Political balance of the Northern Ireland peace process 1998-2018.[1]

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Abstract

The signing of the peace agreement in 1998 in the Republic of Northern Ireland, and the demobilizations and total abandonment of the weapons of the IRA paramilitary group, which ended in 2005, are of vital importance and interest if one seeks to understand the different ways in which political violence can occur. The particularities of the Northern Ireland peace process place it as a fundamental reference for the understanding of this phenomenon worldwide. It is pertinent then to analyze the manner in which the agreement was established and its repercussions on the Norwegian society and culture of today. To do this, a historical review of the conflict will be made in the first place, and then it will be detailed, under different sources, how this process was experienced, and what the current balance of this could be in political matters.

Key words: Peace Process, Northern Ireland, Armed Conflict, National Identity, Political Violence

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Introduction

In 1998, through the Belfast Agreement, the peace process between the Irish government and the British would culminate after three decades of conflict around the independence of the Norwegian Nation. The Irish conflict was one of the longest in the globe and a fundamental reference in contemporary history in Europe, since its implementation process has been quite arduous and has involved the articulation of all the political and social spheres of the country.

Taking into account the above information, it is of great interest to see how this process has taken place that is already 20 years old? And how is the current state of it? In this way, these two questions constitute the central axis of the document. To answer these two questions, it is sought in the first instance to carry out a documentary review that gives account and allows us to expose the historical context that gave rise to the signing of the agreement in Northern Ireland, as well as the main aspects on which it was based, this Descriptive analysis will constitute the first part of the article.

In accordance with the exposed above and in relation to the entire literature review, to answer the second question, there will be a review of five reports submitted by the Community Relations Council of the United Kingdom, dating from 2012 on the balance of the Peace process in Northern Ireland, to contrast them with other bibliographic sources. The results of this analysis will be presented in relation to the political axis and their respective categories.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature and comparative in scope. For Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista (2014) in the qualitative approach, as opposed to the quantitative one, "the investigative action moves in both directions: between the facts and their interpretation, and results in a rather circular process in which the sequence is not always the same, since it varies with each study". (p. 7). The above configures a process that, initially, starts from an idea that becomes a problem statement, which requires an initial immersion in the field that establishes the conception of the study design within which the initial sample is defined.

Subsequently, the data are collected and analyzed, to finally interpret the results and elaborate a report of them.

This process, raised by Hernandez, Fernandez and Baptista (2014), does not establish a static roadmap, as qualitative studies are characterized by their complexity and flexibility. In the same way, the present investigation will be based on the inductive logic, in which it is based on the particular facts to subsequently develop the corresponding theories, in the words of Hernández, Fernández and Baptista (2014) it's about "exploring and describing, and then generating theoretical perspectives." (p. 8) Likewise, research will be approached from an interpretive perspective, typical of qualitative methods, which is "focused on understanding the meaning of the actions of living beings, especially humans and their institutions (seeks interpret what is actively capturing)". (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2014, p. 9) In the case of this investigation, this perspective is manifested in the method of interpretation that will be used for documentary analysis. For Rubio (2009) The documentary analysis is based on the extraction of notions from the documents, which are analyzed according to their context "to analyze, therefore, is to derive from a document the set of words and symbols that serve as representation". (p. 1)

On the other hand, the scope and focus of this article is of an analytical and comparative nature, which seeks to give an account of the current state of the Northern Ireland peace process in comparison with the historical situation in which it was signed and the principles and political proposals that were sought to be implemented with it. To this end, a comparison of bibliographic sources and a documentary review will be carried out, which will be oriented under five categories of analysis, which are independently tracked and analyzed in the corresponding documents, and finally presented as a whole in the results phase. The purpose of these categories is to carry out a cross-sectional analysis that gives an account of their state in 1998 and the current conditions according to the indicators proposed in the following table:

Table 1. Categories of analysis

Category	Definition and indicators
Political participation	Political indicators are analyzed in order to understand how the agreement transformed the relations between the various factions present in the country between 1998 and the present day, namely: -Former terrorists -IRA (Irish Republican Army) and SINN FEIN (Political Wing of the IRA) -UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) -Government of Ireland.
Justice	The aim is to understand how justice mechanisms currently work in comparison with their state in 1998. Among the aspects to be analyzed are: -The way the ex-combatants came to justice -The transition from the peace agreement. -Amnesty.
Dissidence	This category seeks to understand whether terrorist groups continued to fight and carry out attacks after 1998 and the implications of these attacks are analyzed: -Republicans. -Loyalists.

Source: Own elaboration.

