

WILL GALWAY'S GRIDLOCK EVER END?

Andrew Hamilton
News



While sprawling new towns are being built without adequate public services, some established, well-heeled ones seem immunised against any dilution of their exclusive cachet

Justine McCarthy
Opinion&Analysis



THE MOST INFAMOUS FALLING-OUT IN IRISH SPORTING HISTORY

Saipan ★★★★★
Donald Clarke Arts

Ireland's corporate tax policy 'still causing negativity'

Internal paper suggests harnessing popularity of U2, the Corrs and Boyzone
Country positively viewed as a small, 'neutral and benign' state, report finds

JACK POWER
in Brussels

Negative perceptions other European governments have about Ireland's low corporate tax rate remain a "challenge" for its reputation, an internal study on the Government's diplomatic soft power found.

The study suggested Irish diplomats could lean into the enduring popularity of U2, the Corrs and even Boyzone in certain parts of the world, to expand Ireland's economic ties and influence.

The internal Department of Foreign Affairs study, seen by The Irish Times, gives an insight into how the State's diplomatic corps views Ireland's standing in the world and its ability to use soft power to get its way.

Ireland's economic success boosted its influence on the world stage and "rebuilding" that reputation after the 2008 financial crash and bailout was a "critical" aspect of the country's story, the study found.

"The negative perceptions of Ireland's tax policy among EU colleagues, however, remain a challenge," the department study said.

The country was positively perceived as a small, "neutral and benign" state, and viewed as an impartial player, it said. Ireland was also seen as being "non-threatening" and helpful, the review by department officials said.

The department had the ability to deploy "considerable soft power", in part thanks to Ireland's commitment to values and its backing for international institutions.

However, the study noted the "re-emergence" of geopolitical rivalries and increasing retreat away from democracy in some countries posed a "risk" to Ireland's softly-softly style of diplomacy.

The State was working to build up new "alliances" inside the EU since the UK, its closest ally, left the union, the study said.

The department had been successful at using the vast Irish diaspora in the US and other countries "to facilitate

access and influence". The internal study, completed in December 2023, was released under a Freedom of Information Act request.

Ireland had a good track record of using "cultural diplomacy", such as the St Patrick's Day visit of the taoiseach to the White House, or the stories of Irish writers, as a platform to build relationships.

The study suggested the department make better use of the continuing popularity of Irish musicians, who were a "significant" cultural asset. Bands such as U2, the Corrs, the Cranberries, Westlife, and Boyzone remain extremely popular" in southeast Asia, the review said.

The study referenced the Irish Embassy in Singapore taking advantage of a U2 concert in the country, by organising an adjoining event that "raised Ireland's profile and progressed specific economic objectives".

The paper said the idea was "inspired by a smaller-scale event organised when Boyzlife" [a hybrid of Boyzone and Westlife] visited Singapore for the F1 Grand Prix in 2018".

Diplomats were getting better at "leveraging" the State's cultural offering, to work "on behalf of Ireland's economic interests", the study said.

The review was based on interviews with diplomats posted abroad and officials based at Iveagh House in Dublin.

The department had done well to "capitalise" on progressive referendums legalising gay marriage and liberalising abortion access, the internal paper said.

Ireland's identity as a non-colonial state was a "useful opening gambit for Irish diplomats in many parts of the world," especially in the Global South, it said. The review noted a "potential credibility gap exists" between Ireland promoting progressive and inclusive values abroad, and the "lack of representative diversity" among Irish diplomats and officials.

➔ A rare insight into the thinking of Irish diplomats: page 4



Switzerland mourns victims of ski resort fire

MONICA HECK in Switzerland
and NIAMH TOWEY

The fire that raged through a bar in a Swiss ski resort in the early hours of New Year's Day has been described as one of the worst tragedies the country has ever seen.

Some 40 people died and another 115 were injured after the blaze broke out at Le Constellation bar in Crans-Montana.

