



Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context

A Five-Year Review

Embassy of Ireland, Washington DC

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1. Introduction

In March 2009, the Government endorsed: “Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context”. This document of some forty pages was drawn up by the Irish Embassy in Washington after extensive consultations. Its purpose was to guide the future development of Irish-US relations, and to offer a range of specific proposals across individual sectors.

The years since 2009 have seen significant changes in the international landscape and in the US; they have been years of seismic upheaval in Ireland. A five-year review of the 2009 document is therefore timely, so as to allow an update on the 2009 assessments and set out a perspective for the coming years.

This five-year review is submitted at a time when two wide-ranging exercises are underway in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: an overall review of our foreign policy priorities and a separate review of diaspora policy. It is hoped that this spotlighting of the Irish-US relationship will make a contribution to these wider exercises, while maintaining the necessary specificity of focus on our most important bilateral relationship.

2. Continuing Relevance of the 2009 Document

The 2009 report clearly had a significant impact in shaping policy. Much of the analysis and recommendations remain highly relevant.

- A number of the proposals have been implemented fully or partially: these include extending diplomatic representation and the Honorary Consul network, and introducing new mechanisms for recognition of outstanding achievements by members of the diaspora.
- Other proposals were superseded by new arrangements: the proposed new Ireland-US Strategic Policy Group and a new Irish American Leadership Council were in effect replaced by the Global Irish Network and the Global Irish Economic Forum.
- A third group of proposals has so far not been implemented. In some cases, this is because of resource constraints: upgrading the Embassy Washington, developing a dedicated Irish Cultural Institute in Washington. In other cases, the achievement of objectives – in particular, securing a long-term solution for the undocumented Irish in the US – remains dependent on political will in the US.

The approach of this review is to touch briefly on each of the areas highlighted in the 2009 report, in the order of the earlier document, and to offer a comment or update on the current position. The intention is to offer a succinct statement of current realities, and to suggest some pointers for the future.

3. Ireland-US Relations: The Need for Special Attention and Priority

“Our relationship with the United States must be a clear priority and command special attention. It is a relationship of extraordinary depth and energy. In many ways the relationship seems obvious but its very familiarity can be deceptive. It cannot be presumed to look after itself. It needs renewal and priority.”

Five years later, this key sentence of the 2009 review needs to be emphatically reaffirmed. Indeed, the single most important point of this review is to underline again the centrality of the Irish-US relationship.

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In the current period of austerity in Ireland, there are no easy choices as to resource allocation. A rigorous application of cost/benefit criteria is required. But any assessment of our relative interests points to the priority ranking of the US. The policy and operational consequences which flow from this need to be clearly drawn.

4. The Economic Relationship: Our First Priority

In any economic league table, the US is at or near the top of the list. By far the largest share of Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland (72% in 2013) comes from the US. It is our largest single market for export of goods and our second largest tourism market.

The market continues to grow. Our goods exports to the US in 2013 reached almost €18.4 billion, reflecting gains across both newer and more traditional sectors (our agri-food exports to the US, for example, have grown by 50% since 2009).

The solid two-way nature of the relationship is also a key strength: Irish companies investing in the US account for tens of thousands of jobs here.

Impressive as it is, any snapshot of current statistics does not tell the full story. It does not do justice to the quality of the economic engagement nor speak to the still untapped potential.

FDI originating in the US is sophisticated, high on job creation (accounting for three quarters of all jobs created from FDI in 2013), capable of generating significant spin-off indigenous activity. Our exports to this market are high value and highly diversified. Tourists visiting Ireland from the US stay longer and spend more per capita than the average visitor from other parts of the world.

This vast and vibrant country offers extraordinary potential across almost every sector. Even if we have done exceptionally well, there is so much more opportunity to be tapped. The map at Annex 1, which matches the GDP of individual US states with countries of comparable GDP, gives some sense of the scope.

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The US is in every sense an Ireland-friendly environment, with extremely high levels of mutual goodwill, a common language and shared cultural values. It is also a market defined by a strong commitment to transparency, openness, and rule of law.

