CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The embarrassments of Irish nationalist commemorations for Western Europe, from Fontenoy in 1907 to the Easter Rising in 1966
Authors	aan de Wiel, Jérôme
Publication date	2016
Original Citation	aan de Wiel, J. (2016) 'The embarrassments of Irish nationalist commemorations for Western Europe, from Fontenoy in 1907 to the Easter Rising in 1966', Irish Studies in International Affairs, 27, pp. 85-107. doi:10.3318/ISIA.2016.27.1
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.3318/ISIA.2016.27.1
Rights	© 2016, Royal Irish Academy.
Download date	2026-11-07 10:20:14
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/4843



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

The Embarrassments of Irish Nationalist Commemorations for Western Europe, from Fontenoy in 1907 to the Easter Rising in 1966

Jérôme aan de Wiel

School of History, University College Cork

ABSTRACT

The commemorations of the Battle of Fontenoy of 1745 and the Easter Rising of 1916 were major events for Irish nationalism and separatism. For Western European governments of the European Economic Community (EEC), however, they could cause serious diplomatic embarrassments in their relations with the United Kingdom. The same commemorations could also be politically manipulated. Much depended on the contemporary international situation. This article examines how these two commemorations were perceived and handled by the governments of France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and (West) Germany from 1907 until 1966, and also by the Irish government notably at the time of its application for EEC membership. The article also shows how the diplomatic corps of the EEC member states based in Dublin analysed the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 and formed the opinion that the event was not a grandiose display of Irish nationalism or anti-British sentiment.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Decade of Centenaries' (2012–22), commemorating and remembering the Irish revolutionary period of 1912–22, has triggered many debates and produced much literature among historians, politicians, journalists and members of the public. The Irish government's desire to mark this decade, the initiatives it has proposed to do so, and the responses they have generated are lively, and certainly not above controversy. How should the participation of tens of thousands of Irishmen in the British army during the First World War and the rising of Irish republicans against the same British army in April

Author's e-mail: J.AanDeWiel@ucc.ie

Irish Studies in International Affairs, Vol. 27 (2016), 1–23.

doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2016.27.1

1916 be remembered? How should these events be commemorated?[1] It has been argued that

> if a national culture is to remain alive, its history too must live in some distinctive way and must be perceived as integral to the lives of those who share it. This helps to define their sense of collective identity, gives them confidence, lets them know where they are.[2]

This is why regular commemorations of historic events are considered so important by governments and politicians. Also, the act of commemorating is a way to deal with current political problems.[3]

These ideas apply to Ireland and her tumultuous relations with Britain. During the twentieth century, commemorations of two events were used by Irish nationalists to show their difference and independence from Britain: the Battle of Fontenoy of 1745 and the Easter Rising of 1916. The fact that these particular events were commemorated, however, had the potential to cause much embarrassment for the founding member states of the European Economic Community (EEC), well before the creation of the latter. In fact, reactions abroad depended on the international situation at the time and, for some European states, on the nature of their relations with Britain. For example, while the rising was going on in Dublin, a young Breton painted *Vive l'Irlande* on walls in Rennes, the capital of Brittany,[4] a French province with separatist tendencies.

The aim of this article is to analyse the attitude of some Western European countries to the commemorations of Fontenoy from 1907 to the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966. The Irish government had decided that the fiftieth anniversary should be celebrated not only at home, but also in the various capitals of the EEC member states. How did the different capitals in Western Europe react to these commemorations, and how did the diplomatic corps in Dublin analyse the fiftieth anniversary? Also, why did Seán Lemass's government take the decision to have the Irish diplomatic representations in the EEC member states involved in the anniversary?

[1]Department of the Taoiseach, 'National Commemorations Programme: Decade of Centenaries, 2012–2022', available at: http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/News/Archives/2012/Government_Press_Releases_2012/National_Commemorations_Programme_Decade_of_Centenaries,_2012–2022.html (14 November 2014); 'Wear your shamrock, lily and poppy with pride. We can celebrate our release from enslavement of narrow nationalist bigotry', *Irish Independent*, 9 November 2014, available at: http://www.independent.ie/opinion/columnists/ruth-dudley-edwards/wear-your-shamrock-lily-and-poppy-with-pride-30729216.html (14 November 2014); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Ambassador Mulhall's lecture at Liverpool University Institute of Irish Studies', available at: https://www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/great-britain/news-and-events/2014/ambassador-mulhall-lecture-liverpool-university/ (14 November 2014); '1916 Relatives Association criticises lack of centenary plan', *The Irish Times*, 13 October 2014, available at: http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/1916-relatives-association-criticises-lack-of-centenary-plan-1.1961070 (14 November 2014); 'Government plans major campaign for 1916 centenary', *The Irish Times*, 12 November 2014, available at: http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/government-plans-major-campaign-for-1916-centenary-1.1997139 (14 November 2014). The above-mentioned articles are only a very small sample of the abundant literature existing on the subject.

[2]C. Beveridge and R. Turnbull, *The eclipse of Scottish culture: inferiorism and the intellectuals* (Edinburgh, 1989), 16, quoted in Eberhard Bort (ed.), *Commemorating Ireland: history, politics, culture* (Dublin, 2004), 'Introduction', 2.

[3]John Bodnar, *Remaking America: public memory, commemoration, and patriotism in the twentieth century* (New Jersey, 1994), quoted in Bort (ed.), *Commemorating Ireland*, 'Introduction', 3.

[4]Daniel Leach, '"Repaying a debt of gratitude": minority nationalists and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966', *Éire–Ireland* 43 (3 and 4) (Fall/Winter 2008), 267–89: 267.

FONTENOY, ENTENTE CORDIALE, THE EASTER RISING AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Battle of Fontenoy, which took place in Belgium in 1745, played an important role in the Irish nationalist psyche. It was there that Louis XV's French army, under the command of Marshal de Saxe, beat the Anglo-Dutch-Austrian army led by the English Duke of Cumberland. Victory for the French came at the very end of the battle when they decided to send forward Irish regiments, the so-called 'Wild Geese', who carried the day.[5] Ever since, commemoration of the battle has been an annual highlight for Irish nationalism. The nineteenth-century nationalist poet and Young Irelander Thomas Davis immortalised the event in his poem 'The Battle of Fontenoy'. He depicts how, at the last moment, the Irish repulsed the English advance on the French line:

> On through the camp the column trod—King Louis turns his rein,
> 'Not yet my liege', Saxe interposed, 'the Irish troops remain',
> And Fontenoy, proud Fontenoy, had been a Waterloo,
> Were not these exiles ready then, fresh, vehement and true.[6]

While travelling in Belgium in the later part of the nineteenth century, the Irish writer and journalist Eugene Davis went to Fontenoy. The first time he was there was in 1878, when he met a centenarian who had served in Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. The old veteran showed him where the battle had taken place and explained that his grand-uncle had fought with de Saxe. He admired the fighting quality of the Irish and told Davis something that might not have crossed many a French or continental mind at the time:

> The Irish had always a chivalrous love for France, and I have often felt aggrieved that France does not appreciate that affection better. We have only given Ireland Hoche and Humbert and a few battalions; Ireland has given us half a million of men, who died in the defence of our country.[7]

Whatever the exact number of Irishmen who volunteered to serve in the French army, there were indeed strong relations between the two countries, forged through military and religious links. The veteran had made a pertinent remark, as most of the nineteenth century was not a good period for Franco-Irish relations.[8] Notable exceptions were periods within the Second Empire when Paris became a refuge for certain Irish nationalists and during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 when nationalist Ireland wholeheartedly supported France.[9] In December 1970, the French government decided to commemorate the help given by the Irish regiments in 1870 during a visit by a French official to Dublin.[10] The intention was to re-strengthen Franco-Irish links, because by that time relations

[5]David Chandler (ed.), *A guide to the battlefields of Europe* (Ware, 1998), 16–20.

[6]Martin Mansergh, 'Ireland and Europe—a new balance', in Dermot Keogh (ed.), *Ireland and the challenge of European integration* (Cork and Dublin, 1989), 93–118: 95–6.

[7]Eugene Davis, *Souvenirs of Irish footprints over Europe* (Dublin, 2006), 66–8; edited by Owen McGee, first published in 1889.

[8]See Jérôme aan de Wiel, 'The long rupture, 1870–1970: the darker side of Franco-Irish relations', *International History Review*, February 2014, 1–18.

[9]See Janick Julienne's illuminating article 'La France et l'Irlande nationaliste de 1860 à 1890: évolution et mutation de liens multiséculaires', *Études Irlandaises* 24 (1) (printemps 1999), 123–36.

