

# **The question mark of the Irish border**

**The unknown future of the border on the Irish island after Brexit**



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*Illustration front page: Irish border, mirrored, point added.*

# **I Preface**

After weeks of hard work, I can hereby finally present my bachelor's thesis about the influence of Brexit on the Irish border. In the first semester of this study year, 2017/2018, I did an Erasmus semester in Cardiff. This wouldn't be possible without the Erasmus-programme, funded by the European Union. Maybe that is one of the reasons why I value our EU membership so much. The Brexit topic was evident in Cardiff and a lot of people spoke about it. I still think that making such a big decision with such a small majority is bad and now a lot of people in the UK think the same. When I had to find a subject for my bachelor's thesis, I didn't immediately think about the Irish border. But my interest within GPE has always been in Geography, and especially outside our own country. I heard a story about the Irish border in the news and got interested in the topic. The first thing I thought was: I want to go to Northern Ireland. Writing about this topic sitting in my chair at home wouldn't make sense. So, I booked my flights and went there at the beginning of May. It was the first time for me to go abroad completely on my own, stay in a hostel and do interviews alone. But it was an amazing week. The stories I heard in the interview fascinated me, especially combined with the history of the country. The importance of the topic became clear and it was very useful to see and hear with my own eyes and ears what was going on there. Next to that, Northern Ireland is a beautiful country. Seeing the Irish coast was something I always wanted, and luckily I had time for that as well. After coming back, I finally found the motivation to write about the topic as well, after I struggled a bit in March and April. Now I'm done. I hope this thesis will give people more information about why the Irish border is so important in 2018, because, regardless of what will happen, it is.

But writing this thesis would not have been possible without the help of some people. First, I want to thank my mother for supporting everything I do and being the best mother in the world. I want to thank my J.C.39 flatmates for asking (too often) about my progress. Of course, I want to thank the respondents, without their help this thesis wouldn't have been possible. I want to thank Adele from the Derry District Council for the contact details of many respondents. I want to thank the people of the Global Village hostel in Belfast for making me feel at home during my stay. I want to thank Davy for all the days working in the MSc basement on our theses and Mundus for the free coffee we often (maybe too often) drank during our breaks. I want to thank my brothers and Cas for the moral support at home. And finally, I want to thank my supervisor, Henk, for the support and the motivation during the process, especially when I wasn't making progress earlier on. I learned a lot during the last months and without these people, and a lot of others, this thesis wouldn't be here. I hope you will enjoy reading it.

## II Summary

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2016, the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. In Northern Ireland, a majority of 56% voted to stay in the EU. From the beginning of the Brexit-campaign, taking back control was named as one of the biggest reasons to leave the EU. But the Irish border was not seen as an obstacle in the way to Brexit. Now, two years after the referendum, there still has not been a solution to the Irish problem. This thesis tries to find out what the possible influence of Brexit on the Irish border could be.

In the theories and concepts, 'borders' are the central issue. At first, an overview of the existing border literature is given. The focus of border research at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century shifted from the physical line of a border towards the border process, the bordering. Borders were seen as complex processes, made up by different circumstances and parties. Borders can still be physical lines, but its origins and implementations became more important. Next to that, a border can also be a border in the mind, borders drawn between different groups of people. The process of othering can be linked to that, where borders lead to increasing differences between groups of people. Next to that, there are border regimes surrounding a border. This can be agreements between different states about a particular border, concerning, for example, the movement of people or goods.

The different types of borders discussed in this thesis are hard borders, soft borders, smart borders, and external and internal borders. A hard border is seen as a securitised border, where border infrastructure is placed to prevent people from crossing without notice. A soft border is seen as an open border, frictionless, where checks are not necessary and without any border infrastructure. A smart border is a newer type of border, using technology to separate flows. Those who are allowed to cross freely can cross without having to stop. Those who have to be checked to go through separate border crossings. Internal and external borders are related to the European Union. The external borders are the borders of EU member states with non-EU member states, on the outskirts of EU territory, like Eastern Europe. These borders are mostly hard. The internal borders are the borders between different EU member states. These borders are mostly soft.

The types of borders are used in the different scenarios. The scenarios are drawn up by looking at the Brexit negotiations. The different border regimes surrounding the Irish border are used in the scenarios. Some scenarios may not be realistic, but the reasons behind it, why they are hardly possible, are analysed, in order to give a better insight into the circumstances surrounding the Irish border. 4 scenarios are used in this thesis: a smart

border, a soft border on the Irish island, a soft border with a hard border in the Irish Sea, and finally, a hard border on the Irish island.

The methodology used in this thesis is a combination of interviews and literature research, to get theoretic implications in an empirical way. The scenarios drawn up in chapter 2 were used in the interviews I did in Northern Ireland. I also made use of a small observation, crossing the Irish border myself. Eventually, 7 interviews were done with people from different backgrounds. They all have in common that Brexit plays a big role in their work. Next to that, they all grew up or still live close to the border themselves. The respondents were chosen to get different aspects of Brexit. The literature used, consist mostly of reports from involved governments and news articles about the negotiations. These are compared to existing border literature from chapter 2.

Then, the history of the Irish border is examined. From the first settlement of Scottish and English people, the island of Ireland was divided into people who felt British and people who felt Irish. Sometimes these two identities caused trouble. The border as it is, now runs across 6 counties of the Ulster-province. But it was only established in the 1920's. Before, Ireland was part of a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, established in 1801. Eventually, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Irish fought for independence which resulted in the Irish Free State. The border was established separating the North, which stayed in the United Kingdom, from the South, which became the Irish Free State. In the years after the partition, the border played an important role. During the Troubles, which started in the 1960's, the border became militarised. The British Army came in to securitise the border, blowing up minor roads to prevent people from crossing. Republican groups used this border as a target for bombings and shootings. Eventually, only in 1998, the Good Friday Agreements were signed, removing the security on the border and making it the open, frictionless border as it is today.

The history of the Irish border is useful to understand the current border and the circumstances surrounding Brexit. With this in mind, the consequences of the future scenarios and relationships concerning the border are examined. First, the smart border seems no workable solution. It is too hard to install technology on a rural border with so many small crossings. Cameras could even become a target for violent groups, creating a chance for a return of violence. A soft border where the UK would stay in the customs union would mean that the UK Government doesn't realise their goal of taking back control. But the border on the Irish island could stay open and not much will change for Northern Ireland. A soft border with a hard border in the Irish Sea could have different impacts. Unionists are opposed to this plan, because it would handle Northern Ireland differently than the rest of the

UK. But respondents point out that Northern Ireland has always been treated differently and having checks at airports and ports won't make a big difference. They see a hard border in the Irish Sea as a workable solution, although they rather have no border at all. The last option examined is a hard border on the Irish island. This is an extreme scenario, which is ruled out by both negotiating parties. It is, however, useful to see what a return to the border of the past could mean for the country, to emphasize the importance of having no hard border at all. A hard border could become, just like the smart border, a target for violent groups. Attacks could lead to the police securing the border, and eventually possibly the Army coming back. Next to that, it would have devastating effects on Ireland's economy, when crossing the borders could take longer because of border checks.

The relationships concerning the Irish border could also be impacted because of Brexit. In this thesis, 4 relationships are distinguished: Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, the UK and the EU, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and finally, unionists and nationalists. First, the relationship of Northern Ireland with the rest of the UK could be damaged, because Northern Ireland must leave the EU against its will. Northern Ireland could be cut off from the rest of the UK if a hard border in the Irish Sea would be installed, possibly influencing the trade between Northern Ireland and Britain. Secondly, the UK and The EU will have a different relationship after Brexit as well. The UK could become a competitor with the EU for trading deals. But a close relationship could also be possible if the UK would stay in the customs union, which is an option supported by soft Brexiteers in Westminster. Third, the relationship between Northern Ireland and its neighbour, the Republic of Ireland could change. A hard border could harden cross-border work and cooperation. It could damage both economies. But a hard border could also lead to a referendum for unification, which, if majorities on both sides of the border would approve it, could lead to one country on Ireland again. Finally, there's the relationship between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland. The difference between both groups was already back to some extent, because of Brexit. Most nationalists voted to remain, and most unionists voted to leave. A solution for the Irish border could cause protests from the groups. Unionists would be opposed to a hard border in the Irish Sea, where they would be, in some extent, cut off from Britain. Nationalists would be opposed to a hard border on the Irish island, where they would be cut off from the rest of Ireland. Both options could cause discontent and could bring back the division between the two groups. Violence would then, perhaps, become a problem again.

In conclusion, the uncertainty of Brexit is big. What will happen with the border is still unknown. A solution to prevent a hard border has still not been found. The most likely scenario will be keeping a soft, open border on the Irish island. Both parties want to avoid

any type of border infrastructure, and a soft border is the only option then. The question is how they are going to do this. The two options in this thesis are for the UK to stay in the Customs Union or to give Northern Ireland a special status and install a hard border in the Irish Sea. Both options would be protested by groups of people in Northern Ireland. It is the task for the negotiating parties to find a solution that will work for everyone. The question mark about how and when they are going to do this is, however, still there.

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*Note: In this thesis, the 'Republic of Ireland' or 'the Republic', and 'Northern Ireland' or 'the North' are used to describe the two countries on the Irish island. I make use of this distinction because sometimes when I refer to the island I use Ireland. Some see Ireland as the true name of the Republic, but it would cause confusion in this text. There is no political reason for it. Next to that, I refer to 'Derry' and not 'Derry/Londonderry'. The official name of can be sensitive to some people as well, but I chose to use 'Derry' because it is frequently used in the interviews, and the citations would otherwise be too different from the rest of the text.*

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation

Last year I did an Erasmus-semester in the UK. The first thing I looked up before deciding to go there, was about the consequences of Brexit on the Erasmus-programme. Fortunately, Erasmus would remain the same in the coming years, although in the future the programme in the UK might change or even disappear. The uncertainty about Brexit was something I already experienced planning my semester abroad. Eventually, I arrived in the UK, to study in Cardiff, the capital of Wales, and I found out that uncertainty was part of everyday life in the UK. Most students I lived with couldn't vote for the referendum back in 2016. Now most of them are angry about the result and don't know what is going to happen in the future of Britain.

In Wales, the majority of the people voted to leave the EU. But the people I talked to there were already doubting that choice. Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU. Because of the majority in England and Wales, they have to leave as well. A flatmate from Belfast talked about the Northern-Irish Brexit and told me what the people there thought about it. Until then, I hadn't really noticed the complexity of leaving the EU in Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland is still going to be part of the EU. Northern Ireland isn't. This meant the only border of the UK with the EU would be on the island of Ireland. After reading more about it, I found out this could be the most complicated part of the negotiations of the British government with the EU. Suddenly, after almost 20 years of relative quietness, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is an issue again.

The governments of the Republic and Northern Ireland decided with the Good Friday Agreements of 1998, to keep the border between the two countries on the island open and to stimulate trade between them (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). Now, 20 years later, the Agreement is under pressure (Jack, 2010). The discussion creates divisions in Northern Ireland's society. Divisions that were so clearly part of everyday life during the Troubles. Right now, the British government is still negotiating with the EU about the border issue, but the outcomes of those negotiations are still unclear. So to say, the future of the Irish border is still a big question mark. In this thesis, I want to try to find out what this question mark is about. A question mark is put after a question to get an answer. But answers to questions are not always clear. Some questions have multiple answers, some are interpreted differently, others are simply unanswerable. At the end of this thesis, a definite single answer won't be given. But I try to explore different possibilities and scenarios and what the consequences of

these options could be. Hopefully, that will give more insight into the complexity of the border issue. At the end of this thesis, the question mark will still be there. But I hope this thesis will give an idea why the question mark is there and why it is so important.

## **1.2 Project framework**

The Brexit referendum in 2016 caused a lot of discussion in the UK. People who voted to leave said they had their country back. People who voted to stay said they woke up in a different country (Gormley-Heenan & Aughey, 2017). Now, two years later, the consequences of leaving the EU are still unclear. The British government is still negotiating about the conditions of leaving. The general election of 2017, meant to gain more support for Brexit, turned out to weaken the position of Theresa May's government, slowing down the negotiations. Right now, the future of the UK is still unclear. Some authors wrote about the influence of the referendum result on British society (Hobolt, 2016). Most research is done on the economic consequences, and its focus is on the economic future of the UK. Not much has been written about the Irish border in general. During the Brexit campaign, Brexiteers in England did not even think about the Irish border as one of the main problems of Brexit. Right now, it's still unclear what kind of border will be established between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and what the consequences of that new border will be. The majority in Northern Ireland wanted to remain in the EU. Where the majority of the United Kingdom in the 2016 referendum voted to leave, in Northern Ireland 56% voted to stay in the European Union (Stevenson, 2017). Just as in Scotland (62%). Northern Ireland therefore, is somewhat forced to leave the European Union. During the negotiations, it became clear that the case of the Republic and Northern Ireland would be one of the most important and most difficult topics for the UK Government. The UK and the EU both ruled out different options for the future border. A solution which would suit both parties has not been found yet. The future of the border is therefore still unclear. This thesis tries to find out what the future scenarios for the border might be and what the consequences of those scenarios might be.

## **1.3 Relevance**

### **1.3.1 Scientific relevance**

Every week there's something in the news about the Brexit negotiations. A lot has been written about the roots of the Brexit referendum, about the result and about the consequences. Until now, not that many scientists wrote about the Brexit. They wrote about the Brexit in general, not that much about the case of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Some wrote about it from a political perspective. McCann &

Hainsworth (2017) wrote about the result of the Brexit referendum in Northern Ireland and how the political parties campaigned for the 'remain' or 'leave' side. Their paper is useful to see how the 'remain' side got the majority in Northern Ireland. Stevenson (2017) wrote about the possibility of a return to conflict in Northern Ireland. He tries to find out what the Brexit negotiations mean for the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). His main aim is to see what could possibly trigger a new outbreak of conflict. He argues a hard border will cause disrupt by the Republicans and a soft border by the unionists. His outcomes can be used, but the focus in this research is on the border in general, not on the possible return of conflict, although this might be one of the possible outcomes. Gormley-Heenan & Aughey (2017) wrote about the 'border in the mind' concerning Brexit in Northern Ireland. They see consequences of Brexit in identity, politics, and institutions. Gormley-Heenan & Aughey focus on the Brexit from a political view. They don't use the different scenarios to see what Brexit might mean for Northern Ireland, but they use three main concepts which are in for change because of Brexit. Their findings can be used for this research to see what the future of the Irish border might look like.

Until now, the scientific debate about borders and the European Union was mostly focused on the extension of the outside borders. New countries joined the EU, extending its borders. The consequences of these extensions were discussed in the scientific literature, for example by Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2002). Now, something totally different is happening. For the first time in EU-history, a country is leaving the union. An internal border suddenly turns to an external border. This external border is totally different than the former internal border. What this means for the country that's leaving, the UK and for the European Union suddenly getting smaller, is gaining the interest of scientists. But the focus on a country that's leaving instead of countries joining the EU has only been there since the referendum in 2016. Therefore, not that much publications about the phenomenon of a country leaving the EU have been written.

The consequences of the Brexit-referendum also have an influence on the relationships of the different nations within the United Kingdom. The principle of 'devolution', where Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are having their own National Assemblies, gave those countries more autonomy. The Assemblies were established to give the people there more opportunities for self-government about mainly local issues (Birrel & Gray, 2017). The Labour Government of the late 1990's accounted for referenda about the issue of devolution in Scotland and Wales. One of the reasons was that nationalist parties grew bigger (especially in Scotland), taking votes from Labour (Denver, 2002). Now Brexit can bring this nationalism back, especially in Northern Ireland and Scotland. In these two parts of the UK, a majority voted to stay in the European Union. Those two countries now

have to leave the EU because a majority in England and Wales voted to leave. What this means for the relationships within the UK can be of interest to the scientific literature. The relationships between the different countries can be different after Brexit. Researchers in politics could do see if there is a change, and perhaps even, a chance for further devolution of powers.

### **1.3.2 Societal relevance**

The people of the United Kingdom are still living in uncertainty about the consequences of leaving the European Union. The only land border of the European Union with the United Kingdom will be the Irish border. A change in this border will have direct effects on the people living in the region. Arguably, people in Northern Ireland could face the biggest changes in their daily lives because of Brexit. People working in the Republic of Ireland could face difficulties in transport. Local companies with customers over the border could see changes in trade rules, affecting their businesses. Different future scenarios will have different effects on those people.