A further benign element over the past year or so has been the very positive perception of Ireland's management of its economic recovery. The reputational rebuild since 2008 has required deliberate and sustained effort and outreach, but is now paying dividends.

Because the US is an 'established' market, and Ireland-friendly, there is a risk that we feel ourselves in a comfort zone. Any such sense would be misplaced. This is a highly competitive environment: the restless energy and openness to change is part of what characterises America. Nothing can be assumed; everything must be continually earned.

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This fluid, fast-moving, economy, is constantly powering ahead. The commitment to innovation, entrepreneurship, and research is extraordinary. The 2009 document discussed new areas of economic opportunity. The growth areas outlined – green technology, smart technology, life sciences – continue to deliver for us. In the interim, further new areas of growth – such as big data and analytics – have opened up.

And as the economy here recovers, the significant investment funds that have built up over the past few years are in search of outlets, offering a range of new possibilities for Ireland.

There is nothing static about this picture. The situation is constantly evolving, with new areas of specialization and sub-specialization. The US economy five years from now will offer opportunities that are not easily predicted today. We cannot have 20/20 foresight: what we need are the personnel and networks on the ground that are sufficiently engaged and alert to plug us into the opportunities as they emerge.

This means an adequate number of people, of the right calibre, with deep connections to US business. We also need the structures and mindset to ensure the closest cooperation across the agencies and the diplomatic service. And our work together needs to be reinforced by maximum openness and interaction with committed and vibrant networks.

The Local Market Team approach, under the guidance of the Export Trade Council, has offered a good framework for cooperation over the past few years. It can be built on further to ensure even tighter coordination of effort.

5. Ireland, the US and the EU

The 2009 report emphasised that Ireland's EU membership is an important selling point for our image in the US. In both a geographical and political sense, Ireland can be America's gateway to Europe.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) has the capacity to be a truly transformative step forward in the EU/US relationship. On both sides of the Atlantic, there is a huge investment of effort in the current TTIP negotiation.

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The scope and timetable are under intensive discussion - whether Congress will grant TPA (fast-track negotiating authority) is conditioned by domestic politics and still hangs in the balance. Concluding TTIP at the earliest possible date, and in any event before the end of the Obama Presidency, is a shared objective.

Ireland must be poised to maximise the opportunities that TTIP will bring. This means a very alert engagement with the negotiation process, a clear marshalling of our offensive and defensive interests, and intensive dialogue with all the relevant bodies in Ireland.

6. Ireland's Image in the US: Adding Energy

The 2009 document stated, correctly, that Ireland has one of the best “brands” of any country in the US. *“There is, however, a persistent sense, valid or not, that we should seek to do even more to capitalise on the asset of our positive image and derive more benefit from it across the board.”*

But the sense of unrealised potential continues to be felt and articulated.

This persistent sense remains.

There is much that is positive to report over the past five years. The diplomatic network and the agencies have embraced social media. The individual agencies have each run targeted and innovative publicity campaigns, whose concrete outcomes attest to their success. The reputational rebuild has largely succeeded.

But the sense of unrealised potential continues to be felt and articulated. Two key issues in this regard are level of resources for media work and degree of coordination. With image and outreach so critically important, we need to allocate adequate resources – at a minimum, to rebuild to the staffing levels which existed prior to the cutbacks of recent years. And we need to be more coherent, encouraging greater coordination of messaging across the agencies.

The risk is that the whole will remain less than the sum of the parts. We are still in search of an over-arching brand for Ireland that will encompass the traditional and the contemporary, and that will act as an umbrella for agency branding.

This whole issue of national branding goes well beyond the US and requires further in-depth consideration in Dublin. In the meantime, a useful first step in the US might be to commission a “perceptions review” which would provide a baseline from which we could benchmark Ireland’s overall image here.

7. Irish America: A Resource of Incomparable Benefit

The 2009 paper described Irish America as “a resource of incomparable benefit”. The intervening years have amply confirmed the accuracy of that description. Throughout recent economic difficulties, Irish America has stood with us; the goodwill and practical support, manifest in so many ways, have been deeply felt and valued.

