# Defusing the conflict in Northern Ireland

## Pathways of influence for the European Union

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**Abstract**

There are two main schools of thought regarding the influence of the European Union on the peace process in Northern Ireland. One emphasises the structural influence of the European Union in transforming the context for the definition of the conflict and the search for peace. The other school highlights the role of actors at a European, national and regional level in the conduct of the conflict and its resolution. This paper presents an alternative model for analysing the pathways of influence of the European Union in the move from a violent conflict to peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland. Applying the model developed by Diez, Stetter and Albert (2004), it brings together the structural and actor-driven analyses in a framework that assists detailed investigation of the case study. This serves to show that at a governmental level the EU has 'enabled' positive British-Irish relations and at a societal level it has had a direct 'connective' influence on the economic development of Northern Ireland. Yet, the most significant role of the EU in the peace process in Ireland has been its 'constructive' influence on the identities of the conflicting parties and their approach to conflict resolution.

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**1. Dissenting voices on the EU and peace in Northern Ireland**

On 29 April 1998, a matter of days after the Good Friday Agreement was signed in Belfast, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, and David Andrews, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, together addressed the European Parliament. In their presentations, the ministers acknowledged the 'support', 'inspiration' and 'guide' provided by the European Union in the search for peace in Northern Ireland. The choice of forum for the ministers' presentation not only illustrated the importance of the European context for the advancement of British-Irish relations, it also allowed MEPs to present their own impressions of the EU's role in the Northern Ireland peace process. John Hume, the nationalist MEP from the province, echoed the ministers' tribute to the European Union and described it as 'the finest example in the history of the world of conflict resolution'. Jim Nicholson of the Ulster Unionist Party also noted the 'very constructive… support' of the EU. A dissenting opinion of the EU's importance was articulated by Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, on the basis that the implications of the Agreement would be imposed 'not on the people of Europe, but on the long-suffering people of Northern Ireland'. Aside from the ideological differences between these political figures, the nuances in the interpretations of the EU's significance and beneficence for Northern Ireland highlight the complexity of its role in conflict resolution. Following an overview of the main stages of the conflict in Northern Ireland, this paper critiques the main assumptions in literature regarding the EU and the peace process. An alternative framework for analysis is applied, using a model developed by Diez, Stetter and Albert (2004) to investigate the impact of EU integration on the transformation of border conflicts. The application of this model to the case of Northern Ireland enables a balanced, multilevel assessment of the EU's pathways of influence towards the resolution of violent conflict.

**2. The conflict in Northern Ireland**

*2.1 Northern Ireland as a border conflict*

This paper is part of a wider project ('EUBorderConf') investigating the impact of the European Union on the resolution of border conflicts. It begins with the fundamental premise that the conflict in Northern Ireland is a border conflict. This is not to disregard the significance of religious,[1] cultural,[2] socio-economic,[3] or any other interpretation of the cause of the conflict. Neither are these explanations simply subjugated within an analysis of the conflict as a disagreement over the partition of the island of Ireland.[4] Nonetheless, it is notable that the 1998 Agreement itself is founded on a definition of

the conflict in terms of a binary opposition: British/unionist and Irish/nationalist. The constitutional amendments integrated within the Agreement embody the assumption that the contested nature of the Irish border is at the heart of the conflict.[5] Similarly, a conceptualisation of the conflict as a conflict between British and Irish identities is one that has informed the EU's approach to the conflict in Northern Ireland since the early 1980s.[6] Defining Northern Ireland as the site of a border conflict conceives the Irish border not merely as a dividing line between the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom but as the embodiment of historical difference between British and Irish nationalisms. Within Northern Ireland, the ideological conflict between unionism and nationalism is founded on contrasting interpretations of the legitimacy of the border.

*2.2 The first fifty years of partition*

The border was drawn first by the Government of Ireland Act (1920) which partitioned the island of Ireland into two separate jurisdictions, each with their own government and parliament. Partition was envisaged by the British government as a temporary solution to the question of sovereignty over Ireland; for this reason, the Council of Ireland was introduced to link the two parliaments together and provide a basis for reunification (Kennedy 2000:6). However, after a 'mutilated and lop-sided existence', the Council was suspended in December 1922 with the introduction of the constitution of the Irish Free State (O'Higgins quoted in Kennedy 2000:7). Any basis for north-south cooperation eroded as Northern Ireland availed of its right not to be included in the Free State and the Boundary Commission came to an ignominious conclusion. Thus, the border was left as it was, to steadily take a more concrete form as a customs barrier,[7] political separation,[8] cultural division,[9] and security frontier.[10] Divisions between Northern Ireland and the Republic (declared in 1948) were exacerbated by (amongst other things) uneven economic development, sectarianism in the north's labour market, and anti-partitionism in the south (Goodman 1996:73). Yet relations between the two governments began to shift out of alienation towards engagement in the 1960s, as Northern Ireland Prime Minister O'Neill and Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Lemass met in Belfast then Dublin, and the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement (also in 1965) saw the removal of some north-south tariff barriers. A tentative basis for cross-border cooperation was founded on a developing Dublin-Belfast-London relationship, yet negotiations proceeded with caution as each government was conscious of the highly sensitive nature of any cross-border relationship. O'Neill, as leader of the main unionist

party, was in a particularly vulnerable position, and events within Northern Ireland were soon to force him out of office and the province into civil chaos. The governments had assumed that violence in the province could be addressed through pre-emptive action against paramilitary groups, namely the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on the one hand and the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) on the other (Kennedy 2000:270). However, as inter-communal dissent took to the streets of Northern Ireland (in the form of marches, protests, riots and, ultimately, violence), unionist suspicion of and nationalist dissatisfaction with cross-border cooperation contributed to its suspension. Nothing epitomises the projection of the border into the centre of north-south and British-Irish antagonism more than the deployment of the Irish army to the border in August 1969.[11] Within a week, British troops were sent to Northern Ireland to help the security forces cope with the mounting violence in the province. The ensuing thirty years saw the escalation of violent conflict in Northern Ireland with increasing unionist/nationalist polarisation. The recent peace process (since 1993) was founded on the type of principles of British-Irish, north-south and inter-communal cooperation previously proposed in the early 1920s and mid-1960s. The remainder of this section highlights the importance of the European context for the 1998 Agreement, which facilitated the most enduring and significant application of these principles to date.

