

SYNOPSIS OF ADDRESSES

JANE MORRICE
HEAD OF OFFICE
EUROPEAN COMMISSION, NORTHERN IRELAND

Opening the conference, on behalf of the European Commission, Ms Jane Morrice, Head of the Commission's office in Northern Ireland, pointed up the exceptional nature of the exercise in which the participants were engaged. She pointed out that the conference was part of a long process going back to October 1994 with the establishment by the European Commission's former President, Mr Jacques Delors, of a Special Task Force designed to see how the European Commission could help promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

Ms Morrice traced the history of this Initiative through Task Force meetings to prepare the proposal, the consultations in Northern Ireland, the European Parliament debate and the agreement by the European Council in December 1994 to establish a Special Initiative worth MECU 300 to support Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. She also gave details of the draft Guidelines for the Initiative published in February 1995.

Ms Morrice emphasised in particular that consultation had been a hallmark of all stages in developing the Initiative and that this would continue to be the case. She noted that the draft Guidelines were currently being considered by the European Parliament and other Community Institutions and she welcomed consultation undertaken within Northern Ireland and the Border Counties by the respective Governments.

The conference, she stressed, was an opportunity for local voices to have a say on how the financial package would be structured and spent and in particular, to ensure that spending was directed where it was most needed. She drew attention to the role of the European Parliament and considered the European Parliament's proposed conference to be held in Belfast on 11 April 1995 to be a significant component of the entire consultation exercise.

MR ESSEN POULSEN
HEAD OF IRELAND UNIT
DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL POLICY
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Mr Esben Poulsen, in his role as Head of the Unit within the European Commission with overall responsibility for the Initiative set out the specific nature of this Initiative.

After explaining the essential features of the draft Guidelines, the duration of the Initiative, the monies involved, the eligible areas and the priority areas, he emphasised the fundamental goal of peace and reconciliation which was to underpin the entire Initiative and against which all other priorities were to be judged.

Mr Poulsen welcomed the level of consultation which characterised the Initiative and gave an overview of possible delivery mechanisms as allowed for in the draft Guidelines. These involved various forms of partnerships and the possibility of global grants.

Turning to certain guiding principles and success criteria Mr Poulsen emphasised the following:

- visibility - actions must be seen by people on the ground and must make a real impact
- additionality - actions must be genuinely additional, must make a contribution above and beyond what otherwise would have been the case through other forms of funding
- measurability - quantifiable targets must be set and at the end of the exercise a clear demonstration must be given of what has actually changed
- accountability - the entire programme must be held to account both financially and with respect to its management

- order - the Guidelines had set out five priorities and had suggested a large number of possible actions. It was important to put some order into this and establish some degree of prioritisation.

On the issue of management of the overall programme, Mr Poulsen emphasised that there would be a single monitoring committee for the entire programme but that it could have sub-committees. Whatever the model adopted, the monitoring committee must be representative of all those involved.

On the question of global grants, he emphasised that these would be contingent on finding appropriate intermediary organisations.

Finally, Mr Poulsen emphasised that consultation on priorities would be on-going and that even after implementation had begun it might still be necessary to reallocate resources in recognition of emerging issues.

MS JENNIFER WANNAN
ESF POLICY CO-ORDINATION AND INFORMATION UNIT
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Speaking on behalf of DGV of the European Commission, Ms Jennifer Wannan emphasised the commitment of her Directorate to the overall Initiative and in particular to the Employment and Social Inclusion priorities. She apologised for the absence of DGV Director Mr Zangl who was unable to attend the conference.

Ms Wannan explained the central role of the Social Inclusion in the entire Initiative. She considered the priority to be key since it was designed to directly promote reconciliation and was indeed the most innovative of all the priorities within the Initiative and would provide the means of actively engaging local people on the ground.

Ms Wannan indicated that the Social Inclusion priority involved a new departure for the European Structural Funds which traditionally were geared towards economic and labour market issues but she stated, in current circumstances a broader approach was required.

Full reconciliation, she argued, involved addressing the underlying problems of communication and understanding in Northern Ireland's social fabric. These were multi-dimensional and a corresponding response was required. It was important to target vulnerable groups, in particular children, youth, victims and those previously caught up in violence. Key issues were early childhood education, health, housing and cross community cooperation.