Irish-America will remain a potent force, and an extraordinary resource for Ireland.

But we need to be alert to the demographics. The ethnic make-up of this country is changing rapidly. The America of a generation hence will look and feel very different from today's America. By 2050, for example, about one in three of the population will likely be Hispanic. Other ethnic groups are also expected to grow significantly. Irish America will shrink correspondingly as a proportion of the overall population.

And, since Irish-America for some time has not been replenished by substantial new immigration from Ireland, the ancestral ties with Ireland are growing more distant.

Already, census figures from 2012 show approximately 36 million Irish Americans, down from 39 million as recently as 2000.

If the sense of connection is not to loosen, the attachment of the current generation of Irish Americans must be transmitted to the next generation. This requires a strong focus on young Irish America, and a prioritisation of the networks and programmes that engage young people.

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Irish-America is diverse and multi-faceted; there is no single identikit. And, like all diasporas, the Irish-American family will continue to evolve in its own way, shaped by its own particular set of experiences and influences. This diversity and distinctiveness of Irish America needs to be recognised and valued.

But constant interaction and two-way communication are essential. The homeland of memory, or the "Ireland of the mind", will always exert a powerful pull. It should not, however, displace today's realities. Just as we in Ireland need to recognise and respect the diaspora perspective, it is important that Irish America understands the evolution that is taking place in Ireland and is fully aware of the values of contemporary Ireland.

8. Recognition and Acknowledgement: The Need for New Initiatives

The relationship with Irish America must be a two-way one: a mature, reciprocal, 21st century relationship. Anything less will leave both sides short-changed.

How best to structure that relationship is the subject of on-going lively debate.

The examination of voting rights for emigrants is beyond the scope of this review. However, it is undoubtedly seen by some in Irish America as a litmus test of the seriousness of the treatment of the diaspora.

Following the 2009 study, the President’s Awards were introduced as a way of recognising the contribution of the most distinguished members of the diaspora. The Awards are filling a real need, and are immensely valued by recipients. Our challenge over the next years will be to maintain the prestige of these Awards: the sense that this is a truly exceptional honour, merited by a truly exceptional contribution.

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Also on foot of the 2009 report, a new “Certificate of Irish Heritage” was introduced. This has been a mixed success.

Whenever there is some ceremony of presentation – a ritual that conveys a sense of recognition – the Certificates are seen as something of meaning and significance. In other circumstances, the attraction is reduced. There needs to be a rethinking of whether the Certificates can be given greater significance for all recipients.

The conferral of citizenship should be attended by an appropriate degree of dignity and solemnity. Achieving citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration (FBR) has not functioned as it should over the past few years: resource constraints have led to unacceptable backlogs in processing. New procedures are being put in place that will deal with these delays. Separately, there is the issue of celebration of the grant of citizenship. The moment of conferral deserves to be marked in some way, even if simply by a letter of welcome and a range of material to accompany the FBR certificate.

9. Connecting and Staying in Touch: Availing of New Technologies

The 2009 study discussed networking and in particular the power of the web to link our diaspora.

The past five years have seen a significant and very welcome growth of Irish networks. Most notably, there has been a growth of city-based networks of young Irish and Irish Americans. There are now Irish Networks in eighteen cities across the US; the first annual Convention was held in Washington DC in 2013 and the next is envisaged for Seattle in September 2014.

Various other networks have grown up over recent years, such as the Irish International Business Network, the Boston Irish Business Association, and the Young Leaders of the American Ireland Fund. The Wild Geese Network of Irish Scientists has developed a strong online membership.

There is now an increasingly elaborate mosaic of societies. New networks co-exist with longer-established ones, which in some cases continue to flourish and in other cases have lost some of the vitality which characterised their earlier years.

Such co-existence will often make sense, with networks serving differing constituencies and with different areas of focus. However, wherever feasible, adaptation and merging should be actively encouraged. With overstretched Embassy/Consulate and state agency teams, we can better support networks if they are more integrated and streamlined.