For the purpose of analyzing the above categories, three phases are established in the research process: a) Presentation of problems and research objectives, b) Review of literature and formulation of proposals, and c) Analysis of data and presentation of results. In the light of this review process, a development of the historical context of Ireland is proposed, describing the conflict between unionists and nationalists, mediated by the religious context, which ends with the 1998 peace agreement and poses challenges to political governance, which are described in the second section of the article. This section shows how, from 1998 onwards, a three-link government was established to facilitate relations in which the Northern Ireland Assembly acquired significant power which, although it intervened in raising the pillars of transitional justice and the recognition of opposition powers, still reveals flaws in reparation mechanisms. In addition, the tension between unionists and nationalists is sustained by factors such as Brexit.

In conclusion, Northern Ireland is fundamental to understanding how a peace process based on an ethno-religious conflict works. In this process, the Northern Ireland Assembly was directly involved as a mediating power.

1. Historical context: The Troubles and Peace Agreement

In the first place, some general clarifications are necessary: Northern Ireland is a nation belonging to the United Kingdom, together with Wales, Scotland and England, which unlike these is located on the Island of Ireland, northeast of it, sharing territory with the nation of Ireland (it would be this geographical position, outside the British island, that would be worth the conflict). Northern Ireland would be born as a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1921, where the United Kingdom government would ratify its sovereignty over six counties in the province of Ulster on the island of Ireland, which would be renamed Northern Ireland, which would share the island with the Independent Republic of Ireland.

The conflict in Northern Ireland would be determined by the dispute between unionists and nationalists, the former support the status of Northern Ireland as belonging to the United Kingdom, traditionally Protestant and in opposition to the control of the Republic of Ireland over Northern Ireland; For their part, the nationalists are those who consider Northern Ireland as part of the Irish nation, predominantly Catholic and with different wings, some more violent than others (such as IRA - Irish Republican Army), one of these wings is the Republicans, who advocate the use of violence as a mechanism to unify the Irish Republic (O'Kane, 2004). Although in general terms it is a political conflict and the most successful categories to define it are unionists and nationalists, in practice religious distinction has played a fundamental role in strengthening divisions within the country (Palacios & Urdaneta, 2017).

On Good Friday 1998 an agreement would be signed that would put an end to thirty years of a bloody civil war in which more than 3,600 people were killed and more than 30,000 injured. (Fitzduff & O'Hagan, 2009). The Belfast Agreement, as it was called, was approved by the main nationalist political parties in Northern Ireland and the majority of the unionist parties, as well as the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, establishing two main documents: a Multiparty Agreement signed by the majority of the political parties in Northern Ireland and an international agreement between the British and Irish governments. (European Parliament, 2017). In addition, in political matters, the Agreement established provisions regarding aspects such as the constitutional status of

Northern Ireland, the disarmament of paramilitary groups and the delivery of weapons, as well as amnesty and political participation (Hancock, 2008). This document will provide a political assessment of these aspects and of the degree of compliance with the provisions of the Agreement in recent years.

2. Political balance

2.1 Political participation

On political progress, it should be noted, as mentioned in the Community Relations Council Reports, that it cannot be measured on the basis of particular constitutional destinies, such as a united Ireland or greater integration with Great Britain; on the contrary, it must be assessed in terms of the capacity of political advocates to use dialogue to achieve mutually satisfactory results, or said in other words. The situation in which differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere. (Community Relations Council, 2014). Indeed, the particular constitutional destinies have proved not to be a way out of the conflict due to the double minority state that the Irish island experiences, where a united Ireland would contain an important unionist population that would not wish to be part of the Irish state, and partition into 1920 left a considerable nationalist community trapped in the state of Northern Ireland (Laffan, 2018).

The political organization set out in 1998 in the Belfast Agreement was based on a 'three-chain' approach in which a complex set of governing arrangements was established, with the Northern Ireland Assembly being supported by two structures to facilitate cooperation with the Republic of Ireland on the one hand, and relations with the United Kingdom on the other. (González R. , 2015). For the above, two bodies were established: The North South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council (Espiau, 2010). So three approaches were configured: a power-sharing government within Northern Ireland, institutional links on a North-South basis between the Assembly of Northern Ireland and Dail Eireann, and East-West institutional links between British and Irish (Mantilla, 2014).

This system has had a significant development during the twenty years of the implementation of the Agreement, in particular the Northern Ireland Assembly; Despite

having been suspended in 2002 due to a collapse in the peace process and restored again in 2007 thanks to the joint work of the British and Irish governments through the St. Andrews Agreement, the Assembly slowly became an organ of crucial importance in Northern Ireland (Archick, 2015). When the Assembly ended in 2011, this institution already had extraordinary powers within Northern Ireland (in many respects beyond the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom Parliament) and had additionally made Northern Ireland the sub-region with the greatest representation within the United Kingdom. (Community Relations Council, 2012). In the same way, it is important to highlight its "consociational" character, in which all the political parties form a great coalition with seats granted in accordance with the electoral force, an aspect that makes it especially inclusive. (Community Relations Council, 2018).

