

Chris Donnelly, educationalist and political commentator, addressed the launch meeting of the Irish Freethinkers and Humanists at the Holiday Inn Express Belfast.

Although not a supporter of **Brexit**, he said that he was glad that the lazy assumptions of the past are over. For example, it was important in Ireland to prevent restrictions between north and south. The EU helps dilute the British influence in Ireland and the European fund helped fund the Celtic Tiger. **Enda Kenny** is facing criticism over the lack of a plan to deal with Brexit. Borders would be a retrograde step.

However, it has awakened Nationalist Ireland from a Good Friday slumber. Fresh and imaginative ideas are needed to forge a new unity - not one that looks like the past.

Nationalist thinking is wrong on how to convince loyalists/unionists that a United Ireland is a good idea. Unionist culture should be accommodated and written into the Irish constitution. This could mean MLAs from the north sitting in Dublin instead of Westminster in a sort of continuation of what we have had in the north.

On the issue of **integrated schools** Chris thought that communities are still attached to the local schools that they have as generations may have gone to them.

On the **RHI scandal** he said **Gerry Adams** and **Martin McGuinness** should have realised they had two daunting tasks to tackle:

1. failure to plan and deliver SF into a fully functioning party
2. address the perception that SF was a second player to the DUP that was unable to counteract its agenda, on matters like equal marriage and abortion rights

However, the RHI scandal allowed SF to remind the DUP that it has to have agreement, although this won't sort out SF's problems. In the south SF is in a position to expand without Gerry Adams, although his stature in the public mind is still strong. The balance of power is shifting south and this could lead to SF north and south moving in very different directions.

Addressing the malaise in the north must set the political agenda again but with Britishness enshrined in any United Ireland. To many Republicans accepting a Northern Ireland is rejecting the idea of All Ireland, but SF has recognised the advantage of compromise.

Chris talked about the 'sectarianising of funding' with issues like withdrawing of funding from an Irish language group and the funding of Dee Stitt.

SF won't sit in Westminster because that would seem to be further away from Irish unity. One of the major parties in the south may well come up to sit in Stormont but won't sit in Westminster for the same reason.

It should also be noted that if DUP drop to 28 seats in the election they will need [Jim Allister](#) and one other to use the Petition of Concern for issues like Equal Marriage.

Shelley Leggett, 26th January 2016