[10]Affaires étrangères-Archives diplomatiques, La Courneuve, formerly located in the Quai d'Orsay, Paris (hereafter cited as as AEAD), Europe 1944–, Irlande, vol. 51, Maurice Schumann, foreign minister, to Emmanuel d'Harcourt, French ambassador in Dublin, 28 October 1970, and d'Harcourt to Schumann, 18 November 1970. See also Auswärtiges Amt-Politisches Archiv (hereafter cited as AA-PA), Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 376, Karl Kuno Overbeck, German ambassador to Ireland, to Foreign Office, 19 December 1970.

had indeed grown distant.[11] In 1848, the Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa had been bitterly disappointed by Alphone de Lamartine, one of the revolutionary French leaders, who said that Ireland could not rely on France for her struggle for independence.[12] After the Parisian Commune of 1871, the new Third Republic proved to be very anti-clerical and this considerably upset Irish nationalists and Catholics.[13] Furthermore, the Irish themselves seemed not always to be aware of what their contribution had been to France and other continental countries through the centuries. In June 1954, the *Irish Times* published an article entitled 'Irish debt to France', in which it was stated: 'not only had France sheltered the political exiles known as the Wild Geese, but they had given enormous help to the Catholic clergy'.[14] While this was certainly true, it was equally true that Ireland had largely repaid this debt with her soldiers.

Today, on the wall of the local cemetery of Fontenoy a plaque written in English and in French reads: 'In memory of the heroic Irish soldiers who changed defeat into victory at Fontenoy, May 11 1745. God save Ireland'. There is also a Celtic high cross in the middle of the village, which was inaugurated in 1907. The inauguration caused some serious diplomatic activity. The French consul at Tournai, a nearby town, reported to his ambassador in Brussels that some Irish nationalists had the intention of inaugurating the monument. He asked the ambassador whether it would be reasonable if French citizens attended the ceremony and reminded him that in 1903 the Foreign Ministry had strongly advised against the participation of French citizens in a similar commemoration, as 'the occasion was essentially an Anglophobe display', and Edward VII, the English king, was visiting Paris at the time. The ambassador confirmed that French participation in the 1907 event should be dissuaded.[15] The French had some very good reasons for suddenly keeping Irish nationalists, their old allies, at a distance. In April 1904, France had signed the Entente Cordiale with Britain. Although this was not a military alliance as such, it was clear that it was directed against Imperial Germany. The Entente was a major realignment in the European alliance system as, after centuries of rivalry and war, France and Britain were now nominal allies. It forced Irish separatists, anxious to shake off British rule, to look for foreign allies elsewhere, and they lost very little time in contacting the Germans.[16] The German ambassador in Brussels had also paid attention to the ceremony in Fontenoy and had sent a report to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow. He had written:

> The inauguration of a huge monument took place in Fontenoy yesterday. The monument is dedicated to the memory of the Irish Brigade who fought in the French army against the English during the battle of Fontenoy on 11 May 1745. Present at the ceremony were Irish deputations from Ireland, London and America. Among them, the presence of the Lord Mayor of Dublin was particularly noteworthy. It does not seem that the ceremony had a particularly chauvinistic anti-English character.[17]

[11]aan de Wiel, 'The long rupture', 13–15.

[12]Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, *Rossa's recollections, 1838 to 1898: memoirs of an Irish Revolutionary* (Guilford, CT, 2004; first published in 1898), 134.

[13]Julienne, 'La France et l'Irlande nationaliste de 1860 à 1890', 128–32.

[14]*The Irish Times*, 14 June 1954.

[15]Jérôme aan de Wiel, *The Irish factor, 1899–1919: Ireland's strategic and diplomatic importance for foreign powers* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008), 22–3.

[16]aan de Wiel, *The Irish factor*; see Chapter 2, 'Germany: cruelties in Ireland would be no disaster', 45–86.

[17]AA-PA, England no. 80, R5866, German ambassador, Brussels, to von Bülow, 26 August 1907. (Emphasis as per the original document.)

It might well have been that the ceremony had not been particularly anti-English, but it was obvious that the person who had analysed the report had understood that the Irish might well be used again against the British in the years to come, as the underlined passages tend to show. Roger Casement's ill-fated attempt to set up an Irish Brigade in Germany during the First World War comes to mind.

Irish nationalists were fully aware that the French suddenly considered them an embarrassment. In May 1905, the Breton writer Anatole Le Braz was in Ireland, where he experienced at first hand the importance of the memory of Fontenoy. He got wind of the following story. The lord mayor of Dublin had invited the French consul to attend the annual ceremony. But the consul answered that he could not come as his presence might offend the British. The lord mayor apparently got very upset and answered: 'Yes, if England had invited you to the commemoration of Waterloo, you would have gone!'[18] Unfortunately for the French, their old Irish nationalist allies proved hard to forget. During the First World War, France was anxiously monitoring the political evolution in Ireland as she believed that the country was a serious threat to the security of the United Kingdom, France's main ally against Germany. The French deemed that the British government had been guilty of very bad mismanagement of the war effort and also of political blunders in Ireland. The Easter Rising of April 1916 did not take them aback.

To calm down Irish nationalist passions after the rising and the executions of the republican leaders by the British, and also to boost recruitment figures, the War Office approached General Artus de la Panouse, the French military attaché in London, at the beginning of April 1917. He was asked whether the French would consent to give military decorations to the 16th Irish division and the 36th Ulster division at the front in France. Paul Cambon, the very influential French ambassador to the United Kingdom, recommended that his government accept. He wrote: 'It is hoped that these decorations will have a beneficial effect on Ireland where the internal situation is not satisfying'.[19] In fact, the timing of the War Office's request strongly suggests that it was preoccupied with the first anniversary of the Easter Rising. Those Irish soldiers who were about to receive medals would be decorated for political reasons, not necessarily for their bravery. Among them was Major William Redmond, the brother of the constitutional Nationalist Party leader John Redmond who was struggling to obtain home rule for Ireland. But when William died at the front, the medal was to be given to John instead.[20] The decorations did not produce the desired effect; Ireland continued to be politically unstable and Irishmen remained most reluctant to join the British army.

When Ireland became a free state in 1922, subsequent governments with a strong nationalist ethos applied a policy of economic autarky and isolationism from the rest of Europe. Ireland was neutral during the Second World War, but Britain's economic market continued to be of paramount importance to the country. However, a couple of links with the continent remained. The Consultative Council of Europe, established in Strasbourg in France in 1949, was one. Whereas continental and British members of the council debated about the future of a ruined and destroyed Europe, Irish delegates such as Seán MacBride and Éamon de Valera did not hesitate to turn the assembly into an anti-British and anti-partition platform.[21] The old Celtic cross in Fontenoy was

[18]Anatole Le Braz, *Voyage en Irlande, au Pays de Galles et en Angleterre* (Rennes, 1999), 147–8.
[19]aan de Wiel, *The Irish Factor 1899–1919*, 305–06.
[20]aan de Wiel, *The Irish Factor 1899–1919*, 305–06.
[21]Gary Murphy, '"A wider perspective"': Ireland's view of Western Europe in the 1950s', in Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly (eds), *Irish foreign policy: from independence to internationalism* (Dublin, 2000), 248–50.

another link. The monument had survived two world wars, and in 1947 the Department of External Affairs (DEA) in Dublin asked William P. Fay, the chargé d'affaires in Brussels, to go and inspect it. Fay noticed that it had been very little damaged and then had a rather amazing experience. He wrote:

> The people of the village seem proud to have the monument and are jealous of its good estate. Moreover it performs a service of quiet propaganda. One old woman, who remembered the inauguration of the monument in 1907 was able to sing for me 'A Nation once again' in French; and I understand that the school children are still taught the Irish songs sung on the occasion.[22]

Fay was of the opinion that the Irish government should look after the Celtic cross and opined that Ireland should be proud of 'this memorial for one of the few glorious moments in our 18th Century history'.