However, the First Report of the Community Relations Council presented in 2012, which analyzed the period 1998-2011, indicated that the weighting of votes within the Assembly had proved not to be as inclusive in the process of sharing power as it was originally assumed. This was mainly due to the fact that the most important decisions began to be taken by the Executive without the approval of the Assembly, and since the executive was mainly composed of representatives of Sinn Fein and the DUP (in a proportion of 26% and 30%, respectively), power was centralized in this duopoly without accommodating alternative views of the smaller parts of the Assembly, which eventually diminished the centrality of the Assembly as a decision-making body in 2012 (Community Relations Council, 2012).

From that moment, the public perception of the achievements of the Assembly began to deteriorate, if in 2010 citizens considered that the work of the Assembly had contributed to improve relations between Catholics and Protestants, for 2016 they considered that it had achieved less than previous years and that did not guarantee to give voice to ordinary citizens (Community Relations Council, 2016). What at one time was the focus of a gathering of the different political postures and narratives that advocated peace, leaving aside resentment and violence, would become an institution more symbolic than effective. It should be noted, however, that the 2007-2011 Assembly was the first in forty years to complete a period of time. (Community Relations Council, 2013).

2.2 Transitional Justice

Regarding the Return back in 1998, the transferred powers allowed Northern Ireland to make autonomous decisions on matters such as social and health services, education, agriculture, social security and pensions, economic development, local government, environmental issues , transport, culture and sports, police surveillance justice, among others (Fisas, 2010). These powers differ from reserved powers (such as international trade, financial markets and telecommunications) and excepted powers (such as the Constitution, Royal succession, international relations, defense, elections, taxes and currency) in that they cannot be transferred unless they are under intercommunity consent or primary legislation, respectively. (Torrance, 2018).

However, these powers have not remained intact during the first years of the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. From 1998 to 2002 the Assembly and the Executive would lose some powers such as police and justice functions due to political instability derived mainly from issues related to the disarmament of IRAs and sectarian violence. (Fenton, 2018). Once the Assembly was suspended in 2002, several years of constant confrontation and political uncertainty followed, which would not culminate until the disarmament of the IRA in 2005 (although the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defense Association remained armed). After this, there were multiple obstacles faced by the Northern Ireland political organization, both because of the suspension of the delegated institutions and because of the four Westminster Direct Rule between 2000 and 2007.

However, thanks to the St. Andrews Agreement in 2006, the Hillsborough Castle Agreement in 2010 and the Stormont House Agreement in 2014, it can be said, in line with Torrance (2018) that between 2006 and 2016 there was a period of stability. The following table shows a tendency towards balance between political parties in the Assembly between 1998 and 2017, it is necessary to point out that in this last year a number of 108 members was passed to 90, and it is precisely in this year in which the powers are distributed more equitably between the two main parties, so it can be said that this change greatly benefited the Sin Fein.:

Table 2. Composition of the Northern Ireland Assembly between 1998 and 2017.

	Voting percentage (%)						Seats won					
	1998	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**	**2016**	**2017**	**1998**	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**	**2016**	**2017**
DUP	18.1%	25.3%	30.1%	30.0%	29.2%	28.1%	20	30	36	38	38	38
Sinn Féin	17.6%	23.2%	26.2%	26.9%	24.0%	27.9%	18	24	28	29	28	27
UUP	21.3%	22.3%	14.9%	13.2%	12.6%	12.9%	28	27	18	16	16	10
SDLP	22.0%	16.7%	15.2%	14.2%	12.0%	11.9%	24	18	16	14	12	12
Alliance Party	6.5%	3.6%	5.2%	7.7%	7.0%	9.1%	6	6	7	8	8	8
Unionist Party of the United Kingdom	4.5%	0.8%	1.5%	-	-	-	5	1	0	-	-	-
NIWC	1.6%	0.8%	-	-	-	-	2	0	-	-	-	-
PUP	2.5%	1.1%	0.6%	0.2%	0.9%	0.7%	2	1	1	0	0	0
People Before Profit	-	-	0.1%	0.8%	2.0%	1.8%	-	-	0	0	2	1
TUV	-	-	-	2.5%	3.4%	2.6%	-	-	-	1	1	1
UKIP	-	-	-	0.6%	1.5%	0.2%	-	-	-	0	0	0
Green Party	0.1%	0.4%	1.7%	0.9%	2.7%	2.3%	0	0	1	1	2	2
Others	5.8%	5.6%	4.4%	2.8%	4.8%	2.7%	3	1	1	1	1	1

Source: Taken from Torrance (2018)

Nowadays in Northern Ireland there are various factions and parties more or less related to cultural and religious aspects. On the one hand, there are the unionist parties that have historically represented the majority in the Assembly, as Solovitas states (2010) Although the unionist parties cannot be considered as a homogeneous whole, they all share the idea of maintaining union with the United Kingdom. According to the author, the unionist parties can be divided between "those who consider the union as guarantor of their religious-cultural hegemony, and on the other, those who simply consider Northern Ireland as one more region of the United Kingdom." (p. 5) Among the unionist parties, the most important are the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP).

