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**Mediating the European ideal: Cross-border programmes and conflict resolution
on the island of Ireland***

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Abstract

The designation of state borders as essential lines of division in Europe is disputed by the logic of European integration. But does the actual impact of EU membership quantifiably defuse the conflict potential of these borders? The purpose of this article is to assess the impact of the European Union on the resolution of the conflict in Ireland/Northern Ireland through cross-border activity. The primary data for this research is taken from a series of semi-structured interviews with individuals directly involved in the implementation of EU cross-border programmes. Interviewees include politicians, policymakers, and representatives of the community and voluntary sector – all of whom may be viewed as ‘mediators’ of the European ideal of cross-border cooperation as a means to peace-building. The analysis contained here covers three main dimensions of the EU’s role, namely the conditions, context, and consequences of its approach to the border conflict.

Key words

Conflict resolution, cross-border cooperation, European Union, Ireland, Northern Ireland

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Introduction

By showing that state borders can be harbingers of international cooperation, European integration has served ‘not to wither away existing constitutional borders’ but to promote ‘peaceful co-existence’ between different member-states (Kaplan and Hakli, 2002; Teague, 1996, p. 565). One way in which such peaceful co-existence is fostered lies in ‘building networks of interdependence and common action’ across borders between actors at all levels (Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, 1992). Such an approach is simultaneously more difficult and more necessary when it comes to contested borders. In a conflict situation, actors in the networks cultivated by European integration play the crucial role of ‘mediating’ the European ideal of cross-border development, cooperation, and peace. As a locus of a most intense relationship through both violent conflict and peaceful cooperation between two member-states, the Irish border is a remarkable case study of the EU’s capacity in this regard. Indeed, EU programmes specifically targeted at conflict resolution on the island have frequently had an explicit cross-border mandate. The purpose of this article is to critique the rationale and effectiveness of this approach through analysing the perspective of the ‘mediators’ of the European ideal.

The primary data for this research is drawn from interviews with individuals who may be seen to fulfil this mediating function through their roles in implementing EU cross-border programmes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This includes politicians, policymakers, and representatives of the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties, most of whom work in the north-west region of Ireland which formed the focal case study for this research. This analysis of the EU’s approach to cross-border conflict resolution in Ireland covers four main areas. First, what ‘pathways of influence’ have been used by the EU and what the

conditions of this impact have been (see Diez, Stetter and Albert, 2006). Secondly, how the EU's role as an external actor is perceived in Ireland/Northern Ireland in light of other international players and factors. Finally, the relationship between cross-border cooperation and local development in a process of conflict resolution. The opinion of key players in the implementation of EU cross-border programmes regarding these three dimensions of the EU's role – conditions, context, and consequences – provides an invaluable insight into the mediation of the European ideal in Ireland.

I. The conditions of the EU's approach

The four pathways of influence for the EU

Diez, Stetter and Albert (2006, p. 565) define conflict as 'the articulation of the incompatibility of subject positions'; if the European Union is to have influenced the conflict it must have helped to fundamentally change these subject positions. Building on Barnett and Duvall's (2003) categorisation of power types in terms of direct/diffuse power and actors/social relations, Diez *et al.* (2006, pp. 570–5) contend that there are four 'pathways' through which the EU can impact on border conflicts (see Table 1 below). The first pathway – 'compulsory impact' – is the most obvious direct influence the EU has on the political leadership of conflict parties. This can take the form of 'carrot' and 'stick' instruments used to persuade political leaders to engage in a peace process. The second pathway – 'enabling impact' – also affects the political leadership in conflicting parties, yet it is not directly applied. The participation of political leaders in the process of European integration can indirectly alter their approach to the conflict. Crucial here is the institutional and discursive context provided by the EU, including the socialisation of policy-makers. The third pathway – 'connective impact' – covers the points at which the EU's institutional and discursive framework is connected to the conflict society. This includes policies and initiatives through which the EU can directly

affect social actors and activities in the conflict region, such as through project funding. The final pathway – ‘constructive impact’ – is defined by Diez *et al.* (2006, p. 574) as ‘the most indirect but–if successful– also most persuasive mode of transformation’. This is the most long-term and ambitious pathway of influence for the EU, given that it principally aims to affect the subject positions involved in a conflict through ‘a (re)-construction of identities’. This pathway is thus centrally concerned with the EU’s influence on communication and discourse, rather than policies or structures. The validity of each of these pathways to the Irish case is considered below.

Table 1: Pathways of EU impact

Target of impact	Approach by EU	
	Actor-driven	Integration process
	Policy	(1) Compulsory impact
Society	(3) Connective impact	(4) Constructive impact

Source: Diez, Stetter and Albert (2006, p. 572).