Fontenoy was not the only battle in Belgium in which Irish soldiers had participated in the eighteenth century. There was also the battle of Lafelt (or Laeffelt, also known as the battle of Maastricht, and in English sometimes called the battle of Lauffield), which took place on 2 July 1747. The problem by the mid-twentieth century, however, was that the eighteenth-century regiments of Irish exiles had caught the imagination of Flemish nationalists anxious to get rid of French-speaking rulers and to break away from French-speaking Wallonia. One of them was the very influential governor of Limburg, Louis Roppe. Roppe had a passion for Ireland's independence struggle and regularly gave speeches about Irish history.[23] He was also a great admirer of de Valera; so much so that he had a photograph of the Irish leader exhibited in the governmental office of Limburg in Hasselt in 1955. On this occasion, he asked Denis McDonald, the Irish ambassador to Belgium, to send his regards to de Valera and tell him that

> the entire population [of the Province of Limburg] considers him the symbol of Ireland's great and noble struggle which has always been followed in my province with the greatest interest and fellow feeling.[24]

Irish nationalism was a model for Roppe and his followers. In June 1964, Roppe was invited to attend the unveiling of a Celtic high cross in Lafelt on which was written in Dutch *Aan de strijders van de Ierse Brigade* ('to the combatants of the Irish brigade'). Also present were Irish ambassador Frank Biggar and the Cork City Choral Society.[25] During the ceremony, Roppe made a speech in which he compared Ireland and Flanders and said that 'the unveiling of the Celtic cross had been the fruition of the friendship between two peoples. . .'.[26]

West Germany's early post-Second World War difficulties with 1916

What about the post-Second World War celebrations of the Easter Rising of April 1916? The two embassies in Dublin that might have difficulties with commemorating the rising were the British and the West German. The rising

[22]National Archives of Ireland (hereafter cited as NAI), Dublin, Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DFA), Embassy series, Brussels, box 3, B6/17, the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy, Mr McAuley to Fay, 7 June 1947 and Fay to Frederic Boland, DEA, 4 September 1947.

[23]*De Standaard*, 20 January 1955.

[24]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 2, B6/3, Ierse vriendenkring, 1948–1965, Roppe, to McDonald, 10 June 1955.

[25]*Cork Examiner*, 26 June 1964.

[26]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 3, B/6/12, Irish historical links with Belgium, 'Toespraak van Gouverneur L. Roppe, ter gelegenheid van de onthulling van het Ierse kruis te Lafelt, 21 June 64' (copy of speech in Flemish).

had been planned to end British rule in Ireland, with the assistance of Imperial Germany. Now that Western Europe was united in a Cold War, the issue of 1916 could become a tricky one. On 15 April 1952, German Consul-General Dr Hermann Katzenberger reported to Bonn about the Easter Rising parade in Dublin. He gave a rather factual description of the event, praising 'the excellent march discipline' of the Irish troops. About 200,000 people had watched the parade. He wrote that the memory of the independence struggle during the First World War had remained very vivid, especially among the older generations, and that strenuous efforts were made to keep it vivid among the young and the army. Katzenberger added that the diplomatic corps had not been invited to attend the ceremonies.[27] There can be very little doubt that this must have suited him. But if so, his relief was only short-lived.

On 4 August 1953, the West German *Welt* reported that during a ceremony in Ballycastle in Northern Ireland in honour of the memory of Roger Casement, who had negotiated military support with the Imperial German government between 1914 and 1916, 200,000 people had sent a message of thanks to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer for Germany's support of Casement and the Irish republicans.[28] On 3 September, Katzenberger reported that there had been a strong revival of interest in Casement recently. But he explained that Casement remained a 'controversial character', as the Irish considered him a hero and the British a traitor. What if he was invited to attend a ceremony for Casement, he asked? If he accepted it, it would be an insult to the British. If he rejected it, the Irish might be offended. He had not been invited yet, but it remained a distinct possibility. There would then be a conflict of interests, 'either the danger of troubling German-English or German-Irish relations'. Katzenberger concluded:

> The question which of these interests is more important can, according to my opinion, only be decided in Bonn and I am already asking you now for a clear indication as to how I should proceed.[29]

A week later, the foreign minister gave him precise instructions. He confirmed that Katzenberger could indeed find himself in a tricky situation and offered the following advice. The consul-general should, during a private conversation with influential Irish people, manage to dissuade the government from inviting him or persuade nationalist organisers that inviting him would not be suitable. The ministry added that should this fail, then

> it would be best that you shy away from such an invitation by using a well-tried diplomatic method, like pretending to be on a holiday or being ill.[30]

The instructions were clear and the pattern for the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966 was set. However, Katzenberger had also reported that French ambassador Lucien Félix had been officially invited to attend the unveiling of a monument in Castlebar in Co. Mayo. In 1798, the French had landed there and, together with their Irish allies, had defeated a British force, although in the end the Franco-Irish undertaking was defeated.[31] On the occasion of the unveiling of the monument, the *Irish Press* published an article entitled 'President unveils Mayo memorial; '98, men, allies are honoured'.

[27]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 60, Katzenberger to Foreign Office, 15 April 1952.
[28]*Die Welt*, 4 August 1953.
[29]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 62, Katzenberger to Dr Theo Kordt, Foreign Office, 3 September 1953.
[30]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, band 62, von Etzdorf, Foreign Office, to Katzenberger, 10 September 1953.
[31]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 62, Katzenberger to Kordt, 3 September 1953.

The article stated that Félix had laid a wreath and that Canon Curely had paid tribute to the French: 'They were honouring, too, a number of chivalrous French soldiers who came to [the Irishmen's] assistance in dark and evil days'.[32] It was true that the Entente Cordiale was now only a distant memory.

1959: the sudden French revival of the memory of Fontenoy

In fact, the Entente Cordiale was as good as forgotten in Paris, and the French decided to revive the memory of Fontenoy in great pomp. Interestingly, there had been some criticism in Ireland of French historiography. In September 1948, the *Irish Press* published a long article written by Canon Patrick Power, entitled 'New light on Fontenoy'. Power severely criticised French and British historians and philosophers for having left the Irish contribution out of their analysis of the battle altogether. He re-iterated that there were indeed also Irishmen who had fought for the Anglo-Dutch army that day. He was of the opinion that 'we might have expected better of chivalrous France' and wrote:

> Voltaire, on the French side—though we do not take the old scoffer too seriously—does not allow the Irish any part in the victory, and the veracious Froude, for the English, denies that the Irish had any part in the battle.[33]

Be that as it may, it would, however, be wrong to say that the French had forgotten, deliberately or not, Irish help received through the centuries. In June 1958, the Comité France–Irlande (a Paris-based association established to promote cultural links between both countries) organised a lecture given by Colonel Jacques Weygand, the son of General Maxime Weygand, called *Les Brigades irlandaises au Service de la France*.[34] In February 1959, Ambassador William P. Fay reported to Dublin a brief conversation with Charles de Gaulle, who had returned to power in 1958:

> I found President de Gaulle in very good form and extremely affable. He said that he thought that, with the possible exception of Scotland, France had retained close and friendly relations with Ireland for a longer period than with any other European country.[35]

In fact, de Gaulle, of distant Irish descent, had Ireland on his mind.

On 14 April 1959, the Irish embassy in London reported to the DEA that General Frédéric Souard of the French army had paid a visit and had said that he 'had been entrusted with the task of presenting to the Irish Government replicas of the flags of the Irish regiments who fought at the Battle of Fontenoy'. A ceremony would take place in Dublin and was currently being organised. Souard had said that he would make a speech about 'the necessity for Atlantic unity in the face of the threat from the East', and emphasised that he would avoid stressing the fact that on numerous occasions the Irish, the French, the Americans and the Scots had fought against the English. As to the embassy, it carefully pointed out to the general that 'Ireland was not a member of NATO' and explained that this was due to the partition of Ireland.[36]

[32]*Irish Press*, 31 August 1953.
[33]*Irish Press*, 25 September 1948.
[34]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Paris, 122/37-I, comité France-Irlande; *Comité France-Irlande* (bulletin), *c.* 6 June 1958.
[35]NAI DFA, Confidential reports, 313/4g, Paris; Fay to Cornelius Cremin, DEA Secretary, 3 February 1959.
[36]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Paris, 105/34, Irish brigade in France; counsellor, Irish embassy in London, to Cornelius Cremin, 14 April 1959 (copy).

The embassy should have known that this French initiative was precisely all about NATO. The grandiose ceremony took place in Dublin Castle on 12 May 1959. Souard made a speech in which he declared: 'United by their ideals and their faith, the Irish and French have always stood together'. The Entente Cordiale and the deterioration of Franco-Irish relations since 1870 were conveniently forgotten. President Seán T. O'Kelly replied that 'the ties between the two countries were based on a common Celtic heritage and on common Christian traditions'.[37] O'Kelly had decided to forget about the French Law of Separation of the Churches and the State of 1905, which had caused a serious rift between Catholic Ireland and anti-clerical France before and during the First World War.[38] During the ceremony, Souard presented the flags to O'Kelly. Present were, among others, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera, Foreign Minister Frank Aiken and Defence Minister Kevin Boland. Later, the DEA issued a special brochure written in French about the Fontenoy commemoration.[39]

But why had the French suddenly decided to celebrate in great pomp the 214th anniversary of the battle; a rather odd year to choose for such a grandiose ceremony? The answer was tied up in matters relating to the EEC, NATO and one man—Charles de Gaulle. The general did not want Western Europe to be subordinated to the United States, had grudgingly accepted the Treaty Rome of 1957 and rejected Britain's free-trade area plan for Europe in 1958. Furthermore, he was convinced that Britain was far too close to the United States.[40] Above all, he wanted to restore France's prestige and independence, notably in defence issues. As early as 1958, he informed President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that NATO should not be exclusively led by the Anglo-Saxons. He judged their replies unsatisfactory and subsequently took the decision in March 1959 to withdraw the French navy in the Mediterranean Sea from the NATO command.[41] Eisenhower was soon pulling out his hair; he called de Gaulle a 'cross between Napoleon and Joan of Arc'.[42] As it turned out, de Gaulle was in Orléans on 8 May 1959, to participate in the commemoration of the liberation of the city from the English by Joan of Arc in 1429, 530 years previously. Again, this was a rather odd anniversary for such an important politician to be involved in. There can be very little doubt that de Gaulle had used the commemorations of Fontenoy and Orléans to get France's message across to Britain and the United States.[43] On 15 May, the *Dernière Heure* of Brussels informed its readers that the British and Dutch embassies had refused to participate in a ceremony in Fontenoy, which would include a re-enactment of the battle. One of the Belgian organisers said that he ignored 'the reasons for [their] attitude'.[44]

[37]*Irish Times*, 12 May 1959.