On the other hand, are the nationalist political parties, whose common point lies in the aspiration to create a United Ireland that incorporates both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. The two most important nationalist parties are the Social Democratic and Labor Party and Sinn Féin, and at the end of the 1980s they would initiate a process of talks to articulate efforts towards achieving peace. Solovitas (2010) affirms that at present "most nationalist political parties support a consensus political program between the two governments [Ireland and the United Kingdom] and the representatives of all political parties in Northern Ireland." (p. 6)

In particular, it is worth highlighting the role that Sinn Féin has played, which, as noted, has increased its level of political participation in the Norwegian Assembly. Sinn Féin, which in Irish translates "ourselves", is a political party that for a long time was widely regarded as the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), although since the 1990s both organizations emphasized their separation (Cowell & Arthur, 2018). Sinn Féin has a presence in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and its main objective is to end the political partition of the island of Ireland, embodying an ideology that is characterized in various ways such as nationalism and republicanism, also advocates for democratic socialism (Cowell & Arthur, 2018).

After the Belfast Agreement Sinn Féin would scale up to become the largest nationalist party. In the year 2000, when IRA agreed to allow the international inspection of its weapons deposits, the full inclusion of Sinn Féin in the Executive was allowed, and it became the fourth largest party in the Assembly with two ministerial positions in the Executive. In 2003 it would surpass the SDLP in seats and in 2010, in the British general elections of 2010, it became the party with the highest number of votes in Northern Ireland in a British general election (Cowell & Arthur, 2018).

Today, Sinn Féin continues to advocate the unification of the 26 counties of the Republic of Ireland and the six counties of Northern Ireland into a single socialist-democratic Irish republic, and has also spoken out against the British militarization of Northern Ireland and the treatment of nationalists in the province by the British government, the British army and the police force, which is largely made up of Protestants. (Cowell & Arthur, 2018). Sinn Féin is characterized by a strong local organization and a solid structure centered on the Central Committee, which manages party affairs. It should be noted that Sinn Féin has a policy of inclusion of women, which advocates that the Committee should be composed of at least a quarter of them; it is also very popular with young people. (Cowell & Arthur, 2018).

During this period (which would culminate in the Brexit referendum, which would again congest the Northern Irish political system), the only point that failed to reach a concrete agreement between the various factions was the transfer of police and justice powers to the Executive, as the Republicans did not show confidence in this body. This fact changed

in 2008 when republican dissidents murdered three police officers and the then deputy prime minister Martin McGuinness, who belonged to Sinn Féin, spoke out against the fact and treated dissidents as "traitors", this fact would take for granted the commitment of Sinn Féin and the republicans with the agreements. (Fenton, 2018).

2.3 Opposition and dissent

However, in the years following the signing of the Agreement, attacks by the IRA and paramilitary groups continued to appear. Nevertheless, the government declared that, despite the fact that they were still operating, in violation of their declaration that they had laid down their arms, their leaders were committed to political objectives achieved through peaceful means. (Torrance, 2018). The initial problem was that, despite the demands of the various parties and political leaders, peace negotiations in Northern Ireland began without armed groups handing over their weapons, which formed a post-agreement stage that instead of being marked by reconciliation became an uncomfortable peace, a non-violent conflict with no real solutions. (Laffan, 2018).

Despite advances in political terms, dissent and violence continue to be a constant in Northern Ireland. As Edwards's points out (2019) the continued presence of violent groups on both sides of the ethnic division points to broader imperfections in the peace process. According to the author, the increase in violence evidenced in recent years is not explained as much as a result of the uncertainty generated by Brexit but, mainly, as a phenomenon that emanates from both the Irish Republicans and those loyal to the Ulster due to the imperfections in the peace process.

According to Edwards (2019) by March 2019 there were 156 security-related deaths, of which militant Republicans were responsible for less than half while loyal militants accounted for half; although figures show that compared to 1998, political attacks were considerably reduced, ideologies and methods of the old political violence prior to the Belfast Agreement still persist. For Edwards (2019) The radicalization of young loyalists evidenced in recent years, mainly since the flag protests in 2012, is explained by the lack of political education of these, who were born in the years after the signing of the Agreements did not

live the most difficult time of political violence, which leads to little historical awareness and a reuse of old terrorist methods.

For the Troubles period, in addition to the violent intra-state and inter-community conflict in the form of shootings and bombings, paramilitary groups were also involved in assaults and shootings against what they call antisocial elements, as well as in illegal activities designed to raise funds (including protection payments, smuggling, fuel laundering, collection of voluntary contributions). However, with the signing of the agreement their activity was reduced exclusively to purely criminal acts, more in the style of a gang than a paramilitary group. (Turizo, 2005).