No compulsory impact for the EU in Ireland

Despite the fact that interviews were conducted with individuals who have had regular direct contact with the European Union (mainly through the Commission, specifically DG Regional Policy), none of the interviewees identified the ‘compulsory impact’ of the EU as a significant factor in the Irish case. This supports other evidence that it has not been a policy of the EU to directly influence political leadership in relation to the peace process. This is partly because the compulsory power of the EU is most effective prior to membership (a fact borne out in the case of the EU’s approach to Greek-Turkish relations [Rumelili, 2004]), and neither government considered it directly relevant to the Troubles when the UK and Ireland joined in 1973. Moreover, the EU did not attempt to make any direct stand on the conflict until the European Parliament Committee’s

Haagerup Report on the situation in Northern Ireland in March 1984. Describing the situation as one of two ‘conflicting national identities’, Haagerup (1984, p. 7) recognised the limitations of the EU’s capacity to effect change in this regard and consequently recommended a supportive rather than proactive role for the EU, i.e. one which endorsed the peaceful measures taken by the British government and (he urges) by the British and Irish governments together.¹ Yet soon after this, in October 1984, the Parliament was the locus of one of the EU’s strongest attempts to force a core actor to engage in desecuritising moves in Northern Ireland, when it voted in favour of a motion calling on the British government to ban the use of plastic bullets. However, the lack of ‘compulsory’ power behind this action was aggravated by the fact that, within days of the Parliament passing this motion, the European Commission on Human Rights (which had been the focus of international intervention in the conflict up to this point) found that the use of plastic bullets in a rioting situation is justified. More common has been the use of special EU funds as a ‘carrot’ to encourage cooperation between parties to the peace process, exemplified in Commission President Delors’ announcement of funding packages after the first ceasefires in 1994. Any power that this has on political leaders is, however, indirect given that the ones who are most affected by such funds are neither political leaders nor paramilitaries but community-level actors, as discussed below.

The enabling impact of the EU in Ireland

Ultimately, the influence of the EU on political leaders in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland has been most significant and effective in indirect, structural forms arising from EU membership. The first of the three main ways in which the EU has been seen to have an ‘enabling impact’ on the conflict in Ireland is the broadest, namely

¹ For a detailed analysis of the Haagerup Report and the EU’s conceptual approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland see Hayward (2006).

the relevance of the EU for *policy development*. This is particularly acute (albeit not widely recognised) at the regional level, where one policy maker acknowledges, ‘Europe leads the way now in the development of policy’.² This interviewee argues that policymakers need to ‘build on foundations provided by the EU, adding value as opposed to parallel tracking’, because of the primary importance of the EU policy context for the Irish case:

European policies are all about addressing the negative impact of borders and creating parity for border regions. The EU is therefore totally relevant to our role and to the actions we take. It provides a bigger framework and support. There is no point in a development policy that doesn’t tie in with European as well as national policy.³

Arising in tandem with this new policy context has been the growth of multilevel political structures. As a consequence, political actors at a regional level now have new roles, new responsibilities and new relationships – illustrated by the proliferation of partnership boards, regional networks and agencies in the past decade. Many of these are cross-border and many have direct links with officials from the EU Commission.⁴

The second dimension of the EU’s enabling impact in Ireland is the *inspiration* that the EU has provided for local politicians. This includes the specific drawing of parallels between the impact of European integration on relations on the continent and its relevance for the border in Ireland. For example, former SDLP leader and MEP John

² Interview with development officer, North West Region Cross Border Group (NWRCBG), Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

³ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

⁴ Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), Monaghan, 14 July 2004.

Hume cites his first visit to the European Parliament in Strasbourg as a defining moment, due to the experience of standing on a bridge on the Franco-German border and realising that ‘the European Union is the best example in the history of the world of conflict resolution’. This, Hume claims, inspired him to study ‘the philosophy behind the European Union’ in order to learn lessons for the conflict in Ireland.⁵ The inspiration of the EU as a model of conflict resolution had an undoubtedly crucial influence on the ideology espoused by Hume and the SDLP over the past twenty-five years, during which time the politician and his party played a central role in redefining nationalist politics in Ireland and in the peace process that led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (Cunningham, 1997). Hume himself draws direct parallels between the EU model and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, stating that ‘the structures of the EU are clearly reflected in our new political institutions’.⁶

However, as Hume has recently retired from national and European politics and the SDLP has been supplanted by Sinn Féin as the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the endurance and pervasiveness of this aspect of the EU’s enabling impact is debatable. Indeed, another interviewee (who asked this comment to be anonymous) says that the difficulties faced by the SDLP made it ‘questionable as to whether its ideology made an impact’:

People don’t relate to the European perspective which presents big ideals and is not the “on the street, what can we do for you” which Sinn Féin has.