[38]aan de Wiel, *The Irish Factor 1899–1919*, 24–5, 132–3 and 222.

[39]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 3, B6/17; the Irish brigade at Fontenoy, DEA bulletin, May 1959.

[40]Maurice Vaïsse, 'La puissance ou l'influence? (1958–2004)', in Jean-Claude Allain *et al.*, *Histoire de la Diplomatie française* (Paris, 2005), 872–5.

[41]'De Gaulle et l'OTAN', available at: www.charles-de-gaulle.org (23 November 2007).

[42]John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: the deals, the spies, the lies, the truth* (London, 2007), 139.

[43]It is to be noted that at the same period, in 1958, France offered a statue of Joan of Arc to the city of New Orleans in the United States, but it could not be erected owing to financial considerations. De Gaulle, who visited New Orleans in 1960, undertook to raise the necessary finances. See 'The Maid in New Orleans', available at: http://www.stjoan-center.com/topics/jcraven.html (16 November 2014).

[44]'Fontenoy va commémorer la fameuse bataille (1745) qui se déroula sur son territoire', *La Dernière Heure*, 15 May 1959.

But some Belgian politicians too began to have cold feet concerning Fontenoy. In 1965, the Military History Society of Ireland wanted to celebrate in style the 220th anniversary of the battle. The DEA, however, was anxious to avoid any trouble in this decade of EEC entry-negotiations and asked Ambassador Frank Biggar to seek the Belgian foreign ministry's opinion on the matter. Biggar reported that 'the Belgian government would be very adverse to any type of commemoration which might serve to exacerbate further Anglo-French military rancours'. Indeed, as he stressed, 1965 was also the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. Therefore, he strongly recommended that the commemoration of the 220th anniversary of Fontenoy should be low key. As for himself, he suggested he might conveniently be away from Belgium during the commemoration.[45] Negotiating the anniversaries of all these old battles and their commemorations was like walking in a political minefield for the Belgian foreign ministry, all the more since Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak was a convinced Atlanticist and fully in favour of Britain's entry into the EEC.[46] Yet, Spaak could not afford to ignore the powerful French neighbour either. But it seemed that Biggar's warning had fallen on deaf ears in Dublin, as the government had decided not only to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising of April 1916 lavishly at home, but also to involve the Irish diplomatic missions in the capitals of the EEC member states.

DECIDING TO CELEBRATE THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF 1916 AT HOME AND ABROAD

In fact, the issue of celebrating the Easter Rising had been a complex one since the foundation of the Irish Free State, with some governments being more prone to celebrate than others.[47] Moreover, the international situation had to be taken into account. For example, in 1941 the twenty-fifth anniversary fell right in the middle of the Second World War, and some officials of the Department of Defence believed it should be massively celebrated. There were talks of a 'mass victory parade' and that the ceremonies should be 'based on the Olympic games ceremonial'. But de Valera would have none of it and wrote: 'in present circumstances the holding of a commemoration on elaborate lines would not be appropriate'[48] Clearly, he was taking into account the war and the reactions the belligerents might have. And yet, eventually, a rather grandiose military parade did take place in 1941, and the *Irish Independent* reported that de Valera had reviewed 25,000 soldiers. The newspaper added that it had been the 'largest and most spectacular military parade the city has seen'.[49] Why had the taoiseach changed his mind? Some believe that it was a show of strength, meant to warn that Ireland would defend her neutrality if need be. Such a show might have been directed at Nazi Germany in particular.[50]

On 2 February 1965, Taoiseach Seán Lemass put forward that the fiftieth anniversary of the rising should be lavishly celebrated in 1966. At home, a large number of events would be organised, and abroad Irish embassies and

[45]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 3, B6/18/1, Military History Society; Biggar to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 10 June 1965.

[46]Timothy Bainbridge, *The Penguin companion to European Union* (London, 2003), 480.

[47]Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising, 1922–65: "A figurative scramble for the bones of the patriot dead"?', in Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan (eds), *1916 in 1966: commemorating the Easter Rising* (Dublin, 2007), 198–218: 199–205.

[48]Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising, 1922–65', 206.

[49]Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising, 1922–65', 206.

[50]Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising, 1922–65', 206–7.

consulates would be asked to participate. Bord Fáilte (the Irish tourist board) created a leaflet of which 75,000 copies were sent to foreign countries. The celebrations were, however, by no means of an anti-British nature. Anglo-Irish relations had improved despite the partition issue. Lemass paid tribute to those Irishmen who had fought in the British army during the First World War, and the British government agreed to return an Irish republican flag that had been taken by the British forces during the fighting in Dublin in 1916. London even agreed to return the remains of Roger Casement to Ireland.[51]

The *Irish Times* published an article that correctly summed up the situation between the two countries.

> With our principal trading partner, Britain, relations have never been better. Good personal relations have been established, both at civil service and ministerial level. The Taoiseach, Mr. Lemass, and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Wilson, have found much common ground and can have frank discussions in a friendly atmosphere.[52]

The improvement in Anglo-Irish relations had been noticed by the foreign diplomatic corps in Dublin. In July 1959, Count de Laubespin, the Belgian ambassador, reported to Brussels that Ireland's attitude towards Britain had changed for the better and that the government did not even want to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Republic of Ireland Act. He emphasised, however, that 'a certain enmity towards England was still quite general'.[53] On 5 March 1965, the DEA sent a circular to all Irish diplomatic missions, stating that the taoiseach attached much importance to 'the desirability of publicising the occasion [the 1916 fiftieth anniversary] abroad'.[54] Later, in January 1966, the department asked the missions 'to consider what it might be possible for them to do by way of special activities, e.g. film showings, lectures, or a special Mass during Easter Week to mark the occasion'.[55]

Lemass's insistence on celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in the capitals of the EEC member states might well have had psychological underpinnings. When Ireland first applied for EEC membership in 1961, his government had made the mistake of stressing that the country was heavily dependent on Britain's economy. Consequently, the member states had believed that Ireland was not really interested in the Community in and of itself, and that she only wanted to join because Britain had decided to do so. The EEC then considered Ireland and Britain's membership applications in one single bloc.[56] The Easter Rising jubilee would serve to show that although Ireland was closely linked to Britain, she was different. This is also borne out by the fact that in 1965, the DEA had decided to make Ireland known abroad by asking its embassies and consulates to circulate a booklet entitled *Facts about Ireland*. By November 1965, 53,500 copies had been printed and another 50,000

[51]Rory O'Dwyer, 'The golden jubilee of the 1916 Easter Rising', in Gabriel Doherty and Dermot Keogh (eds), *1916, the long revolution* (Cork, 2007), 352–75: 354–8.

[52]*The Irish Times*, 22 May 1965.

[53]Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères Belge (hereafter cited as AMAEB), Brussels, 13261, Irlande, de Laubespin to Pierre Wigny, Belgian foreign minister, 13 July 1959.

[54]NAI DFA, 2005 release, Embassies, 2001/20/355, Holy See; Department of External Affairs to all missions, 5 March 1965.

[55]NAI Department of the Taoiseach, 1997 release, 97/6/160, 50th anniversary of Easter Rising; Department of External Affairs to all missions, 31 January 1966.

[56]Maurice FitzGerald, *Protectionism to liberalisation; Ireland and the EEC, 1957 to 1966* (Aldershot, 2000), see chapter 3, 'Ireland's first EEC application, 31 July 1961', 103–70.

copies had been ordered.[57] Ireland was some kind of political *terra incognita* for many a continental European mind. Not only for average citizens, but, surprisingly, also for persons in diplomatic circles. The following series of brief examples will amply suffice to illustrate this point.