Northern Ireland has always been a special case within the United Kingdom. They were always the only state within the UK with a land border with a country outside the UK. The Irish border has been a turbulent border, which is more explored in chapter 4. The times of political violence better known as the Troubles shaped dominated Northern Ireland for around 30 years. One of the key points of the Good Friday Agreements (GFA), signed in 1998, was to keep the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland open. After 30 years of customs controls and British Army, the GFA changed the way people crossed the border dramatically. It helped to establish peace between nationalists and unionists in the country. Now this important part of the GFA, keeping the border open, is the point of discussions in the Brexit negotiations. The case of the Irish border is unique because it's the first time that a former border between two EU countries turns into a border between an EU-country and a country outside the EU. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with land border and Brexit could bring the biggest change here. Border controls would put the Irish border back in time and one of the key features of the Good Friday Agreements would be undermined. In a country where violence has only been away for 20 years, this could be sensitive. A return to the times of the Troubles probably won't happen, but a hard border could restore divisions within Northern Ireland's society. The relevance of this research, therefore, is to provide more insight into the future border. The people in Northern Ireland right now, are living in uncertainty about their future. This thesis could help to gain more insight into the different future scenarios, to help people and politics prepare for the coming years.

## **1.4 Research objective**

This research tries to explore the different possible future outcomes of the Brexit negotiations for the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The objective of this research is to get more insight into the future of the Irish border, by examining the possible consequences for different scenarios and relationships regarding the border. The scenarios are drawn up in the theories and concepts and are used in the interviews and analysis of the possible future border. The research will focus on the consequences of Brexit on the border for Northern Ireland because Northern Ireland is the country where most things will change concerning Brexit. The consequences of Brexit for the Republic of Ireland will not be the focus of this thesis, because it would be too broad to discuss. Other researchers could focus more on the consequences on the other side of the Irish border. But the future relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is examined, so it is not completely ignored. This research uses a combination of history, politics, and geography, but is written from a geographical point of view. Therefore, it's different from the existing literature, which focuses more on the economic and political consequences of Brexit in general, not so much just on the Irish border.

## **1.5 Research questions**

The main question of this research will be:

*'What will the influence of Brexit be on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?'*

The aim of the main question is to view the influence of Brexit in Northern Ireland on the Irish border in general, not just looking at the economic or social impacts of a new type of border. The possible future scenarios of the Irish border will be used to see different possible future outcomes.

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions are formulated:

*'What does the history of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland look like?'*

*'What are possible future scenarios for the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?'*

*'What are the consequences of future scenarios on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?'*

*'What are the consequences of different relationships between involved parties around the Irish border?'*

The sub-questions are formulated to help answer the main question. The history of the Irish border is used in the sub-question because the current border and the current situation in Northern Ireland are not easy to understand without knowing what its history looks like. The history of the Irish border is also a turbulent one. A lot has happened and changed around the border in the 20th Century. This still has implications for Northern Ireland as it is today. Therefore, the history of the border is also one of the main aspects of this thesis. The scenarios and their consequences are used in the other sub-questions. This is done to give more structure to answering the main question. The scenarios are drawn up by looking at the Brexit negotiations and the different scenarios that were on the table during those negotiations, from both the EU as the UK. Those scenarios are then described and the consequences of those scenarios if they would become reality. This all together will lead to an answer to the main question.

## 2 Theories and concepts

### 2.1 Borders and border processes

Borders between countries have always been an important part of the relationship between countries. Scientists also used different concepts to do research on borders. In this chapter, different concepts are explained, to use as the theoretical background in the interviews and observations in Northern Ireland. Starr & Most (1976) were among the first to start theorizing the concept of borders. Until then, the significance of borders in international systems was acknowledged. But not that much attention was paid to the “*conceptualization, operationalization and measurement*” (Starr & Most, 1976, p.581). In the time of writing, borders became more and more important, because more borders were created. New states were founded, especially because of decolonisation. For example, the total of independent nation-states grew after the Second World War from 66 to 125 in 1965 (Starr & Most, 1976, p.581). More nation-states meant more borders and so, the importance of borders in scientific literature grew. O’Dowd (2002) indicates that this growth of nations, and so borders, was a new phenomenon in 20th Century Europe. The unification of different nations into large states/empires was at the peak at the end of the nineteenth century (O’Dowd, 2002). From the Treaty of Versailles on, big states or empires were split up into smaller states and nations, meaning a growth of borders.

Agnew (2008) sees two main groups of thinkers in border-research. Those who see borders as physical lines on the ground and those who think borders *are “complex human creations that are perpetually open to question”* and *“the result of processes in the past that are either no longer operative or are increasingly eclipsed by transnational or global pressures”* (Agnew, 2008, p.3). Agnew talks about how different influences and events in history shaped borders, as is the case in the Iris border as well. What Agnew describes is that borders are more and more seen as complex processes, rather than just a physical line on the ground. For example, Agnew argues, airports are part of borders as well: *“most borders remain unfenced and largely undefended outside of the checkpoints to which people crowd because of routes and modes of transport that focus them there. In a number of respects, therefore, it is not entirely clear to me that airports differ fundamentally from other border checkpoints”* (Agnew, 2008, p.184). This view comes back in the Irish Sea scenario, where border checks move to the ports and airports of Northern Ireland.

The two groups of thinkers are both relevant for this thesis. The border as a physical line is used in the different types of borders used in the future scenarios. Hard, soft and smart borders are distinguished as different types of ‘lines’ on the ground. Next to that, processes of bordering and othering are relevant because of the complex history of Ireland. Differences

between groups of people are a big part of this history (further described in chapter 4) and border processes play a key role in these differences. The border process is also useful, because of the different border regimes surrounding the Irish border.

### **2.1.1 Bordering and othering**

In the second half of the 20th century, border researchers thought globalisation would lead to a borderless world (Newman, 2006). Countries would connect more, and the importance of borders would become less significant. This, however, was not the case. It became apparent from the 90's on that borders were still of great importance. Globalisation was still growing, but this didn't mean that borders would disappear. Instead of a focus on the physical line of the border, researchers started to look at the border process, the 'bordering'. This focus brought researchers from a wide range of different disciplines together, from geography, anthropology, politics, history et cetera (Newman, 2006). Borders still separate different groups of people. Van Houtum & Van Naerssen (2002) argue that borders can lead to a greater division between groups of people, of 'othering'. A border creates an us and them. Van Houtum & Van Naerssen (2001, p.126) explain borders as follows: *"Borders do not represent a fixed point in space or time, rather they symbolise a social practice of spatial differentiation."* This explanation of borders focuses more on the process, the practice of bordering. The paradox of borders is that they create both unity and difference at the same time. Borders try to create and shape common identity, while they also create new or reproduce differences between other nations or countries (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2001). This othering could be applied to Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Othering does not necessarily have to be between two countries, it could also happen within a country. There are lots of countries with different ethnic groups living together in a country. Belgium could be a close by example of that. In Northern Ireland, this could have been the case during the political conflict. There were borders between unionists and nationalists, creating that us and them, although they lived together in one country. There is a possibility that this imaginary border could come back because of Brexit.

### **2.1.2 Border regimes**

The border process is shaped by different agreements between neighbouring states, called border regimes. Border regimes or frontier regimes, according to Anderson (2000), consist of *"agreements with neighbouring states, either bilateral or multilateral, and the practices which have grown up around them, administration and management of frontier controls and related systems of police and customs co-operation, and institutions and arrangements for transfrontier cooperation."* (Anderson, 2000, p.2). Border regimes are relevant in this thesis because they

shape the current Irish border. It is hard to understand the current border without knowing what kind of border regimes apply to it. Border regimes, as defined by Anderson (2000) are about agreements with neighbouring states. Those states, in this case, have a change in jurisdiction. One state leaves the EU while the other state stays in it. Therefore, current border regimes need to be adjusted to the new situation and maybe new border regimes need to be created. The current border regimes of the Irish border are described in chapter 2.3.

## **2.2 Types of borders**

There are different future scenarios for the Irish border. It is therefore good to know what different types of borders are discussed in scientific literature. Different terminology is used in descriptions of border types. Border studies in the 20th Century classified border types mainly in 'closed and open' (Newman, 2006). In this thesis, I chose to use hard and soft borders. A closed border sounds like a border you can't go through. A hard border might be harder to cross, but it is not closed. The Irish border, regardless of what the outcomes of Brexit will be, is still going to be a border you can cross, either hard or soft. Next to that, the word 'hard' border is often used in publications and articles regarding Brexit (like European Commission, 2018a). The opposite of hard is soft, therefore a 'soft border' is often used in articles regarding Brexit (like Leahy, 2018 and Campbell, 2018). Next to those two types, I added 'smart borders'. This is a relatively new, technological type of border that was discussed in the Brexit negotiations as a possible solution to the Irish border. Although both parties already ruled out using this option, it is interesting to find out how such a technological border would have worked and how it could be applied to the Irish border. It could give more insight into how such a technological border could be applied in the future on other border cases.

### **2.2.1 Hard borders**

In the 20th Century, borders were still seen as physical lines on maps. Border research, therefore, was mostly about hard borders. The previously discussed paper of Starr & Most (1976) conceptualized the concept of borders in 6 types of borders, to use for measurement of interaction between different countries. In their time, colonies were still of big importance in the world system, so they distinguished borders between noncolony and colony borders. Starr & Most (1976) distinguished contiguous noncolony land borders, water noncolony borders, proximity-zone noncolony borders for noncolony borders and the same three types for colonial borders. This division into different physical types of borders was common in the 20th Century. Right now, as described before, scientists tend to focus more on the process instead of the physical line. The importance of the types of borders distinguished by Starr &

Most (1976) is the interaction between different states. A different kind of border leads to more, or less, interaction, they concluded. From the end of the 20th Century, the border process became more important than the physical lines. Hard borders were however still of great interest of researchers because this type of border is still the most common one between countries. Different researchers used different definitions. Eder (2006) sees hard borders as the geographically accepted borders and soft borders as *"boundaries we draw between people"* (p.255).

The hard border got renewed interest in the European Union because of the migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East in the last few years. Hard borders were installed to keep people without a visa out. For example, in Hungary, big fences were put up to prevent migrants from coming in. The image of a hard border, a big wall or fence impossible to cross, became reality again. Even though after the fall of the Berlin wall, people thought we would never see those type of hard borders again. The iron curtain dividing Europe in East and West was gone, and even former nations from the other side of that curtain joined the EU. But almost 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, hard borders dividing the world are as normal as they were then. Badiou (2008) points out that after the fall of the iron curtain *"the world's wall has simply shift: instead of separating East and West it now divides the rich capitalist North from the poor and devastated South."* (p.38). Agnew (2008) writes about this division as well and says that *"borders still stand guard over massive difference in standards of living"* (p.186). This division can be applied to the external borders of the EU as well. The fences were put up to prevent migrants from the Middle East and Africa to come into the EU. The consequence was that lots of migrants came by boat to avoid these hard borders. They tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea to get to the EU. The sometimes called 'refugee crisis' (especially the perception of it) eventually was one of the main drivers for people to vote to leave the EU in the Brexit referendum (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017). People in the UK wanted stronger immigration control and, in some extent, a hard border between the EU and the UK.

### **2.2.2 Soft borders**

From the end of the 20th Century, the focus in border studies shifted from the physical, geographical line to the process, the bordering (see 2.1.1). This also meant writers distinguished different types of borders. The difference between 'hard' and 'soft' borders became more and more important. Eder (2006) tried to give an overview of Europe's construction of borders. He says soft borders are *"soft facts"* and *"boundaries that we draw between people"* (Eder, 2006, p.255). This is comparable to the process of 'othering', described by Van Houtum & Van Naerssen (2002). Eder's idea of soft borders is symbolical, it's about borders in people's minds. A soft border in this sense can be hard as well.

Sometimes boundaries we draw between people can be harder than an actual physical line. Some groups of people can, for example, live separate from each other, never interacting, but live within the same country. The concept of 'soft borders' in the Brexit negotiations is used in a different way. Gormley-Heenan & Aughey (2017) for example tried to find out what effects the Brexit would have on the 'border in the mind'. They used different types of borders as possible outcomes. According to them, soft borders are borders that are more a crossing than a boundary(Gormley-Heenan & Aughey, 2017). They see a soft border as an open border, just like the current state of the Irish border. So, a border without customs checks and border control or infrastructure. This is comparable to the borders of the Schengen-countries in the European Union. As mentioned before, lots of news articles speak about a 'hard' and 'soft' Irish border as well. The reason for this is probably because the government reports often speak of a 'hard' and 'soft' Brexit. This is about how close the association of the UK with the EU will be after Brexit. A soft border is in this way different than the type Eder (2006) used. In this research, soft borders are viewed in the way Gormley-Heenan & Aughey (2017) did. Although other scientific literature often sees soft borders as borders in the mind, in this thesis a soft border means a frictionless, open border, just like the current Irish border. The borders of Schengen countries are a good example of this type of border. Although the Republic of Ireland and the UK are not part of this Agreement, they have their own agreements which make the current Irish border open as well. This was established with the Good Friday Agreements of 1998 (more about it in chapter 4). I chose to use the soft border, because it is often used in the Brexit negotiations, in the reports and articles about it. It may not be in line with some scientific literature, but it suits better within this Brexit-subject.

### **2.2.3 Smart borders**

Next to hard borders and soft borders the European Union also talks about the 'smart border' in the Brexit negotiations. This type of border is newer than the hard and soft border. Smart borders were first used on the border between the United States and Canada, in 2001 (European Commission, 2017a). Back then, smart borders were not so much about technology as they do now. The general idea of implementing smart borders was to keep the borders secure, without long border controls. Cooperation between the two countries was important, to filter the high and low risks crossing the border. Côté-Boucher (2008) analysed the principle of 'smart border' on the US/Canada border. She tried to find out what a 'smart border' in this context was about and why it was implemented. The governments of Canada and the US signed the Smart Border Declaration following the events of 9/11 in 2001. The main goal of the declaration was to filter out the potential high risks, in the 'war on terror' (Côté-Boucher, 2008). Both governments agreed to work together and share information

about people entering their countries. High risks were put on a list and this information was shared with each other.

As Côte-Boucher stated, with the principle of 'smart borders', information-sharing is one of the key concepts. In the Book 'Global surveillance and policing' Muller (2005) talks about sharing of biometrics in border policy. Biometrics is the measurement of body parts for identification (Muller, 2005). With biometrics, security agencies can identify people by using for example fingerprints or pupil scans. This information can be stored in databases and those databases are the information shared between different countries. The most obvious critique of this kind of data collection is also pointed out by Muller (2005): privacy. Big databases were created, storing a lot of personal information. After 9/11, security suddenly became of big importance again, especially in the U.S. The biometrics industry viewed itself as the solution to the threat of terrorism.

The EU also used the concept of the smart border in the Brexit negotiations. A smart border is defined by the EU: *"smart borders involve utilising modern technology, risk management, domestic and international cooperation as well as international standards to create secure and low -friction borders. Smart borders recognise that people and goods carry different risks and so separate these flows, so they can be managed differently."* (European Commission, 2017a, p.21). This definition is used by the EU in their report (further explained in chapter 2.3.2) about a smart border between the UK and the Republic of Ireland to avoid a hard border with long waiting times. In their explanation of smart borders, the European Commission gives an overview of 'international standards and practices' concerning smart borders. They describe *trusted traders programmes*, which are databases with companies that are able to *"meet specific compliance and/or security standards in their day-to-day operations"* (European Commission, 2017a, p.22). These companies will then receive benefits for their trades, with both import and export. This mostly means fewer checks of transport when crossing the border. This is another example of filtering out the high and the low risks, described by Côte-Boucher (2008). The European Commission (2017a) also talks about different systems for border control with smart borders, where information about the transport of goods is submitted before and stored in databases. Duties which have to be paid for moving goods across the border can be paid on a monthly basis, so transports don't have to be checked every time they cross a border. If inspections or controls are still required, then this could be done away from the border, for example at the warehouses where the goods are loaded. Controls for exports could be done at the place of business where the goods are going to. In this way, long stops on the border are reduced.

## **Examples of smart borders**

In the description of hard borders and soft borders, examples are provided, but not necessarily with extensive descriptions. With smart borders, this is more useful, because the concept of smart borders is the least known of the three and the literature is not as extensive as the other types of borders. A few specific examples of smart borders could, therefore, help to make the concept clearer. Côté-Boucher (2008) described the smart border between the U.S. and Canada. The European Commission (2017a) also described this example, next to the smart border between Sweden and Norway and the smart border between Australia and New Zealand. The Australia - New Zealand example, although also using technology to reduce border checks, is not used in this thesis, because their sea border is not applicable to the Northern Ireland - Republic of Ireland border.