Nonetheless, what one might term the progressive pragmatism of Sinn Féin in its recent evolution has included quite a significant adjustment of its approach to the European

⁵ Interview with John Hume, former MP, MEP, MLA for Foyle and former leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

⁶ John Hume, Speech by the Leader of the SDLP, Newcastle, Co. Down, 10 November 2001.

Union. Whilst its spokespersons would tend to take a much more sceptical approach to EU affairs than their opposite numbers in the majority of political parties in Ireland (leading ‘No’ campaigns in referendums on EU treaties, for example), there is no doubting that Sinn Féin’s move into mainstream politics has developed in parallel with a move towards ‘constructive engagement’ with the EU. The party now not only accepts the SDLP’s mantra of the EU as changing the context for national sovereignty, it also views it as a major factor in a range of domestic political issues. This relates the third dimension of the enabling impact: the EU has increasingly become a *reference point* in relation to cross-border cooperation and the peace process in Ireland.

This is evident in the manifestos of Sinn Féin and the SDLP for the general election to Westminster in May 2005, which make far more reference to the EU than any other manifesto in the United Kingdom or, indeed, those produced for general elections in Ireland. As well as detailed sections on EU affairs, both manifestos make reference to the EU context in virtually every other sector, including ‘job creation, growth and competitiveness’, ‘community and voluntary’, ‘farming and rural development’, ‘regional development’ and ‘education’.⁷ Similarly, both parties also make reference to the all-Ireland context in virtually all sections, showing that they make a point of extending their policy remit beyond Northern Ireland to the rest of the island and the EU. Whilst the SDLP sees the EU model and context as facilitating effective transcendence of the border (for example, according to its 2005 election manifesto, seeking the close integration of Northern Ireland in ‘Trans-European Networks’), Sinn Féin sees the EU as a means to an end. Under a section titled ‘Ireland is moving towards unity and independence’, the manifesto says that Sinn Féin has led the way in

⁷ Quotations taken from subheadings in SDLP Election Manifesto and Sinn Féin Election Manifesto, May 2005.

‘Campaigning in Europe and in Ireland for an increase in INTERREG and Peace funding’.⁸

In contrast, whilst they also claim credit for campaigning for continued EU financial support for Northern Ireland, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) make few and fleeting references to the EU in their 2005 Westminster manifestos. This reflects a fundamentally different conceptualisation of the EU by nationalist and unionist parties (as with the Irish and British governments respectively): if nationalists see Ireland as needing to *pursue* its interests in Europe, unionists see Britain as having to *defend* its interests in Europe. Yet evidence from the work of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC), established through the Good Friday Agreement as a means of cooperation between the Irish government and Northern Ireland Executive,⁹ shows that reference to the EU has served to legitimise functional cross-border cooperation on all sides. For example, when Reg Empey, since leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the Northern Ireland Executive, reported back to the Assembly discussions held with his southern counterparts on the creation of a ‘Digital Island’, he emphasised the ‘European Union dimension to extended collaboration in this area’, and noted ‘the potential for enhanced North/South co-operation in science and technology through a variety of EU

⁸ Sinn Féin Election Manifesto, May 2005, p. 18.

⁹ The devolved Northern Ireland Assembly and its Executive was established in accordance with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. It met first in July 1998, and was temporarily suspended on four occasions due to a stand-off between the political parties, the last occasion being October 2002. Efforts were made in late 2006 towards the goal of its reinstatement in March 2007.

programmes [and] a pan-European network'.¹⁰ However, a noteworthy weakness of the enabling impact is the fact that few voters would know of (or, indeed, be given much information about) the varied and subtle influence of the EU at this level. In this particular study, it was only the elite-level interviewees (politicians, policy-makers) themselves who even mentioned any aspect of the enabling impact of the EU. The lack of public awareness of the EU's role is discussed in the next two sections regarding the societal impact of the EU.

The connective impact of the EU in Ireland

The most widely recognised and obvious pathway of the EU's influence in relation to the conflict in Ireland is the connective impact. Every interviewee explicitly acknowledges the importance of this pathway and its broadly positive influence on the conflict in Northern Ireland. Of all the interviewees, only the politicians identify the Single Market as having a direct effect on the pertinence of the Irish border for the conflict:

The European Union is now a single market and, as I say, if you look at the border in Ireland now, if you drive across the border there's no stopping, so in that sense, physical borders all over Europe have gone, not just in Ireland.¹¹

The funding given by the EU to community groups in Northern Ireland and the border counties is, however, much more widely considered important due to its direct impact at grassroots level and its implications for peace-building.¹² The specific implications of

¹⁰ Reg Empey, UUP MLA and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Northern Ireland Assembly, 9 September 2002.