Today, although all of the major paramilitary groups that operated during the Troubles period continue to exist, the most serious threat in the region comes from dissident Republican groups. (Community Relations Council, 2018). However, there is a marked reduction in violent actions due to The Troubles compared to 1998:
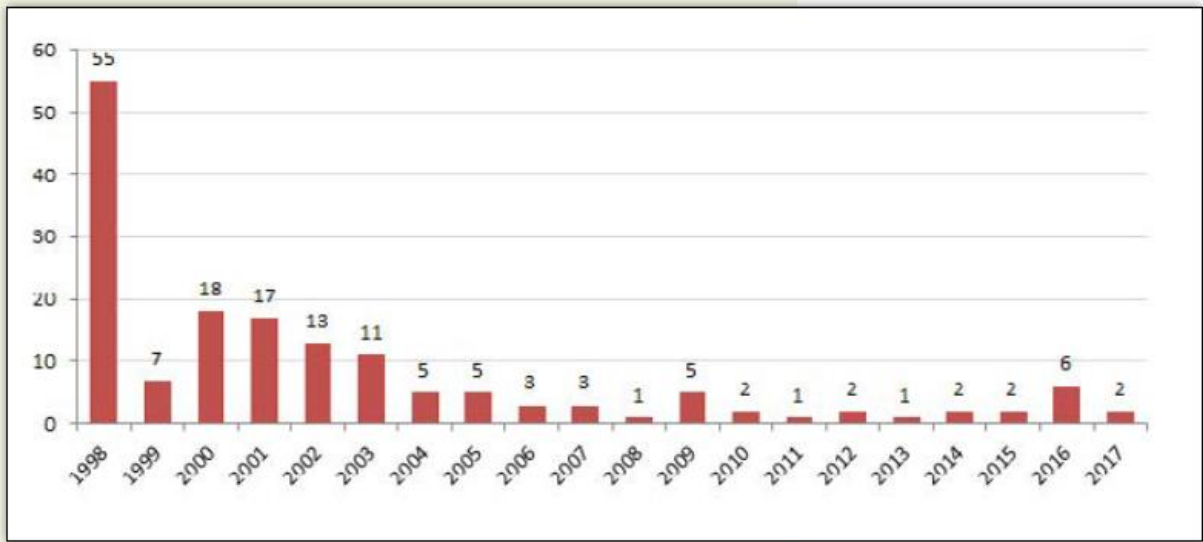

Figure 1. Assassinations attributed to paramilitary groups for motives derived from The Troubles.

Source: Taken from the Fifth Report of the Community Relations Council (2018).

On the justice and reparation of the victims to date, no acceptable mechanism has been found to complete investigations into murders related to the time of The Troubles.

According to the latest report of the Community Relations Council, presented in 2018, the problem related to this issue focuses on the fact that it is possible that in an in-depth investigation into the murders committed in the context of the period of violence, former members of the army are judged British who served in Northern Ireland, a situation that naturally does not please the British government and most of the unionists. In the following figure, it is evident that the population is divided into this subject according to their religious identity:

Table 3. Approval percentage against the possibility that members of the British army will not be prosecuted for their actions in The Troubles.

	Total percentage	Catholic percentage	Protestant percentage	Percentage without religion
Strongly agree	15	1	30	12
Agree	21	9	31	23
Neither agree nor disagree	19	22	13	23
Disagree	18	27	10	19
Strongly disagree	13	22	6	9
I cannot choose	15	18	9	14

Source: Taken from the Fifth Report of the Community Relations Council (2018)

In fact, both the unionists and the British government have advocated the protection of the security forces, based on the Covenant by the Armed Forces, so a general amnesty was proposed for them, however, as stated in the report, it is not possible for a law of this type to prosper. (Community Relations Council, 2018). Amnesty plays a fundamental role in this process as investigating human rights violations and abuses during the conflict is fundamental to establishing the truth and ensuring justice, such elements are essential to addressing impunity in Northern Ireland and ensuring meaningful and lasting peace. (Amnesty Internacional, 2013).

Amnesties are designed to promote the fulfillment of a state with its legal obligations and at the same time meet its broader policy objectives, such as ending conflict or repression, restoring public order and stability, establishing democratic structures. and the rule of law, deal with the underlying causes of conflict or repression and promote reconciliation and sustainable peace (Transitional Justice Institute, 2013).

2.4 News and political stalemate

However, in 2017 the UN Special Rapporteur, who visited London and Northern Ireland on an Amnesty International mission, pointed out that in the face of the Norwegian issue, the absence of a comprehensive approach to deal with the past and to correct the legacy of violations and abuses that emerged during the decades of political violence (Amnesty International, 2017). The Rapporteur points out that this failure is felt at the individual level in the dissatisfaction of the victims and families, at the social level due to the social fractures that continue to exist, at the political level because the scenario remains deeply polarized and at the institutional level due to the enormous burdens about the entities (Amnesty International, 2017). In this regard, Amnesty International and the UN argue that it is essential to design an approach to dealing with Northern Ireland's past, where the principles of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition are understood as part of a comprehensive policy to redress the negative legacy of violations and abuses.

