complement an unshakeable commitment to NATO.](#)"

You can read the full *Guardian* article [here](#).

## On the Bookshelves

Tim Shipman has written *No Way Out*, published by William Collins, London, a massive 700-page volume, the instalment in his four-part Brexit series following *All Out War* and *Fall Out*. The fourth instalment, *Out*, will be published in the autumn.

Shipman's latest text picks up the Brexit story from the end of 2017 to offer what he describes as "an unflinching, unfiltered account of some of the most turbulent years of British politics." He deals with Theresa May's time as Prime Minister and covers her three notable negotiations: with her cabinet and party; with the European institute; and with Parliament. The saga of the Northern Ireland Backstop is also detailed. He describes the book as "lifting the lid" on the Brexit machinations within the Labour Party, Change UK, and the Brexit Party and on Boris Johnson's year-long campaign to bring down the Prime Minister. He chronicles the eventual fall of Theresa May and the ensuing Tory leadership election in "thrilling detail". Andrew Marr from the *Sunday Times* [acclaimed the book](#), saying: "I can't imagine a more even-handed or better sourced, all points-of-view account of the biggest story in British politics since WWII."

## Section Three: Background Material and Further Reading

### Background Material

**Irish Times** Diarmaid Ferriter. We hardly need further reminders of how little the British Tories think of Ireland. *IT*, 3 May 2024. <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2024/05/03/diarmaid-ferriter-we-hardly-need-further-reminders-of-how-little-the-british-tories-think-of-ireland/>

**Irish Times** Opinion. The Irish Times view on dealing with the migrant crisis: International cooperation is the only solution. *IT*, 3 May 2024. <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorials/2024/05/03/the-irish-times-view-on-dealing-with-the-migrant-crisis-international-cooperation-is-the-only-solution/>

**Irish Times** SDLP calls for action to remedy defective Stormont Government. *IT*, 13 May 2024. <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2024/05/13/sdip-calls-for-action-to-remedy-defective-stormont-government/>

**Hodges Figgis** The Instant Sunday Times Bestseller. <https://www.hodgesfiggis.ie/book/no-way-out/tim-shipman/9780008308940>

**The Guardian** Welsh First Minister rejects covid inquiry perjury claims. *Guardian*, 8 May 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/may/08/welsh-first-minister-rejects-covid-inquiry-perjury-claims>

**BBC** Pressure piles on Wales' FM as Plaid ends deal. *BBC*, 17 May 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce5186e0veeo>

**RTE** Humza Yousaf resigns as Scottish First Minister. *RTE*, 29 April 2024.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/uk/2024/0429/1446240-humza-yousaf-scotland/>

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### Further Reading

**Tim Shipman**. No Way Out. William Collins

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