¹¹ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

¹² It is important to note, however, that this result is no doubt affected by the fact that all of the community-level interviewees were linked to projects that had received EU funding.

this funding are outlined in later sections, yet it is worth noting here that the connective impact of the EU through community funding is seen as having a directly positive influence towards conflict resolution. A number of interviewees draw explicit connections between projects being funded by the EU and a decrease in the level of sectarian violence in those localities.¹³ Others trace a more indirect route for the impact of PEACE funds. For example, in projects that develop skills in individuals enabling them to become social actors themselves, first as contributors to their local community and then as lobbyists for peace.¹⁴ Certain claims are made of EU Community Initiatives (such as INTERREG and LEADER) and the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE) distinguishing them from other funding available for peace work in the region. In facilitating ‘innovative, risk-taking projects’,¹⁵ that ‘come[] in at the bottom level’,¹⁶ the EU has not only helped build a strong culture of partnership and peace-building at a community level, it has ‘changed the nature’ of voluntary work itself.¹⁷

The constructive impact of the EU in Ireland

¹³ See interviews with project trainer and project co-ordinator, Right to Hope Project, Derry/Londonderry, 27 April 2004; project manager, Cathedral Youth Group/ Shared City Project, Derry/Londonderry, 28 April 2004; youth worker, St. Johnston and Carrigans Resource Centre, St. Johnston (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004; and with community youth worker, Ballintra/Laghey Youth Project, Ballintra (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004.

¹⁴ Interview with project co-ordinator, Holos Project, Derry/Londonderry, 27 April 2004.

¹⁵ Interview with development officer, Area Development Management Ltd./Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/CPA), Monaghan, 24 August 2004.

¹⁶ Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, SEUPB, Monaghan, 14 July 2004.

¹⁷ Interview with community youth worker, Ballintra/Laghey Youth Project, Ballintra (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004.

Whilst the connective impact of the EU is seen to be the most obvious in the Irish case, the constructive impact is the most unique and, for a number of interviewees, most significant. One interviewee contends that this pathway is the most important of the four because the main strength of the EU lies in its indirect influence in ‘draw[ing] people in from across divides’.¹⁸ An indirect consequence of the opportunities provided by EU funding for community development to this effect is the growth in confidence of ‘previously silent section[s] of the population’.¹⁹ This has been particularly evident for the Protestant community in the southern border counties, not least because they began with a weak concept of ‘community’ and only applied for EU funds at a late stage and after much encouragement (for example, from the cross-border Derry and Raphoe Action Group). The overwhelmingly positive outcome of the applications under PEACE I from this was to be ‘a huge investment of confidence in the Protestant community’.²⁰

The constructive impact of the EU is not confined within the bounds of different communities or localities but is multilevel, reflected in new networks of contact and communication. One Donegal TD notes that, just as fishermen and farmers in Northern Ireland have been known to lobby the relevant Irish (rather than British) ministers to support their interests at the EU level, she now receives almost as many representations from people across the border in the north as from her own constituents on the big issues. She attributes the way in which people now gravitate towards the politician who

¹⁸ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

¹⁹ Interview with development officer, Derry and Raphoe Action Group, Raphoe (Co. Donegal), 20 May 2004.

²⁰ Interview with development officer, Derry and Raphoe Action Group, Raphoe (Co. Donegal), 20 May 2004.

best represents their needs, regardless of the border, to the impact of the EU.²¹ One interviewee from a joint authority north/south body sees the development of such cross-border links as the reinstatement of ‘the normal physical, economic and emotional links between regions’ previously hindered by partition.²² Regarding these ‘emotional links’, John Hume’s argument is that the true value of European integration and the peace process is that it addresses the ‘real border’ which lies not on a map but ‘in the hearts and minds of the Irish people’.²³ The consequences of Hume applying his vision of the EU’s model of conflict resolution – respect for difference, institutions that respect difference, a healing process in working together for common interests – to the 1998 Agreement may be seen as the clearest evidence for the constructive impact of the EU. It also points to the central role played by local conditions and actors in determining the effectiveness of the pathways of influence for the EU in any particular context.

EU’s impact conditioned by local politics

Diez *et al.* (2006, pp. 587–9) acknowledge that the form and success of the EU’s impact on a conflict is influenced by the structural environment of the conflict and the relationship between the EU and actors within the conflict setting. The research performed in this case study to date suggests that these local conditions do not merely ‘influence’ the impact of the EU but actually serve to determine it. This is exacerbated by the fact that the EU is itself far from an homogenous actor but rather a complex set of collective players. When the EU is taking on the role of an external actor to a conflict, it is open to the influence of various actors at a range of levels. Ultimately,

²¹ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD [member of Dáil Éireann] and former county councillor for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

²² Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, SEUPB, Monaghan, 14 July 2004.