"Today, Switzerland is sad but united by heart, in the pain and determination to understand and protect. To the families of victims, I say: 'Your pain is ours'," said Swiss president

Guy Parmelin yesterday. Switzerland will fly flags at half-mast for five days, he added. "What was meant to be a moment of joy has turned the first day of the year in Crans-Montana into a day of mourning affecting the entire country and beyond." Many of the dead were young people with "projects, hopes and dreams".

Crans-Montana is a resort town of about 10,000 people perched high in the Valais canton of the Swiss Alps, with a view across the valley to the famed Matterhorn mountain.

Witnesses said the fire broke out at 1.30am after sparklers or

flares were put into champagne bottles. Two women told French broadcaster BFMTV a bartender carried a female member of staff who was holding one of the bottles.

The flames set fire to the ceiling. Within seconds the blaze had spread, engulfing a crowded basement packed with revelers. Many were teenagers. One of the women described a crowd surge as people desperately tried to escape up a narrow flight of stairs.

Eyewitness Alexis Lager told Radio Télévision Suisse (RTS) that a lot of young people were queuing to get into the bar

when the flames took hold. "I can still see in my mind's eye people trying to break the windows with tables and chairs to get out. I can recall a man's shadow inside, running through the flames, and another person outside screaming while burning from head to toe."

An investigation has been opened by the public prosecutor's office and Valais police are prioritising victim identification. They ruled out a terrorist attack.

Frédéric Gisler, Valais police commander, described "war scenes" as he confirmed about

40 deaths and 115 injuries, most of whom are in a critical condition. The age profile of those caught in the fire was mainly between 15 and 20. Authorities declined to share any information on the nationality of the victims.

Cmdr Gisler praised the speed of the emergency response and noted that the red alert was called at 1.32am local time and that by 5am all victims were receiving care in several hospitals across Switzerland.

People laid flowers and candles at the scene yesterday. There are no known Irish victims. Minister for Foreign Af-

■ People gather yesterday evening in front of flowers and candles laid near the scene of the fatal fire in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana.

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES

fairs Helen McEntee said: "I want to express my shock and sadness at the tragic fire. Our embassy in Switzerland will provide any consular assistance required." - Additional reporting: Guardian

➔ Eyewitness saw flames engulfing bar: page 6

Petrol bombing was second mistaken attack on same house

CONOR LALLY
Crime and Security Editor

Gardaí investigating the petrol bombing of a family home in north Dublin on New Year's Eve believe it is linked to a previous incident at the same location when a car was deliberately rammed into a house.

They are also reviewing other violent incidents, including windows being broken in houses, an assault and a car ramming in Finglas on suspicion they are all part of the same campaign of violence over the past year.

When arsonists threw a petrol bomb into the property in Finglas at about 12.45am on Wednesday, they attacked the wrong house, the second time they had mistakenly done so. The flames quickly engulfed the three-storey property on Creston Avenue, Meakstown,

Finglas, trapping inside two women, in their 40s and 20s, and three children - a boy and two girls.

The youngest child managed to escape and raise the alarm, and the other family members were rescued by neighbours and firefighters.

However, the eldest woman and the boy were left in a serious condition in hospital. Garda sources said the victims were lucky to be alive after quick-thinking neighbours saw the flames and began a rescue effort.

The person believed to be the arsonists' intended target lives in the Creston area and is linked to gangland criminals in Co Louth. He has been targeted by a Dublin crime gang in recent months as part of a feud. In one of the incidents last year, attackers broke windows in Creston but, in the first case of mis-

taken identity, wrongly targeted the family home that has now been gutted by fire.

The Finglas attack comes just weeks after a firebombing linked to rival drug gangs claimed the life of Tadhg Farrell (4) and his grand-aunt Mary Holt (60). Their home in Edenderry, Co Offaly, was targeted on December 6th in an apparent attempt to intimidate a man previously linked to the property.

Two weeks earlier, a woman was set on fire at her home in Clondalkin, Dublin, after she was sprayed with accelerant in another act of drug-related intimidation.

Gardaí are becoming increasingly concerned about drug-related intimidation.

➔ Neighbour tells of rescuing children: page 2

Weather

Sunny spells and scattered showers, with some falling as sleet or snow in Ulster. Highs of 2-6 degrees.

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