General European understanding of Ireland

On 23 August 1961, the West German ministry of the economy issued a report, the title of which was 'The Irish Free State's EEC-entry application'.[58] On 25 August, the head of the European Integration Division in the Foreign Office in Bonn mentioned in a note 'the Irish Free State's claims to Northern Ireland'.[59] Both ministries seemed not to be aware that the country had officially become a republic in 1949. On 16 December, during a meeting between the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and various parliamentarians, Anthony Esmonde, the Fine Gael TD, pointed out that Maurice Couve de Murville had not made any mention of Ireland's EEC application whereas he had spoken about the British and Danish applications. The French foreign minister regretted that he had indeed omitted Ireland.[60] The problem was that he kept forgetting about Ireland. On 10 May 1962, he spoke about the European question before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly. Once more, no mention was made of Ireland. This time, Irish ambassador Denis McDonald objected and wrote to the DEA:

> It is not new to us. . .that Mr Couve de Murville seems to regard the entry of Ireland simply as an accessory to the entry of Great Britain into the Common Market.

The ambassador was subsequently reassured by the French foreign ministry, which said that 'there was no new development which could give rise to statements unfavourable to Ireland's case'.[61] Finally, on 2 September 1964, the Irish ambassador in The Hague got a phone call from the Dutch police who asked him if the embassy wanted 'a police escort provided for the "prominent Irish political personage"' who was currently visiting the country. The ambassador had to explain diplomatically that Captain Terence O'Neill came from 'that part of Ireland still under British rule and suggested an approach to the British Embassy'.[62] Years of economic autarky and deliberate isolationism in Ireland had taken their toll. Now that Ireland was applying for EEC membership this needed to change, and the Easter Rising jubilee provided a good opportunity to get the country on the map of Europe, at least according to the Irish government.

[57]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 11, J2/1/2, broadsheet; Department of External Affairs to all missions, 22 November 1965.

[58]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B20–200, Band 635, 'Beitrittsantrag des Irischen Freistaates zur EWG', 23 August 1961.

[59]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B20–200, Band 635, Dr Voigt, head of European Integration Division in Foreign Office, to Rolf Lahr, Under-Secretary of State in Foreign Office, 25 August 1961.

[60]NAI DFA, Confidential reports, 313/4I; Paris, McDonald to Cornelius Cremin, DEA Secretary, 18 December 1961.

[61]NAI DFA, Confidential reports, 313/4J; Paris, McDonald to Cornelius Cremin, DEA Secretary, 11 May 1962 and 12 May 1962.

[62]NAI DFA, Confidential reports, 313/30I; The Hague, J.W. Lennon to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 9 September 1964.

The Netherlands, Italy and the 1966 commemorations

The Irish missions in the capitals of the EEC member states began to sound out the local authorities. Unfortunately for Lemass's government, the first reactions of the embassies were extremely cautious. From the Netherlands, Ambassador Lennon reported that it was a rather delicate matter. 'As you are well aware, Dutch sentiment is very pro-British. If a 1916 Commemoration were regarded as anti-British, it is quite likely it would be boycotted'. He therefore cleverly suggested that a 1916 commemoration function should take place on St Patrick's Day, which 'has become recognised [in the Netherlands] as one of the "open" National Day receptions'.[63] Lennon was absolutely right in his assessment. The Netherlands, and especially the foreign minister, Joseph Luns, were totally in favour of Britain's entry into the EEC and of a strong relationship between Britain and the United States within NATO.[64] Under these circumstances, the Dutch were not going to upset the British with Irish nationalist celebrations.

Dutch unease was soon made very clear. The DEA had commissioned a fifteen-minute documentary on the Easter Rising made by George Morrison, which was meant for foreign consumption.[65] The embassy's secretary met Mr Neumann, the head of the Documentary Section of the Dutch Catholic Broadcasting Company (KRO), to whom he proposed that Morrison's documentary be shown on Dutch television. Neumann believed this would not be possible, as KRO had recently broadcast such a documentary, but one made by the BBC.[66] Morrison's film was never screened by the Dutch. From Italy, the Irish embassy reported that it had approached the competent authorities regarding the broadcasting of the same documentary. But it seemed that the Italians were mainly interested because it was short and free of charge.[67] It is not known whether it was eventually shown or not. The Italian press, however, did report the Easter-Rising celebrations in Ireland and was generally sympathetic.[68]

France

In France, there was the thorny issue of Breton nationalism and there was no doubt that separatists would want to commemorate the Easter Rising in Brittany, or to participate in the celebrations in Ireland. Yann Goulet had been a member of the Parti National Breton (PNB) and during the Second World War had been head of Bagadoù Stourm, its paramilitary youth organisation. He had even met Dr Josef Goebbels, the Nazi minister for propaganda, in Berlin, but not in the capacity of a PNB representative. He did not agree with the existence of Bezen Perrot, a Breton military unit that wore German uniforms (those of *Sicherheitsdienst*, the SS intelligence service) and which was dedicated to the struggle for Brittany's independence. Despite his rejection of Bezen Perrot, however, he was condemned to death in France but fled and had

[63]NAI DFA, Embassy series, The Hague, 78/2, 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising; J.W. Lennon to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 7 September 1965.

[64]Albert Kersten, 'De langste; Joseph Antoine Marie Hubert Luns (1952–1971)', in Duco Hellema, Bert Zeeman and Bert van der Zwan (eds), *De Nederlandse Ministers van Buitenlandse Zaken in de twintigste eeuw* (Den Haag, 1999), 211–27.

[65]O'Dwyer, 'The golden jubilee of the 1916 Easter Rising', 357.

[66]NAI DFA, Embassy series, The Hague, 78/2, 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising; C. Greene, secretary in Irish embassy in The Hague, to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 19 April 1966.

[67]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Rome, 456B, Easter Rising-50th anniversary; Gearóid Ó Broin, Irish embassy in Rome, to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 21 February 1966.

[68]NAI DFA, 2005 release, Embassies, 2001/20/355, Holy See; Thomas Commins, Irish ambassador to the Holy See, to Hugh McCann, DEA secretary, 23 April 1966.

settled in Ireland in 1947. He was a renowned sculptor and made the Irish republican monument at Ballyseedy in Co. Kerry, commemorating members of the Irish Republican Army executed by their Free State Army captors during Ireland's civil war (1922–23). In October 1965, Goulet wrote the following letter to the 1916 Committee in Bray:

> Since Easter 1965, I have created in Brittany a new association called the 'Committee Brittany–Ireland'. The main purpose of this association is to group all the Breton Nationalists anxious to come to Dublin. . .to pay their respects to the Irish heroes of the 1916 rebellion. . .
>
> For us, Breton Nationalists. . .Easter Monday 1916 has always been a memorable date. The old generation will not fail to recall the memory of that sensational issue of BREIZ ATAO ['Brittany for Ever', PNB's journal] dedicated to the Irish insurrection. . .We have benefited from that example and in doing so we have contracted a debt of gratitude.[69]

It was a taste of things to come. Breton nationalists would regard the fiftieth anniversary as a celebration for the larger Celtic brotherhood, and as an occasion for the meeting of various Celtic comrades in arms. The Irish embassy in Paris made some enquiries and reported that the French authorities would not be opposed if Bretons went to Dublin and participated in cultural activities, provided that it was made very clear that they were not autonomous.[70] Any display of Breton autonomy would definitely be frowned upon by the centralist French state.

West Germany

The situation in West Germany was most complex. The West Germans were now solid partners and allies of Western Europe within the EEC and NATO frameworks. The defence of northern West Germany was in the hands of the British army, a fact that Chancellor Ludwig Erhard's Christian-Democratic and anti-Communist government particularly appreciated. But back in 1916, the Imperial German government had supported the Irish republicans against Britain. History could not easily be ignored, and it now threatened to trigger a diplomatic embarrassment between Bonn and London. All the more since Dublin had undertaken to invite, 'all expenses paid', the surviving German crew members of the *Aud*, the ship that was meant to deliver German arms to the Irish republicans in 1916, and of the *U-19*, the submarine that had transported Roger Casement to Ireland.[71] Karl Spindler was the captain who had commanded the *Aud*. He had written a book about it, which was translated into English and published by Anvil Books in Tralee, Co. Kerry in 1965, with the title *The mystery of the Casement ship*. Spindler's concluding thoughts were that:

> . . .the German General Staff did not take the initiative out of pure friendship for Ireland but simply because it reckoned on the possibility of a timely end being put to the war as the outcome of a successful uprising.[72]

[69]Daniel Leach, *Fugitive Ireland: European minority nationalists and Irish political asylum, 1937–2008* (Dublin, 2009), 99, 117–19, 196 and 200.

