

EUROPEAN
UNION
INITIATIVE
FOR
PEACE
AND
RECONCILIATION

A REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF A CONSULTATIVE
CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL,
NEWCASTLE, CO DOWN
29 MARCH 1995

REPORT COMPILED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND CENTRE IN EUROPE
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PREFACE

The United Kingdom Government has undertaken to consult widely with local organisations during the drafting of the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. This consultation takes the following form:

- (i) departmental discussions with as many as possible of the key groups, which might be affected the Programme;
- (ii) a public advertisement place in local papers asking any organisation wishing to make proposals on the content of the programme to submit these to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) before 14 April 1995; and
- (iii) a conference held in the Slieve Donard Hotel on 29 March 1995.

This document presents the conclusions of the Workshops at the Slieve Donard Conference, attended by approximately 230 people. Many came from the community and voluntary sector but all sectors were represented including elected members and officials of District Councils, Trade Unions, the education sector, including higher education, Chambers of Commerce and private enterprise as well as Government officials and officials from the European Commission. A small number of representatives from the Republic of Ireland also attended.

The document also sets out the background to the European Union Initiative, integrates the results of previous consultation exercises and summarises the main results and issues arising from the consultation exercise.

NOTE:

Due to the demand for funding to flow to projects as quickly as possible, Government is aiming to submit jointly with the Irish authorities a Programme by the end of May 1995. The desire to consult widely must therefore be balanced against the need to lodge a Programme as quickly as possible. It is hoped that any major views can be lodged with the Department of Finance and Personnel throughout April 1995.

NOTE :

All workshop reports contained herein have been compiled by the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe on the basis of notes provided by official note-takers. The text of the Introduction and Conclusion Chapters and the Report on the Conference Addresses has been drawn up by Dr Colm McClements, Deputy Director, Northern Ireland Centre in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

1 BACKGROUND TO THE EUROPEAN UNION INITIATIVE FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

The Special Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation derives from an Initiative undertaken by the European Commission under its former President, Jacques Delors. A Special Task Force was set up in September 1994 with a remit was to:

".....consider ways to develop and to refocus the policies of the European Union to help those people who have been most affected by the conflict to live together in mutual respect and economic prosperity".

The Task Force involved senior European Commission officials, the UK and Irish cabinets within the Commission, the President's cabinet and the European Commission offices in Belfast, Dublin and London. It was chaired up by Deputy Secretary General, Carlo Trojan.

After an initial and extensive consultation exercise, close collaboration between the European Commission and the Northern Ireland and Irish authorities, and significant involvement by the region's Members of the European Parliament, the European Commission adopted the Task Force's report in early December. A Communication from the Commission to the European Council and European Parliament of 7 December 1994 was endorsed by the Heads of Government and State of the Member States at Essen 9 December 1994.

The Commission's Communication stated that:

"the new circumstances [in Northern Ireland] provide a challenge to all to promote social inclusion, to put behind them the alienation and marginalisation caused by violence. In particular, those who have been victims, whether the individuals or whole communities, and those who have not benefitted from life in a normal society, expect the new developments to bring about a clear change".

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In endorsing the Commission Communication, the European Council at Essen also welcomed reports by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and of Ireland on the progress made in the Peace Process. While warmly welcoming the recent historic developments in Northern Ireland, it reaffirmed the necessity of insuring the irreversible character of the Peace Process. The Council also confirmed its commitment to underpin this unique opportunity for reconciliation and economic recovery by agreeing on the principle of a multi-annual programme worth some MECU 300 to provide support in the areas of urban and rural regeneration, employment, cross-border development, social inclusion and the promotion of investment. The programme was to apply to all of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties in Ireland. It was to be additional and was to pursue the central objective of reconciliation benefiting both communities

"in an equitable and balanced way, and especially those areas and sections of the population suffering most acute deprivation".

[End of summit communiqué, Essen, 10 December 1994]

On Tuesday 14 February 1995 the European Commission, meeting in Strasbourg approved draft Guidelines for the proposed Special Support Programme. The Guidelines were drawn up subject to Article 11 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 4253/88 and laid down the legal basis for a special Community Initiative in favour of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. The draft Guidelines were closely modelled on the Communication agreed by the Heads of Government and State at Essen: the text is currently the subject of consultation with the European Parliament, the Committee of Regions, the Economic and Social Committee and relevant management committees. It is hoped that the Guidelines will be formally adopted in May.

The draft Guidelines propose a special Community Initiative with five essential priorities:

- employment
- urban/rural regeneration
- cross border development
- social inclusion
- productive investment and industrial development.

The Guidelines also request the Member States to submit a more detailed operational programme which will elaborate on areas to be funded, propose financial allocation and give details of consultation/monitoring arrangements and technical assistance.

It is only when this programme is submitted by the Member States and negotiated with the Commission that the implementing body will ask for applications to be lodged for funding for individual projects.

Consistent with its intention that this Community Initiative will genuinely engage the efforts of all citizens, Government has decided to undertake a wide consultation with regard to the details of the programme eventually to be submitted to the European Commission for negotiation. It is expected that the Programme will be submitted sometime after May 1995.



The ideas set out in this document are not to be seen in isolation, nor do they derive exclusively from the consultation exercise of 29 March 1995. Previous consultation has already helped focus the direction of deliberations that took place on 29 March. The Commission's Communication to the European Council and European Parliament was itself based on fairly wide consultation and the five priority themes (mentioned above) were derived from that. The draft Guidelines, being modelled on the Commission's Communication to Council are therefore also a product of consultation.

2 THE ISSUES FOR CONSULTATION

It was suggested by the Department of Finance and Personnel that five major issues might be considered in the context of the consultation exercise of 29 March 1995. These were:

- priorities for fundings
- structure of the programme
- partnership/global grants
- monitoring/implementation
- other major issues.

In order to assist the discussion in the Workshops, the Department circulated a paper in advance to all Conference delegates. This is attached at annex (A) for information. The introductory speeches outlined also asked the workshop sessions to target specific areas in their discussions.