The specific contribution of the Social Inclusion priority would be to complement other, more economic based activities to build grass root capacities and to stimulate cross community cooperation. Responses would be bottom up, would build on existing solidarities in both urban and rural areas and would involve local people and give a sense of ownership.

Ms Wannan emphasised the key role of grass roots communities in combatting exclusion and emphasised that much of the expertise required would lie outside the public domain.

Nevertheless both central Government and local authorities would have an important role to play. She emphasised the need for the full involvement of non-Governmental bodies and local and community groups and considered this a prerequisite for success.

Like Mr Poulsen she considered that all actions must contribute to reconciliation and be distinct from and in addition to existing Community and Member State actions. The Initiative was intended to promote added value and not simply be more of the same.

Referring to the draft Guidelines, Ms Wannan pointed out that there would be a special focus on deprived areas and that five specific measures had been identified under Social Inclusion:

- developing grass roots capacities and cross community partnerships promoting reconciliation,
- promoting the full inclusion of children and young people,
- improving the accessibility and quality of services for vulnerable groups,
- direct action to promote the inclusion of vulnerable groups
- developing innovative model actions for reconciliation.

Finally Ms Wannan referred to a draft paper drawn up by the Directorate General for Social Affairs and Employment which would be made available to participants in the course of the day to stimulate thought on the issue of Social Inclusion. She highlighted, as an area deserving further reflection, how to actively involve local people and which support mechanisms might be needed to make this happen. She felt people on the ground might be best placed to translate ideas into practice and looked forward to hearing the views expressed in the workshops.

MR JOHN LOUGHEED

PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATOR

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In a short but significant address, Mr John Loughheed pointed out the need not to neglect the problems of rural areas in this Initiative. He emphasised that rural regeneration was a priority in itself and that other priorities including Social Inclusion, Employment and Cross Border Development equally applied to rural areas.

Mr Loughheed emphasised the need to concentrate funding to ensure that actions actually do have a real impact on the process of reconciliation.

**MR VICTOR HEWITT
HEAD OF EUROPEAN AND ECONOMICS DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL**

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Finance and Personnel, the Department with overall responsibility for coordinating the Initiative on behalf of the Northern Ireland authorities, Mr Victor Hewitt emphasised the overall aim of reconciliation and the desire to reach out to those who had suffered most. He gave a brief outline of the details of the package and emphasised in particular that while MECU 300 was indeed a generous package, it was nevertheless finite.

In this light he suggested that several issues required reflection. These were:

- priorities
- structures
- partnerships/global grants
- administration.

He noted that the five priorities in total had, in the draft Guidelines, given rise to forty-one measures and that there was a need to proceed to a grouping of measures into a more manageable form. He emphasised that Government was open in principle to looking beyond existing measures.

On the issue of structures, Mr Hewitt explained two simplified models for the management and implementation (details on these had also been presented to the participants in their information packs). Mr Hewitt explained the features of a conventional approach to funding involving classical sub-programmes breaking down into measures leading to projects on the ground. He emphasised that this was a proven model that could be rapidly implemented.

However against this model, he suggested that it might prove to be inflexible particularly in the context of the current Initiative. He outlined an alternative model involving global allocations to intermediary bodies at the regional, local or community level, differentiated according to either a functional or territorial basis. Such a model had the advantage of being more clearly bottom up and flexible. On the other hand it was highly innovative, would take time to implement and did have certain difficulties in terms of management.

Central to the latter model would be the development of partnerships, either geographical or functional. The strength of such partnerships would be viewed in terms of their capability, accountability and representativeness.

On the question of global grants, understood as an intermediate funding mechanism, he suggested that key criteria for these would be the capacity to handle applications, impartiality, accountability and, crucially, their number. He suggested that an excessive number of such partnerships would pose genuine problems.

Finally on the issue of overall administration of the programme he emphasised that there would be a single monitoring committee and that as laid out in the draft Guidelines there would equally be accompanying consultative platforms. Precisely how these would interact was yet to be resolved.