| Stage | 1969-1974 | 1978-1986 | 1991-1996 | 1996-2003 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Summary** | *Internal political settlement and order impossible* | *External actors become more significant* | *'Three strands' approach and inter-party talks* | *Desecuritisation and politicisation* |
| **Key events** | 1969: Irish troops at border; British troops sent to NI | 1978: ECHR judgement on internment | 1991-92: Brooke-Mayhew talks | 1996: NI Forum, All-Party talks |
| | 1971: Reintroduction of internment | 1983: New Ireland Forum (Dublin) | 1991, 1993, 1994-6: Paramilitary ceasefires | 1997: Renewed ceasefires |
| | 1972: Direct rule from Westminster | 1984: Haagerup Report | 1993: Hume-Adams initiative | 1998: Good Friday Agreement |
| | 1973: Accession to EEC | 1985: Anglo-Irish Agreement | 1993: Downing Street Declaration | 1998: NI Assembly |
| | 1974: Collapse of Sunningdale settlement | 1986: International Fund for Ireland | 1995: Framework Documents | 1999: NI Executive established |

Fig. i. Overview of the four stages in the conflict in Northern Ireland

*2.3 Internal settlement impossible: 1969-1974*

The arrival of British troops plus the reintroduction of internment without trial for terrorist suspects showed the Northern Ireland administration had effectively lost both autonomy and control.[12] The subsequent imposition of direct rule from Westminster forced the fundamental unionist/nationalist disagreement about partition to the forefront again. Recognising that '[p]artition signified to most Irish Catholics a barrier to national unity, and to most Ulster Protestants an essential condition for self-determination', the British government ordered a poll on the matter of the Northern Ireland border was taken (Lawrence and Elliott 1972:1).[13] Nationalist parties and their supporters did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the border, nor that of any plebiscite taken in the six counties, and therefore abstained from voting. Hence, only 58 per cent of the population voted and 99 per cent of the poll was in favour of Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom (Lawrence and Elliott 1972:28). Conditions in the province itself were such that a 'unionist versus nationalist' poll such as this was could only serve to further exacerbate divisions. In the twelve months prior to the poll in March 1973, 428 people were killed and 3,362 were injured as a direct result of the violent conflict (Lawrence and Elliott 1972:14). Attempts to reconcile the political parties through the Sunningdale agreement's new devolved assembly, executive and planned north-south Council of Ireland collapsed as a result of unionist abstention and loyalist popular protest (the Ulster Workers' Council strike in 1974).[14] Extreme securitisation and polarisation of communication between the conflicting parties served to prove that an internal (Northern Ireland) solution to the problem could not be found. Whereas the British government interpreted this as giving it full responsibility for the governance and order in the province, the Irish government sought to change the dynamics of the conflict by turning to the changing external context.

*2.4 External influence: 1978-1986*

In May 1974, the Irish government acted upon its threat (issued over two years earlier) to take the British government to the European Commission of Human Rights with allegations of torture and brutal treatment of internees in Northern Ireland. Thus, Europe (in this case the Council of Europe) became a new forum for the acting out of both (a) British-Irish tensions over Northern Ireland and (b) the Irish government's self-appointed role as defender of nationalist interests in the province. The judgement of the European Court of Human Rights four years later was less significant than its

symbolism: cooperation in Europe made it impossible for a border conflict to be treated as a mere domestic issue.[15] Over the coming years, the boundary between domestic and international affairs became increasingly blurred for Britain, as events on the international stage (such as the Falklands War)[16] as well as in Northern Ireland (such as the Hunger Strikes by republican prisoners)[17] became opportunities for the Republic of Ireland to articulate objection to British policy regarding the conflict. The Irish government's decision at this time to risk jeopardising British-Irish and north-south relations for the sake of raising the external profile of the conflict in Northern Ireland soon bore fruit in the form of the attention of the European Economic Community (EEC), which both states had joined in 1973.

Following a series of motions and debates on the conflict in the early 1980s, the European Parliament's Political Affairs Committee commissioned a report (chaired by Haagerup) on the situation in Northern Ireland and possible roles for the EEC therein. At the same time, the Economic and Social Committee of the EEC completed a report on the development of Ireland's border areas. Unionists in Northern Ireland objected in the strongest terms to any outside 'interference' in the province, and the then-Northern Ireland Assembly[18] passed a motion urging the British government to do all in its power to prevent the Haagerup report from seeing the light of day. As it was, the British government was already active in its opposition to the developing interest of the EEC in the conflict. Prime Minister Thatcher's statement to the House of Commons in May 1980 – that the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland was a matter, 'for the people of Northern Ireland, this government, this parliament, and no one else' – was not directed towards the Republic of Ireland alone (Arthur 1983). It is notable, therefore, that the location for the turnaround in British-Irish relations at this time was an EEC summit of the European Council in Brussels in March 1983, where Taoiseach FitzGerald and Thatcher held their first meeting in fifteen months. From this point onwards, regular summits and the first meetings of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council (agreed by the two leaders two years previously) created a context for a bilateral approach to the conflict, leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough in November 1985. The Agreement once and for all brought the Republic into the centre of the search for a solution in Northern Ireland. There were now formal structures for a consultative role for the Irish government in certain areas, including cross-border cooperation, with the Irish government explicitly expected to propose schemes on behalf of the interests of the minority nationalist community in Northern Ireland (Article

4). Moreover, the growing importance of the international context was acknowledged in the Agreement itself, in the expressed 'determination of both governments to develop close cooperation as partners in the European Community'