First, Amnesty International argues (2017) that any mechanism for investigating past human rights violations and abuses needs to incorporate procedures to ensure both the appearance and reality of independence and impartiality, as one of the current obstacles to progress in establishing mechanisms for investigating past human rights abuses and violations is the UK government's insistence on retaining a national security veto to prevent the disclosure of information to families and victims.

Secondly, Amnesty International (2017) argues that there is an urgent need for greater attention to be paid to how mechanisms or instruments could better investigate the more structural and systemic dimensions of the violence and rights violations that characterized

the context in Northern Ireland. This is something that should be seen as a complement, not a substitute for mechanisms that can provide satisfaction to victims in terms of truth and justice. Thirdly, Amnesty International (2017) argues that there is a need to analyze the impact of gender-related violations and abuses arising from The Troubles and that such analysis should be integrated into policy making, something that has been seriously lacking in the years of implementation. Attention must also be paid to serious cases of rights violations such as illegal detentions, injuries, serious harm and torture. These mechanisms must be able to ensure that all allegations of human rights violations and abuses committed in the past are investigated promptly, impartially, independently, thoroughly and effectively; they must also investigate general patterns of abuse by state and non-state actors so that those responsible can be identified at all levels and the right of victims to an effective remedy, including full redress, can be guaranteed. (Amnesty International, 2017).

On the other hand, the political stalemate has also affected other issues related to issues of tolerance, including the inability to deal with the accumulation of inquiries related to The Troubles; the inherited investigations draw attention, as the unionist parties consider that those currently in charge of such work have a preference for trying crimes committed by the security forces and the nationalist parties do not admit the possibility of initiating a trial process until all the parties involved are included. (Archick, 2015). Indeed, according to the Community Relations Council (2018) .The collapse of the Executive in 2017 was due in large part to the fact that the Sin Fein front rejected the refusal of the DUP to approve the financing of inherited investigations. In the face of reparation, the discussions are no less complex since the proposal of a pension for victims with serious physical injuries has been shocked by the lack of characterization of the persons eligible for said pension. In particular, the unionists have rejected the proposal as they refuse to repair any person related to terrorism.

Along the same lines, the process of reintegration of ex-combatants does not have great progress, which is largely due to the fact that the Belfast Agreement did not contain a detailed plan for the demobilization and reintegration of combatants, there was only an accelerated program for the release of prisoners with political motives (White, 2013). Since liberation by itself did not guarantee adequate integration into civil life, many of them ended up unemployed (although it is noteworthy that the crime recidivism rate was much lower in

the demobilized in the Irish case than in other parts of the world). To this must be added that the former prisoners were denied access to public service vehicle licenses that allowed them to work as taxi drivers, they could not claim compensation for injuries under criminal injury legislation, they could not access loans for creation from small businesses, they could not welcome or adopt children and visas were continually refused to visit countries like the United States and Australia (Rolston, 2007).

While the Belfast Agreement recognized the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community through support both before and after release, including assistance aimed at taking advantage of employment, training and higher education opportunities, this it was not evident in practice. The low state funding was one of the main reasons for this failure, as much of the achievements were made thanks to EU-funded programs. Professor Rolston (2007) points out that the work of former prisoner groups contributed significantly to the training, supported the "healing" process, revealed a broad level of community participation, involved participants in a manner consistent with the best community development practices at the international level and encouraged self-help. Along the same line, Clubb (2016) states that the strength of the reintegration process was the experience of ex-combatants which allowed them to participate in conflict transformation, restorative justice, a project to discourage the recruitment of young people and the demilitarization of communities, all of which has played an important role in reducing intercommunal violence in areas where police penetration is low.

In summary, the failure of the Agreement's reintegration process contrasted with the success in terms of commitment, dedication and reliability of the ex-prisoners, who took much of the prison's learning from the ideals of self-help, mutual aid and community development and applied it to their reintegration process. Professor Rolston (2007) He points out that the Irish case provides a lesson on how not to carry out a DDR strategy (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration), especially in relation to the way in which the dismantling fixation hindered political progress for more than a decade. This fixation refers to the emphasis that was placed on the disarmament of IRA while leaving other groups aside, this led to a double opposite position between Sinn Fein and the DUP, and for the former it was necessary to guarantee a normalization before delivering the weapons, while

for the unionists, disarmament was essential to achieve this normalization. According to Rolston (2007) The failure of the DDR in Northern Ireland was due to a lack of political will and not having taken as a reference successful international experiences, what the former prisoners needed was not a narrowly defined reintegration, but a solid reconstruction program and recognition of their skills and political wisdom as an essential element for community development.

However, since the problem evidenced by Brexit there has been a clear lack of commitment to the three-line approach proposed in the Good Friday Agreement. Both internal relations between the various political sectors of the Norwegian government, as well as relations between Belfast and Dublin, and between Dublin and London have deteriorated, since the structures established to manage them or were suspended or have failed to ensure the necessary political support for work (Community Relations Council, 2018).