[70]Leach, '"Repaying a debt of gratitude": minority nationalists and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising', 276.

[71]NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, 1997 release, 97/6/160, 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising; Aiken to Lemass, 20 January 1966 and Lemass to Aiken, 22 January 1966.

[72]Karl Spindler, *The mystery of the Casement ship: by its commander Captain Karl Spindler* (Tralee, 1965; first published in Berlin, 1931), 206.

Lemass's government either ignored or chose to ignore Karl Spindler's correct assessment of Germany's policy towards Ireland during the First World War. This was the kind of inconvenient historical truth that should not be stressed during the golden jubilee commemorations of the rising.

On 18 February 1966, Heinz von Trützschler, the West German ambassador in Dublin, reported to Bonn what the Irish intended to do for the jubilee. He explained that the surviving crew members of the *Aud* and the *U-19* had been officially invited, and that the Irish had in mind to exhibit some pictures of the submarine and also some extracts of its log-book. Irish officials had asked him if his government would object to this. Von Trützschler had replied that his embassy appreciated the fact that these former German sailors would be honoured, but that it would also like that Germany's military help should not be unduly emphasised. He then explained to the foreign office in Berlin that his embassy was currently discussing the issue with the British, to see if they had any objections. Considering the good relations between Ireland and West Germany, von Trützschler suggested that Federal President Heinrich Lübke should send a congratulatory message to President de Valera on this particular occasion. He had in mind a rather short and neutral text, and even included a draft.[73]

Six days later the foreign office informed von Trützschler that he should continue to discuss all the details with the British ambassador in Dublin. Also, he should clearly stress that the German authorities had nothing to do with the invitation of the former crew members. Furthermore, the foreign office wanted to know which other statesmen would send congratulatory messages to de Valera.[74] On 24 March, the ambassador reported that he had made some inquiries among the diplomatic corps. It transpired that many foreign governments would not send a message of congratulation to the president of Ireland. Their ambassadors would, however, accept invitations to attend Mass and the inauguration of a monument dedicated to the victims of the fighting. Yet, von Trützschler still advised that Lübke should send a congratulatory message to de Valera. Furthermore, he deemed that the sending of such a message would encourage the Irish government to persevere at resisting all 'initiatives' coming from East Germany,[75] in other words, the strenuous efforts at diplomatic recognition being made by East Berlin. The West German government did not recognise the German Democratic Republic. The issue of the message of congratulation was again discussed in the foreign office, and it eventually decided against it for the following reasons. Lübke had already congratulated de Valera on 17 March 1966, Ireland's national bank holiday. The date of the Easter Rising was not a bank holiday and therefore protocol did not dictate that another message should be sent. If the West German government did congratulate the president when others did not, it could be interpreted as a political gesture and upset the British. It was agreed that the ambassador should, of course, accept all invitations also issued to the rest of the diplomatic corps in Dublin.[76] Von Trützschler was duly informed on 28 March.[77]

[73]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 302, von Trützschler to Foreign Office, 18 February 1966.

[74]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 302, Foreign Office to vonTrützschler, 24 February 1966.

[75]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 302, von Trützschler to Foreign Office, 24 March 1966.

[76]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 302, 'Deutsche Beteiligung an den Feierlichkeiten zur 50. Wiederkehr des irischen Osteraufstandes von 1916', 25 March 1966.

[77]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 302, Foreign Office to von Trützschler, 28 March 1966.

Belgium

Undoubtedly, however, it was in Belgium that the fiftieth anniversary of 1916 could wreak most political havoc. On 25 November 1965, Frank Biggar sent a long report to Dublin in which he explained all the reasons why the DEA needed to be very cautious about the intended celebrations in Belgium. The ambassador wrote that during the First World War many Belgians had felt that the Easter Rising was a 'stab in the back' for the Allies. There was, at the time, very little consideration given to Ireland's freedom, as Belgium herself was occupied by the German army. Moreover, Casement's actions in the Congo, where he had exposed the brutality of Belgian colonialism, had been and were still resented by the people. Biggar also stressed that the Belgian establishment remained 'strongly pro-British in sentiment' and warned 'Belgian official circles would certainly be slow to take part in any function which might be considered as of an anti-British character'.[78]

Then there was the tricky issue that Irish nationalism was an example for Flemish nationalists, and he quoted Louis Roppe, the governor of Limburg. Incidentally, Roppe himself was in touch with Flemings who were living in Ireland, some of them having fled Belgium in 1945 as they were accused of collaboration with the Germans. One of those Flemings with an ambiguous war record was Dr Edward op de Beeck. He had originally been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for collaboration and informing and had been living in Ireland since 1947.[79] Op de Beeck was now president of the Flemish Group in Dublin. On one occasion, Roppe had transmitted a letter to op de Beeck on the subject of the *Guldensporenslag*, the Battle of the Golden Spurs of 11 July 1302, when the Flemings had defeated the French knights.[80] There was also the fact that biographies of Patrick Pearse and Éamon de Valera had been published in Dutch but not in French. For all these reasons, Biggar was 'highly dubious as to the advisability of the Embassy's organising any function specifically designed to commemorate the Rising', as it might well be 'boycotted'. Like his colleague in The Hague, he felt that it would be better to stick to the usual St Patrick's Day reception. And yet, despite all these sensible arguments, Biggar thought it would be a good idea to have articles published on the rising in the Belgian, especially Flemish, press. He further suggested that documentaries for the radio and the television should also be envisaged for broadcast[81] In fact, Hugh Leonard's eight-part documentary *Insurrection* was shown on Belgian television.[82] The ambassador's assessment would prove to be entirely correct.

FOREIGN PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMEMORATIONS IN IRELAND

In Dublin, the DEA had become aware that various nationalist groups from Western Europe such as the Free Wales Army, the Breton movement and the Scottish Liberation Army, might want to travel to Dublin and could thus become a huge embarrassment to the government. On 30 November 1965, the DEA issued a memorandum in which the following was stated:

[78]NAI, DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; Biggar to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 25 November 1965.

[79]Leach, '"Repaying a debt of gratitude": foreign minority nationalists and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966', 281.

[80]See Robert Houthaeve, *Vlamingen in Ierland* (Izegem, 1989), 25.

[81]NAI, DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; Biggar to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 25 November 1965.

[82]O'Dwyer, 'The golden jubilee of the 1916 Easter Rising', 370.

> Should the Bretons want to take part in the march past the GPO, it could be explained to them that the parade is being confined to Irish bodies. . . . Otherwise minority groups from various countries would be given the opportunity of publicising their respective causes, to the displeasure of various governments.[83]

In December, Lemass said that he did not want to invite foreign heads of state and government to the anniversary, and DEA Minister Aiken would not invite Afro-Asian delegations,[84] who would probably consider the Easter Rising and Ireland's struggle for independence as a successful fight against colonialism. There were former colonial powers in Western Europe, some of them founding member states of the EEC. Then, there was of course the all-important British factor to be taken into account. The Easter Rising was all about nationalist Ireland struggling to shake off the British yoke. This and the participation of Scottish and Welsh separatists might upset Prime Minister Harold Wilson's government. DEA Secretary Hugh McCann had met Sir Gregory Tory, the British ambassador in Dublin. According to McCann:

> The Ambassador asked about the character of the commemoration, and, in particular, whether it would be oriented towards the future or a re-enactment of the past. I referred to the Taoiseach's recent speech on the subject and told the Ambassador that I felt sure he could take it that the commemoration would be a forward-looking occasion without any attempt to re-open old wounds.[85]

In March 1966, Lemass even wrote to Wilson that he was determined to work in favour of 'the building of Anglo-Irish good will'.[86] Indeed, at a time when the overwhelming majority of Irish exports and imports depended on the British market, and so soon after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement (AIFTAA) in December 1965—not to mention Ireland's application for EEC membership, in which she depended entirely on the British government's success in doing the same—Lemass's policy was a wise one. Now was not the time to provoke the British neighbour.

On 17 February, op de Beeck sent a request to Aiken. He explained that he was the 'President of the Flemish Group in Dublin' and that there was 'great interest in Flanders for the 50th anniversary of the Rising'. Hendrik Borginon, a 'Flemish Nationalist Leader' in Belgium, had asked him if a 'Flemish delegation would be officially welcome. . .and given a reserved place during the Easter Monday service [in Dublin]'.[87] Borginon was a Fleming who also had an ambiguous war record. Biggar was contacted by the DEA to give his opinion on the matter. Not surprisingly, he strongly advised against inviting op de Beeck and his Flemish group:

> They are bitterly opposed by the French-speaking Walloons and Bruxellois [sic] and are heartily disliked by probably the majority of Flemings because both of their aims and methods as well as the tainted (from the general

[83]Leach, '"Repaying a debt of gratitude": foreign minority nationalists and the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966', 275–6.