### 2.5 'Three strands' approach: 1991-1996

The Anglo-Irish Agreement may be seen as creating the framework of cooperation between the two states within which the two 'communities' in Northern Ireland were expected to fit. But the escalation of loyalist paramilitary activity (particularly in the territory of the Republic) after the Anglo-Irish Agreement paid testament to the futility of state-level agreement in the absence of regional and local level inclusion (English 2001). For this reason, the initiatives taken by the governments in the early 1990s were intended to combat the estrangement of the British and Irish states and unionism[19] and nationalism respectively, not least by shifting from a policy of 'bolstering moderates' towards one of 'incorporating extremists' (Cunningham 2001:160).[20] The Brooke-Mayhew talks (named after consecutive Secretaries of State of Northern Ireland) introduced a three-stranded approach to negotiation in the conflict:

> Strand 1. Internal to Northern Ireland
>
> Strand 2. North-South on the island of Ireland, and
>
> Strand 3. East-West between Britain and Ireland.

These talks ran for approximately 18 months, until November 1992, during which time the four main parties of Northern Ireland (Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party, Sinn Féin) discussed options for devolution in the province and (with the exception of the DUP) opened direct channels of communication with the Irish government. At a different level, preparation for an IRA ceasefire in August 1994 was aided by behind-the-scenes talks conducted by the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party's (SDLP) John Hume and British intelligence services with Sinn Féin's Adams and Martin McGuinness. Placing these internal developments in context was the strengthening relationship between the British and Irish governments, sealed in the 1993 Downing Street Declaration and the 1995 Framework Documents. Both these documents explicitly acknowledged the significance of the European Union as a context for all three strands of agreement.[21]

### 2.6 Desecuritisation and politicisation: 1996 -

The restoration of the IRA ceasefire (broken in February 1996) in July 1997, and the maintenance of the loyalist ceasefire (declared in October 1994, two months after the

original IRA ceasefire), allowed communication between the conflict parties to progress, ultimately resulting in the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. The success of this Agreement was due to the fact that it drew together both desecuritisation and a rise in politicisation of the conflict, i.e. the forum for the expression of disaccord became the democratic political sphere.[22] Institutions for devolution to Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly), north-south cooperation (North-South Ministerial Council, the six implementation bodies), and east-west communication (British-Irish Council, British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference) were to alter the means by which conflict over the border was articulated in the three strands. Framing these institutions was constitutional adjustment in the two states to include Ireland's acceptance of the continuation of the status quo and British acceptance of the possibility of change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status (Coakley 2003; Mansergh 2001). Within this new context, structures for maintenance of order, economic development, social harmony, and political settlement were established (such as the Civic Forum and independent Policing Commission). At the same time, although paramilitary activity has not ceased since the Agreement, the drawing of previously marginalised republican and loyalist parties into the political mainstream has aided the removal of terrorist violence as a conduit of inter-community conflict.[23] The next section of this paper considers analyses of the role of the EU in the politicisation of the conflict, specifically in relation to new conceptions of the Irish border and territory applied in the 'three strands' model.

## 3. Framing the influence of the EU on the conflict in Northern Ireland

*3.1 Levels of analysis*

Keating (2004) summarises the EU 'solution to national problems' as being a process of 'territorialization'. This process is, he notes, epitomised in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, in which new structures of governance for shared territory are introduced. The three-stranded model applied in the Agreement is a useful tool for outlining the levels of analysis for the impact of the EU on the resolution of border conflict in Ireland. First, the explicit violent conflict has been between the unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland (Strand 1). Because the devolved status of Northern Ireland has not been established for a substantial period of times since the accession of the United Kingdom to the EEC in 1973, the impact of the EU at this level has been mediated through various national and local institutions. Second, the difference between these two communities in Northern Ireland has essentially but not exclusively centred on different conceptions of the Irish border. The impact of European integration on

cross-border cooperation in the island of Ireland is related to Strand 2 of the Agreement. Finally, conceptions of the border are related to broader ideological and identity connections to the British and Irish states. The effects of European integration on Strand 3 are mediated through the two governments. Divisions between these three strands are often blurred, particularly in a European context; nevertheless, it is useful to bear these different levels of analysis when one considers the two main approaches to understanding the EU's impact on the conflict – structural and actor-driven.

*3.2 Structural analyses: the EU and Northern Ireland*

3.2.i Strand 3 – Structures/Context

O'Dowd (2002) notes that change in the function, structure and meaning of European state borders did not begin with European integration, but rather is democratically managed in this new context. Anderson and Hamilton's (2002) study relates the concept of 'transnational democracy' to the issue of conflict resolution in Ireland through cross-border cooperation. Showing that borders can be harbingers of international cooperation, the purpose of European integration has been 'not to wither away existing constitutional borders but the promotion of peaceful co-existence between different nations' (Kaplan and Häkli 2002; Teague 1996:565). The structural effects of European integration on developing British-Irish relations as the central pillar of the peace have been widely traced (Arthur 1999; Gillespie 2001; Meehan 2000). The growing equality that occurred between the Irish and British states in the European context was one that formed a crucial foundation for a positive and productive intergovernmental relationship. With strong intergovernmental links forged, the two states have been able to cooperate across borders, transcending the limitations of exclusivist nationalism for the benefit of Northern Ireland (Anderson 1997). The very character of the institutions established under Strand 3 reflects the application of the model of European integration to British-Irish and north-south cooperation (Kearney 1998).