### **U.S. and Canada**

In 2001, the U.S. and Canada signed the Smart Border Declaration, as described in chapter 2.2.3. Currently, both countries make use of technology with their border crossings. The border between the two countries uses *“barcode scanning of customs documentation, automatic number plate recognition, RFID technology and biometric data in cards for approved drivers”* to manage and filter different risks and speed up the process of crossing the border (European Commission, 2017a, p.33). The countries use the Free And Secure Trade (FAST) program as a form of a trusted trader program. This program is meant for low-risk commercial goods, to speed up export and import to both countries. For this purpose, the governments of both countries installed four different FAST lanes, spread across the border. The companies of the program get a barcode, and this is scanned at the border, so the companies can cross the border without stops (European Commission, 2017a). Gillan & Gados (2007) even found out in their Empirical Investigation of the Pacific Crossing that participants in the FAST program had a reduced time of border crossing up to 81%.

### **Sweden and Norway**

The case of Sweden and Norway is interesting for the Irish case. Sweden is part of the European Union and Norway is not. The difference is that Norway is part of the Schengen Agreement and the European Economic Area, but not part of the EU customs union (more about the differences between the different EU unions and agreements in chapter 2.3). Since the UK also aims to leave the EU customs union, it is interesting how customs checks can be done by making use of a smart border. Another similarity is the own arrangement of free travel between the Nordic countries, just like the Common Travel Area (CTA) (also further explained in chapter 2.3). The Nordic Passport Convention of 1957 made it possible for

citizens of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark (Iceland joined later as well) to travel between each other without needing passport control (European Commission, 2017a). Just as the example of the US - Canada border, the Sweden - Norway border has its own trusted trade program: the Authorised Economic Operators (AEO) program. Companies who are within this program can cross the border without massive delays. Both countries also created a 15-kilometre zone, where custom controls can take place. These controls can be carried out by both customs authorities and on both sides of the border, in order to their own customs regulations. This includes the EU Custom regulations for Sweden. Custom controls can be undertaken on other country's behalf and goods must pass through special customs locations. Only 14 of more than 80 crossings facilitate customs controls (European Commission, 2017a). Companies need to submit a summary declaration at least one hour before arriving at the border, so customs authorities can check if controls will be necessary. Only around 10% of the import on both sides of the borders has to undergo physical controls (European Commission, 2017a). Vehicles selected for control are going through a scanner and will only be further checked if necessary, to reduce waiting times. Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) is used on border crossings where customs authorities are not present, to detect customs violations (European Commission, 2017a). Here, the technology aspect of the smart border plays a big role again. The future plan is to integrate the ANPR system into customs checks, so vehicles that submitted their declaration before and are cleared as well can pass the border without having to stop at all (BBC, 2017).

#### **2.2.4 Internal and external borders**

The European Union consists of internal and external borders. Internal are the borders between different EU-member states, external the ones between an EU-member and a non-member. As mentioned in chapter 1, the focus in the scientific literature has mostly been on the external borders, because every time new member states joined the EU, those external borders changed. This change was of interest to scientists. Now what happens is that for the first time in EU history, an internal border turns in to an external border. Therefore, it's good to know the different definitions and implications of both internal and external borders.

O'Dowd (2002) writes about the external borders of the EU. He points out the downfall of the big European empires, which created a lot of new borders, as one of the main reasons for a growing importance of borders. At the end of the 19th century, Europe was mainly dominated by a few big states/empires. At the end of the 20th century, this had changed completely. Lots of different nation-states were established. During this century, the early form of cooperation was started which would lead to the European Union as it is now. The Treaty of Rome in 1957 was one of the first attempt to create free movement of goods,

services, capital and people (now known as the 4 freedoms) across the boundaries of the member states of the European Economic Community (EEC) (O'Dowd, 2002). This Treaty changed the perception of internal and external borders. Until then, there was almost no difference between internal and external borders of the European Economic Community (EEC). The four freedoms would make the internal borders softer, creating more unity among the member states. The external borders would change heavily after the establishment of the single market in 1993. After the downfall of the Soviet Union, new states got independent, creating a growth in borders. A lot of these former Soviet-states joined the EU later on, most of them in 2004. This extended the EU's external borders to the East. The single market provided the free movement of people, goods, capital and services between member states. Now, crossing internal borders of the EU was totally different from crossing the external borders.

Delanty (2006) saw the same developments of the EU borders. He sees a change in hardening and softening of internal and external borders. He points out that the *"internal borders of Europe are becoming more open, and in some cases there is an indication of a move towards soft borders"* (p.191). He gives the *"easing of security on the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland"* as an example of this (Delanty, 2006, p.191). In the past, the EU internal borders were harder, and more securitised, while the external borders were, except for the Iron Curtain, relatively open and open to change. Now, the internal borders mainly disappeared and are fully opened, while the external borders are more closed and fixed. Changes in those external borders, like the joining of new member states, seems harder now than it was before (Delanty, 2006).

The external, mainly South and Eastern borders, of the EU are becoming harder and more fixed, but now a new kind of external border is going to occur in the West of the EU. The Irish border won't be the same as the external borders in for example Greece and Hungary, but it's interesting how this new type of external border is going to work when the UK leaves the EU in 2019. The uncertainty that's surrounding the Irish border is mostly there because it's a first-time case. Never in the history of the EU did a member state leave the Union. What will happen is still unknown, but it's interesting to compare the shrinking of the EU with the former enlargement to the East. Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2002) wrote about this enlargement and tried to theorize the process of enlargement of regional (international) organisations by looking at the enlargement process of the EU that started in 2002. The first thing to compare is their description of the process of enlargement: *"...enlargement is best conceptualized as a gradual process that begins before, and continues after, the admission of new members to the organization."* (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier,

2002, p.503). This conceptualisation could be applied to the shrinking of EU's territory as well. That process started with the Brexit campaign or the referendum in 2016. When the UK has to leave the EU in March 2019 there is a transition period until (at least) December 2020. The process, therefore, continues after formally leaving the Union. Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2002) then distinguish 4 main dimensions of enlargement. But these focus more on the political process of countries applying for membership, the strategy of current member states and the strategy of the EU itself. It's useful however to view the new relationship of the UK with the EU using the description of Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier (2002), because the Irish border is, in essence, the place where this relationship meets.

## **2.3 Brexit**

On the 23rd of June, 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. 51,9% of the people that showed up, voted to leave. The reasons why British people voted to leave were also examined in the years after the referendum. Goodwin & Milazzo (2017) for example investigated the role of the immigration debate in the Brexit vote. They argue that concern about immigration was one of the main reasons why people voted to leave (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017). Hobolt (2016) also pointed out that immigration control was the main argument for leave-voters in the referendum. The concerns and perceived effects of immigration on the country and communities triggered people to support the leave-campaign. The leave-campaign wanted to gain back control over their own borders. The othering described by Van Houtum & Naerssen (2001) can be viewed here as well. Borders can create more unity in the own state and more difference with other countries. The leave-voters wanted to make the UK border harder, because of their concerns on immigration. They also viewed the situation in an us and the others.

9 months after the referendum, the UK government triggered Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon to start the process of leaving the EU (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017). Now, two years after the referendum, the outcome of this process is still unclear.

### **2.3.1 Current border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**

This chapter tries to describe the current type of border and the general rules and legislation of the European Union, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland applying to it.

The Irish land border is 310 miles long and has over 200 formal crossing points to go from Northern Ireland to the Republic and vice-versa (House of Commons, 2018). The current border can be viewed as two different borders in one. 1. The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland 2. The border between the UK and the Republic

of Ireland. After Brexit, a third one would be present: the border between the UK and the EU. Currently, the Irish border is only viewed in these two different ways. These 2 expressions of the border have different meanings. Brexit will have an influence on both borders and will create a third border.

### **Current border regimes**

Border regimes, as discussed in chapter 2.1.2, play an important role in the current border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Currently, there are different agreements playing a role with the Irish border. The Centre for Cross Border Studies (2017) described these in their first briefing paper about Brexit and the Irish border. The most important border regimes according to them are arrangements (1) between the UK and the EU, (2) between the UK and the Republic of Ireland and (3) between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

- (1) Currently, the UK is still part of the European Union and, therefore, it is part of different agreements between the UK and the EU. First, the UK is part of the EU customs union. The customs union means *“that members apply the same tariffs to goods imported into their territory from the rest of the world and apply no tariffs internally among members.”* (European Commission, 2014a, p.3). The EU makes trade deals with other countries as one customs block. The same tariffs for one country then apply to all CU members. Secondly, the UK is part of the EU Single Market. The single market *“allows people and businesses to move and trade freely across the 28-nation group.”* (European Commission, 2014b, p.3). The most important part of the single market is the four freedoms: free movement of people, goods, services and capital (European Commission, 2014b). When the Republic of Ireland and the UK joined the EU in 1973, they also joined the EU customs union. In 1993, the EU Single Market was established, which meant that customs infrastructure could be removed (House of Commons, 2018). The Single Market relates to the customs union because the CU controls the outside of the single market. The European Commission described is as follows: *“The EU customs union acts like the skin of the body. It surrounds the EU’s internal market, allowing goods to move freely internally by controlling their external import and export. In fact, the internal market, where businesses can sell their goods and invest in any Member State, would be unthinkable without the EU customs union.”* (European Commission, 2014a, p.3).
- (2) The UK and the Republic of Ireland also have their own agreements concerning the Irish border. The Republic and the UK are both not in the Schengen Zone. The Schengen Zone was established to give EU-citizens freedom to work and live in other

EU-member states. *“Schengen cooperation enhances this freedom by enabling citizens to cross internal borders without being subjected to border checks”* (European Commission, 2018b). Free movement of people is, however, possible from the Republic to Northern Ireland. This is because the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have their own kind of Schengen Zone, the Common Travel Area (CTA). This means free travel of people between the Republic and the UK (including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands), which was agreed upon in 1922 when the Irish Free State was established (McGuinness & Gower, 2017). This meant no border checks when people wanted to move from the Free State to Northern Ireland. During the Troubles, this free movement of people was not possible anymore because of the security checks. But after the Troubles ended, the CTA was restored.

- (3) Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have made their own agreements to end the years known as the ‘Troubles’. In 1998, the Belfast Agreements, better known as the Good Friday Agreements (GFA), were established to bring peace to Northern Ireland. Although the customs checks already ended before in 1993 after joining the single market (more about that in chapter 4), 1998 marked the definite return to an open border without security and custom border checks and physical border infrastructure. The GFA also gave the opportunity for people in Northern Ireland to have both an Irish passport and a British passport, if they wanted to. Next to that, in the GFA, both North-South (Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) and East-West (Northern Ireland and Britain) cooperation is one of the essential parts of the Agreements.

### **2.3.2 Future scenarios Northern Ireland**

At the moment of writing this thesis, Theresa May’s government is still negotiating about the future of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Different options for that border were discussed in those negotiations. The scenarios used in this thesis are different options that at some point were discussed in the negotiations. The reality is that some of them are not an option for both parties. However, this thesis still tries to find out what could have happened if those scenarios were coming true. The scenarios described in this chapter are examined in chapter 5. Then the advantages, the disadvantages and the consequences of the scenarios will be described. The UK published its position on Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in a position paper in August 2017 (HM Government, 2017). 4 main points were described in this paper:

1. Upholding the Good Friday Agreements in all its parts.
2. Maintaining the Common Travel Area.

3. Avoiding a hard border for the movement of goods.
4. Preserve North-South and East-West cooperation.

In December 2017, the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom published their joint report on the progress concerning phase I of the Brexit negotiations (European Commission, 2017b). Both parties were committed to avoiding a hard border “*including any physical infrastructure or related checks and control*” (European Commission, 2017b, p.7). In this joint report, the United Kingdom guaranteed that no hard border would be implemented on the Irish island, to keep north-south cooperation on the island. The UK also guaranteed that Northern Ireland would stay in their internal market. Together with the government of Dublin, the United Kingdom intended to keep making arrangements concerning the Common Travel Area, to give EU-citizens the chance to move to the United Kingdom without border checks. This was Phase I of the Brexit negotiations. Currently, there has been no definitive agreement about the Irish border. In June, a Brexit-summit is taking place and both parties want to find agreements about the Irish border before that time.

Gormley-Heenan & Aughey (2017) used three different main types of borders for the future of the Irish border: hard border, soft border and technological border. These three types are used in this research as well, but different types of hard borders are distinguished because the place of the border could change. A hard border in the Irish Sea would be a different type than a hard border on the Irish island. The consequences for these different types of hard borders could also be different (see chapter 5).

However, the different types of borders as described before are not always clear or one-sided. As Katy Hayward from Queen’s University Belfast points out, a soft border sometimes can only be a soft border for travel, but a hard border for customs (House of Commons, 2017). This happened at the Irish border as well, when the customs checks disappeared after the establishment of the single market. Security checks were still going on after that, until the GFA in 1998. It’s good to keep in mind that a soft border doesn’t always mean soft in everything and a hard border doesn’t always mean hard in everything. This is kept in mind in the scenarios. Although the titles of the scenarios may suggest a hard distinction between different scenarios, in reality, these can overlap. The descriptions of the scenarios make clearer what is meant by hard, soft or smart, concerning the Irish border. The scenarios are not used to predict one future, they’re merely drawn up to give structure to the exploring of the future Irish border. In the interviews, the scenarios were used to find out what consequences of different borders would be in general. In chapter 5, where the future of the Irish border is analysed, these scenarios are used to give examples of what the future border could possibly look like.

**Scenario A: smart border 2.0, new technological type of border on the Irish island**



Figure 1: Smart Border. Source: ESRI ArcGIS basemap, own work

In November 2017, the European Parliament published a study aimed to provide a way to avoid a hard border on the Irish island by implementing ‘smart border 2.0’ (European Commission, 2017a). This report, already described in chapter 2.2.3, argues that a ‘smart border 2.0’ would meet all international standards to provide a border without needing intensive border controls. The ‘2.0’ part in the title suggests that this type of border is a different type of smart border than the usual types of smart borders in other countries. The solution proposed by the European Union is more focused on technological aspects than previous smart borders. This new type of border is also named an ‘electronic border’ by the European Commission (2017a).

In the rapport of the European Commission (2017a), an example is provided of what crossing a ‘smart border 2.0’ would mean in practice:

*“A company in the North of Ireland needs to move goods to a client in the UK. The company is pre-registered in the AEO database (AEO status or application for AEO Trusted Trader), a simplified export/import declaration is sent, including a unique consignment reference number. The transporting company is pre-registered in the AEO database and the driver of the truck is pre-registered in the Trusted Commercial Travellers database. The simplified export/import declaration is automatically processed and risk assessed. At the border*

*the mobile phone of the driver is recognized/identified and a release-note is sent to the mobile phone with a permit to pass the border that opens the gate automatically when the vehicle is identified, potentially by an automatic number plate registration system. A post-import supplementary declaration is submitted in the import country within the given time period. Potential controls can be carried out by mobile inspection units from EU or UK with right of access to facilities and data, as required.” (European Commission, 2017a, p.11)*

For the movement of people, the European Union aims to maintain the CTA. Citizens from the UK and the Republic of Ireland who are permitted to make use of the CTA would be allowed to go across the border at any place. People who need to have identity checks are required to go to special crossings, where they need to be checked. If they cross the border on a normal crossing, then they have crossed the border ‘illegally’ (European Commission, 2017a). This division of different kinds of people means no intensive border control has to be installed at all crossings. The aim of both the UK and the EU to avoid physical border infrastructure would, although partly, be achieved. Some form of border control will, however, be necessary, on both sides of the border (European Commission, 2017a).

**Scenario B: soft border on the Irish island, UK stays in customs union**



Figure 2: Soft Border. Source: ESRI ArcGIS basemap, own work

The main goal of the UK when they voted to leave the European Union was to take control of their own borders. But currently, more and more MP’s in Westminster advocate for the UK to stay in the customs union, or some other form of customs union that would replace the

current one (BBC, 2018b). These ‘soft Brexiters’ argue staying in the customs union and single market would keep the UK in a good trade position with the rest of the EU and at the same time would offer a solution to the Irish border problem. Staying in the customs union would make trade a lot easier and reduce checks when goods would enter or leave the UK. For Northern Ireland, this would mean that customs checks would not be necessary on the Irish island. For the movement of people, the CTA could stay. However, the goal of Brexit to take back control would be hard to realise inside the customs union. Then, the UK won’t be able to sign its own trade deals with countries from over the world.

I distinguished two different types of soft borders on the Irish island because they both have different impacts on relations between Northern Ireland and Britain. It would be different with scenario C, where there also is a soft border on the Irish island, but the border controls would move to the Irish Sea.