²³ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

however, it is the opinions of core elite-level actors with access to the main EU institutions (and, therefore, generally from moderate ideological and mainstream democratic positions) that become integrated into the EU's approach. John Hume, for example, explicitly acknowledges that his leading position in the largest political grouping in the European Parliament provided him with regular meetings with 'prime ministers and European commissioners'. As a consequence, Hume asserts that:

the European Union conception of the conflict in Northern Ireland is the conception put to it by both governments and by representatives from Northern Ireland.²⁴

Thus, even the most ardent advocate of the EU as the most relevant model and context for conflict resolution in Ireland acknowledges that its position of influence regarding the conflict is decided not so much by neutral, transcendent European ideals but as by physical proximity and personal relations between elite actors.

It was only in the mid-1990s that the EU can really be said to have come into its own as an external player in relation to the conflict, with its actions (in establishing the PEACE programme in 1994) at last mirroring the assertion by Haagerup ten years previously that the conflict in Northern Ireland could not be viewed as an internal domestic problem of the United Kingdom. This action came on top of the first paramilitary ceasefires in Northern Ireland, themselves product of political progress made within Irish republicanism/nationalism and loyalism. These political changes in Northern Ireland were facilitated by a new (albeit tentative) climate of cooperation between the British and Irish governments. In fact, the symbiotic relationship between member-state governments and European integration is reflected in the links between British-Irish relations and the EU in the Irish peace process. As discussed in detail elsewhere, the

²⁴ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

context of European Union membership played a key part in enabling the positive British-Irish relationship that forms the foundation of the peace process (Arthur, 2000; Guelke, 2001; Meehan, 2000). Yet a coherent approach from the European Union that treated the conflict as a cross-border issue depended on agreement between the two governments. Indeed, Hume goes so far as to say that, 'had the two governments been quarrelling about it, we wouldn't have got a united European Union approach'.²⁵ Hume sees this as the major limitation to the EU's role in conflict resolution:

at the end of the day it is for the different sides of the conflict to reach agreement and the European Union can support them in creating the process for agreement and can support their agreement. But the European Union can't impose an agreement on them.²⁶

So, the EU's access to the conflict situation (and specifically its connective impact) came *in response to* joint proposals put to it by the British and Irish governments. Moreover, the way in which local conditions determine the direct impact of the EU on the conflict is illustrated by the fact that cross-border initiatives from the EU are enacted differently between the two jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, not least as a consequence of differing national legislation, regulations and civil service cultures north and south.²⁷ This particular condition is gradually changing as a result of the institutional and structural changes implemented by the 1998 Agreement, for example the Special EU Programmes Body is working to ensure a more even implementation of EU cross-border initiatives. This is another example of the symbiotic

²⁵ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

²⁶ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

²⁷ Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, SEUPB, Monaghan, 14 July 2004; interview with development officer, ADM/CPA, Monaghan, 24 August 2004.

relationship between European integration and its constituent parts. The context of the EU enabled unionist to agree to the cross-border bodies as economically rational rather than politically significant, now these bodies facilitate a greater influence for the EU north and south. The influence of the EU is thus clearly mediated through, and restricted by, the conditions of local politics. This suggests that the EU is not so much an independent force for conflict resolution but rather that *its main role is to build upon and facilitate further change* within the conflict society.

II. The context for the EU's approach

The EU: material benefactor not peace-maker

Popular perception of the European Union in Northern Ireland and the border counties bears out the finding that the EU is at best a facilitating (as opposed to driving) force for conflict resolution. For a start, the EU is rarely directly associated in people's minds with either conflict resolution or with cross-border relations. One interviewee suggests that the connective impact of the EU is limited to non-governmental organisations simply because they are the only ones aware of the EU's role at community level.²⁸ Ignorance of the EU's activity persists despite the requirements to advertise receipt of EU funding and the willingness of those involved to acknowledge the importance of these funds ('we try to advertise the EU dimensions as much as possible').²⁹ Certainly, even some interviewees directly involved in gaining EU funding for community

²⁸ Interview with community relations officer, Derry City Council, Derry/Londonderry, 28 April 2004.

²⁹ Interview with community youth worker, Ballintra/Laghey Youth Project, Ballintra (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004.

projects admit that even they ‘wouldn’t really know a whole lot about the EU’.³⁰ There is concern that ‘society is not aware of what the EU does’,³¹ that people are unclear about ‘the impact of what goes on in Brussels and how it affects them where they are’.³² In addition to a generally poor level of national public knowledge about the EU, the geographical isolation of the constituencies most affected by the conflict from central government also works against strong identification with the EU. As one interviewee comments, ‘whenever you live in the backend of nowhere like Donegal, Europe might as well be Argentina’.³³ This reinforces the point made above about the crucial mediating role of local and national political conditions for the EU’s influence.