3.2.ii Strand 2 - Structures/Context

It is interesting to note that the agenda for talks between Northern Ireland Prime Minister O'Neill and Taoiseach Lemass in 1965 bears much similarity to the remit of the cross-border institutions established by the 1998 Agreement, namely tourism, interchange of information in health, education, agricultural research and industrial promotion, and increasing cross-border traffic (Kennedy 2000:235). Not only has the general process of European integration covered such areas as these, it has provided a

context in which cross-border cooperation in Ireland is to some extent depoliticised. Within the EU, cross-border cooperation has been presented as achieving common interests and making common sense. Hence, the ECOSOC (1983:1) report on the border region of Ireland noted that it suffers not only from the effects of violent conflict, but that it has 'the additional disadvantage of being cut in half by a frontier that hampers normal economic development'. It therefore urged cross-border cooperation and joint projects. Such projects have been growing in number and significance in Ireland to such a degree that, according to O'Neill (1996:134), cross-border cooperation has changed the geographical definition of political and economic concerns on and between the islands of Ireland and Britain. By placing the issue of cross-border cooperation in a context of shared European interests rather than a common Irish identity (for example), the EU has, some contend, introduced one of the most major changes in the arena for resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland (Anderson and Goodman 1998; Anderson *et al.* 2001). Such structural and institutional alterations have certain indirect and conceptual dimensions, for example the symbolic as well as economic significance of cross-border cooperation (Wilson and Donnan 1998). In the Irish context, European integration has 'internationalised' the ideological and operational arena for all actors, allowing 'some political points' of nationalism and unionism to be 'de-emphasised' (Todd 2001).

3.2.iii Strand 1 - Structures/Context

Cooperation across borders has also been facilitated *within* European member-states, namely between regions (Christiansen 1997; Jönsson *et al.* 2000; Paasi 1996:5). Green Cowles *et al.* (2001) found that member-state governments experience pressure to adapt to the EU context through institutional change, including more autonomy for sub-national regions. This is broadly in line with other studies on the development of multilevel cooperation and its place in the European Union, including those of Kohler-Koch and Eising (1999) and Hooghe and Marks (2001) In relation to the context of Britain and Ireland, Day and Rees (1991) were among the first to assess the importance of European regionalism here, anticipating the devolution in the United Kingdom which Bulmer and Burch (2002) link to processes of multilevel policy-making in the EU. The introduction of devolution to Northern Ireland in the 1998 Agreement ran in parallel with devolution of power to other regions of the United Kingdom and bears similarity to models of EU cooperation.

*3.3 Actor-driven analyses: the EU and Northern Ireland*

3.3.i Strand 1- Actors/Institutions

In Strand 1 of the Agreement, the common interests of the parties in Northern Ireland are recognised in new role of the Northern Ireland civil service and the departments of the Executive (coordinated by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister) in their responsibility for EU-related matters and in developing a 'joint approach' to the EU. Such a 'joint approach' would have been inconceivable even ten years previously. Change in the approach of the British government and, in turn, moderate unionists towards EU involvement occurred as (a) the limitations of the EU's direct impact on Northern Ireland became evident, and (b) the British government accepted the classification of Northern Ireland as a European 'region'.[24] The direct effects of being a region of the European Union have been acknowledged as significant for the transformation of Northern Ireland's economic position, particularly in terms of its links with the Republic (O'Dowd and Corrigan 1995; Tannam 1996). As a consequence of integration into the EU, Northern Ireland is no longer seen as a region on the periphery, of either Europe or the United Kingdom (CEC n/d: 1). In addition to the support contributed through its Community-wide programmes, the EU Commission has directly responded to the specific needs of the province with the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation[25] established in response to the ceasefires in 1994 and its donations to the International Fund for Ireland. Aside from its incalculable effect on the peace process, EU funding has been a crucial means of bypassing central government for Northern Ireland (Loughlin 1999:316). Decentralisation of the decision-making process in Northern Ireland and a new focus on local micro-economies have not only facilitated a strengthening of actors at the regional level, it has facilitated 'the active promotion of alliances that may have existed prior to partition' across the island (McCall 1998:394).


3.3.ii Strand 2 - Actors/Institutions

The European dimension is also central to Strand 2 of the 1998 Agreement. The North-South Ministerial Council is charged with ensuring the representation of all-island interests at the EU level, both informally and through the inclusion of NSMC members in Irish delegations to the Council of Ministers and its working groups. In addition, the remit of the cross-border Implementation Bodies includes areas traditionally under an EU umbrella (e.g. agriculture, rural development etc.). The British and Irish governments were influenced in this regard by the impetus created by the European

Charter for Cross-Border Co-Operation adopted in 1981 (Logue 1999:7). The dual purpose of programmes such as Interreg – 'to help integrate the economic space of the Community as a whole and to address the negative legacy of border areas' – demonstrate the way in which wider EU ambitions held direct relevance for the situation in Ireland (CEC 1991:169). Thus, EU funds have also been directed at cross-border initiatives aimed at including local administrations, local enterprises and voluntary organisations on both sides of the border. As consequence, non-governmental organisations recognise that joint applications for EU funding are 'more likely to be favourably received' and are therefore becoming increasingly inclined to build links with groups on the other side of the border (O'Neill 1998:8). Yet the enduring effects of such developments at societal level are severely undermined by the fact that a significant number of projects collapse after the EU funding expires (Jamison *et al.* 2001:11). Moreover, the 'cross-border' nature of the projects themselves are sometimes doubtful, as seen in the fact that only one project conformed to the cross-border management criteria in the first Interreg programme (Meehan 1998:14). This points to the limitation of the EU's reach 'on the ground', and the subsequent centrality of local and regional political 'possession' of such projects. However, the highly centralised nature of the Irish and (until 1998) British states, in addition to the 'mismatched administrative structures' of north and south in Ireland have 'ensured a rather localised and fragmented approach to local cross-border co-operation' (O'Dowd and Corrigan 1996:130). Hence, Goodman's (1996:202-203) pre-Agreement observation that cross-border permeability is rarely politicised in economic and cultural life on the island of Ireland remains true today.