**Scenario C: soft border on Ireland, hard border in the Irish Sea**



Figure 3: Scenario C: Hard border in the Irish Sea. Source: ArcGIS basemap, <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/gateways-sea-ports>, Google Maps and own work

A soft border on the Irish island and a hard border in the Irish Sea, between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Border control will be installed for entering Great Britain. Northern Ireland will stay in the UK and leave the EU, but Northern Ireland could get a special status and stay in the EU customs union. This scenario is similar to scenario B, but now only Northern Ireland would stay in the EU customs union, not the whole United Kingdom. The

scenario is drawn up from the ‘backstop’ idea of the European Union. On the 28th of February, the EU published a draft withdrawal agreement in which it stated that Northern Ireland could become part of a ‘common regulatory area’ (BBC, 2018a). This would only be the case if another solution to the Irish border would not be found. It’s a ‘backstop’ needed in case of no solution. The UK Government did not agree with this option (BBC, 2018a). In the common regulatory area, the Common Travel Area would be kept intact and people and goods would be able to move across the Irish border without interruption. The common regulatory area is the form of customs union that would let the Irish border open, without Northern Ireland officially staying in the EU customs union. For Northern Ireland, trade with the other side of the island would still be significant and there will be no border checks on the Irish island. Only goods going from Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK will be checked. Therefore, the hard border would be ‘in’ the Irish Sea, not on the island itself. The border would be no line in the sea, but checks would be enforced at airports and harbours. Agnew (2008) pointed out that airports differ not that much from other border checkpoints. The place of control simply shifts. The UK did not agree to this backstop (HM Government, 2018). The EU however, at least wanted to investigate the possibility for this scenario, in case the Brexit negotiations would not succeed.

***Scenario D: hard border on the Irish island***



Figure 4: Hard Border. Source: ESRI ArcGIS basemap, own work

A hard border between the EU and the UK Border infrastructure and control will return. Both parties have made clear that they want to avoid this option. However, after long negotiations, a decision on the border issue has not been made. The probability of a hard border between the Republic and Northern Ireland is still low. It is, however, good to describe what a hard border would look like and what it would mean for Northern Ireland. If the UK would leave the customs union and they would have no deal with the EU because the negotiations would end up in nothing, then customs control could return to the border. Therefore, border infrastructure would need to be re-installed and waiting times to cross the border could return. The controls would mainly be for customs because both governments would keep the CTA in order, which means free movement of people.

## 2.4 Conceptual model

By using the different possible scenarios, a conceptual model can be made to view the way this thesis will examine the future of the Irish border. The thesis uses three different time periods of the border: the history of the border, the current border and the future of the border.

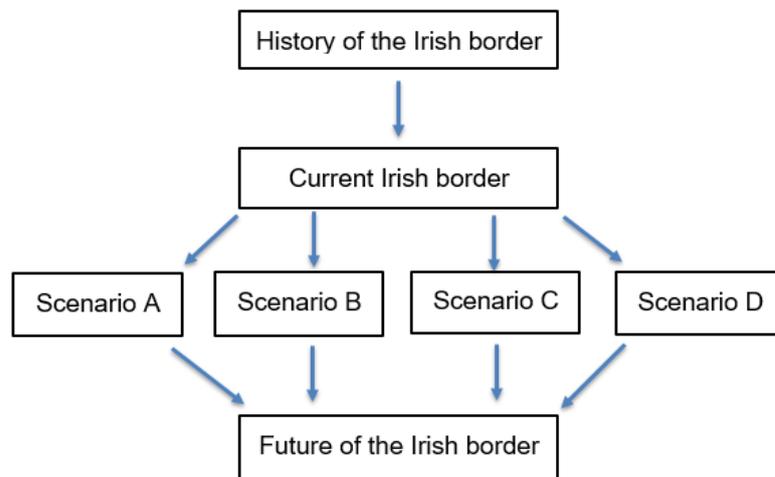


Figure 5: Conceptual model

The history of the Irish border shaped the current border. Without describing the history, it's hard to understand the current border and its surrounding border regimes. From establishing the border when Northern Ireland was constituted, until the signing of the GFA in 1998, when the Irish border was fully opened again, all events in the 20th Century have had its influence on the border as it is now. Then different scenarios are used to view the different future possibilities. Each scenario will have different impacts on the future border. The consequences of those scenarios on the future border and relationships concerning the border are then examined and analysed in the last part of this thesis.

## 3 Methodology

In this thesis, a combination of different research strategies and methods are used to answer the main and sub-questions. This chapter explains what strategies and methods are used and how they are applied in this research.

### 3.1 Research strategy

Before starting the analysis and going to Northern Ireland, theories and concepts were drawn up to provide the basis for the analysis. With these theories and concepts, 4 scenarios were made. The scenarios were used in the interviews, by asking the respondents their opinions about them. In management-studies, scenario planning is used as a strategy for managers to run their company. By drawing up different scenarios, it is easier to be prepared for future situations. Although scenario planning is used by for example managers in big companies, it is also used as a planning tool (Schoemaker, 1995). Regarding Brexit, organisations also use scenario planning as a tool to prepare for Brexit. Joe Lavery pointed out in the interview that the EURES Cross Border Partnership uses scenario planning as well. In my thesis, I'm not 'planning' for Brexit. Neither do I have to make policy for future scenarios. But drawing up scenarios helped to give structure to the interviews and the analysis. They also give an indication of what the future could look like. Therefore, I used this strategy before going on with the analysis.

After drawing up the scenarios, the analysis of the consequences started. This analysis uses qualitative methods for gathering information to answer the main question. An important part of qualitative research according to Vennix (2011) is to study a phenomenon in its natural environment. Although the central subject of this thesis, the 'future' of the Irish border, is not something easy to study in its natural environment, going to Northern Ireland would at least give more insight into the situation. Observing crossing the border and talking to people who live around that border is also part of the natural environment of the border. That is one of the reasons why I chose to go to Northern Ireland in the first place. The way the main answer is answered is by giving theoretical indications of an empirical question. The future of the Irish border is viewed in an empirical way, by visiting the country and doing interviews with different people during the visit. The aim of those interviews is to get more insight into the different implications of different future scenarios, to add to the empirical way the main question is answered. The theoretic way this is done, is about the comparison of the scientific debates concerning borders, with the case of the Irish border. The future Irish border will be compared to the creation of external borders of the European Union. Next to

that, theories about borders in general will be used to see what the influence of (re)creating a border can be.

The data collection of literature and interviews is used to help to find answers to the sub- and main questions. These methods could be compared to existing research strategies. There are different types of research strategies and different ways to structure a thesis. Verschuren & Doorewaard (2010) distinguish 5 main types of research strategies. However, those types do not completely match the way this thesis is conducted, but it has got some characteristics of desk research and case study.

Desk research is *“a research strategy in which the researcher does not gather empirical data himself, but uses material produced by others.”* (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010, p.194). The three main characteristics of desk research according to Verschuren & Doorewaard (2010, p.194) are “1) the use of existing material, in combination with reflection; 2) the absence of direct contact with the research object; 3) the material is used from a different perspective than at the time of its production.” The existing material mainly consists of reports from governments and organisations working on or around the border. But with desk research, the absence of direct contact with the research unit(s) is important. That is not the case in my thesis, where I went to Northern Ireland to do interviews to gain more insight into the situation.

A case study is *“a research strategy in which the researcher tries to gain a profound and full insight into one or several objects or processes that are confined in time and space.”* (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010, p.178). A case study is more focused on depth, to get more insight in a specific situation. You could view the Irish border as the case in this study. Then this thesis would focus on that border to see what is happening now. This research, however, looks at the history and the future of the Irish border, it is not confined in time and space. In case studies, a specific object or group of people is chosen to focus on. In this thesis, there's not a specific homogenous group that is used for the case study. The respondents do have in common that they all live in Northern Ireland, mostly close to the Irish border, and Brexit plays a key role in their work/functions. But the respondents are from different sectors and have different viewpoints.

The goal of this thesis is not to gain insight into how Brexit influences one group or community, but on the border in general. Although some elements of desk research and case study are recognizable, the way this research is done is not sufficient to use the criteria for those research strategies in this thesis. This combination of different types of sources and can be seen as a form of 'triangulation'. Triangulation is used when a researcher uses several sources of information, using different methods, comparing these results to see if they agree with each other (Vennix, 2011). The results from the interviews are compared to the findings

from the literature. If the results from several sources and methods give the same conclusions, then the results should be more reliable (Vennix, 2011).

### **3.2 Data collection**

Interviews were conducted with 7 people during the visit. Because of time restrictions, it was hard to speak to a lot of different people to conclude something about a particular group. Therefore, I chose to do in-depth interviews, to get more information about the Irish border, rather than trying to say something about one particular group of people. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured interviews. This means an interview guide was made beforehand (added in the Appendix), but there was still space to add questions that came up during the interviews. The interview guide is necessary, to keep structure. But you can also keep space for questions that come up during the interview (Cresswel, 2013). One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews according to Barribal & While (1994) is that *“they are well suited for the exploration of the perception and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues”* (p.330). This applies to the case of the Irish border. It is a complex subject and sometimes touches sensitive issues, especially when it comes to the history of Northern Ireland. The semi-structured type of interview was also chosen because of the different types of respondents. If the respondents would be a homogenous group of people, then structured interviews could have been useful to make a conclusion about that group of people. In this thesis, the goal of the interviews was to gain more insight into the history of the border, the current border and the future possibilities. Every respondent had different personal experiences and had to deal with Brexit differently in their jobs. It was, therefore, useful to ask more about certain topics.

It was not easy to find enough respondents. Finding people was difficult to do when you're in another country. I also only had one week in which I was able to conduct interviews. This restricted some respondents, because they were not able to meet me during that week. Eventually, I used a snowball method to find respondents. I started out with emails to different cross-border organisations to districts around the Irish border, the Derry and Strabane District, and Armagh district. Through the Derry and Strabane District, I got a list of people who could be interesting to talk to. I emailed those people and asked in the emails if they knew other people who could be interesting to talk to. Some people suggested people I already contacted, but some, like Stephen Kelly, was suggested by others. Eventually, I arranged 6 interviews before I went to Northern Ireland in May.

In Northern Ireland, I did 6 interviews with 7 people for whom Brexit is a major influence in their daily work. Joe Lavery of the EURES cross-border partnership was not available in that week, so I arranged an interview by phone with him. I went to Derry to do 4 interviews, and the other 2 I did in Belfast. It was useful and interesting to speak to people living in and around Derry because Derry is a border-city, close to County Donegal, which is in the Republic. On figure 6 you can see how close Derry is to the Republic of Ireland.



Figure 6: View from Derry's peace bridge towards the hills of Donegal (Republic of Ireland)

In Derry, people cross the border regularly. If some kind of border would be re-installed, then Derry would be one of the cities facing the biggest changes. But the respondents also grew up around Derry or in other border regions (Fermanagh). Therefore, they could also tell me about their personal experiences with the border in the past, before the GFA.

A small observation was also used when crossing the border. An observation is *"the act of noting a phenomenon in the field"* (Cresswel, 2013, p.166). The main point of this was to see how crossing the border right now would be like. Usually, the researcher is *"involved in that which he or she is observing"* (Cresswel, 2013, p.166). Here, I participated in the observation myself, by making this crossing of the border. The observation scheme is added in the Appendix. The observation was not really structured, because the only chance I had eventually was to take the bus from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland. The observation is not a big part of the analysis, but it was useful to see with my own eyes how open the border was. The bus I took was on the M1 motorway from Dublin to Northern Ireland, it was going too fast to get a good view of the border. However, it was clear how little the differences were across the border.

### 3.2.1 Overview respondents

#### 1) **Paul Fleming and Conor Heany**

Paul Fleming is councillor of Sinn Féin in the Derry and Strabane City and Region council. Conor Heany is working in the European Team of Sinn Féin in Derry, under the supervision of Martina Anderson. Sinn Féin is known as a party that strives for the unification of Ireland. Therefore, they campaigned for a stay vote in the EU referendum. This would keep the island under one jurisdiction. I also emailed their counterpart, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) for an interview about Brexit, but they did not respond. I knew Sinn Féin's opinion about Brexit and Ireland before, so I could do the interview objective. I think it was useful for my thesis to hear their viewpoints and their proposed solutions for the border. I kept in mind in the report that there is also a 44% of the people in Northern Ireland who voted to leave the European Union, although I did not speak to a party representing those votes. It was also very useful that Heany joined the interview. He works in the European Team and is working on Brexit topics on a daily basis. He knew a lot about the negotiations and different possibilities because he also works in Brussels.

#### 2) **Jim Roddy**

Jim Roddy is City Centre Manager in Derry. He mainly had an economic viewpoint about Brexit, because he has to deal with businesses a lot in his role as City Centre Manager. Derry is a border city and a lot of people from both sides of the border cross that border on a daily basis around the city. A lot of the companies Jim works with, also work across the border. Brexit, therefore, could have big impacts on those businesses. Roddy could tell me a lot of the cross-border economy of Derry. He also works between different parties, from different political viewpoints, to bring them together. Therefore, he could tell opinions about Brexit and the border from different perspectives. This was very useful to hear. It was also very useful that he works in a border city, where crossing the border is part of daily life. He could tell me a lot about how the border changed over time, how crossing the border became normal after the disappearing of customs and security checks.

#### 3) **Martin Reilly**

Martin Reilly is councillor of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in the Derry and Strabane City and Region council. The SDLP also strives for Irish unification, and devolution of power as long as Northern Ireland stays in the UK. The SDLP was historically different than Sinn Féin because they rejected the violence during the Troubles. Reilly works around Derry and Strabane and worked on different political levels. He worked for an MP of the British parliament, who first

worked in the National Assembly of Northern Ireland. Therefore, he experienced politics on various levels within the UK and Northern Ireland. He could tell me a lot about the politics behind the referendum and the leave vote. He also told me a lot about how the border used to be, before the GFA.

4) **Freya McClements**

Freya McClements is a journalist living in Derry, working for the Irish Times and the BBC. She works around the whole island of Ireland, crossing the border regularly. The stories she reports and articles she writes are also about both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Right now, she covers a lot of Brexit stories. The interview with her was very useful because in her work, McClements talked a lot to people around the border about what Brexit could mean for them. She could give a lot of personal examples of those people. She also knew a lot about the negotiations, while she follows the news closely as a journalist. She provided a lot of information that I could use in this thesis.

5) **Stephen Kelly**

Stephen Kelly is the CEO of Manufacturing Northern Ireland. He is head of an organisation made up of a lot of different businesses operating in manufacturing in Northern Ireland, from small family businesses of 5 people to big production companies of 5000 employees. He had a good view of the business side of Brexit because Northern Ireland's economy is in a great sense connected with Britain and the Republic of Ireland. He could also give a lot of information and examples of how companies prepare for Brexit. Next to that, he gave me different views about possible future scenarios for Northern Ireland.

6) **Cathal McCall**

Cathal McCall is Professor of European Politics and International Relations at Queen's University in Belfast. His research deals a lot with borders and conflicts, both inside and outside Europe. He knew a lot of the cross-border relationships between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Already before the referendum, in 2015, McCall wrote in the Guardian about the possibility that leaving the European Union could destabilize the peace process in Northern Ireland (McCall, 2015). He saw that Brexit campaigners did not see the Irish border as a problem in Brexit. Eventually, that border would be one of the key issues in the Brexit negotiations. McCall told me a lot about the peace process and what possibilities he saw for the future.

7) **Joe Lavery**

Joe Lavery is Coordinator of the EURES Ireland - Northern Ireland Cross Border Partnership. At first, I tried to arrange an interview with the Centre For Cross Border

Studies. They eventually could not meet me during my week in Northern Ireland, but they provided me with a lot of information and reports, used in this thesis (see: Centre For Cross Border Studies, 2017). But I tried to find another organisation working on cross-border issues. I emailed the EURES Cross Border Partnership and agreed to do an interview by phone with Lavery, cause he was not available during the week in Northern Ireland. EURES works across Northern Ireland and the Republic, stimulating businesses and employees to work across the border. They make it easier for employers on one side of the border, to find employees on the other side of the border. EURES is funded by the EU and right now their future is unclear because it is not certain that the EU-funding is going to continue. Lavery told me how cross-border cooperation evolved during the years after the GFA. Before, it was a lot different. Only a summary of his interview is used for the analysis, using the notes I made during the interviews because the phone recording technology did not work.