The EU may be said to be viewed in popular opinion as politically insignificant to the conflict, as economically vital but legislatively and bureaucratically antagonistic (‘We say EU, but there’s our EU and their EU... when you are getting all these rules and regulations from the EU and yet don’t seem to be getting any of the advantages’).³⁴ Although the EU is ‘not consciously linked with cross-border relations’ in the minds of local people, it is generally seen as ‘a resource for infrastructure’.³⁵ Yet perception of

³⁰ Interview with project trainer and project co-ordinator, Right to Hope Project, Derry/Londonderry, 27 April 2004.

³¹ Interview with community relations officer, Derry City Council, Derry/Londonderry, 28 April 2004.

³² Interview with project trainer and project co-ordinator, Right to Hope Project, Derry/Londonderry, 27 April 2004.

³³ Interview with youth worker, St. Johnston and Carrigans Resource Centre, St. Johnston (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004.

³⁴ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

³⁵ ‘People assume we’re going to get money on the basis that we’re a border region with Objective One status etc. but I don’t know if they really associate that with cross-border

the EU as a material benefactor rather than a peace-maker may be seen as one of its most unique and positive assets. As one interviewee in Derry notes, the development focus of the EU enables it to be accepted as a key player in the otherwise controversial area of cross-border relations:

Looking at what we have here, the EU has had a direct impact. People may not be aware of the extent of its reach partly because it has been seen as non-threatening... Cross-border cooperation was a product or by-product [of economic development], therefore it was natural as opposed to staged.³⁶

The fact that the EU is “‘expected” to support Irish infrastructure’ gives it a passport to peace-building through economic development.³⁷ This subtle influence of the EU stands in contrast to the role of other external actors in relation to the conflict, most particularly the USA which is recognised as ‘winning the publicity stakes’ in this regard.³⁸

The EU in comparison to the US

Every time you switched on the TV it always seemed that it is America that is trying to solve the conflict in Ireland.³⁹

The high profile role played by the United States in the peace process in Ireland, particularly during the 1990s, stands in such contrast to the European Union’s role because it is, first and foremost, a very different type of actor. The story of the role of the US in the peace process is primarily that of key individual political figures.

relations.’ (Both quotations from an interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004).

³⁶ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

³⁷ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

³⁸ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

³⁹ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

President Bill Clinton, for example, is popularly seen as having ‘put Northern Ireland right at the top... of his agenda of support for peace’, and his political decisions (such as granting Sinn Féin’s Gerry Adams a visa to visit the US) as well as personal involvement in negotiations are considered by even Hume (the most persistent advocate for the EU in Northern Ireland) as giving him a ‘major role’ in the peace process.⁴⁰ Whilst Senator George Mitchell played an important part in facilitating de-securitisation of the conflict, the so-called ‘Four Horsemen’ (Speaker Tip O’Neill, Senator Ted Kennedy, Governor Hugh Carey and Senator Pat Moynihan) helped bring Northern Ireland to an international stage. Their work laid the foundation for President Jimmy Carter’s presidential statement on the subject in 1977, promising economic support from the US if the two governments worked together to resolve the conflict. John Hume recalls a phonecall from Tip O’Neill the day after the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 in which he said, ‘we keep our promises, we’re setting up the International Fund for Ireland’.⁴¹ The EU may not be an homogenous actor, but its identity is collective and defined more by institutions than individuals. This means that it lacks the media-friendly face of US politicians and the ‘natural interest in Ireland’ stimulated by Irish-Americans. Yet these features bring with them certain risks, and, as one interviewee (who wished this comment to be anonymous) notes, the impact of the US on the conflict has not always been constructive (‘Noraid’, for example), and many unionists view US politicians attempting to appeal to an Irish-American electorate with a certain degree of suspicion.

The wider international dimension to conflict resolution

⁴⁰ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

⁴¹ Interview with John Hume, Belfast, 1 June 2004.

There is a certain sense of urgency in maintaining a profile for Northern Ireland/Ireland on the international stage. The peace process provided ‘an opportunity to sell ourselves’, but it also opened the possibility of valuable two-way connections with players in other conflict situations.⁴² For example, a number of interviewees mention contacts they have with groups in South Africa. The well-established links between these two cases exist not only between non-governmental organisations but also between politicians and negotiators from Ireland, north and south, and South Africa. Even those non-governmental organisations that are purely locally-based, as opposed to international, recognise the value of a wide network of support (as well as South Africa, interviewees mention specific contacts in Israel/Palestine, Nigeria, Germany, Austria, and the US). This includes funding support, and a number of NGOs appear to be well-versed in sources of funding beyond local government and the EU. The government of Ireland, and specifically the Department of Foreign Affairs, is acknowledged by a number of groups in Northern Ireland, including those working in the Protestant community, to be an important funding source. Groups based in the southern border counties, however, do not generally have access to funding sources from the United Kingdom and this can restrict cross-border projects.