### 3.3.iii Strand 3 - Actors/Institutions

Anastasakis and Bojicic-Dzelilovic (2002:5) argue that the EU's potential for conflict resolution lies in 'building networks of interdependence and common action' between various actors.[26] Such networks are institutionalised in the Strand 3 bodies of the Agreement which formalise links between the two governments (BIIC) and establish a forum for negotiation between the two governments and the devolved administrations of the United Kingdom. These institutions reflect the internal political change and the increasing interdependence that shaped relations between Britain and Ireland and their 'joint prospects in Europe' (Gillespie 1996:172-177). As the two governments became increasingly aware of matters of mutual interest, membership of EU made a bilateral approach to common issues increasingly plausible (Ruane and Todd 1996:281). The

Council of Ministers and European Council has also provided a context within which pressure has been placed on the two governments to act as partners in relation to common interests and to reach compromise on issues on which they differ. Growing equality that occurred between the Irish and British states in the European context was one that formed a crucial foundation for a positive and productive intergovernmental relationship. The British-Irish relationship is the central pillar of the peace process in Northern Ireland, and the importance of the EU in establishing this is well-recognised (Arthur 1983; Gallagher 1985; Gillespie 2001; Laffan 2003; Meehan 2000). With strong intergovernmental links forged, the two states have been able to cooperate in strengthening the position of Northern Ireland as a focus for action by the EU itself.

*3.4 Diez et al.'s (2004) model*

After defining conflict as 'the communication of incompatibilities', Diez *et al.* (2004:12) go on to define the EU's role in the transformation of conflicts as that of a 'perturbator'. In contrast to the general assumptions of EU 'pacification' or 'transformation' outlined above, this model contends that the EU serves actually to provoke a 'conflict with a conflict' through either an 'institutional or discursive frame' (2004:13). In an attempt to account for the complexity and multiplicity of the EU's influence, Diez *et al.* (2004:14-19) bring together structural and actor-driven approaches in a four-dimensional model (see Fig.ii below). They define the two types of approaches used by EU actors thus:

> Actor-driven approaches are direct, and often interpersonal and short-term. Structural approaches may or may not be intended, are indirect and often long-term. (Diez *et al.* 2004:15)

Yet the originality of this model lies in that it allows for the fact that the most significant impact of the EU may lie in the *interplay* of these approaches.

| | | Approach by EU | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Actor-driven** | **Structural** |
| **Direction of incentive vis-à-vis conflict parties** | **Political leadership** | (1) Compulsory impact | (2) Enabling impact |
| | **Wider societal level** | (3) Connective impact | (4) Constructive impact |

Fig.ii. Diez *et al.*'s model of pathways of EU influence

Building on Barnett and Duvall's (2003) categorisation of power types in terms of direct/diffuse power and actors/social relations, Diez *et al.* produce four pathways of influence for the EU in a conflict situation. The first pathway – 'compulsory impact' – relates to the direct influence of the EU on political leadership. 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 and conflict-exacerbating factors. The third pathway – 'connective impact' – moves beyond the leaders of the parties concerned in a conflict, and instead directly affects the conflict society. The EU's organisation and economic structures are to the fore in this direct societal influence. The final pathway – 'constructive impact' – is defined by Diez *et al.* (2004:17) as the 'most indirect but also most persuasive mode of transformation', affecting 'a (re)construction of identities' in society. The final section of this paper now applies this model of four pathways to the case of Northern Ireland.

**4. Four paths of EU impact in Ireland**

*4.1 Pathway 1: Compulsory (Actor-driven; Political leadership)*

The 'compulsory' power of the EU is most evident prior to accession, when candidate countries are negotiations are conducted and preparations are made for acceptance into the EU. This is illustrated by the EU's use of Turkey's application for membership to exercise the 'carrot' and 'stick' in urging resolution in its relationship with Greece and in the conflict in Cyprus (Demetriou 2004:23; Rumelili 2004:7-8). However, although the Irish government and nationalist community did view accession to the EEC as significant for north-south relations in Ireland,[27] neither the British nor Irish government saw any direct consequences of EEC membership for the conflict in Northern Ireland at the point of accession. This is partly because of the nature of the EEC at the time (with its delimited remit of influence), partly because the conflict in Northern Ireland had not emerged when Britain and Ireland's membership applications were lodged in 1962, and partly because Northern Ireland was not then a priority for either government (Dorr 2002). It seems that the time-frame for the development of the EU, of British-Irish relations, and of the conflict in Northern Ireland was such that 'compulsory influence' was not an instrument at the EU's disposal in relation to Northern Ireland. Moreover, the main actors in the conflicting parties were active at a sub-national level (as opposed

to governmental) and were therefore beyond the reach of the EU. The EU's direct compulsory influence on the political leaders therefore had to be exercised towards the two governments. An example of a 'stick' being used by the EU directly in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland is the European Court of Justice ruling (November 1995) that aspects of the ROI Prevention of Terrorism Act contravened European Community law in restricting the right to freedom of movement (CAIN). This case, however, was less about how to deal with the situation in Northern Ireland than about the value of EU citizenship and integration. Another significant example of an attempt by the EU to force a core actor to engage in desecuritising moves in Northern Ireland is that of the European Parliament vote (October 1984) in favour of a motion calling on the British government to ban the use of plastic bullets (CAIN). However, the lack of 'compulsory' power behind this action was exacerbated by the fact that, within days of the EP passing this motion, the European Commission on Human Rights (which had been the focus of international intervention in the conflict) found that the use of plastic bullets in a rioting situation is justified. 'Sticks' that were used by the EU directly on the political leaders involved in Northern Ireland may be seen primarily as by-products of European integration, and only secondarily as the EU's compulsory power in relation to conflict resolution. 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.