## 4 History of the Irish border

One of the main questions of geography is about location: why is something at a certain place? This also occurs with borders. To understand why borders are at specific locations, you need to go back in history to see the reasons behind it. Borders are also frequently changed or moved. Most borders are relatively new and were established in the 19th or 20th Century (Starr & Most, 1976). This chapter tries to find out why the current border is where it is and how this border changed over time, change about the physical border but also the surrounding border regimes and its effects on Northern Ireland's society. First, the broad history of the island before establishing the current border in 1921 is given. The importance of this is finding out the reasons why a border between the Republic of Ireland (Irish Free State back then) and Northern Ireland was established. The main focus, however, will be on the last hundred years, from establishing the border until the current pre-Brexit situation. The history of the border is important in this research because the roots of the division of the Irish island influenced the next hundred years. It is hardly impossible to try to find out what the possible future border will look like, without understanding what circumstances led to establishing the current border. The history of the border is drawn up from a few different books and publications, together with personal experiences and examples from the interviews of people living in Northern Ireland.

**Table 1: Changes around the Irish border (Leary, 2016 and Bew, 2007)**

1801	<i>Act of Union: establishing the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland</i>
1920	<i>Government of Ireland Act: first approved independence Act</i>
1921	<i>Anglo-Irish Treaty: establishing the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland</i>
1949	<i>Irish Free State becomes the Republic of Ireland, leaving the Commonwealth</i>
1968	<i>The 'Troubles' start, with attacks on the Irish border</i>
1973	<i>United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland join the EEC</i>
1985	<i>Anglo-Irish Agreement</i>
1993	<i>Single market established</i>
1998	<i>Good Friday Agreements</i>
2016	<i>Brexit referendum</i>

## **4.1 From British rule to independence**

The history of the current Irish border starts before establishing in 1921. Although there was no actual border between the North and South of the island, the divisions on the island go back in time. Two main relationships are important: the relationship between the islands of Britain and Ireland and the relationships between unionists and nationalists on the island of Ireland. Both relationships would eventually be important for the events that happened in Irish history. In the years before, relations between the two islands were frequently changing. The relationship between the island of Ireland and Britain was, in some sense, a relation between the rich East and the poorer West. Between centre and periphery. But relationships on the island itself were also tense. Conflict on the island happened over time, distinguished by Todd (2009) in three main phases: the 17th Century plantations, the 19th Century nationalism and the 20th Century political violence.

During the 17th Century, settlers from England and Scotland came to the North of Ireland to start their 'plantations' (settlements, not to confuse with the colonial plantations in the Americas and Africa) in Ulster. The religious aspect of the divisions already started during this colonisation. Protestant settlers came from Britain to provide resistance against the mainly Catholic Ireland. The Protestant settlers were depending on the British state for money, power and security, to survive on an island with a Catholic majority. This created the first divisions on the Irish island. Most Catholics resented the incoming settlers, just as the native people did with incoming settlers in the colonial world (Todd, 2009). The settling of the British in Ulster also gives the geographic dimension to the divisions on Ireland. Northern Ireland now is made up of the Province of Ulster, with the exclusion of 3 counties which are in the Republic right now.

From the 18th century, divisions on the Irish island started to become clearer between nationalists, unionists, Protestants and Catholics (Bew, 2007). From the 17th Century on, the British passed several laws, discriminating Catholics. This increased the already existing divisions between the British Protestants and Irish Catholics. But it was not only religion that divided people. The division between loyalists and nationalists was also increasing. This did not necessarily mean that all loyalists were Protestants and all nationalists Catholic. Around the time of the French Revolution in 1789, Irish people got inspired to get rid of the English (Bew, 2007). Some Protestants also joined this rebellion. But instead of the English leaving, a totally different thing happened. The Act of Union in 1801 established a single kingdom of Ireland and Great-Britain (Harkness, 1983). The border between the two islands had always been the Irish Sea. Now, a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland was established, but the Sea was still there, separating the two islands.

The question was if this unification would remove that border. The British could not simply remove the Sea and join the two islands together. Britain wanted to avoid conflict with the Irish island and convinced the Irish by promising economic development. The Irish economy was already quite dependent on the British. About 85 per cent of Irish export was going to Britain and 75 per cent of Irish import was produced there (Bew, 2007). So, a union was somehow already in existence in the economy. But both islands were different in religion. Ireland was mostly Catholic, Britain mostly protestant. Next to that, Ireland had its own language. Back then, a lot more people spoke that language than they do nowadays. This was harder when it came to unification. One of the main difficulties of the union was the case of the emancipation of the Irish Catholics. Catholics did not have the same rights as Protestants, because the laws the British passed to exclude Catholics from some high functions. After the merging of the two kingdoms, the Irish government was abolished, and Irish MP's were moved to Westminster. There, 100 Irish MP's represented the island in the House of Commons in the new Union Parliament (Bew, 2007). But Catholics were not allowed in Westminster. Although most votes for Irish MP's came from Catholics, the candidate was not allowed to be one. The case of the Catholic 'emancipation' was one of the key issues concerning the union. Catholics thought they would be getting more rights, as citizens of the British empire. This, however, was not the case. The growing nationalist movements in the 19th Century also reached Ireland. Irish nationalists continuously demanded home rule for their island. During that Century, eventually, the Catholics were allowed into Westminster and got their emancipation. In 1912, the third Liberal Home Rule Bill was introduced to Westminster (Harkness, 1983). Unionists in that time had mobilised themselves in a volunteer force to try to resist the Home Rule Bill. Their efforts caused a delay in the Act and when the First World War broke out, the call for an independent Ireland had no priority anymore. During that war, however, tensions on the island rose. In 1916, nationalists proclaimed an independent Irish Republic (BBC, 2018c). The British acted by hanging those who were behind that proclamation, intensifying the tensions on the island.

#### **4.2 Divisions after the Great War**

The First World War had a significant impact in Great-Britain and Ireland. Lots of soldiers lost their lives in the trenches and this had a direct influence on the economies of the United Kingdom. Discontent within Ireland got bigger and bigger and the call for independence was something that gained more and more interest. A guerrilla war from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against the British Army starts (BBC, 2018c). This is known as the War of Independence (1919-1921). During this war, protestant-unionists in the North of Ireland tried to defend the Union (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). When the war ended with the Anglo-

Irish Treaty of 1921, the British solution to the conflict was the partition of Ireland (Arthur & Jeffery, 1988). 26 counties in the South as the Irish Free State, and 6 counties in the North as Northern Ireland. The Northern counties were given the opportunity to remain in the United Kingdom. They made use of this opportunity and stayed in the United Kingdom. With this treaty, the Irish Free State was established as an autonomous country, but under the authority of the British king, George V (Arthur & Jeffery, 1988). Devolved governments were set up in Dublin and Belfast but under the authority of the British king. The current border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was established with this partition. 6 of the 9 Ulster counties stayed in the United Kingdom and formed Northern Ireland. The border ran across the borders of the different counties, as it does today.

During the Second World War, the Republic of Ireland was neutral, and the UK was at war. The border now was easy to spot at night. In Northern Ireland, people had to dim their lights and keep their houses as dark as possible to make it harder for air attacks. In the Republic, this was not the case. In 'Unapproved Routes' by Leary (2016), US army official Callahan describes this weird division in a border town called Pettigo: "*One side of the town was blacked out, in total darkness, while the other, in the Free State, glittered brightly.*" (Leary, 2016, p.3). It's a good example of what difference a border can give to a certain place.

After the Second World War, changes were about to come to both sides on the island. The Irish Free State moved out of the Commonwealth and became the Republic of Ireland in 1949. In the North, unrest was growing steadily. The country was mainly dominated by unionists. nationalists were less represented and demanded more rights and less discrimination. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), one of the fighting parties during the War of Independence, started to attack border posts across the Irish border between 1956-1962 (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). Their tactic was attacking isolated border posts on the countryside, to have an easy getaway. The organisation was now banned on both sides of the border, and these attacks eventually did not gain much support. A lot of IRA members were arrested when internment, detention without trial, was introduced, to stop IRA's border campaign (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010).

The 1960's marked the beginning of worldwide protest for civil rights. This wave of protest found its way to Northern Ireland as well. 1968 is widely seen as the year when the 'Troubles' began. In that year, demonstrations broke out across the country, to demand civil rights (Arthur & Jeffery, 1988). Starting out as a civil rights movement, it eventually ended up in 30 years of conflict. In 1969, student protesters organised a 'People's Democracy' march from Belfast to Derry. Close to Derry, the marchers were attacked by unionists with rocks and sticks (Edwards & McGrattan). For Bew (2007), this event marked the change from a civil

rights movement: *“the march marks the pivotal point at which the Troubles changed from being primarily about civil rights to being about the more traditional disputes concerning national and religious identities.”* (Bew, 2007, p.493).

After the march, the conflict got worse and paramilitary groups started to mobilise. The Irish border eventually became a target. A customs official on a minor road in the periphery was an easy target and the area provided an easy getaway. It was the same tactic used by the IRA in the 1950's. Eventually, the British Army came to the island in 1969 to keep peace in Northern Ireland (Arthur & Jeffery, 1988). They started to hold security checks around the border. Minor roads were blown up or concrete blocks were put on the road, to prevent people from crossing the border unnoticed. These minor roads were called 'unapproved routes', also the title of Leary's book (2016) about the Irish border between 1922-1972. Before the Army came, these roads were unapproved because of smuggling. Now, violence brought a whole other problem. Martin Reilly described in the interview what happened in local border towns during the first years of the Troubles: *“The British would have come, rather than having to put their checkpoints and their security apparatus on the border roads, what they actually did was to destroy the roads, to prevent people from using it. Then you had local people, farmers and others, to come and fill it in again, and then the army came again to blow it up.”* Leary (2016) describes different examples of local people filling up roads, like the town of Aghafin, where people used bushes and branches and bulldozers to push earth, with *“road surfacing material of rough quality”* on top (Leary, 2016, p.164). Events like this happened regularly along the Irish border during the first years of the conflict. Local towns were interconnected and people lived on a cross-border mentality, just as they do now, although there were custom checks. But the army changed the border into a *“border of militarism”* as Jim Roddy put it in the interview.

Other events took place during the Troubles, one of the most famous was 'Bloody Sunday' in Derry, 1972, where 14 people were killed by the British Army (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010) But it would take too long to describe all the events happening during the Troubles. In that same year, the British set up Direct Rule from Westminster, replacing the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly. Edwards & McGrattan (2010) argue this only led to an intensifying of the conflict. Unionists saw it as a big concern because they held a majority in the Assembly since it was set up in the 1920's. Now the British Government wanted to give more rights to Catholics. Nationalists saw it as a motivation to keep going. They felt Irish unification was closer now the Unionist-dominated Assembly was dissolved.

Amid violent times, something happened that would shape the future of the Irish border. In 1973, both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the European

Community (EC). This meant that the Irish border, playing its part in the conflict, was now a border between two EU member states. But the single market was not established yet and the British Army was still in position across the border. People around the border couldn't see an immediate change. But the EU would play a big role in the eventual peace process. In the same year, 1973, first attempts at a peace process were made by the British, proposing a new devolved Assembly by proportional representation. It would be run by a power-sharing executive, with widespread support across Northern Ireland (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). The new dimension would be a 'Council of Ireland', consisting of Ministers from the Assembly in Dublin and in Belfast (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). In January 1974, this new devolved Assembly started. But in May, it already fell down. Violence continued and the border became more and more closed.

Coming back to the Irish border, the British Army changed the way people crossed to the Republic of Ireland. In the interviews I asked how crossing the border was during the Troubles. The respondents told me they would not cross that often because of the checks and queues. But there were a lot of people around the border who had family on the other side. Cathal McCall remembered the border as a child, when they would visit family in the Republic: *"as a child, it was quite a daunting experience to cross the border because you had to encounter a British Army checkpoint. This was at a place called McCloy, and very often you would see cars being pulled in to a separate hangar, and my father would always say: 'we don't want to be going there.' That's where they did you know, potentially use violence, or certainly, keep you a very long time."*

Martin Reilly had family across the border as well: *"...if you wanted to go to, from my home in Fermanagh to my granny's house which was in county Cavan, so going from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. Often you could go through the army checkpoint. You had a red traffic light, like every other traffic light. You'd have to wait, they would come in, they sometimes would stop you and view you on the way in, and talk to the driver, maybe check, search in the boot of the car."* But he pointed out that waiting times depended on the circumstances. If there would be heavy goods vehicles in front of you, the queue would be longer. If something had happened in the area, like a bombing or shooting, the security would be intensified, and the process would take longer. All of this time was taken into account when people had to cross the border. So they would factor extra time in, if the queues would be longer. The checks on the border had its influence on cross-border work as well. Joe Lavery pointed out that people did not work across the border. Companies looking for employers only looked in their own country, not across the border.

In 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed by the UK Government and the Irish Government. It provided a say of Dublin representatives in the governing of Northern Ireland. It can be seen as one of the first major steps towards peace (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). In the years after the Agreement, ceasefires for the fighting groups were proposed. Eventually, in the 1990's, this happened and the peace talks could move on to the next phase, which would lead to the Agreements that shape the border as it is today. In the talks leading to the Good Friday Agreements of 1998, both the British and Irish government were involved, as well as unionist and nationalist representatives. With the Agreements, a devolved power-sharing Assembly was set up, where unionist and nationalist parties should work together. Next to that, North-South and British-Irish Councils were set up to be involved in governing Northern Ireland (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010). The security checks along the border were removed and the border was opened up again, to stimulate cross-border work and life. The establishment of the single market in 1993 and the ongoing agreement of the CTA helped to remove the need for border checks. From 1998 on, the border almost disappeared from people's lives, being the unnoticeable, frictionless crossing as it is today.

## **5 Future of the Irish border**

The current Irish border is almost unnoticeable. When I took the bus from Dublin to Belfast, I tried to find out what the border looked like and what changes occurred across the border. The small observation is added in the Appendix. The most important thing I noticed was not noticing the border. I tried to look out of the window to see it, but both journeys, from and to Dublin, I could not see the exact place of the border. The vibration of my phone with a text 'Welcome to the United Kingdom' was more noticeable than the physical border itself. Some other things are easier to notice. In the Republic, road signs have the Irish translation on it as well, Northern Ireland has not. Next to that, their signs have kilometres instead of miles in the United Kingdom. In the interviews, Stephen Kelly pointed out that the road is slightly different in the Republic when you cross the border, cause a different type of stone is used. But next to these small changes, the border is hard to spot at all. My uncle and aunt live next to the border with Germany and we used to visit their neighbour, who lives across the border, often. The only noticeable thing about the border were the electricity poles, that look different than in the Netherlands. For me, a border is like that, frictionless, only spotted with small changes. It is therefore hard to imagine what the Irish border looked like in the past. The literature and the interviews gave me an idea, but I couldn't imagine army checkpoints at my uncle and aunt's place. The border as described in chapter 4 gives, however, a good image of a recent past, only 20 years ago. It is one of the reasons why the future of the border is deemed so important by the people living in the country.

After looking at the history of the border in chapter 4, this chapter tries to give insight into the future of the border, to try to find answers to the question mark. I now know what the border looked like in the past and how it is today. But the future is still unclear, still a question mark. In the first part, an overview of the different outcomes of the Brexit negotiations is given, to view the developments of the negotiations. Then in the second part of this chapter, the different scenarios as described in chapter 2 are used to explore the different consequences for the possible future Irish border. Quotes from the interviews are used to give examples of possible consequences to try to make it more clear what decisions concerning the border could mean in reality.

### **5.1 Brexit: what has been decided**

The future of the Irish border might still be a question mark, but we do know what has been decided about it yet. Although until now an agreement about the border has not been made, it is good to view what the negotiators of the EU and the UK decided concerning Brexit. On the 23rd of June 2016, 51,9% of the people in the United Kingdom voted to leave the European

Union. To exit the union, Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty had to be activated by the UK Government. Eventually, a Withdrawal Act was passed by the UK parliament, where after Prime Minister Theresa May formally activated Article 50 by writing a letter to the President of the European Council in March 2017 (Lords Select Committee, n.d.). Article 50 provides the guidelines and conditions about how a member state can leave the European Union. After notifying the European Council of its intention to leave, negotiations will start to make an agreement over the withdrawal arrangements and future relations between the leaving member state and the EU (EEPA, n.d.). The EU Treaties cease to apply to the country that's leaving on the date when the withdrawal agreement goes into force, or when that fails, two years after the notification of leaving the EU (EEPA, n.d.). Therefore, March 2019, exactly two years after May's letter to the European Council, is continuously named as the deadline when the EU has to leave the EU.