Funding sources other than the EU are important because they can be easier to access (particularly for smaller grants) and, unlike the EU’s PEACE funds, they are able to facilitate projects venturing outside the region of Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties. As a Community Relations Officer notes, ‘those most active in peace and reconciliation here are those who have left Northern Ireland and got a wider

⁴² Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

perspective'.⁴³ Yet, whilst happy to fund a southern Catholic youth club's visit to the loyalist Shankill area of Belfast, for example, the EU funds could not even contribute to a cross-border, cross-community trip to the Somme. This trip (made separately by women's groups and youth groups) was viewed as one of the most valuable and successful cross-border and cross-community projects performed in the Derry/Donegal region and yet it was only made possible by private funds and fund-raising.⁴⁴ A number of interviewees argue that, although expensive, such visits to Europe (Flanders, Brussels, Berlin, Eastern Europe) would serve both to bring individuals outside the context of conflict and to educate and inspire them with the ideals of European integration.

III. The consequences of the EU's approach

Progress in cross-border relations

One area of substantial and ongoing change in Ireland is that of cross-border relations. At an individual level, the reduction in violence in Northern Ireland as a result of the peace process means that a wider range of people in the south are more confident in crossing the border.⁴⁵ With regard to economic and political cooperation, the European Union may be seen to have 'normalised' cross-border activity. Although some level of cross-border cooperation occurred prior to the EU initiatives in this area, it was not 'fashionable' and bodies such as the North West Region Cross Border Group did not

⁴³ Interview with community relations officer, Derry City Council, Derry/Londonderry, 28 April 2004.

⁴⁴ Interview with project manager, Cathedral Youth Group/ Shared City Project, Derry/Londonderry, 28 April 2004.

⁴⁵ Interview with community youth worker, Ballintra/Laghey Youth Project, Ballintra (Co. Donegal), 6 May 2004.

formalise or announce their activities.⁴⁶ Now, in line with the aims of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) established through Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement, ‘north/south relationships have been made real and impacting, plus there is a greater degree of integration and north-southerly now’.⁴⁷ It is notable that, in contrast to the other north/south implementation bodies established at the same time (such as Inter-Trade Ireland or Waterways Ireland), the SEUPB has very broad parameters. This is reflected in the comments of a then-Director of the SEUPB, who described the Body’s work as being, ‘not for geography but for the benefit of people in the area by encouraging economic activity’.⁴⁸ Yet if this vagueness makes it unique among the Strand Two institutions, it does bear resemblance to the rationale of a range of other cross-border bodies whose work has been significantly bolstered and formalised through the requirements of EU programmes (now managed by the SEUPB). This includes the NWRCBG, which has seen its foundational principle – that ‘physically advancing the region and its profile etc. all creates a stability which goes towards creating peace and enhancing it’ – given legitimacy and material resources through the SEUPB.⁴⁹

Elite-level interviewees place a distinct emphasis on the economic dimension, arguing that ‘on cross-border relations, if we put the infrastructure there... people will use it’.⁵⁰ An example used to illustrate this is that of the car ferry established in June 2002 on Lough Foyle between Donegal and Co. Londonderry, part-funded through PEACE I via the Irish government and the work of the NWRCBG, which had half a million

⁴⁶ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

⁴⁷ Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, SEUPB, Monaghan, 14 July 2004.

⁴⁸ Interview with the director of Community Initiatives, SEUPB, Monaghan, 14 July 2004.

⁴⁹ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

⁵⁰ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

passengers in its first fifteen months of business.⁵¹ The belief that ‘conflict resolution happens in tandem with economic and social development activity’ has underpinned the approach of many policy-makers and politicians to cross-border relations.⁵²

Reconciliation is almost a by-product of what we do, it has never been a conscious statement. In fact, that may well be why conflict resolution has been a successful by-product of our activity, because it is not the focus or aim.⁵³

A primary emphasis on economic gain is viewed (particularly by the elites) as being fundamental to the success of cross-border activity in Ireland. This reinforces the point made above, namely that the EU’s greatest asset as an influence on the conflict is its economic credentials.

The EU ideal: development, cooperation and peace

The EU, therefore, may be viewed as a successful and significant actor in relation to cross-border relations in Ireland. Questions remain, however, as to how cross-border relations relate to and affect the conflict itself. The EU has conceived of the conflict in essentially binary terms: British/Unionist/Protestant and Irish/Nationalist/Catholic. This dualist conception of the conflict lies at the heart of the 1998 Agreement, hence its three ‘strands’ of British-Irish, north-south and unionist-nationalist cooperation. According to this approach, the conflict is not fundamentally about religion or ideology or class, it is about the contested sovereignty over the island of Ireland. Historically competing visions of Irish and British nationalism are embodied in the Irish border and in every part of society in Northern Ireland that replicates this dual divide. The logic of the Agreement, as that of the European Union, is to move the conflict from one of violent

⁵¹ Interview with Fianna Fáil TD for Donegal North-East, Dublin, 1 July 2004.