On Brexit, it is necessary to mention that the accession of both the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom to the European Union in 1973 provided the scaffolding for a notable improvement in British-Irish relations, in the same way, this act played a vital role in the resolution of conflicts in Northern Ireland and in the mediation of relations between the two islands (Wilson, 2016). The 1998 Agreement had transformed, at the hands of the EU, a disputed barrier filled with customs posts, checkpoints and towers of the British army, into a shared space with little visual evidence of division. At present, the Irish border has an extension of 500 km with 208 border crossings (a number much greater than the 137 crossings of the eastern border of the Union) and is configured as the only land border in the United Kingdom, hence its complexity (Laffan, 2018).

The problem around Brexit is manifested, as Laffan argues (2018) from three axes: the peace process (involving British-Irish relations and the shared border), the volume of economic and social exchange between the United Kingdom and Ireland and the common travel area. While the Irish government opts for a negotiated solution to the problem in which its only request is the evasion of a hard border, the EU advocates the same but without this being against its legal and commercial system, this means that it must be avoided at all costs that the United Kingdom use the "soft" Irish border and the status of Northern Ireland to

obtain privileged access to the EU market "through the back door". (Laffan, 2018). This problem is in an apparent impasse, since the United Kingdom has no intention of negotiating the border problem and the EU does not propose the possibility of negotiating alternatives that involve the flexibilization of its commercial system.

Since 2017 Northern Ireland has been in a crisis of representation as it does not have fully functioning delegated institutions and the resurgence of dissidents such as the New IRA reinforces the already existing partisan conflicts. (Byers, 2019). Similarly, issues such as the decriminalization of abortion and same-sex marriage are widely discussed today because both the Republic of Ireland and the other nations of the United Kingdom have much more progressive positions on these issues. (Torrance, 2018).

In general terms, with the exception of some crises between 2011 and 2013 (such as the flag crisis and the failure to change the Assembly), the political scene in Northern Ireland achieved relative stability until the clash with Brexit, the which opened new and old discussions about the independence of the nation (McCall, 2019). Both the May 2016 Assembly elections, as well as the result of the Brexit referendum in June of the same year, tested the fragile political stability of the Norwegian government, showing deep divisions and disputes that have resulted in problems such as the region not having delegated governments since January 2017 (Community Relations Council, 2018).

In general, most of the Northern Irish electorate voted to remain (56%) a trend similar to that found in Scotland, where 62% voted to remain part of the EU, however, the voting population of Scotland and Northern Ireland, they barely add up to more than 10% of the United Kingdom (where Northern Ireland contributes only 2.3%), therefore, although the majority of the electorate in Northern Ireland did not want to lose the material, symbolic and tangible benefits of EU membership , should take care of the decisions made by the majority located in England. Both the return in Northern Ireland and Scotland would be violated with the Brexit referendum, because although both nations voted mostly to remain in the European Union, the British government would take as valid the general vote obtained in the four nations and ratify the exit definitive, which would go against the provisions and autonomy of those nations (Vidal, 2019). And although the Irish government, the EU and a large part

of the British government advocated (and continue to advocate) the maintenance of a soft border, the latter does not have the tools to propose alternatives that would, at the same time, allow it to withdraw from the EU legal system and maintain an open border in Ireland. (Mitchell, 2017).

In addition, Brexit showed that the population within Northern Ireland is deeply divided, nationalists or Catholics voted overwhelmingly (80%) to stay and unionists were divided, with only 40% voting to stay. (Wilson, 2016). As Laffan states (2018) the referendum served as a reminder to the two communities in Northern Ireland that they were deeply divided on core political issues.
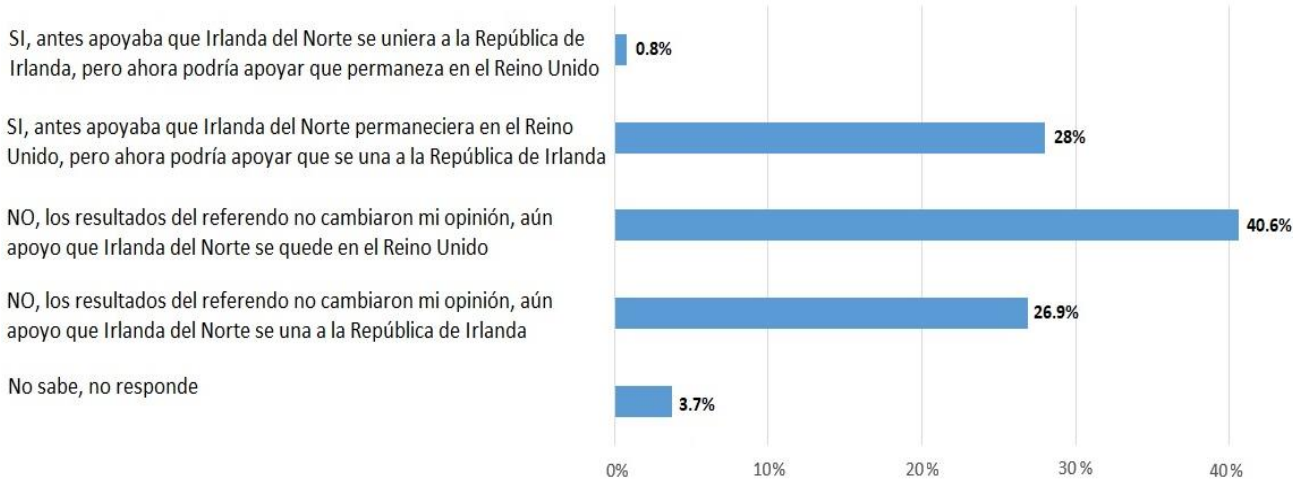