The negotiations concerning the withdrawal of the United Kingdom started in June 2017 (Lords Select Committee, n.d.). From then on, the negotiations were divided into two phases. Phase I from June - December 2017, and Phase II from December 2017 - October 2018. This means that the withdrawal agreement should be finished in late 2018 so that both the UK Parliament and the European Parliament can vote on it. The timeline of table 2 gives an overview of the most important dates concerning the Brexit negotiations.

**Table 2: Timeline Brexit negotiations (Lords Select Committee, n.d. and BBC, 2018c)**

<i>23 June 2016</i>	<i>Brexit referendum</i>
<i>16 March 2017</i>	<i>EU Notification of Withdrawal Act passed by UK Parliament</i>
<i>29 March 2017</i>	<i>Theresa May officially notifies the EU of intention to withdraw, Article 50 procedure starts</i>
<i>19 June 2017</i>	<i>Brexit negotiations officially begin with Phase I, terms of reference published</i>
<i>15 December 2017</i>	<i>Negotiations move to Phase II</i>
<i>28 June 2018</i>	<i>EU summit to decide about Phase II</i>
<i>18 October 2018</i>	<i>EU summit to agree about future relations UK and EU</i>
<i>13 December 2018</i>	<i>EU summit to finalise a deal if there's no agreement in October</i>
<i>29 March 2019</i>	<i>The UK must leave the EU according to Article 50</i>
<i>31 December 2020</i>	<i>End of the transition period, new relationship UK and EU begins</i>

Decisions about the Irish border are expected before the EU summit of December 2018. Until that time, negotiations will go on.

## **5.2 Future scenarios: what lies ahead**

Right now, the future of the Irish border is still unclear. The future is hard to predict, but I will try to give more insight into the different possibilities that might happen in the coming years. The scenarios from chapter 2 are used to give more structure to the analysis. They were made up before going to Northern Ireland and were used in the interviews as well.

The history of the Irish border as described in chapter 4 gives an image of a turbulent border. Especially over the past 100 years, a lot of unrest happened on that border. But since the Good Friday Agreements of 1998, the border lies at peace, almost unnoticeable when crossed. After 1998, people from both nationalist and unionist finally had time to build up their country again. The Brexit referendum came at a point when economic growth was stabilised, and the country finally attracted foreign investors again (Northern Ireland Office, 2017). The traditional division between nationalist and unionist parties was noticeable in the referendum campaigns as well. Nationalist parties campaigned for a stay-vote, whereas unionists campaigned for the leave side. Eventually, 56% voted to stay in the European Union, but the UK as a whole voted to leave. Now, almost two years later, there's still great uncertainty about the outcomes of leaving the EU. When I went to Northern Ireland in May, one of the first things I heard on the bus from Dublin to Belfast, crossing the border, was something on the local radio news about the Brexit negotiations. When I did a city tour in Belfast during that week, after 10 minutes of walking, Brexit was already mentioned 5 times by the guide. Local newspapers were full of Brexit as well. It became immediately clear how important the topic is in the country, for their society, and their future. The interviews with the different people in Northern Ireland gave insight into the possibilities and consequences. I will try to describe what the reports and publications say about the future, as well as the opinions of the respondents about the border.

### **5.2.1 Smart Border**

Technology is the future. That is also what negotiators thought about the Irish border. In other countries, the concept of a 'smart border', as described in chapter 2, is already used. The EU and the UK indicated that technology might be a solution to the new relationship between both jurisdictions. Both parties declared to avoid a hard border on the Irish island and technology would help to control the border without installing a hard border. At the

moment, this idea is already off the table as for how it was proposed before. But it is interesting how technology was named as a serious option for border control. The examples of the Norway-Sweden and US-Canada border were used to describe how such a border works in other countries and how it could be applied to the island of Ireland. If the UK leaves the customs union and the Single Market, then Custom controls would be necessary when goods would come into the UK. Technology would then be used to scan vehicles and goods, to smoothen crossing the border. Technology as a solution to the Irish border was already rejected in the negotiations. But another solution has not been found. It is good to know why the idea of a smart border was rejected because the reasons behind it give more insight into the complex situation of the Irish border.

To start with, the complexity of the Irish border lies in the number of crossings. The 500km border officially has 208 crossing points (Hutton, 2018). To give an idea of how many this is, Conor Heany stated: *"...there are more crossing points on this border in Ireland than there is on the entire Eastern side of the EU."* The EU member states on that Eastern border already have difficulties enough to keep their border secure. More crossings would make it even harder. As described in chapter 4, the British army blew up minor roads or put concrete blocks to stop people crossing. This was one of the ways to secure the minor roads. But right now, to install technology on all those 208 crossings seems hardly possible. The idea of the smart border was to separate flows. This meant that higher risks would be taken out to check and companies on Trusted Trader Programmes could cross the border freely.

Asking about how such a smart border would work on the Irish border, the respondents said the same thing: technology can only work if there would be people on the ground implementing it. If there is a vehicle crossing the border at the wrong passing through, then that vehicle has to be stopped. If there are no officials on or around the border, this can't be done.

Next to that, there's a fear of privacy. The proposition of smart borders would install number plate scannings and would require registrations. In this age of growing privacy concerns, after for example the big data-problems with Facebook, people are more suspicious about giving up personal information.

Installing technology would also mean installing 'something' visible. A camera on a border can be seen by some, as a type of border infrastructure, while both negotiating parties intended to install no border infrastructure at all. A small minor camera would not necessarily be seen as a problem by the decision makers. The Centre For Cross Border Studies (2017) pointed this out in their report about Brexit, where they discussed the

openness of a border. They question if a border without visible border infrastructure, like small cameras, is 'open'. For some people, they argue, a camera would already be a reason to avoid crossing the border. The respondents pointed out that even a camera, although small, could be a target of people who don't want any border type of all between the two jurisdictions. Martin Reilly compared it in the interview with a domino-effect:

*"To say, the cameras are there. But realistically that's not going to enforce a border. You would need people on the ground, to make sure the jurisdictions are established. If you put people on the ground, with upholding the border, that's where the security comes in, that's what happened before. They put the customs there to enforce the border. Those who didn't want it there came to attack them. Then the customs officials asked the police to protect them. That's the domino effect of having people on the border policing the jurisdictions, it's what attracts the violence."*

The study of the European Commission (2017a) to 'smart borders' gave examples of Norway-Sweden and U.S.-Canada (also described in chapter 2). But looking at the possibilities to apply those same measures at the Irish border, it is clear that the Irish case is different. The history of conflict is still there in people's minds, it's only 20 years ago that the GFA were signed. A smart border might be a good solution in other cases, but it will be hard to apply to the Irish border. Fortunately, the EU also acknowledged this when the UK Government proposed a form of a technological border. The idea is now off the table in the negotiations.

### **5.2.2 Soft border, UK in customs union**

During the time from the start of writing this thesis until finishing it, a lot has happened regarding the Brexit negotiations. At the moment, more and more politicians, even conservatives, are standing up to keep Britain in the customs union (Staunton, 2018). They argue that the leave voters did not vote to leave the customs union. Staying in the customs union would mean custom checks would not be necessary on the Irish border. Then this scenario of a soft border and the UK staying inside the customs union could be possible. The UK would be a non-EU member state, inside the customs union. This would be similar to Turkey, which is also part of the customs union, although the agreement is limited to industrial and agricultural products (European Commission, 2014a). The question if this scenario is possible is a political one, since the House of Commons and the House of Lords need to vote on this in the future. One of the main reasons pointed out by the leave campaigners for Brexit was to take back control of trade deals with countries outside the EU. If the UK would stay in the customs union, they would have to follow the trade rules and tariffs established by the EU itself. Therefore, May's government tries to get a special customs

deal, which would benefit from trade with the EU, but at the same time gives freedom to establish own trade deals with countries outside the EU. But then the UK would profit from the EU without paying for its membership, something hard to accept for the EU negotiators. For the Irish border, staying in the customs union would mean that customs checks would not be necessary and if the UK would also stay in the single market, then the border could be as open as frictionless as possible.

### **5.2.3 Soft border, hard border in Irish Sea**

The other option for a soft border would be that Northern Ireland would stay in the customs union and single market, while the rest of the UK stays out of them. Right now, there is an open, almost unnoticeable border on the Irish island. A soft border as described in chapter 2 means a frictionless border without infrastructure. This special arrangement would mean that Northern Ireland gets a different Brexit than the rest of the UK. The EU and the UK have not yet decided about the future of the Irish border, but a special arrangement could make an exception for Northern Ireland if Britain wants to leave the customs union and the single market. Then, border controls would move to the Irish Sea, creating some kind of 'hard' border in the Irish Sea, as described in chapter 2. Moving the border checks to the ports and airports around the Irish Sea would keep the Irish border open.

EU negotiator Guy Verhofstadt already stated he wanted to keep Northern Ireland in the customs union, to give their citizens the same opportunities as they have now (McDonald, 2017). Nationalists were happy with Verhofstadt's words because they favour keeping a connection with the Republic of Ireland. Unionists in Northern Ireland were opposed to his sayings because they did not want to have a different status than the rest of the UK. The DUP, backing the majority of MP's with Theresa May's government was opposed to this suggestion as well. I have not been able to speak to someone from the DUP while I was in Northern Ireland, but their opinions and viewpoints are easy to find in news articles. The DUP stated that they will not accept a deal where Northern Ireland would be treated differently than the rest of the UK (Carswell, 2018). Theresa May's government depends on the DUP MP's for a majority in the Commons. So, to put through a Withdrawal Bill without the support of the DUP would be hard. The sound of a division between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is not appreciated by unionists like the DUP. Often the word 'border' already creates opposition in Northern Ireland. Mostly, this is for people who feel Irish and don't want a border between North and South. But a border in the Irish Sea would be hard for people who feel British. It would cut Northern Ireland off from the rest of the United Kingdom, they argue. Jim Roddy, opposed to Brexit, understands this feeling: *"as much as I don't want a border between Irish people on the island of Ireland, I have to respect the people here who see*

*themselves as British, I don't want a border for those people either.*" The identity issue is important in this scenario as well. But a border in the Irish Sea would also have consequences for trade. Northern Ireland's economy is for a big part dependent on trade with the rest of the United Kingdom. A lot of this trade goes through the ports, like the port in Belfast on figure 7. Goods going through this port could be delayed by customs checks.



Figure 7: View on Belfast port towards Britain

Stephen Kelly, therefore, suggested looking at the whole border as a bridge. *"Northern Ireland is uniquely positioned between the UK and the EU, to benefit from Brexit. I don't like the idea of a border, we need to see Northern Ireland as a bridge. A border always sounds negative, but a bridge is a connection with two sides, benefits from it and has its foundations on either side as well."* Kelly, seeing Brexit as mostly negative for Northern Ireland's businesses, tries to see Brexit as a chance, because Brexit is going to come anyway. Making the most of it would be wise. For the movement of goods, checks will be necessary, but Stephen Kelly pointed out that you can solve a big part of longer waiting times by changing the place of checks to the ferries. If you would put EU Customs officials on those boats, they would have plenty enough time to do those checks on board, Kelly argued.

Cathal McCall pointed out that having checks on ports and airports is one of the easier things for Brexiteers to realise their goal of securing their own borders: *"...from a British point of view, if it's all about taking back control, the easiest thing to do is to control your ports and airports. Put your border controls at your ports and airports. Because there's a limited number of them."* It is much harder to secure a 500 km long land border. Next to that, a harder border in the Irish Sea would not necessarily be a big change for people travelling from Northern Ireland to Britain. Freya McClements in the interview pointed out, there already were checks at the airports going to Britain: *"...when you fly from here to England or Scotland or Wales. You have to show some ID, it not necessarily be a passport, might be a driver's licence..."* For the

movement of people, if there already were ID checks, not much will change. This is the same as Agnew (2008) pointed out in chapter 2, that airports are just as much part of borders as the physical border itself.

The EU has called for a 'backstop', which would prevent a hard border on the Irish island, in case there would be no trade deal between the UK and the EU before December 2020, when the transition period would end. Both parties are debating what such a 'backstop' should look like. EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier already proposed the EU's backstop idea, where Northern Ireland would remain in the customs union and single market. The UK rejected this proposal and proposed their own backstop idea (HM Government, n.d.). In this backstop, the UK would keep the EU's customs rules for a limited time. The EU then rejected this backstop, because of its time limitedness. So, a definitive agreement on the backstop has not been made.

#### **5.2.4 Hard border on the Irish island**

Both negotiating parties have stated to avoid a hard border on the Irish island. In this thesis, it is not my goal to predict the future, but rather to give more insight into it. To understand why the Irish border is so important, it is interesting to view what would happen to it when hard border infrastructure would return. Thinking of a hard border myself, the images of the fences in Eastern Europe come up. But two countries so intertwined, on one island, could simply not be separated like that. A hard border on the Irish island would mean some kind of return to border checks. At the beginning of the Troubles, there were only custom checks. Because of the violence, the Army eventually came in to protect customs officials and securitise the border. From an outside perspective, having customs officials for the check of goods would not be associated with violence. But almost all of the respondents pointed out that border checks could start a process which would bring back violence. Probably not the same level as during the Troubles, but the danger of violence could come back. The border checks were removed in the 1990's, but they're still remembered by the people of Northern Ireland. Although installing a hard border is ruled out by both parties, I still chose to describe what could happen if hard border infrastructure would ever return.

In the interviews, I also asked what kind of effects installing a hard border would have. Firstly, Freya McClements pointed out that the promise of 'no hard border' from both parties is not very clear: *"...what is the definition of no hard border, what does that mean? To one person that might mean absolutely nothing... for somebody else, no hard border might just mean there's cameras and being scanned."* A smart border, the technological border, could be seen by people as a form of border infrastructure, making it a hard border. But the Government could see this as preventing a hard border. The Centre For Cross Border Studies

(2017) pointed out that the lack of 'visible' border infrastructure does not mean that the border is 'open'. So, any type of border infrastructure, visible or not visible, could be for some people a hard border.

A hard border could have its consequence on cross-border work and life, Martin Reilly argued: *"I think a hard border, leads us back a situation where people are cut off from their family life, their businesses and so on, people will start then to think again about trading only in Northern Ireland and within the UK."* Currently, lots of people work on the other side of the border or cross the border to visit family or to go shopping. Installing a hard border could reduce this cross-border life. It would take more time and that could be a barrier for people to cross. A hard border would, therefore, mean that employers on one side of the border would not be looking for employees on the other side. The economic damage could be huge, if cross-border life and work could not go on. Jim Roddy, more focused on the economic impact of Brexit, said: *"when it comes to trade, if they do try and put some sort of border control on, again as I said, it would mean stopping people. It will have an added cost to the movement of goods. That added cost will, you know, consumers have to pay for it. It will have a detrimental effect to persons here."*

Installing a 'hard' border will be 'hard' as well. The Irish border is a long, rural border, with lots of minor crossings. Jim Roddy points out that *"it would be impossible for governments to place a hard border. If it would mean closing roads, most of the roads that cross between here and Donegal are small roads. They don't know which roads are the most important. They put mass concrete blocks on borders in the past. That's the only way to do that again."* But putting up concrete blocks on roads would probably lead to resistance by the local people living there. That resistance could eventually end up in a return of violence, Martin Reilly points out: *"unfortunately, in the society we live in here, we would see people then feeling the need to turn back to the days of violence."* Conor Heany sees that as the worst scenario: *"apart from the economic impact, which will be huge, the political damage will also be huge. There would be many that would fear that the peace process itself could be so badly damaged that it could unravel. There's a generation of young people now, who have never exchanged a border, like the one that was up, it would be a real backwards step for the Irish peace process. It would be a total undermining of the peace agreement, the GFA that put that in place."* For people in Northern Ireland, the image of a hard border is not that distant. The securitised border during the Troubles was by no doubt a 'hard' one. Both customs controls and security controls from the British Army were present. That image of a hard border is closely related to the violence of the Troubles. Installing a hard border because of Brexit could bring the memories of the conflict back.

### **5.3 Consequences for different relationships**

Borders exist between different groups of people. A border shapes the relationship between those groups of people. This can be physical borders between different countries, but also borders in the mind, between groups of people. In the case of the Irish border, different groups of people are involved. Brexit could influence their relationships. From the perspective of Northern Ireland, there are different important relationships; between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, between the EU and the UK, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and in the country itself, between unionists and nationalists. As with the possible future scenarios, each type has different impacts on Northern Ireland as a country. But those future scenarios could also have major impacts on the relationships concerned with the border. From the moment of the Good Friday Agreements in 1998, relationships concerning Northern Ireland improved. But Brexit could change that. As Jim Roddy stated: *“The relationships within Northern Ireland improved, the relationships between North and South improved and indeed the relationship between Ireland and the rest of the UK as well. Since the Brexit vote, they’ve all been damaged”*. But is this true and to what extent are these relationships then damaged?