### 4.2 Pathway 2: Enabling *(Structural; Political leadership)*

A far more significant impact of the EU on the conflict in Northern Ireland has been its *indirect* structural influence on the political leaders involved, mostly connected through the European Council and Council of Ministers. The Council, as an intergovernmental body, has been unable to act independently in relation to the conflict. Nonetheless, the forum of the Council is widely acknowledged as substantially altering the relationship between the two governments (Gallagher 1985; Gillespie 2001; Meehan 2000; O'Dowd *et al.* 1995). Callaghan and Lynch's meeting on the sidelines of the European Council summit in Copenhagen in 1978 was the first between the leaders of the two governments in this neutral context and set a precedent for the future easing of tensions of British-Irish relations through this means. Albert Reynolds (2003) testifies to the ultimate importance to the peace process of the 'great personal relationship' he built with John Major as Finance Ministers in the Council of Ministers. The informality, secrecy and regularity of such meetings between government ministers at the European

level proved to be invaluable in the development of an 'agreed approach' to Northern Ireland. In addition, the progress of European integration itself has impacted on the working-out of the British-Irish relationship at a practical level (Guelke 2001:259). For example, the Council has also been significant in the working-out of cross-border cooperation in Ireland which, as Logue (1999:9) notes, 'is not just about North/South relations; it's about British/Irish relations as well'.

At a broader structural level, the language and convention of EU policymakers created 'an open space for contending parties to talk about solutions to old problems in a new way and to act upon that' (Meehan 2000:96). Laffan (2001; 2003:10) outlines four dimensions of the new model offered by the EU: the 'adequacy of partial agreement', 'the importance of institutional innovation', 'problem-solving pragmatic politics', and 'the sharing of sovereignty'. The *practice* of European integration has itself had an indirect impact on political leaders in Northern Ireland, given that it has legitimised policies (such as cross-border cooperation) that would previously have been considered untenable. This is most clearly demonstrated in the stated tasks of the cross-border bodies established under Strands 2 and 3 of the 1998 Agreement in relation to the EU. Moreover, the mix of supranational cooperation, intergovernmental agreement, and sub-national coordination that is embodied in the EU is reflected in Strand 3 of the Agreement (Kearney 1998). Common policies may be developed through the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIC) on areas of mutual interest in the EU as well as on cross-border matters that are beyond the powers of the devolved institutions, such as policing, justice, and security. The most significant function of the British-Irish Council (BIC) is symbolic: the British and Irish nations are internally diverse, they share common interests, their territorial borders are causes for cooperation rather than conflict.

### 4.3 Pathway 3: Connective *(Actor-driven; Wider society)*

The European Commission's expectation that the Northern Ireland Assembly would play 'an increasingly significant part in determining how Northern Ireland can get the most out of UK membership of the EU' does not appear to be supported by the necessary change in practice at regional level (CEC n/d: 1). The continued lack of direct impact from the EU on regional level politics in Northern Ireland is indicated by the limited effects that the new European Constitution is likely to have on Northern Ireland politicians. Even renewed emphasis upon the principle of subsidiarity in the EU will

affect Northern Ireland indirectly only through the role of Westminster, given that it gives national parliaments an increased formal role in EU decision-making processes. Thus, apart from some consultation conducted by Westminster with devolved assemblies (to a degree decided at a national level), the most impact Northern Ireland politicians can have in relation to the working out of subsidiarity in the EU is through participation in relevant committees in the House of Commons (Phinnemore 2003). The EU's direct impact on political practice in Northern Ireland is delimited by the national structures of the United Kingdom. Yet, the EU is also limited in this regard by the nature of the EU itself as an organization. For example, following an EU Summit in Cannes, the Taoiseach (Bruton) and Prime Minister (Major) made a request to the European Commission in June 1995 that its officials look into the issue of decommissioning (Elliott and Flackes 1999:77). However, this task was soon passed onto International Body on Arms Decommissioning given its capacity to produce what the EU could not, i.e. neutral, international 'personalities' with whom the media could engage directly.[28]

The active intervention of the EU in Northern Ireland has instead been essentially conducted through its programmes for economic and regional development. Given that the most 'clout' that the EU has is economic, it is not surprising that the most significant power that the EU has for societal conflict resolution lies in economic measures (Brown and Rosecrance 1999; Piening 1997). As the central driver and facilitator of European economic integration, the Commission has thus been generally seen as an external and beneficent player in relation to Northern Ireland as a region of the EU (Teague 1996). The funding power of the EU has also (and to substantial effect) been used as 'an instrumental carrot' in Northern Ireland (Anderson and O'Dowd 1999). This has also provided the EU with its most substantial path of influence on the society directly affected by the conflict, i.e. local and regional levels. Conditions for Community funding in areas such as communications, agriculture and tourism have necessitated cooperation between authorities, organisations, firms and political actors on both sides of the divide, both unionist/nationalist and north/south.[29] Subsequent plans for the 1994-1999 round of EU Structural Funds in both the Republic and Northern Ireland recognised the opportunity for enhanced cross-border cooperation (McAlinden 1995).[30] EU funding has also been used as a 'carrot' by the EU, for example when its contribution to the International Fund for Ireland was increased by a third one month after the announcement of the IRA ceasefire in 1994.

The EU has been particularly successful in forging change in cross-border economic relationships in Ireland through its structural impact on the significance of the border as an economic and customs divide. The recent economic boom in the Republic of Ireland (with growth rates far exceeding that of the UK) – linked at least in part to 'enthusiastic embracing of EU initiatives' – has encouraged individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland to be far from hostile to 'economic interaction with their island neighbours' (Bradley and Hamilton 1999:37; D'Arcy and Dickson 1995:xv). This is reflected in the fact that the Republic of Ireland's share of trade from Northern Ireland is steadily growing and that the border region is now effectively a 'dual currency region' (Bridle 2002).[31] This has been crucially facilitated by the general context of European economic integration. For example, the introduction of EEC regulations on customs declarations in 1987 had immediate effect on the ease with which goods could be transported between north and south in Ireland (MacEvoy 1988:11). Many further obstacles to cross-border trade and economic development were immediately eroded with the creation of the Single European Market in 1992. Bradley's (1995:49) prediction that, '[j]ust as the Single European Market and EMU contain an internal logic of further integration, so too a process of North-South co-ordinated development is likely to lead inexorably to suggestions for further harmonisation and policy convergence' was supported by the straightforward economic necessity for cooperation (Cook *et al.* 2000:5; Goodman 2000; Tannam 1996).[32]