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The 2009 paper noted in particular the potential for global networks which would provide an online link for Irish communities in the US and beyond. This area remains underdeveloped and will benefit from consideration as part of the diaspora review that is currently underway.

10. Immigration: New Arrangements Needed

As time has passed, the need for US immigration reform has become increasingly urgent. While reform legislation is currently stalled in the House of Representatives, the underlying political and economic logic of reform remains compelling. We are convinced that momentum will be maintained, and are continuing to engage accordingly.

The Government's goal is that employment opportunities be available in Ireland for all our people. But until there is a significant further reduction in unemployment levels, it is inevitable that many Irish people, and young people in particular, will consider emigration. A pathway for legal migration to the US would offer choices and prospects not currently available.

The comprehensive immigration reform bill which passed the US Senate in June 2013 would offer such a pathway. We remain fully focused on the objective of having a specific allocation of visas for Irish nationals included in any legislation that Congress may be prepared to adopt.

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Resolving the status of the undocumented is an issue which continues to unite and mobilise the community. It is imperative that the Irish perspective and concerns are

articulated in a clear and coherent manner. The Government, Oireachtas, the Embassy and Consulates General will continue to press the case relentlessly.

The bilateral twelve month Work and Travel Arrangements, agreed on a five-year basis in September 2008, was renewed in Autumn 2013 for an interim period of one year. This will allow time for elaborating longer-term arrangements as of Autumn 2014. The benefits of the scheme have been considerable, and renewal on appropriate terms is a policy priority.

11. Supporting the Irish Communities in the U.S.

As we increasingly focus on the future of Irish America, and the engagement of the next generation, we cannot forget the debt owed to the older and more vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors of Irish America.

The Irish Abroad Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is now ten years in existence. The Emigrant Support Programme, established in 2009, has disbursed a total of €120m, about one sixth to projects in the US. There is appreciation that this level of funding has been sustained through the years of austerity, and a hope and expectation that this will continue into the future. It will be important that information regarding the work of the ESP – still a relatively new programme – is disseminated as widely as possible.

Across the US, we maintain our efforts to provide consular services to the community in the most efficient and customer-friendly manner: the workload for our consular network is considerable, including the issuing of about 12,500 passports in the US annually. We continue to seek to upgrade the quality of our service.

12. Education: Generating Potent Links

The 2009 paper set out the scope for intensified links in the education sector.

Since then, significant progress has been made. The umbrella brand for attracting international students in Ireland, *Education in Ireland*, was re-developed and launched in March 2011. A joint marketing fund has been developed; a Student Ambassador Programme has been established; and new Government of Ireland scholarships have been introduced. We hope to see appropriate prioritisation of the US market in these initiatives.

A degree of competition among universities is to be expected, as each seeks to project its distinctive 'brand' and offering. But this vast US marketplace offers a considerable challenge for institutions the size of Irish universities. It is therefore important that joint marketing and development of niche specialities are continued and further developed, building on the work that has commenced in the area of post-graduate studies.

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The Embassy in Washington remains ready – in partnership with EI and the Irish Universities Association – to host an early dialogue on the future of Irish-US relations in the area of higher education and research.

13. Irish Studies: An Area of Growth and Opportunity

Irish Studies play a vital transmission role, creating links to the next generation of Irish Americans and indeed to young Americans more generally.

All of the existing programmes continue to do valuable work, as outlined in the 2009 report. The opportunities for growth remain considerable.

While the larger, financially well-endowed programmes (such as those at Notre Dame, Boston College and Glucksman Ireland House) are key anchors for Irish Studies in the US, a number of the smaller programmes depend on the efforts of one or two individuals with little infrastructure or support to sustain them into the future. Inevitably, not all will survive: the objective should be to develop a strong spread of programmes with longer term viability.

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The 2009 paper proposed a new 'leadership development programme' between Ireland and the US, which would have a small number of emerging US leaders spend a week or so in Ireland in a government-led programme. This proposal has so far not been acted on. It remains a very worthwhile idea, particularly in the perspective of building the next generation of Irish American leaders. We suggest implementation, as resources permit, over the next few years.