#### **5.3.1 Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom**

At first, there’s the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Scotland and Northern Ireland both voted to stay in the EU. The majority in especially England, but also Wales eventually was enough to get a total majority in the UK. The referendum showed huge differences in voted across the UK. In some extent, the referendum showed divisions between the different countries of the Kingdom. The relationship of Northern Ireland with the UK changed over time. When the Republic of Ireland left the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland stayed, the North got their own National Assembly. Behind this was the principle of ‘devolution’. Each country within the United Kingdom eventually would get their own National Assembly, which would be allowed to make own legislation (in some extent). Major issues and issues concerning the whole United Kingdom would however still be decided in Westminster. The first example of devolution in Britain and Ireland was the issue of Irish Home Rule, which would eventually end up in Irish independence for the Republic. After partition, Northern Ireland got its own Parliament as well. Wales and Scotland only followed in 1999, after referendums about an own Parliament were passed in both countries. Now, every capital of the countries making up the United Kingdom had their own Parliament. During my time in Cardiff, I visited the National Assembly of Wales. The guide told us the reasons why it was created. He spoke about the discontent about London rule, where Westminster would decide about local issues in Wales. The National Assembly gave the

Welsh people more of a say in their own local issues. The same mostly applied to Scotland. Devolution was a solution to the growing dissatisfaction. But with the Brexit referendum, the 'United' Kingdom is divided again. In Scotland, calls for another referendum for independence are back (BBC, 2018d). Brexit is named as one of the reasons why Scotland could have another referendum for independence. In Northern Ireland, the relationship with British rule is more complex. During the Troubles, the British Army came in and the National Assembly of Northern Ireland was overruled by Westminster. For unionists, involvement of the British was necessary to keep their country within the UK. For nationalists, involvement of the British was seen as a negative thing. Now that a majority of the people in Northern Ireland voted against the will of namely England, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is weakened. In the Brexit negotiations, Northern Ireland plays a crucial role in Britain's wish to leave the EU. But respondents in the interviews felt that the British government doesn't care about what happens in Northern Ireland. The difference could be in the experience of a border. Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with the experience of a land border. Bringing back this border would be a step backwards, as described in the first part of this chapter. But in Britain, the experience of a border is different. Freya McClements pointed this out in the interview: *"It struck me that, most people's idea, in England, of a border, is when you go on holiday, you show your passport at the airport. I don't mean this in a negative way, because when you don't live on the border, you can't really, it'd be difficult to understand it, but I think most of them just don't grasp actually in what extent how much of our lives is across border, our lives here. This is really going to seriously struck people's lives, people's livelihoods."* Other respondents pointed this out as well: people in Northern Ireland feel like the British Government does not understand the importance of the Irish border.

But a border in the Irish Sea would also put some kind of barrier between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The DUP and other unionist parties would be opposed to this because it would treat Northern Ireland differently than the rest of the UK. Northern Ireland would be, they argue, cut off from Britain. Its economic relationship with Britain would still be significant, so cooperation between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK will be necessary, regardless of what scenario might come true.

### **5.3.2 The UK and the EU**

Next is the relationship between the UK as a whole and the European Union. The only land border between the EU and the UK in the future will be the one on the Irish island. For future trade, Northern Ireland could be the EU entrance to the UK. Rather than seeing Brexit in all negative ways, it could also be an opportunity. As mentioned before, Stephen Kelly talked about seeing a border in the Irish Sea as a bridge. If Northern Ireland could stay in the

customs union, then it would play a crucial role in the UK's trade with the EU. A bridge between the UK and the EU could be a good position to profit from both sides, get best of both worlds. This positive aspect of Brexit was also noted by Katy Hayward from Queen's University Belfast, in: 'Bordering on Brexit: Views from Local Communities in the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland'. Hayward asked border communities about their opinions of Brexit. Just like Kelly, she noted the chance of being a bridge between two worlds. She acknowledges the fact that Northern Ireland probably is the area most affected by Brexit, but this also gives an opportunity:

*"The Border Region is thus at risk of being the Region most deeply affected by Brexit and least closely protected by measures that may be put in place by London or Brussels to mitigate its effects. However, this particular position also puts it at the cutting edge of the new relationship between the UK and European Union. This could mean acting as a bridge between the two."* (Hayward, 2017, p.28).

But this all depends on the outcome of the negotiations. With a hard Brexit, the UK would leave the customs union and would be able to negotiate trade deals itself, one of the things pointed out as the key issues in the leave-vote. But the UK could in that scenario become more of a concurrent of the EU rather than a partner. The UK could try to take trade away from the EU into their own country. The question is how the EU would then handle its new external border. As described in chapter 2, the EU's external borders have become more and more closed. This could happen to the Irish border as well. But even in a hard Brexit, it still would have to negotiate a trade deal with the EU. If the negotiations will cause damage to the relationship between the two parties, then signing a positive trade deal will be hard. In a soft Brexit, the EU could still stay in the customs union and its connection with the EU would be more closely. The relationship between the two would then be better and discussions about the Irish border won't be necessary.

### **5.3.3 Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**

The third is the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The island, separated in the 1920's, was in some way held together by its EU membership. The GFA of 1998 basically removed the border from the island, improving the relationship and connection between the two countries. Now, this common EU membership on the island will be gone. That inevitably will have consequences for the relationships between both sides of the island. Of course, it all depends on the future type of border, but right now there are already some differences because of Brexit. For example, companies move some degree of their production from Northern Ireland to the Republic. Stephen Kelly talked about his

members of Manufacturing Northern Ireland: *"We have some of our largest employers have made significant purchases in the Republic of Ireland. They have been supported by the Republic of Ireland government to invest there, with new facilities, and that's their hedge against the worst possible Brexit."* The Republic of Ireland welcomes these investments. They see Brexit as an opportunity to attract more businesses. Martin Reilly spoke about the benefits for the Republic: *"At the minute, the Republic is very strong, they're an English-speaking country in the EU, but also in the Euro-zone. Once Britain leaves, the Republic would be the only English-speaking country that is in the euro-zone and in the EU. That's going to have a huge attraction for the Irish government."* So, companies might move to the Republic. This could create a competitive relationship between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Economically, the Republic is growing rapidly (Hamilton, 2018), while Northern Ireland's economic growth is declining (O'Neill, 2018). Brexit could enforce this economic difference.

But there are also negative consequences for the Republic's economy if Brexit means a border between them and the UK. Evan Davis from BBC Newsnight pointed out that trade in the Republic of Ireland uses the United Kingdom as a *"land bridge to the rest of Europe"*. If there's a hard Brexit, goods would have to go through customs checks to get into the UK and out of the UK through the Channel to the rest of the European Union. As Davis says *"instead of a land bridge, Britain becomes an obstructive piece of rock."* (Davis, 2018). Irish lorries would need to find another way to reach the rest of the European Union, probably by using Irish ports more than the route through the United Kingdom.

Cross-border cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland could also face more difficulties. Projects working cross-border are often financed by European Funds. An example was given by Martin Reilly about a cycle network, funded by the EU, which was set up together with the local council of Donegal in the Republic of Ireland (see figure 7). Projects like these, where local councils from both sides of the border work together, could be harder to realise if the European funding stops. Joe Lavery from the EURES cross-border partnership told me the same in the interview. Funding for his organisation is guaranteed until the transition period ends in December 2020 will end. After that, the future is unclear. Another example was given by Martin Reilly in the interview: a cancer centre opened in Derry which serves both sides of the border. For cancer patients in Donegal, the nearest option was Galway, 308 km away, while Derry was a few miles away across the border (McCann & McSorley, 2017).



Figure 8: Cycle route in Derry, funded by the EU

The uncertainty of Brexit is still a big issue. But if Northern Ireland would have to leave the customs union and Single Market, then Sinn Féin, an Irish nationalist party, already pointed out that they would advocate for a referendum for the unity of Ireland. Fleming and Heany from that party told they see no other way to keep their European identity. This shared identity was one of the key elements of the GFA. That people from Sinn Féin talk about unification is not strange. But Jim Roddy pointed out that even some unionists acknowledged that Irish unification could be realistic in the future: *“...some of my protestant unionist friends are business people, I’ve heard them say recently that the unity of Ireland was inevitable. This would be unionists. I think that’s very strange, to hear a unionist say that.”* In the Good Friday Agreements of 1998, the involved parties decided that it would be possible for the people in Northern Ireland to unite with the Republic of Ireland in one country, if a majority would vote for it in a referendum on both sides of the border. Both countries would have to be involved then. It’s still uncertain if this will happen in the future, but most respondents, although not outspoken nationalists, saw this as something that won’t be surprising.

#### 5.3.4 Unionists and nationalists

Finally, there’s the relationship between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland. Firstly, the division between those two different groups of people is not the same anymore as it was during the Troubles. The peace after the GFA made it more attractive for migrants to come to Northern Ireland, as Martin Reilly pointed out:

*“...one of the things that’s different now, from 1998 the GFA, there are lots of people in Northern Ireland now who are not unionists, who are not nationalists, who came to live here, because it’s an EU country, there’s free movement of travel. Before the GFA, with the violence that we had, people still had that right, to come and live in Northern Ireland, if they wanted to,*

*but nobody did, nobody wanted to live in Northern Ireland, because of the violence. We were a place that was unattractive to migrants, to other EU citizens, who never thought of coming to live or coming to work here, because of the political violence.”*



*Figure 9: Peace bridge between (mainly) nationalist and unionist sides*

The peace process of the Good Friday Agreements helped to bring people from nationalist and unionist side together. I found a good example of that in Derry, which can be seen on figure 9. Here in 2011, a ‘Peace Bridge’ was opened connecting the mainly unionist east side of the river with the mainly nationalist city centre side (Simpson, 2011). Projects like these are partly funded by the EU Peace programmes, which were installed with the GFA in 1998.

But although the division is not as black and white as it used to be, in Northern Ireland, people often still identify as unionist or nationalist. The Troubles, as described in chapter 4, had a devastating effect on Northern Ireland as a country. Now that it’s over, both parties, unionist and nationalist, are glad that the violence has gone. One of the main points stressed out by the respondents in the interviews was the possible return of violence because of Brexit. Installing a hard border would be a step backwards, they argue. And if you go only 30 years backwards, the violence was still there in Northern Ireland. Jim Roddy mainly stressed out the problem of uncertainty for businesses. But next to that, he sees a possible return of violence as a problem as well:

*“For business, uncertainty is a major problem, without a doubt. But so is also the fear of the threat of the return of violence. And I think sometimes people minimise that fear. But, the conflict’s all living memory for us, we all remember the conflict, quite a few of us, it’s only 20 years since the conflict really ended. So, you know, the fear of division within this small country, it’s a small country, and Brexit is already creating divisions.”*

Looking at the principle of the 'border in the mind', one could argue that the 'border' between unionists and nationalist is also a 'border in the mind'. A border that can't be seen, not a physical border, but nevertheless a border that divides groups of people. This 'border in the mind' could lead to 'othering' as described by Van Houtum & Naerssen (2002). They describe 'othering' as something that happens with people from different countries on a side of the border, that they see the people across the border as the 'other'. On the island of Ireland, this is more complex. The people who feel Irish, mainly nationalists, would see the people living in the Republic of Ireland as 'their' people, 'their' nation. While the unionists, who feel British, are seen as the 'other'. Although this division, as said before, is not as much present anymore as it was in the Troubles, Brexit could bring this back. The 'us and them' of 'othering' would now be between the 'leave' voters and the 'stay' voters. Most voted along unionist/nationalist lines, although some unionists must have voted to stay in the EU because otherwise, a majority of 56% would not be possible. Cathal McCall explained how this majority was possible: *"It's a head and heart issue, unionist farmers obviously see a hard border as detrimental to their interest. Many business people, with business interest, they would have voted for to remain. They're making their decisions based on the head. But there's an identity aspect in this, and many see it as an identity issue. Making it with the heart, and to hell with the consequences."* As mentioned before, McCall was also some of the first to point out that Brexit could be a problem for the peace process on the island (McCall, 2015). The peace process is still going on, 1998 is only 20 years ago. The fear now is that division is back in Northern Ireland's society and that this could raise tensions between extremists on both sides. This all, of course, depends on what happens with the border.

Extremist groups are currently still active, as becomes clear from a footage of Peter Taylor, known for his reports of the Troubles, for the BBC (Taylor, 2018). Taylor looks at a dissident Republican group known as the 'New-IRA'. They are seeing Brexit as a new opportunity to strive for the unification of Ireland. Chief Constable of the Northern Ireland's Police George Hamilton sees the threat that this group pose as "severe". But they don't have the capacity as the IRA did during the Troubles. However, some kind of border infrastructure, like cameras, could become a target by this new dissident group, like the border was a target by the IRA during the Troubles. George Hamilton points out that from a policing perspective, any type of border infrastructure could become a problem: *"It could symbolically become the focus of attention and targeting of dissident Republican groups"*.

## 6 Conclusions

The main goal of this thesis was to gain more insight into the future of the Irish border. The literature and interviews provided information about the border in the past and the border in the future. I'm not going to predict the future, but hopefully, this thesis will show what might lie ahead. To help to understand this, I try to answer the sub-questions as mentioned in chapter 1. Finally, putting everything together, I will try to describe my insights to help answer the main question.

### 6.1 Answering the sub-questions

#### **'What does the history of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland look like?'**

The history of Northern Ireland is a turbulent one and the Irish border played a big role in it. From the first Scottish and English settlers, there was a division on the island between people who identified as Irish and those who identified as British. After years of tension, in 1921, the island of Ireland was divided into the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. This created the Irish border. The physical place of that border is still the same right now. But the meaning and function of the border changed a lot during the 20th Century. In the Second World War, the border was the difference between a country at war and a neutral country. After the Second World War, the border became a target. First, in the 1950's, when the IRA started to attack customs posts. But this wasn't a significant threat. From the late 1960's on, civil rights demonstrations eventually ended up in a political conflict known as the Troubles. Republican and loyalist paramilitaries fought each other for 30 years. The Irish border became a popular place for attacks by Republican groups. Customs posts became a target and the British Army had to come in to secure the border. From that time on, the border became a militarised border. Minor roads were blown up or concrete blocks were placed to prevent people from crossing. The border was 'hard' now. During the Troubles, in 1973, both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the European Union. But being in the same union did not bring peace. Eventually, the conflict kept on going, despite different attempts at bringing peace. In 1998, the Good Friday Agreements were signed, and the conflict finally ended. A transformation on the border was happening. The army went away, and the border was opened again. Small destroyed roads were restored, and people started to live on a cross-border mentality again. Northern Ireland profited from Peace programmes funded by the EU. Now, the border is open and almost unnoticeable. But 20 years after the Good Friday Agreements, the border suddenly is an issue again.

## **'What are possible future scenarios for the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?'**

In the negotiations following the Brexit referendum in 2016, different possible scenarios were discussed. The main discussion was if there was going to be a hard Brexit or a soft Brexit. For the border, this meant a hard border or a soft border. The soft border scenario is split into two types: a hard border in the Irish Sea and a special status for Northern Ireland, or a soft Brexit where the whole United Kingdom stays in the customs union and single market. Next to that, the smart border was added, because it was one of the possibilities in the negotiations. Right now, the smart border is not an option anymore, but it's interesting how the negotiating parties wanted to prevent a hard border by using technology. Eventually, this led to 4 scenarios.

A). Smart border. Technology applied to control the Irish border, with cameras and scanners installed on border crossings. Proposed as a solution to prevent a hard border on the Irish island.

B). Soft border, UK stays in customs union. Soft Brexit where the EU keeps an intensive trade relationship with the UK. The Irish border would stay open.

C). Soft border with special status for Northern Ireland, hard border in the Irish Sea. Northern Ireland gets a special status and stays in the customs union and single market. The rest of the UK would leave the customs union and single market, creating border control in the Irish Sea.

D). Hard border on the Irish island. With no deal in the negotiations, a hard border could return to the Irish island. Northern Ireland would have to leave the customs union and single market as well and the Irish border would be closed again. Border checks return.

## **'What are the consequences of future scenarios on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland?'**

By using the literature and the interviews, I could draw up the consequences of the different scenarios. Although the interviews were, of course, opinions of individuals, publications and reports about Brexit mostly helped to support the arguments made by the respondents.