⁵² Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

⁵³ Interview with development officer, NWRCBG, Derry/Londonderry, 14 July 2004.

subordination, through an identity conflict, to a conflict about issues articulated through political debate. The assumption here is that interests on both sides can be best met through cooperation, and that cooperation increases mutual understanding. Development, cooperation and peace are thus tied together in the 'European ideal' and, specifically, in the EU's approach to borders. This is seen in the two major programmes of the EU relating to cross-border relations in Ireland, namely PEACE and INTERREG.

The broad aims of the Europe-wide INTERREG programme are to 'support cross-border cooperation, social cohesion and economic development between EU regions'.⁵⁴ In the context of Ireland/Northern Ireland, the 'economic and social disadvantages which can result from the existence of a border' are tackled in INTERREG IIIA through the promotion of 'cross border networks involving, and also benefiting, local communities' (SEUPB, 2003, p. 1).⁵⁵ Through INTERREG and other Community Initiatives such as LEADER, URBAN and EQUAL, the Special EU Programmes Body considers it possible to 'develop *cooperation, understanding and action* between people and organisations in Ireland and Northern Ireland'.⁵⁶ The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE) established in 1995 exclusively for Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties is similarly founded on a connection between development, cooperation and peace. Its aims are:

To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting

⁵⁴ See <<www.eugrants.org>>.

⁵⁵ The priorities of INTERREG IIIA are integrated local development strategies, supporting physical infrastructure, and civic and community networking (SEUPB, 2003, p. 1).

⁵⁶ See <<www.seupb.org/about>> (emphasis added).

urban and rural regeneration, development of cross-border co-operation and extending social inclusion (ADM/CPA, 2000, p. iv).

Hence, the EU's approach to the conflict in Ireland/Northern Ireland stands or falls on the strength of its core assumption: cross-border cooperation is fundamental to economic development, and both are fundamental to the achievement of peace. A criticism made by Harvey in a report on PEACE I is valid here:

The links between peace and reconciliation, community development, community relations and economic development were ambiguities buried deep in this Programme from the very start and remain unresolved. (Harvey, 1997, quoted in McDonald, 2000, p. 8).

Assessing the integrity of the development/cooperation/peace nexus is a task that lies beyond the immediate requirements of this particular article. Nonetheless, the evidence produced by this research project suggests that the ambiguities that Harvey refers to do have consequences for the practical implementation and success of the EU programmes in Ireland.

Conclusions

The most significant realm of direct action for the EU regarding the conflict in Ireland has been in cross-border relations. Its role in this area has been facilitated by its credentials as a powerful, and neutral, economic actor or, more specifically, material benefactor. Thus, the indirect 'enabling' influence of the EU on the elite and the direct 'connective' impact of the EU on the conflict society through EU cross-border programmes are broadly recognised as the chief pathways of influence for the EU in the conflict. By funding projects in the community sector as well as in the private and public sectors, the EU has become a major stimulant for community development on

both sides of the border. For many see long-term reconciliation as coming from building relations ‘not between individuals but between communities’, and will argue that ‘community development and peacebuilding are the same thing’.⁵⁷ This fits in well with the EU’s own approach to the conflict, which is to view it as a conflict of identities that needs to move to a non-violent debate around practical issues:

Bringing different communities together – permanently ending conflict – is the very essence of what the European Union stands for. (Santer, CEC President 1995-1999, quoted in McDonald, 2000, p. 34).

However, this study has shown that the EU is a long way from having the ‘constructive’ influence that would enable a permanent and irreversible transformation of the conflict situation. This is essentially because the EU is not an independent force for change but its influence is mediated by local actors and is vulnerable to local conditions. Cross-border trade and partnership have been a good ‘trial run’ for EU-fostered networks and programmes because they are seen as having clear, beneficial and neutral ends (i.e. economic development). When it comes to more subtle, normative community-level work, however, the EU’s lack of independence becomes much more of a liability. The fact that even those who work full-time in EU-funded cross-border and cross-community programmes view the EU as more of a ‘cash cow’ than a ‘peace-maker’ indicates the futility of waiting for peace through ‘Europeanisation’. Instead, we are drawn to acknowledge the crucial role of these ‘mediators’ and to take encouragement from the gradual development of this role through the EU’s wider impact on contemporary policy-making and practice. This impact is (in ideal terms) tending towards cooperation that is multilevel, multi-sectoral, self-perpetuating, change-inducing and, furthermore, based on ‘common interests’ beyond purely economic gain.

⁵⁷ Interviews with youth workers in St. Johnston and Ballintra/Laghey, 6 May 2004.

The impetus and opportunity for putting such cooperation into practice increasingly lies in the hands of the local ‘mediators’ and not of the European decision-makers. This could well be the principal validation of an EU role in conflict resolution through cross-border cooperation.

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