14. Culture and Sport: Adding to our Stature

Our culture defines us in so many ways; it speaks to who we are as a people. The Irish cultural imprint in the US goes particularly deep. It is also one of our best calling cards here - an important part of our tourism offering and reinforcing the image of creativity which is a key part of our FDI appeal.

For very many Americans, the interest and engagement with Irish culture is well-informed and sophisticated; there is a constant interrogation of the place of the arts in Ireland.

We have ground to make up over the next few years.

Culture Ireland had developed a very strong profile in the US; the experiment with a Cultural Ambassador was also widely considered to be a success. Questions are being posed as to how a specific cultural policy for the US is now being developed.

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We should be ready to seize major opportunities that present themselves to showcase Irish identity and culture. The 1916 centenary, in 2016, will offer a unique platform and the Embassy has developed outline proposals. We envisage a multi-dimensional celebration, anchored by a strong cultural component.

The building of an Irish Arts Centre in New York is under way with a target finishing date of 2016. This flagship project requires ongoing support.

Other initiatives in the cultural area deserve to be examined. Aosdana, for example, has significant US-based membership. Periodically bringing together these US-based members, together with other Irish cultural practitioners in the US, could provide a valuable forum for discussion and advice.

The potential of sport has been further illustrated over the past few years. College football has been given a big boost: the Notre Dame-Navy game in Dublin in 2012 was a phenomenal success and the University of Central Florida - Penn State University game this year will also have an important tourist spin-off.

The GAA continues to play a leading role within the Irish-American community. Bringing Gaelic games to a wider American audience is the next big challenge, and we will continue to be supportive of all GAA efforts to internationalise the appeal of the games.

15. Political Relations; Peace in Northern Ireland

The extraordinary level of engagement with the US Administration has continued throughout the past five years. President Obama and the First Lady have demonstrated their sense of friendship and connection, particularly in their high profile and successful visits to Ireland.

The Friends of Ireland in the House of Representatives continue to be a valuable voice for Ireland. Work is taking place towards the further enlargement of the Friends. The objective is to ensure a vibrant, bi-partisan, well-informed grouping, regularly updated on developments on the island of Ireland. Beyond the Friends, we are also working to further enhance outreach in both Houses and on both sides of the aisle.

A particular area of focus over the period ahead will be to strengthen our relationships at state and city level across the US. We are fortunate to have a range of Governors and Mayors in a number of major cities, with strong connections and affinity with Ireland. Equally, there are very many members of State Legislatures with a deep fund of goodwill towards Ireland, either because of their own ethnic background or the level of Irish American presence in their constituencies.

We have begun to assemble more sophisticated data bases to enable us to further build these relationships at State and City level. Encouragement of visits to Ireland will be a key element of our outreach.

The U.S. has maintained its unique and distinctive role in encouraging political progress and reconciliation.

The political landscape in Northern Ireland continues to evolve.

Throughout that evolution, the U.S. has maintained its unique and distinctive role in encouraging political progress and reconciliation. This was further highlighted in the course of the past year when the political parties in Northern Ireland invited Dr. Richard Haass to chair talks on a range of sensitive issues. The contribution of Dr. Haass, together with his deputy Dr. Meghan O'Sullivan, has been extremely valuable.

The constructive and well-informed engagement of the US Administration and Congress will remain vital. Sustaining the interest and involvement of Irish America – whose encouragement and practical support has made such a difference over the past decades – will be equally important.

For our diplomatic network in the US, the promotion of all efforts to advance reconciliation and political progress in Northern Ireland will continue to rank among our key priorities.

16. Meeting our Foreign Policy Goals: More Structured Dialogue

Although, inevitably, there will be differences of evaluation and approach from time to time on specific issues, the US and Europe are fundamentally united in their shared values and objectives. Our very familiarity with each other can lead to a certain taking for granted. Recognising this, senior US policy-makers over recent months have spoken of the need for a “Transatlantic Renaissance”. Ireland can play a very positive role in that discourse.

