

The Peace programme for Northern Ireland

One of the more distinctive features of EU regional policy during the 1990s was the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. This was not only an expression of satisfaction at European level at the ending of violence within the province, but also highlighted the extent to which EU financial support, and the fact that both Ireland and the United Kingdom were members of the Union, could play an important role in cementing a lasting peace.

The origins of the initiative go back to 1994 and the announcement on 31 August by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) that it intended to make permanent the 'temporary' ceasefire that it had announced that April. Commission President Jacques Delors was one of many to react positively, affirming the EU's 'support for the ongoing peace process' and stating a willingness to consider additional financial measures to help Northern Ireland⁽¹⁾. These would be in addition to the ECU 25 million the Community had already been contributing to the International Fund for Ireland set up in response to the 1986 Anglo-Irish Agreement⁽²⁾.

Both the Irish government and that of the United Kingdom were quick to respond to Delors's announcement. John Major, the UK Prime Minister, replied within 2 days, and by early September the Commission had been encouraged to push ahead at an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers⁽³⁾. In response Delors asked the Deputy Secretary-General, Carlo Trojan, who already had some knowledge of Northern Ireland from his involvement with the International Fund for Ireland, to form a task force on the question comprising a number of Northern Irish officials from across the Commission, along with representatives of those parts of the Commission likely to be involved in delivering a regional aid package and members of the cabinets of Sir Leon Brittan, Bruce Millan and Pádraig Flynn⁽⁴⁾. After a preliminary meeting on 3 October its first formal session took place on 14 October 1994⁽⁵⁾.

The European Parliament was also keen to get involved, and the three Northern Irish MEPs in

particular⁽⁶⁾. Ian Paisley, John Hume and Jim Nicholson met with Delors on 13 October and thereafter involved themselves closely with the work of the task force and the implementation of the Commission programme⁽⁷⁾. Crucially though, neither the Commission nor the MEPs felt it appropriate for the scheme to be devised primarily in Brussels. Instead, as Trojan underlined, it was 'the result of widespread consultation with the British and Irish governments, the Northern Irish authorities, MEPs, local authorities, the voluntary sectors, and many other committed people on the ground'⁽⁸⁾. To this end, three Northern Irish Commission officials were sent to the province in October to consult as widely as possible (they met over 300 people in 4 days), Trojan himself visited Belfast in November and a large number of written submissions were considered by the task force⁽⁹⁾. Both the programme and its subsequent implementation were hence as much bottom-up processes as top-down. Indeed, a 1997 report drawn up on behalf of the three Northern Irish MEPs assessing the programme identified the dialogue it had fostered among and with local-level 'partnerships' as one of the most positive outcomes of the whole process⁽¹⁰⁾.

By late November the task force had completed its report, and the Commission won budgetary approval from the Parliament and Council to cover the additional expenditure planned⁽¹¹⁾. On 7 December the Commission adopted a communication on the programme in time for it to be considered by the Essen

⁽¹⁾ See *Europe in Northern Ireland*, No 89, European Commission Office, Belfast, September-December 1994.

⁽²⁾ Interview with Carlo Trojan, 2 June 2017.

⁽³⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/1, 'Letter from John Major to Jacques Delors', 2 September 1994.

⁽⁴⁾ Interview with Carlo Trojan, 2 June 2017.

⁽⁵⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/4, 'Summary records of the five meetings of the task-force "Northern Ireland"'.
⁽⁶⁾ The Parliament passed a resolution on the peace process in Northern Ireland on 27 September 1994.

⁽⁷⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/1, 'Boyd note for the file on Delors's meeting with the NIRC MEPs', 14 October 1994.

⁽⁸⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/4, 'Investment Conference dinner speech by Carlo Trojan, Belfast', 13 December 1994.

⁽⁹⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/11, 'Note to Carlo Trojan from special advisers to Delors Task Force: H. Logue, H. McNally and R. Ramsey on the programme to support peace and reconciliation', 31 October 1994.

⁽¹⁰⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/10, 'Special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland — Revisited: report to Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission', 1 October 1997.

⁽¹¹⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/1, SEC(94) 9013, Rev. 1, 'Report of the Task Force on Northern Ireland', 29 November 1994; BAC 74/2000/4, 'Letter from President Jacques Delors to Klaus Hänsch', 16 November 1994; and BAC 74/2000/4, 'Trilogue on the adaption of financial perspectives in view of the enlargement of the European Union (Brussels, 29 November 1994) — Statement of conclusions', 29 November 1994.