A). Smart border

The smart border is seen by the respondents as something that will never work. The examples of the Smart Border 2.0 report from the U.S.-Canada and Sweden-Norway border are not comparable to the Irish case. The Irish border is unique and sensitive because of its history. The respondents feared if a smart border would be installed, smuggling would be

stimulated because technology won't be able to look in the back of a car or van. The respondents also pointed out that there's a fear of privacy, if every crossing is going to be registered by cameras. But the main reason why the smart border is not a solution, pointed out by the respondents, is that technology can only work if you have people on the ground. Cameras can maybe detect someone who is not allowed to cross, but you would still need people on the ground to stop them. Cameras could also become a target by violent groups who don't want to see any border infrastructure at all. Then the police would have to come in to protect the technology and maybe the army to protect the police. This domino-effect could bring a militarised border back, something that according to the respondents, nobody wants, neither unionists or nationalists. Both negotiating parties made clear they want to avoid any type of border infrastructure. The opinions of what this 'infrastructure' means are divided, but a smart border could be seen as a form of infrastructure. This is probably one of the reasons why both parties don't see the technology as part of the solution anymore.

#### B). Soft border, UK stays in customs union

This scenario is part of a 'soft' Brexit. Hard Brexiteers in Westminster are firmly opposed to this, but it could still be an option. Soft Brexiteers are advocating for the UK to stay in the customs union and single market. Then, the Irish border could stay open and border checks would not be necessary. The respondents point out that this would be the best option, although they don't see it working out with the current Tory government. The respondents wanted the border to be the same as it is today. In this scenario, not a lot will change, especially not with the border. The question remains if EU law would be

#### C). Soft border on the Irish island, hard border in the Irish Sea

This scenario is part of the 'backstop' idea by the European Union. Northern Ireland would get a special status and would stay in the customs union and single market, but the rest of the United Kingdom would leave. This would create border control at ports and airports in Northern Ireland, making a border in the Irish Sea. The respondents mostly favoured this option. This would keep the Irish border open and the same as it is now. Unionists, like the DUP, are opposed to this plan because it would treat Northern Ireland different than the rest of the UK. Some respondents stated they don't want a border at all, also not for the people on Northern Ireland who feel British, but it would be one of the only scenarios where the border could stay the same. Next to that, Northern Ireland has always been treated differently, in legislation and its position within the United Kingdom. Some laws are different and the biggest political parties in the UK don't get any votes in Northern Ireland. Showing passports at ports and airports won't be a problem, because this was already the case at airports

anyway. Not much will, therefore, change. The only negative thing could be checks for goods between Northern Ireland and Britain, which could cause delays in transport. The economy of Northern Ireland is dependent on Britain, so that could form a problem.

#### D). Hard border on the Irish island

In the most extreme scenario, a hard border will return to the Irish island. Customs control would return to prevent people from crossing illegally. Both negotiating parties ruled out this option. There are several reasons for that. At first, the Irish land border is too long and has too many crossings to put checks on. Like in the past, minor roads would have to be blocked or destroyed. But this would be resisted by the local people. People living along the border live on a cross border mentality and go to the other side for work, family or shopping. Putting up controls would delay this and cause protests. Violent groups could use the border as a target again, the police would have to come in to secure the customs posts, and then perhaps the army to protect the police. A militarised border could come back if this 'domino-effect' would happen. The peace process, started with the GFA, would then be thrown away. Next to the potential violence, the economic damage will be huge. Companies work across the border regularly. Queuing at the border could cost big companies a lot of money. This could be a reason for them to leave Northern Ireland and set something up across the border. A hard border could, therefore, have a devastating effect to Northern Ireland's society, for its economy but also for the stability and the peace process.

#### **'What are the consequences of different relationships between involved parties around the Irish border?'**

Different scenarios can have different effects on the Irish border. But that border also has its effects on different groups of people. The future of the relationships between different states and groups of people is, therefore, also an important part of the future after Brexit.

#### **Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom**

The Brexit-vote showed a division within the United Kingdom. A majority in Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to stay in the European Union. Now they have to leave that union, because a majority in England and Wales voted for it. Depending on the future of the Irish border, this could worsen the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. If Northern Ireland would get a special status and a hard border in the Irish Sea would be installed, then this would cut Northern Ireland even more off from Britain. But trade of Northern Ireland is still in a big way dependent on Britain. A bad relationship with the rest of the UK could mean economic damage.

## **The United Kingdom and the European Union**

The UK and the EU are still together in one union right now. But after the ending of the transition period in December 2020, the UK definitively leaves the EU. The deal (if there is a deal) that will be signed by both parties will decide about their future relationship. The EU and the UK could still work together closely, if the UK stays in the customs union for example. But with a hard Brexit, what the UK Government wants, the UK could become competitors of the EU concerning trade. This could mean a tense relationship between the two. Ireland could become the place where this relationship meets. The question then is how the EU will handle its new external border. The external borders of the EU have become more and more closed, maybe this could happen to the Irish border as well. If Northern Ireland would get a special status, then the EU and the UK have no other option than working together concerning Northern Ireland. EU law and trade rules would maybe apply to Northern Ireland as well in that case. In case of a hard border, the EU-UK relationship will be different as well. Then both parties would have to secure their side of the border, increasing the difference between the two parties.

## **Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**

Regardless of what happens with Brexit, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would still be on the same island. In any scenario, they would have to work together to some extent. The main goal of the negotiators is to keep the border open and frictionless. Then, cooperation between the countries would still be significant. Cross-border cooperation between parties and local governments would continue. A hard border could change this. Then, it would be a lot harder for people to work on the other side of the border, and for companies to trade cross-border. A referendum for the unification could then be realistic. Referenda in both countries would then be held and Northern Ireland could leave the UK, joining the EU again. Majorities on both sides of the border would need to vote for that. For years that has not been something people thought could happen, but Brexit could bring unification back on the table.

## **Unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland**

As described in the history of the Irish border, the Troubles had a major impact on the country. The GFA brought peace and now unionists and nationalists live together without conflict. Brexit could bring tensions back to the two groups. Brexit was put forward as an identity issue, although the economic argument was the most important. It forced people in Northern Ireland to think about identity again. Most unionists voted to leave, because they would stay closer to Britain then. Most nationalist voted to stay, because they would stay

closer to the Republic of Ireland. The division in the country could come back because of Brexit. Border infrastructure could become a target for dissident republicans. Next to that, some unionists feel threatened by the call from nationalists for a unification referendum. Violence could come back between the two groups. Then, the peace process would be destabilised, and the country would fall back to old times again.

## **6.2 Answering the main question**

Putting the conclusions of the sub-questions together, the conclusion of the main question is drawn up. The main question was:

*'What will the influence of Brexit be on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic Ireland?'*

Analysing that influence was done by looking at the history, scenarios and relationships surrounding the border. The most obvious conclusion is the uncertainty about the future. It has been 2 years since the referendum and there is still no solution to the Irish border. This uncertainty already has its effects on Northern Ireland. Companies start to set locations in the Republic or even leave Northern Ireland. But if more companies follow will depend on the type of border that will be installed. The different scenarios and its consequences were described. The history of the Irish border is a turbulent one, also pointed out by the respondents. The importance of a workable solution to keep the Irish border open cannot be stressed enough. No deal could bring hard infrastructure back and implementing a hard border could send Northern Ireland back to political violence. Opponents of a hard border could use it as a target for attacks. Although a hard border will probably not be realistic, it's good to keep in mind why it is such a dangerous scenario. The Irish border is not 'just' a border. Technology won't offer a workable solution to the border either. Even cameras could become a target for violence. If both negotiating governments want to avoid 'any border infrastructure at all', then cameras could also be seen as a form of infrastructure.

To conclude, most likely will be that the border will stay an open, soft border. Both negotiating parties stated that they want to avoid any hard border infrastructure at all. They both want to see no changes to the Irish border. The same applies to the people in Northern Ireland. This means a soft border is the only realistic and workable option. The way they are going to do this could differ. In a hard Brexit, the scenario of a border in the Irish Sea could be realistic. Although the DUP is opposed to it, if this is the only way to a solution for the Irish border, then the British Government will probably agree to it. Extra control at ports and airports would be necessary, but a hard border on the Irish island would be prevented. In a soft Brexit, the UK could stay in the customs union and keep the Irish border open as well. But

it would then miss part of its goal to 'gain back control'. The hard brexiteers in Westminster will probably not agree with it, but politics can quickly change. May's Government could fall down for example, and another party could push the negotiations in a different way. But this is, just like the border, something that lies ahead. The future is unclear, but a soft, open border, would be best for all parties involved. Time will tell if both negotiating parties will find a way to implement this. The question mark of the future for the Irish border is still there. But hopefully, this thesis has given more insight into why this question mark is so important and how it could be answered.

### **6.3 Discussions and recommendations**

After finishing this thesis, it is useful to discuss some of the limitations of this research. At first, there was the uncertainty of the Brexit negotiations. During the writing process, different votes in the UK Parliament were held for example, about the Brexit process. I used a lot of news articles from the BBC and the Irish Times, and every week there were new developments and opinions from players in the process. I couldn't keep up with everything, but at the moment of writing, there still has not been a solution for the Irish border. In March 2019, the UK has to leave the EU. I'm curious to what they come up with for the Irish border. It will be useful to see if one of the scenarios of this thesis will be the solution, but maybe they come up with something else. In that case, the scenarios made up in this research could not be useful anymore. If the situation on the border would somehow change again in the future, then maybe the results in this thesis could be valuable again.

Some scenarios I used were already ruled out by the negotiating parties. The EU and the UK both wanted to avoid any border infrastructure on the Irish border. The smart border, also a type of infrastructure, was ruled out, maybe for that reason. Although those two scenarios don't seem likely, or realistic for the future, I still added them to my research. I've done this because using technology is one of the newer forms of borders. I think this could be applied to other borders in the future. It was, therefore, interesting to find out why technology is not a workable solution for the Irish border. The reasons behind it were interesting to examine. But one could see the addition of unlikely scenarios as a limitation to this research.

Next to that, the interviews I did were not with people from all backgrounds in Northern Ireland. The respondents in the interviews in Northern Ireland were all opposed to Brexit. They all lived and grew up along the Irish border as well. Maybe it would have been useful to speak with people who supported Brexit. Or people who grew up on the more Eastern side of Northern Ireland, where more people are unionist. They could have given me

more insight into why the UK is leaving the EU and how Brexit could be positive to Northern Ireland. Now, this thesis might seem like an argument why Brexit is bad for Northern Ireland. But this could have been different if there would be more focus on pro-Brexit people.

The relevance of this thesis lies, as mentioned in the introduction chapter, in the newness of the subject. The Brexit referendum is two years ago, and the negotiations only started last year. After finishing this thesis, I hope I can say my research will add to the small amount of Brexit, and especially Irish border, publications. Maybe the scenarios I discussed can be used to prepare for the future, if one of them comes true after the negotiations end. But even if the solution to the Irish border won't be one discussed in this thesis, I hope the information about the other possibilities could help understand the Irish border better.

I could make some recommendations for future research in Brexit and the Irish border. The fear of a return of violence in Northern Ireland because of Brexit was often pointed out by the respondents. But that subject is already covered in some literature and publications (like Stevenson, 2017 and Hayward, 2017). It depends on the solution the negotiators come up with for the Irish border if violence could really return. Once a solution would be installed, further research could use this solution to see if it would have an influence on the peace process. One of the other things pointed out by the respondents was that they feel that the British government did not care about their situation. It could be interesting for further research to examine the role of Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations, to see how the UK Government dealt with the border problem from the referendum until the end of the negotiations. Did they value it enough? And what was the role of the DUP, backing Theresa May's Government majority, in the negotiations of the Irish border? Next to that, further research could focus on the consequences of the United Kingdom as a whole after leaving the European Union. Since it's the first time that a country is leaving the EU, it's interesting to see how such an exit works out. Brexit is a recent phenomenon and has implementations on lots of different fields of research. The coming years will be interesting to scientific research and I think there are enough aspects of Brexit which will be investigated. I hope my thesis can give more insight into the Irish border after Brexit for further research, regardless of what the outcome will be.

## **6.4 Reflection**

Looking back on writing this thesis, there's a couple of things I could point out to do differently next time. At first, the methodology I used could have been better. I had to use a lot of news articles and reports, instead of scientific literature. The lack of scientific information about Brexit and Northern Ireland was a reason for that. But this makes sense since it's only 2

years since the referendum. Arranging the interviews was also quite hard. I could have started contacting people earlier, or try to call people more instead of emailing. In the end, I was satisfied with the amount of information I got from the interviews because this thesis was not a case study. I did not want to make a conclusion about one particular group of people. This brings me back to the type of research, if I had more time and possibility for transport, it would have been interesting to choose one case around the Irish border to do research on. Now, the respondents were from different backgrounds but they were all opposed to Brexit. It would be interesting to find a case, where I could interview opinions of both proponents and opponents to Brexit, to compare both views on the topic. Maybe this could be something for the future.

The process of writing was hard in the beginning, but after I went to Northern Ireland, everything was put together quite fast. The scenarios drawn up before going there to do the interviews helped me to give structure to my research. Scenarios are good instruments to analyse a future. But, they also constrain. The possibilities for the Irish border are maybe bigger than I implemented in the scenario. Different special arrangements could be made by the EU and the UK, which I have no knowledge of yet.

Doing the interviews in English on my own was something new for me as well. Earlier projects were often in a group and we did interviews together. Now, I had to do it myself. Sometimes, I noticed in the transcription of the interviews, I was suggestive in my questions or remarks about Brexit. As I mentioned in my preface, I'm pro-European Union, and I tried to hide this as much as I could in the interviews. But I found out it is quite hard to be totally objective during an interview, because I'm not used to being neutral. In further research and during my master's, I hope to improve this interview skill. The recording process of the interviews was also something that I could have done better. I mostly used two recording devices during the interviews, but with the one I didn't, the recording stopped after 15 minutes. I was lucky to have made notes during the interviews, otherwise, I wouldn't know what was said. In the future, a mistake like that needs to be prevented.

All in all I can say I learned a lot during the process. I think writing this thesis will help with my master's in the future. The experience of going to another country and doing research there on my own is also something I value. Geography is a global field of research, and it is likely that I will go to another country again to do research in the coming years. I'm glad to have done this and I think it added a lot to this thesis. I'm really looking forward to next year now.

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# 8 Appendix

## 8.1 Interview guide

1. Introduction
  - a. Who am I, what am I studying, why did I choose this subject
  - b. Explain the main question, explain what the interview will be about
  - c. Ask permission for recording
  
2. Introduction respondent
  - a. Function
  - b. How are you involved with Brexit? In your work? In your personal life?
  
3. (Depending on the age of the respondent) History of the border
  - a. How do you remember the Irish border before the Good Friday Agreements?
  - b. Did you cross the border often back then? Can you describe what crossing the border looked like?
  - c. What changed after the Good Friday Agreements?
  - d. Did you experience crossing the border differently after the Agreements? Did you cross the border more often than before because of that?
  
4. Brexit
  - a. What do you think of Brexit in general?
  - b. What do you think will be the influence of Brexit on Northern Ireland in general?
  
5. Future of the border
  - a. What do you think Brexit will mean for the future of the UK and Northern Ireland in general?
  - b. Explain the different types of borders (hard, soft and smart)
  - c. What do you think a hard border (border infrastructure and control) will mean for Northern Ireland? For trade with Ireland? For ordinary life?
  - d. What do you think keeping a soft border (no stops at the border) will mean for Northern Ireland? For its position in the UK? For ordinary life? (Also: Northern Ireland in the EU customs union, or special arrangement)
  - e. What do you think installing a smart border (technological border, databases, filtering risks) will mean for Northern Ireland? (Check if the respondent knows

enough about this type of border)

f. What do you think is the best option for the future border? Why? And what do you think is the most likely?

## 8.2 Observation scheme

The observation focuses on the Irish border. Because I was not able to rent a car, or find time for another way to go to the border, the only option was using the bus. I booked flights to and from Dublin instead of Belfast. In this way, the bus would take me across the border from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland.

### Observation questions

- 1) What does the Irish border look like?
- 2) Do you notice crossing the border?
- 3) Is there anything you can see that's changed when you cross the border?

Question	Observation
1). What border looks like	There's not a visible notice when you cross the border. I was looking out of the window of the bus and did not see anything that would let me know I entered the United Kingdom. There would probably have been a sign saying 'you entered the United Kingdom', but I may have missed it because we were driving on the highway.
2). Notice crossing	I only noticed crossing the border when I got a message on my phone from my provider that said 'Welcome to the UK'. The vibration of the phone was more noticeable than the physical crossing itself.
3). Changed after border	The things that change when you cross the Irish borders are mainly the signs. In the UK, the signs will use miles instead of kilometres. Also, the signs in the Republic of Ireland have all information and place names in both Irish and English, while Northern Ireland only uses English.