On many international issues, our exchanges with the US will be situated within the wider EU/US dialogue and cooperation. However, there are areas of distinct interest and strength where there is value-added in bilateral co-operation. This is especially the case in the nexus of development/human rights/reconciliation/peace-building issues. Significant work is already under way, particularly in relation to food and nutrition security where Ireland and the US have been pathfinders - notably through the 1000 Days partnership - and in our common goal of combating diseases of poverty through global health partnerships. We will build on these strong foundations.

17. Irish Government Presence in the US: Upgrading and Developing

The 2009 report drew attention to the inadequacy of our diplomatic representation in the U.S. In the interim, a new Consulate has opened in Atlanta and the decision to open a Consulate in Austin, Texas has been announced. Procedures are in hand to open an Honorary Consulate in Charlotte, North Carolina.

This is unquestionably progress. Yet the status quo leaves much to be desired.

The 2009 report discussed the need to move to new Embassy premises in Washington - to develop a landmark Embassy which would allow us to present a more modern image, showcase Ireland, and support Irish business. The need has become even clearer over the intervening years.

Prioritisation should surely lead towards further upgrading of the diplomatic and agency presence in the US

As acknowledged at the outset of this review, a rigorous prioritisation of resources is required particularly in this period of austerity. But such a prioritisation should surely lead towards further upgrading of the diplomatic and agency presence in the US – growing our footprint incrementally and upgrading our infrastructure. This will remain a significant

challenge over the next few years, but one that needs to be addressed in a determined way.

18. Building Common Purpose

The 2009 Report recommended that an Irish American Leadership Council be established under the patronage of the Taoiseach which would meet on a periodic basis under the chairmanship of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Additionally, there was support for an Ireland-US Strategic Policy Group also to meet under the chairmanship of the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

These proposals were in effect superseded by the creation of the Global Irish Network, and the three successful meetings in Dublin of the Global Irish Economic Forum. The Global Irish Advisory Council has played a very important steering role.

The future of the GIN will be fully considered in the context of the diaspora review being conducted by DFAT; a preliminary comment is offered in the context of this review.

The bringing together of the global Irish family has been a morale booster through the period of austerity and an incubator for an impressive range of good ideas and initiatives. However, it may be that a somewhat adapted structure – tighter, more focussed, more segmented by subject matter and geography – is better aligned with our needs in the recovery phase.

From a US perspective, we continue to see benefit in a structure that is specifically focussed on challenges and opportunities in this country. We also see the benefits of a degree of specificity of target group. The GIN indeed demonstrated the potential synergies between the business and cultural worlds, and the benefit of periodic interaction between the two communities. But if ideas are to be progressed in a concrete way, it is perhaps easier to interact with individuals sharing a common experience and perspective.

We believe that in current circumstances the priority should be to create a single body (effectively merging the earlier proposals for a Leadership Council/Strategic Policy Group) – small in size, chaired at political level, and with a clear focus on advancing the Irish-US economic relationship.

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19. The Next Five Years

This review has emphasised:

- Valuing and prioritising the relationship with the US;
- Focusing on the economic agenda;
- Affirming Irish America;
- Pursuing immigration reform;
- Advancing reconciliation in Northern Ireland;
- Crediting culture;
- Developing the shared foreign policy agenda;
- Building our diplomatic footprint in the US.

Through all these avenues, we will be seeking to build an even stronger Irish-US relationship over the next five years. We will be working to ensure that the closeness of today's political relationship transfers to the next Administration. We will further raise the bar on the economic front: challenging ourselves to deliver even more ambitious targets in a tighter coordination framework. We will work to enhance Ireland's image, through more coherent "branding" as well as high-impact celebrations in 2016.

In all our endeavours, we count on a continuing close bond with the Irish American family – building a true partnership around a dynamic shared agenda.

Under the direction of the Government and of DFAT HQ, and working as closely as possible with the state agencies, this is the vision that will guide our work over the period ahead.

US States Renamed for Countries with Similar GDPs, 2012