### 4.4 Pathway 4: Constructive *(Structural; Wider society)*

This final pathway, the constructive impact of the EU, has been the most significant for the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland, not least because the EU is in a unique position to make such a contribution. Neither the individual member-states nor other international actors were able to effect a 'change of scripts' within and between the conflicting parties. Changes in the ideology of the leading political parties in Northern Ireland, not to mention in the national constitutions of the British and Irish states, have shown that revision to political identity is possible (Delanty 1996). As Diez (2002) elaborates in relation to the conflict in Cyprus, such 'postmodernisation' of the identities of the conflict parties facilitates the resolution of disputes. Such identity change, however, does not necessarily entail a decreasing role for identity difference in contemporary Europe, Anderson and Bort (2001) identify the blurring of boundaries within EU as serving to increase the importance of borders as markers of identity. This

analysis appears to be borne out when one considers the current situation in Northern Ireland, with the continued fourth suspension of the devolved institutions and increasing polarisation between the two communities. The different approach taken by nationalists and unionists to the EU reflects the influence of identification with the different states and their nationalisms (Bew and Meehan 1994). Yet, the increasing visibility and credibility of local and regional actors from Northern Ireland on the European stage enabled them to develop their own version of British and Irish national identity, one not tied to a static vision of the homeland.

Most notable among such actors were the MEPs, all of whom recognised the European Parliament as a new forum for the articulation of their ideological positions. These ideological differences meant that the interest of the European Parliament in the conflict in Northern Ireland was viewed by unionists as a threat and by nationalists as an opportunity. There can be little doubt that Hume's approach was ultimately the most influential for the peace process. As Hume enjoyed the attention of an audience at a European level, so the discourse he was advocating gained wider credibility with the media and public in Britain and Ireland. Indeed, Todd (2001) argues that the impact of the SDLP was so significant because its leader, John Hume, 'redefined the battlefield as Europe', bypassing Britain in fashioning a new nationalist discourse that related to an international, specifically European, context.

> The EU commits all its members to an 'ever-closer union' among the peoples of Europe. That includes an ever-closer union between the people of Ireland, North and South, and between Ireland and Britain. Borders are gone all over Europe, including in fact the Irish border. (Hume 1996:46-47)

The plenary sessions of the European Parliament also gave Ian Paisley, the DUP leader and Northern Ireland MEP with the largest mandate, an opportunity to express unionist objections to the approach being taken by the British and Irish governments to the situation in the province. Paisley's attempts to interrupt the speeches made by Taoiseach Lynch (as President of the European Council) in 1979 and, in 1986, by Prime Minister Thatcher with complaints about the Anglo-Irish Agreement the previous year (at which time he was expelled from the session) are prime examples. The difference between the Paisley and Hume's use of the European Parliament may highlight another point of unionist/nationalist division, yet it also demonstrates the acceptance of the EU as a significant audience and, to a lesser extent, actor.

**5. Conclusion**

The pathways of influence of the EU in the conflict in Northern Ireland reflect the different roles of the EU institutions in relation to different levels of conflict communication. Figure iii (below) sets out the findings of this research, highlighting the EU institution and addressee mainly but not exclusively involved in aspect of the EU's influence on the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland.

| Pathway | Direction of Incentive | Approach by EU | Main EU Institution | Main Addressee | Nature of Influence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Compulsory** | Political leadership | Actor-driven | Court of Justice | Governments | Rulings |
| **Enabling** | Political leadership | Structural | Council of Ministers | Governments and officials | Pragmatic politics |
| **Connective** | Wider societal level | Actor-driven | European Commission | Local authorities/ NGOs | Structural funds/ Community Initiatives |
| **Constructive** | Wider societal level | Structural | European Parliament | Regional politicians | Internation-alisation |

Fig. iii. Overview of main influence of EU institutions on Northern Ireland

The 'compulsory' influence of the EU, directly on the leading governmental actors, has been the least significant in the Northern Ireland/Ireland case study. This is largely because the EU does not wield effective instruments of compulsory influence against its existing member-states. It is also because it is not so much the direct involvement of governmental actors but rather the impact of their ideology and relationship to each other that has affected conflict resolution in Northern Ireland. Thus, the 'enabling influence' of the EU on the structures affecting the relations of the British-Irish governments has been far more significant. Both the practice and the model of intergovernmental relations in the EU has made this an important factor for change. The 'connective influence' of the EU on the societal level of the conflict (i.e. the region of Northern Ireland) has been most effective in economic terms, given the opportunities for direct impact in this area. Yet the most crucial influence the EU has had on the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland has arguably been 'constructive', indirectly affecting the structures, context and language of conflict resolution amongst regional level actors. This reflects the nature of the EU as a diverse organisation whose

substantial effects are determined at the level of the recipient. It also reflects the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland itself, which is multilevel and has required a peace process that works at all these levels to achieve common interests through political cooperation. Ultimately, it appears that it is not so much the actors or structures of the European Union but the actual process of European integration itself that has served to transform factors that would previously have contributed to the conflict[33] into bases for cooperation across ideological, political and territorial borders.

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[1] Analyses of the conflict in Northern Ireland in terms of a religious or theological divide include Akenson (1982), Fulton (2002), and Mitchell (2004).

[2] Nic Craith's (2003) work emphasises the importance of linguistic and cultural signifiers in Northern Ireland politics and society.

[3] For examples of literature which emphasizes the centrality of socio-economic disparity to the Northern Ireland conflict, see Bew, Gibbon, and Patterson (1979), Probert (1978), and Teague (1987).

[4] Connections between such contributing factors as class, religion and culture within the larger identifying ideologies of nationalism and unionism are noted by such authors as McGarry and O'Leary (1995), Moxon-Browne (1983), Ruane and Todd (1996).

[5] The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 was repealed by Westminster and the irredentist claim over the territory of Northern Ireland was removed from Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.

[6] This assumption is articulated in the Haagerup Report of the Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (1984). For further elaboration of this point see Hayward (2004a).

[7] The customs land boundary was drawn in April 1923.