[84]Leach, "Repaying a debt of gratitude", 276.

[85]Ferriter, 'Commemorating the Rising, 1922–65', 215.

[86]NAI, DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; Biggar to Hugh McCann, DEA Secretary, 25 November 1965.

[87]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; op de Beeck to Aiken, 17 February 1966.

> Belgian point of view) past of many of their members who collaborated with the Germans during the last war. Dr. Opdebeeck [sic] is apparently one of these. Their methods and, I should think, to a large extent their mentality certainly derive from Nazism, the behaviour of their militants being strongly reminiscent of the S.S. . . .The character and objectives of an essentially domestic political movement in Belgium are not, of course, a matter for the Irish Government even if they claim to draw inspiration from Irish nationalism. On the other hand, it is equally not in our interest even to appear to give countenance in any way to such a movement, particularly one which arouses such controversy and emotion in this country. To do so would obviously leave us open to the charge of taking sides in a Belgian internal quarrel and could prove highly embarrassing for our relations with the Belgian Government.[88]

The DEA accepted Biggar's sound advice and informed op de Beeck that

> visitors from abroad are not being officially invited to Ireland for the ceremonies. . .nor would it be considered appropriate that [a Flemish organisation] should lay a wreath at the Garden of Remembrance or at Kilmainham Jail

where the leaders of the Easter Rising had been executed.[89] In Dublin, Aiken eventually took the wise and pragmatic decision of informing the Irish missions abroad that it would be preferable to have low-key celebrations of the Easter Rising jubilee. He explained that 'Missions might arrange their St. Patrick's Day Reception [traditionally on 17 March] as a joint one to cover the celebration of the National Day and the commemoration of the Rising together'. In this way, continued Aiken, special additional expenditure would be avoided to a great extent and 'it would help to meet the susceptibilities of persons who might hesitate to attend a function solely to commemorate the rebellion against Great Britain'.[90]

The diplomatic corps's reaction to the 1916 commemorations

A last question needs to be answered now: how did the foreign diplomatic corps analyse the 1916 jubilee in Dublin? The beginning of the celebrations went off with a bang: the destruction of Nelson's Pillar in Dublin city-centre on 8 March. Republicans and anti-partitionists had blown up this remnant of British rule. Francis-L. Goffart, the Belgian ambassador, informed Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak that nobody had been injured and that the explosion had been expertly carried out. Nevertheless, the Irish government was embarrassed. Although the minister for justice, Brian Lenihan, had immediately condemned the explosion, Goffart added that 'he had neglected to shed a few tears on the loss of the monument itself'.[91] Spaak must have remembered his days as chairman of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg when Irish delegates in a very nationalist mood had given him 'a lot of hassle'.[92] Goffart's analysis of the

[88]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; Biggar to Frank Coffey, Department of External Affairs, 2 March 1966.

[89]NAI DFA, Embassy series, Brussels, box 12, 6/2, the Rising; Seán G. Ronan, Department of External Affairs, to op de Beeck, 7 March 1966.

[90]NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, 1997 release, 97/6/160, 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising; Department of External Affairs to all missions, 31 January 1966.

[91]AMAEB, Brussels, 14946, Irlande; Goffart to Spaak, 9 March 1966.

[92]NAI DFA, Confidential reports, 313/20A, Brussels; McDonald to Seán Nunan, DEA Secretary, 14 February 1955.

destruction of the pillar was shared by Heinz von Trützschler, the West German ambassador.[93]

Their French colleague, Roger Robert du Gardier, sent a twelve-page report to Paris. It is worth analysing in some detail. He defined the period of jubilee festivities as a 'formidable week' and explained that it was not so much troubles and attacks that the government, foreign observers and the public feared, but rather 'the very excess of the official events'. Indeed, if it had not been the case, the ambassador continued,

> the opposition would not have lost the opportunity to criticise the government for having belittled the national epic in order not to upset Great Britain too much with which Mr. Lemass' cabinet has just established new relatively close economic links.

The strong Catholic aspect of the ceremonies had also caught his attention, as the diplomatic corps had been invited to attend a high Mass in the presence of the 'severe Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, surrounded by his coadjutors and an impressive number of auxiliary bishops, "monsignors" and various canons'. He described the pageant as 'quite impressive', and pointed out that the French revolutionary support for the United Irishmen in the 1798 rebellion had been 'largely recalled'.[94] Perhaps this was an Irish way to please Gaullist France, which was the sole obstacle left to Ireland's (and Britain's) entry into the EEC.

However, Robert du Gardier wrote that battles between the English, Irish and French did not succeed in warming up the audience in the bitter cold that was gripping Dublin. But he stressed that despite several rancorous remarks against Great Britain and her past repressions in Ireland made during the pageant, great care was taken in official speeches not to offend the British. The president, taoiseach and ministers especially evoked 'national heroism' and the 'purity of the heroes that had sacrificed themselves', but

> were very careful not to insist on the enemy; the occupier of yesterday had now become an almost likeable neighbour who, like Ireland, was going through a difficult time of its economic and social evolution.

De Valera had even met the former British captain who had made him prisoner in 1916. The Englishman's presence at certain ceremonies 'largely contributed to convey a "relaxed" feeling to this thorny commemoration, something the Government wished', according to the ambassador. Nevertheless, Robert du Gardier wrote that the

> usual anarchists of this country—those of the extreme wing of the Irish Republican Army, disavowed by the official staff of that organisation incidentally—indeed indulged in their now traditional pranks: destruction of a few electrical transformers and telegraph poles, a bomb put near a monument in Galway

and so on. He pointed out that near Dublin a certain number of persons, mainly Anglo-Irish people working for British companies, had received threatening letters. But they were only scared in the end, as the police had taken considerable precautionary measures. On Easter Monday, the press had criticised Northern

[93]AA-PA, Berlin, 'Irland', Bestand B31, Band 311; von Trützschler to Foreign Office, 11 March 1966.

[94]AEAD, Europe 1944–, Irlande, no 52; Robert du Gardier to Couve de Murville, 21 April 1966.

Irish Prime Minister Terence O'Neill's decision to forbid the crossing of trains into Northern Ireland. Editorialists spoke of an 'iron curtain'.[95]

Interestingly, the French ambassador was of the opinion that the population of Dublin did not show an 'exaggerated enthusiasm' for the celebrations. No doubt, the exceptionally cold weather was a factor that helped to explain their behaviour, but, he added,

> among the foreign observers, we are a few to think that apart from politicians, admen and professional agitators, few people here are now interested in the great venture of 1916, even in the present profound evolution of their country.[96]

This was a pertinent remark, as most of the Irish youth in those days indeed did not identify with the generation of 1916 and their ideals.[97] Robert du Gardier mentioned that certain newspapers had spotted the government's caution and pusillanimity, and also de Valera's priorities—first the Irish language and then reunification—whereas action in the economic and social fields in the Republic 'was probably far more urgent than any other question at the moment'. His last comment was: '[The economic situation and social conflicts] are a difficult deadlock for Ireland, which the nicest of patriotic displays are hardly able to solve. Nor will they bring about a peaceful and prosperous future in the short term'.[98] He was right. In the 1960s, the population was more and more preoccupied by the national economy, which was undergoing radical changes.

Ambassador von Trützschler sent an eight-page report to Bonn. He wrote that the activities from 10 to 24 April 1966 were impressive, and that the Irish people, so often divided in political groups and cliques, succeeded in uniting themselves on the occasion, apart from a few extremists. There were several protest actions by extremists and IRA sympathisers, notably in the south-east of the country, in Kilkenny. A few Sinn Féin activists were arrested by the police. In Northern Ireland, incidents were rather limited and it could not be said that the relations between Ireland and Northern Ireland had suffered from the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary. In his speeches, de Valera had avoided any anti-British statements and focused on the memory of the freedom fighters. Von Trützschler even remarked that it could almost be argued that an uninformed listener would not even have known that the Irish had fought against the English.

A series of foreign heads of state sent congratulatory messages to de Valera, notably President Johnson (USA), President Radakrishnan (India), General Franco (Spain) and President Podgorny (USSR), although Ireland did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In addition, Irish people from Britain and people of Irish descent throughout the world participated in the commemoration, notably Senator Joseph McCarthy (USA). The old crews of the *U-19* and the *Aud* had caught 'special attention'. The German guests and their families stayed a week in the country and were accompanied by the Irish general-consul in Hamburg, Mr Mulloy. Von Trützschler then described their activities, notably the laying of a wreath on Casement's grave. Raimund Weißbach, the former captain of the *U-19*, was repeatedly interviewed by the

[95]AEAD, Europe 1944–, Irlande, no 52; Robert du Gardier to Couve de Murville, 21 April 1966.