Figure 2. Change of opinion after the Brexit referendum.

Source: Taken from the Fifth Report of the Community Relations Council (2018)

The repercussions of these results may be a resurgence of political violence, since with an un negotiated exit from Brexit, this is a "hard border", the most radical sectors of nationalism, who voted for Sinn Fein, could begin a season of protests, mainly towards border controls, which may end in a violent escalation. The problem lies mainly in the fact that, despite the decisive positions of the British government, it has failed to propose an alternative to the problem. The Brexit Task Force would propose in 2018 a roadmap composed of three options;

1) Maintain relations between the EU and the United Kingdom.

2) If this is not possible, the United Kingdom must propose specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland.

3) In the absence of agreed solutions, the United Kingdom will maintain full alignment with those rules of the internal market and the customs union that, now or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the economy of all islands and the protection of the 1998 Agreement. (Laffan, 2018).

However, the British government has not submitted any proposal to guarantee compliance with the Agreement and the benefits obtained by both nations; Although the central point of the Brexit discussion is respect for each of the provisions of the Agreement, in practice the United Kingdom does not seem to dimension the responsibility and consequences in terms of security, economic, political and social that such a decision can carry.

Conclusions

To finalize this document, it can be concluded that the peace process in Northern Ireland has been quite slow and with many obstacles. Even after 20 years of its signature, it has not been possible to fully establish or reduce the rates of violence as expected at that time. Likewise, national identity is identified as one of the structural problems that begins the armed conflict in this country, since religious and ideological diversity and lack of tolerance has not allowed consensus within and unity within the population.

On the other hand, although the events that occurred after the signing of the agreement reveal the political intention of maintaining the agreement and achieving a future peace evidenced in agreements such as "Fresh Start Agreement" and "Stormont House Agreement" where non-violent exits were sought to the obstacles that appeared on the road; In practice, political and social indicators reflect deep crises that do not solve the country's underlying problems and often threaten to reverse the process and return to a previous state, as is the case of Brexit, which is currently presented as the most important point of debate in both the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The political balance allowed us to conclude that although there was a profound transformation in terms of organization and balance of powers between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, it also highlighted the fragility of the Northern Irish state, as there were few interventions by the British in the North Irish affairs by question of irremediable internal crises. Similarly, the incorporation of all political parties, including those with strong ties to paramilitary groups, all things being equal, was a risky move, given that the Norwegian conflict is based primarily on the denial of the other.

Although the work of the Assembly was repeatedly halted and its prestige was declining over time, and although the executive is currently collapsed by not having a delegated government; The role played by this body has been fundamental for the maintenance of the Belfast Agreements. Therefore, although it is often an institution with more symbolic than practical value, the truth is that it has been the gateway and the reference for the consolidation of the country's political structure. So nowadays the Norwegian issue

does not go unnoticed in the debate by Brexit, being configured as the center of the discussion at this time.

This status is due in large part to the work done by the multiple dependencies of the government of Northern Ireland, who have made a great effort to enforce the 1998 Agreement, regardless of the difficulties that this entails. Beyond the dissent and attacks of dissident groups, the resistance of many leaders, including former members of armed groups, is an example to be followed for the resolution of conflicts, just as the reinserted express and the community do usually.

Finally, it can be said that the example of Northern Ireland is fundamental to understand the way in which a peace process configured from an ethno-religious conflict works. The Norwegian experience, which also covers the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (and recently also the EU) is particular because of its inclusive nature, the years of negotiation resulted in a solid political structure based on consensus and respect for the another, in a country where politics was marked precisely by the difference, this aspect is noteworthy.

Finally, given the large number of bibliographic references found, it is also evident how Northern Ireland is a source for research and learning for future peace processes, since, from the experience of the latter, they have learned what should be done and what not, as for example, that for any agreement it is imperative the delivery of weapons during the negotiation process or the first years after signing the agreement, and not, as in that country, that the demobilization took a large number of years and brought with it certain diplomatic crises.

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