[8] A good personal relationship between Craig and Cosgrave, did not lead to meetings between the two Prime Ministers (of Northern Ireland and the Free State respectively) after December 1925. The concern of both governments to consolidate their internal position and independence meant that political difference between north and south became increasingly entrenched.

[9] In a study of a border region in the 1950s, Harris (1986:19-20) identifies the border as a 'definite influence on the pattern of social relationships in the area' since partition. This she attributes to the different view that Catholics and Protestants hold of the border, the former viewing it as 'invalid', the latter as 'vital to freedom' (Harris 1986:20).

[10] The securitisation of the border increased in response to the activity of the IRA, for example during its border campaign of December 1956-February 1962, when security forces of north and south cooperated to combat the threat posed by the paramilitary force.

[11] This troop deployment took the form of setting up field hospitals to treat 'those injured in the disturbances in the Six Counties who did not wish to be treated there' (Government of Ireland press release, quoted in Kennedy 2000:341). Despite the Irish government's explicit commitment to unification by exclusively peaceful means, let alone the fact that the army was not equipped for a successful invasion, speculation that the Irish Army was preparing to invade the Bogside area of Derry was rife at the time, and served to heighten unionist-nationalist, north-south and British-Irish tensions.

[12] Internment was used by British security forces as a means of combating the rising paramilitary violence (August 1971-December 1975), but of the 1, 981 people detained only 107 were Protestant (CAIN).

[13] Notably, the British government appears to have been quite open to the idea of Irish reunification, as seen in Whitelaw's White Paper in 1972, which stated that the government was not opposed to 'unity by consent' (Elliott and Flackes 1999:505-6).

[14] The Council of Ireland was inspired by the failed Council of the early 1920s and modelled on the EEC Council of Ministers. The inspiration of the EEC institutions was significant for Irish nationalists even at this early stage (Britain and the Republic acceded to the EEC in January 1973).

[15] Dermot Nesbitt (2001) of the UUP has described this period in the 1980s as one of dawning 'realisation that Northern Ireland is not unique', with over 100 million people in Europe living, as he describes it, 'on the wrong side of the border'.

[16] Ireland went against majority consensus in Europe by refusing to endorse EEC trade sanctions against Argentina, as Britain's opponent in the Falklands War. Britain and, indeed, their fellow

EEC member-states, viewed Ireland's ostensibly neutral position as much a stance for sovereignty and anti-British sentiment as it had been forty years previously (Arthur 1983:172).

[17] The unpopularity of Thatcher's refusal to countenance republican requests amongst the Irish population was expressed through visits by members of the Dáil (TDs) to prisoners in the Maze, the election of two hunger strikers to Dáil Éireann (mirroring Bobby Sands' election to Westminster), an attempt to burn the British embassy in Dublin, and some of the largest protest marches ever seen in the south.

[18] This Assembly (October 1982-June 1986) was established under the so-called Prior proposals (named after the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at the time). Nationalist politicians abstained from the Assembly, and it did not lead to the successful introduction of devolution.

[19] According to O'Malley (1990:105), unionist leaders viewed the Anglo-Irish Agreement as 'an unmitigated disaster'.

[20] This was a marked change from the governments' ambition in the Anglo-Irish Agreement which FitzGerald (2000) summarised as 'a deliberate attempt to isolate Sinn Féin'.

[21] Article 3 of the Downing Street Declaration reads: '[The Governments] also consider that the development of Europe will, of itself, require new approaches to serve interests common to both parts of the island of Ireland, and to Ireland and the United Kingdom as partners in the European Union.'
The Framework Documents noted that 'an agreed approach for the whole island in respect of the challenges and opportunities of the European Union' would need to be found (Article 26 of 'A New Framework for Agreement') and Article 2 of 'A Framework for Accountable Government' urged the establishment of new institutions taking into account 'newly forged links with the rest of Europe'.

[22] The identification of 'desecuritisation' and 'politicisation' as the two processes central to the de-escalation of conflict is made by Diez et al. (2004:6-10).

[23] Now paramilitary violence is largely conducted either through anti-Agreement extremist republican groups (such as the 'real IRA's' Omagh bombing), amongst competing loyalist sections, or by paramilitary organisations against members of their own community, as in so-called 'punishment beatings'.

[24] For a comparison of the British and Irish government's approaches to the definition of Northern Ireland as a region of the EU see Hayward (2004b).

[25] The aims of this Special Support Programme are to: 'combat social exclusion, promote reconciliation and cross-border development, and contribute to the social and economic regeneration of Northern Ireland and the six adjacent border counties' (Logue 1999).

[26] The stated aims of the Interreg III programme, including the 'creation and development of networks of cooperation across the internal borders', reflects the significance of this concept in EU practice.

[27] Information pamphlets published by the Department of Foreign Affairs prior to the 1972 Irish referendum on EEC membership demonstrate this (see for example DFA 1972).

[28] The International Body on Arms Decommissioning established in 1995 had American (Mitchell), Canadian (de Chastelain) and Finnish (Hokeri) members. These men were later asked to extend their expertise into these three-stranded talks

[29] The Economic and Social Committee's report (1983) on the development of the Irish border areas highlighted the areas of industry, tourism, drainage, agricultural services and transports as the key issues for joint north-south projects in which the EU could contribute.

[30] A report for ADM/CPA (1999:12) outlined the ways in which several pre-existing cross-border structures have been 'consolidated and strengthened' by the use of EU Structural Funds.

[31] 9 per cent of manufacturing sales in Northern Ireland in 2001 were with the Republic of Ireland, compared to 12 percent to EU countries. These figures are still substantially less than the 35 per cent share held by Great Britain (Bridle 2002).

[32] FitzGerald et al.'s (1988:xiv) study of cross-border shopping in the late 1980s (submitted to the European Commission) highlighted the need for greater harmonisation between the Republic and Northern Ireland 'even without the requirements of the completion of the Single European Market'.

[33] This hypothesis is supported by Anderson (1998).