[96]AEAD, Europe 1944–, Irlande, no 52; Robert du Gardier to Couve de Murville, 21 April 1966.

[97]Carole Holohan, 'More than a revival of memories? 1960s youth and the 1916 Rising', in Daly and O'Callaghan (eds), *1916 in 1966: commemorating the Easter Rising*, 173–97: 193.

[98]AEAD, Europe 1944–, Irlande, no 52; Robert du Gardier to Couve de Murville, 21 April 1966.

Irish press, radio and television and was very tactful. Von Trützschler, who met the guests in his embassy, was of the opinion that they had made a very good impression. He deemed that thanks to them, the relations between West Germany and Ireland had strengthened and found 'a positive reaction among the masses', without the German authorities having to be politically compromised.[99]

Although not part of Western Europe, it is interesting to mention briefly how the anniversary was portrayed by the press in East Germany, which strictly followed the government's line. Walter Ulbricht's regime had approached Dublin several times in order to gain diplomatic recognition, but to no avail; neutral Ireland strictly followed the Hallstein doctrine of non-recognition advocated by Bonn.[100] The Easter-Rising anniversary was reported in the daily *Neue Zeit* and, unsurprisingly, analysed from a Leninist-Marxist angle. It spoke of a commemoration of the 'heroic struggle' of 'Irish patriots' against 'British rule' during the First World War. The newspaper wrote that several weeks before the great event, a 'noticeable restlessness' was apparent in the capital after the blowing up of Nelson's Pillar. Policemen and customs officers were very busy, as the Irish government feared other 'anti-English actions'. Yet, continued *Neue Zeit*, many in Ireland reproached President de Valera and Lemass's government for their 'pro-English policy', which had negative effects on the economic and cultural situation in the country. A group of Irish speakers had announced their seven-day hunger strike because '"the government has betrayed the ideals of those who fell during the Easter Rising of 1916"'. The newspaper concluded:

> Yet, as long as a unifying national force is lacking—the IRA has no program to solve the exceedingly many social problems, and is partly ridden with nationalism—English infiltration will continue.[101]

For *Neue Zeit*, the Irish question was still one of a struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

Ambassador Goffart informed Pierre Harmel, the new Belgian foreign minister, that the Irish government was careful not to embarrass several diplomatic representations during the celebrations. So it was that certain diplomats were not asked to attend the ceremony at Kilmainham jail. It was the same with the celebration at Banna strand where Casement had landed from the *U-19*. Only a representative from West Germany was there. A wreath was laid in the Garden of Remembrance by the apostolic nuncio and the Italian ambassador on behalf of the diplomatic corps. Goffart also commented on the attitude of Western countries during the jubilee. It had been agreed between various representatives of the diplomatic corps to recommend to their respective governments that no letter of congratulation should be sent to de Valera. Goffart expressed his admiration for the fact that the Irish did everything possible not to hurt or embarrass the opponents of the Easter Rising, the then allies France, Britain and Belgium. According to him, everything went smoothly and Anglo-Irish relations were not negatively affected by the jubilee. He stressed that former Belgian [Flemish] collaborators, the so-called *inciviques*, were not allowed to attend the ceremonies, although Breton nationalists

[99]AA-PA, Berlin, Bestand B31, Band 302; von Trützschler to Foreign Office, 29 April 1966.

[100]For a detailed study of the relations between Ireland and the German Democratic Republic, including East Berlin's efforts at obtaining official recognition, eventually achieved in 1980, see Jérôme aan de Wiel, *East German intelligence and Ireland, 1949–90: espionage, terrorism and diplomacy* (Manchester, 2015), Chapter One, 'History of the relations between Ireland/Northern Ireland and the GDR', 15–97.

[101]'Salutschüsse in Dublin', *Neue Zeit*, 15 April 1966, in ZEFYS (Zeitungsinformationssystem), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, available at: http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl = SNP2612273X-19660415–0–3–40–0&highlight = Irland (22 March 2015).

were present.[102] Indeed, some Breton nationalists paraded together with other Celtic separatists from Wales, Scotland, the Isle of Man and Cornwall. A Welsh representative went as far as to declare: 'We came here to join this parade to show our hatred of England'.[103] But the separatists' march happened two hours after the official parade organised by the government and had nothing to do with it.

CONCLUSION

The commemorations of Fontenoy and the Easter Rising show that the act of commemorating is not simply remembering the past and paying tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for ideals and patriotism. Commemorating can have strong political motives, according to the political situation of the time in question, be it a purely domestic situation or an international one. The fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising was the opportunity for Ireland, a small and politically speaking young nation, to show Europe and the rest of the world that it existed, and that it was not simply the small island behind the big one. Marking the anniversary was also a way to affirm Ireland's identity in an evolving Western Europe, where issues of intergovernmental cooperation, federation, confederation and supranationality were being debated within the EEC—an organisation of which Ireland wished to become a member. Was the Easter Rising jubilee perhaps a subtle or unconscious desire to tell the EEC that Ireland was more inclined to evolve towards a *Europe des Patries* (a Europe of Nations) as defined by de Gaulle rather than a supranational Europe?

It can be argued that the Irish government's approach to the capitals of the EEC member states showed some lack of understanding of Western European relations. Indeed, how could one expect Belgium and the Netherlands, for example, to become involved in celebrations that might have an anti-British connotation, bearing in mind that they favoured Britain's entry into the EEC, that the British army had liberated them in 1944–5, and that the same British army now was one of the essential components of NATO, which was meant to protect them against a possible Soviet threat?

And yet it can equally be argued that the EEC member states had made things awkward for themselves. Indeed, was it not legitimate that Ireland celebrated her efforts to achieve independence from Britain? Surely, even the pragmatic British did not oppose it, and proved to be very cooperative by returning Casement's remains and also the Irish flag that had been taken from the republicans during the rising in 1916. These were highly symbolic gestures. One is even tempted to argue that inviting the surviving members of the German submarine *U19* on the one hand, and inviting the British officer who had taken de Valera prisoner on the other, looked more like a reconciliation operation than anything else; not to mention Lemass's tribute to Irish soldiers who had served in the British army during the First World War, given that he had been expecting German help in 1916. Aiken was right when he wrote that Irish missions abroad

> need not be too sensitive about any embarrassment which an invitation to attend a commemoration of the Rising might cause in official, or indeed other quarters. It is quite normal for countries which have even very recently achieved their independence to mark the anniversary by a reception without giving offence to anybody.[104]

[102]AMAEB, Brussels, 14946, Irlande, Goffart to Harmel, 20 April 1966.
[103]O'Dwyer, 'The golden jubilee of the 1916 Easter Rising', 364.
[104]NAI, Department of the Taoiseach, 1997 release, 97/6/160, 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising; Department of External Affairs to all missions, 31 January 1966.

It remains true, of course, that the anniversary could have had negative repercussions, Belgium being the best case in point. However, if, say, the Dutch head of state or government had been officially invited by the White House in 1966 to attend the 190th anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, the likelihood was that they would not have refused to participate, regardless of British sensibilities, unless Dutch public opinion would have voiced opposition in light of the ongoing war in Vietnam. It was all a political choice. It can be argued that the American War of Independence was finished business, whereas Ireland's struggle for independence was, for some, unfinished because the Northern Irish question remained. In other words, in the Irish case in 1966 political sensitivities remained. All things considered, however, it seems that there was a certain lack of political courage or correctness shown towards the Irish celebrations in 1966.

A last, very important point can be made. The various reports written by dispassionate Western European diplomats clearly confirm that the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 rising was indeed *not*, at least not at the official level, an 'explosion of nationalist sentiment' or 'the greatest orgy ever of the cult of the Rising', as it was defined by Conor Cruise O'Brien and other Irish commentators.[105] Controversies did again arise in regard to how to commemorate the centenary of 1916 in 2016, and became heated on occasion.[106] Owing to a much changed political situation in Europe, however, and to the considerable Anglo-Irish rapprochement resulting in the current peace process in Northern Ireland and the reciprocal visits by British and Irish heads of state, a similar diplomatic chess game *à la* 1966 did not happen in 2016. The centenary of the Easter Rising celebrated on 27 and 28 March, and the numerous other official ceremonies and popular activities associated with it, took place in a dignified atmosphere in which 'hundreds of thousands [enjoyed a] fine day of reflection' on this seminal event in Irish history.[107]

[105]O'Dwyer, 'The golden jubilee of the 1916 Easter Rising', 352–3.
[106]Lorna Higgins, 'Mister 1916', *The Irish Times* (Weekend Review), 15 November 2014.
[107]Hugh Linehan, 'Hundreds of thousands enjoy fine day of reflection', *The Irish Times*, 29 March 2016. See also numerous other articles on the centenary in that newspaper.