Meeting between Commission President Jacques Santer and a delegation of new parliamentarians from Northern Ireland. From left to right: Jim Nicholson MEP; Seamus Mallon, Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland; Jacques Santer; David Trimble, First Minister of Northern Ireland; and John Hume, Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

European Council, where it met a positive response ⁽¹⁾. The package of measures was to amount to ECU 300 million (then equivalent to about GBP 240 million) of additional funding for the province and was to cover a period of 5 years.

The task of turning this agreement in principle into a working scheme fell to the Santer Commission. By February a draft proposal was ready to be transmitted to the European Parliament ⁽²⁾. In order to sustain the political momentum behind the programme — and to underline the commitment of the new Commission — the new Commissioner for Regional Policy, Monika Wulf-Mathies, travelled to Ulster in late February, and then again in April. On the second occasion she was

accompanied by Jacques Santer and Neil Kinnock ⁽³⁾. Finally, on 28 July 1995 the Commission was able to approve the initiative and start organising its implementation.

In substantive terms the vast majority of the ECU 300 million provided by the package was to be spent in Northern Ireland itself, although up to 20% could be directed towards the border counties in Ireland. Much of the money would actually be spent by a number of intermediary funding bodies, independent of both national governments, and by a series of newly developed local partnerships involving representatives from district councils, community and voluntary groups and the private sector. Monika Wulf-Mathies was instrumental in ensuring that the resources would be used as far as possible for individual projects conceived or implemented with the involvement of both communities in Northern Ireland. Targets included urban regeneration, social-inclusion projects and the development of tourism infrastructure. Also funded were innovative projects that were outside the

⁽¹⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/1, COM(94) 607 final, 7 December 1994, 'A special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland'; PV(94), Minutes No 1226, second part, meeting of 7 December 1994; Presidency conclusions of the Essen European Council, 9 and 10 December 1994: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21198/essen-european-council.pdf>

⁽²⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/7, SEC(95) 279 final, 14 February 1995, 'Draft notice to the Member States laying down guidelines for an initiative in the framework of the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland'.

⁽³⁾ HAEC, BAC 74/2000/7, 'Note to file on Commissioner Wulf-Mathies' visit to Northern Ireland 27-28 February 1995', Brussels, 3 March 1995; the same file contains extensive paperwork on Santer's visit.

◀ normal scope of EU regional policy programmes, for example to address the complex needs of ex-prisoners. And, vitally, all of the money was additional to the sums that London, Dublin and the EU were already spending in the province. As such it would represent a very tangible 'peace dividend' and a symbol of European solidarity. As the UK government would later acknowledge, 'EU support, and especially the Peace programme, made a vital contribution to securing the Good Friday Agreement' ⁽¹⁾.

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important for sectors such as coal, steel, textiles and shipbuilding, which had experienced substantial job losses.

Under the 1989 reform the Commission increased the emphasis placed on harmonising data collection, not only through national statistical agencies but also through Eurostat, its own statistical service. This service was used in particular to collect Community data on regional GDP and unemployment rates, so that the Commission evaluation used for the allocation of future supranational funding became more independent with respect to data delivered by Member States.

The Commission also tackled the low profile of Community actions. From 1989 Member States were required to show, in their public accounts, the 'additional' resources from the Community, to demonstrate that the funding that made investments possible came on top of existing national resources rather than replacing them ⁽¹⁾.

Further Community initiatives were also introduced. Some of the well-known projects launched during 1989-1990 were Rechar, for the conversion of coal-mining areas; Envireg, for sustainable regional development on environmental issues; REGIS, for the most remote regions; REGEN, designed to develop networks for the transmission of natural gas and the distribution of electricity; Stride, devoted to initiatives to boost regional capacity in the field of research and technological development; and Interreg, which addressed cross-border development. The last of these was the most enduring, and today it is one of the three pillars of EU regional policy.

⁽¹⁾ HAEC, BAC 312/1999/128, 'UK *aide-mémoire*', 19 March 1999.

⁽¹⁾ Hall, R., 'The development of regional policy in the process of European integration: an overview', in Bischof, G. (ed.), *Regional economic development compared: EU-Europe and the American south*, 'Interdisziplinäre Forschung' collection, Innsbruck University Press, Innsbruck, 2014, pp. 13-33.