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The Role of the European Union as a Peace Builder: Northern Ireland as a Case Study

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Abstract

The United Kingdom and Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973 at a time when bitter communal conflict engulfed Northern Ireland. It appeared to be a deviant case in a modernising Europe anxious to unleash the shackles of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact the unusual conjunction of conflict within a disputed region of the British/Irish archipelago and joint membership of the European Community offered an opportunity to move beyond the excessive intimacy of an ancient quarrel through different temporal and spatial lenses. This article addresses the issue of dealing with minority grievances in an inter- and intra-state dispute by analysing the role of functional regimes and the deliverance of “peace in parts” through the changing context of statehood within Europe where sovereignty may be divisible and borders more permeable. It will conclude that the EU has made an essential contribution to the changing relations between Britain and Ireland and to conflict management within Northern Ireland.

Keywords: *Capotorti Report, European Union, Good Friday Agreement (1998 Belfast Agreement), Northern Ireland, peacebuilding*

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**The Role of the European Union as a Peace Builder:
Northern Ireland as a Case Study**

Paul Arthur

Abstract

The United Kingdom and Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973 at a time when bitter communal conflict engulfed Northern Ireland. It appeared to be a deviant case in a modernising Europe anxious to unleash the shackles of the first half of the twentieth century. In fact the unusual conjunction of conflict within a disputed region of the British/Irish archipelago and joint membership of the European Community offered an opportunity to move beyond the excessive intimacy of an ancient quarrel through different temporal and spatial lenses. This article addresses the issue of dealing with minority grievances in an inter- and intra-state dispute by analysing the role of functional regimes and the deliverance of “peace in parts” through the changing context of statehood within Europe where sovereignty may be divisible and borders more permeable. It will conclude that the EU has made an essential contribution to the changing relations between Britain and Ireland and to conflict management within Northern Ireland.

Introduction

In 1979 the United Nations Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities published the Capotorti Report. It addressed the

desirability of bilateral treaties between states most directly concerned and deserves to be quoted at some length:

History shows that the minority problem can poison international relations. However, with the new standards set by the United Nations in the framework of human rights, minority groups can now play a positive role in international relations. When their rights are guaranteed and fully respected minority groups can serve as a link between States. The Special Rapporteur strongly believes that bilateral agreements dealing with minority rights concluded between States where minorities live and the States from which such minorities originate (especially between neighbouring countries) would be extremely useful. It must be stressed, however, that co-operation with regard to the rights of members of minority groups shall be based on mutual respect for the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the States concerned and non-interference in their internal affairs (Para. 618, recommendation 10b).

This fits neatly with one conception of the EU's approach to conflict resolution—its potential through practices of “Europeanization” that create a European public sphere in which incompatibilities can be peacefully communicated through creating a framework for a European identity that makes the cost of conflict across borders too high to continue and that feeds into the recognition of shared needs and the creation of common identities (cited in Hayward, 2006, p. 262).

Many of the contentious issues that are addressed in the 1998 Belfast Agreement are to be found in Recommendation 10 (b) and are an illustration of the extent to which

the British and Irish governments have dealt successfully with outstanding historic grievances *within* the European Union. After all, as Boyle and Hadden assert, the European Community was established “principally as a means of breaking down historic enmities. Member states are bound to recognize their existing boundaries and are expected, with the assistance of their fellow members, to resolve any outstanding difficulties by sharing resources across national frontiers and by channelling the potentially dangerous forces of traditional nationalism into a broader communal framework” (1986, p. 47). In the context of the Northern Ireland problem the Community offered two other advantages: one was the “changing context of statehood”; and the second was that the “EU system offered a far more benign external environment for small states, including Ireland, than traditional balance of powers systems or empire”. The result was that joint “membership of the EU altered the context of British/Irish relations in a radical manner by providing the Irish economy, polity and society with a highly-institutionalised and rule-bound context which it could adapt to economic and political internationalization” (Laffan and O’Mahony, 2008, pp. 198–9). One example concerns the pattern of Irish exports: “In 1971, the UK market absorbed 61 per cent of Irish exports; the proportion had fallen to 25 per cent by 1998” (p. 199). It also offered in part a route to a solution of the Northern Ireland problem. In one of the early interventions (the European Parliament’s (EP) 1984 Haagerup Report) it sought to address “one of the gravest political and social problems existing in the Community”—3,375 people were killed between 1969 and 1994 as a result of the conflict in a population of less than 1.7 million. That is precisely what this article will address by examining the period until the signing of the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

When Jean Blanchard described Ireland as an island behind an island he was alluding to the fact that the neighbouring island of Britain had had a disproportionate influence on Ireland, an influence based on a colonial history that stretched back to the seventeenth century at least. That state of mind is best encapsulated by Edmund Burke in his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol*, when he writes that when “any community is subordinately connected with another, the great danger of the connection is the extreme pride and self-complacency of the superior, which in all matters of controversy will probably decide in its own favour” (1777). It calls to mind the concept of the Prospero complex evolved by the radical French historian, Octave Mannoni, when he argued that the coloniser has created a neurotic sense of inferiority in the coloniser.

This theme is developed in Joseph Lee’s study of Irish politics and society in the twentieth century where he examines a dependency syndrome that curbed the Irish psyche and a collective mentality that strove after security. The former he said was quite natural in that a “small occupied country, with an alien ruling class, culturally penetrated by the language and many of the thought processes of the coloniser, was bound in large measure to imitate the example of the powerful and the prosperous” (Lee, 1989, p. 627). The result, Lee asserts, was that when allied to the “elusive but crucial psychological factors that inspired the instinct of inferiority, it shrivelled Irish perspectives on Irish potential” (629).

Lee was published in 1989 at a time when the Irish economy was in the doldrums; emigration (particularly of the educated young) was on the rise; and there was no sign of an end to the Northern Ireland conflict. Contrast that with a more recent publication where Ireland was judged to be the most globalized country that ever yet was seen and

the *Economist* ranked Ireland's "quality of life" as the best in the world in 2004 (Foster, 2007, pp. 4–5). Admittedly the "Celtic Tiger" is in serious recession at the time of writing; but, on the other hand, the seemingly intractable conflict in Northern Ireland has come to an end. Indeed some hold it up as a model of conflict resolution to be applied elsewhere in the world.

Various explanations have been adumbrated to explain the sloughing of fatalism in Ireland and a more expansive and inclusive approach to life. This article intends to look at one aspect of this relative success through an examination of the experience of nearly four decades of participation in "Europe". When the United Kingdom (UK) of Great Britain and Northern Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in January 1973 it was accompanied by the Republic of Ireland (henceforth Ireland). Their joint accession was to change the British-Irish relationship fundamentally and was to contribute towards a greater understanding in their approach to solving the Northern Ireland problem. We will examine both of these aspects.

Attitudes in the UK and Ireland to European accession

Ireland

The UK and Ireland entered the EEC in different frames of mind. There is some evidence to suggest that Ireland entered more positively. In his first major policy speech in 1973 the Irish Foreign Minister Garret FitzGerald told the Dail (Irish parliament) that it was time to formulate new general guidelines for future foreign policy because of the movement "towards greater interdependence" in the world economy; "the evolving situation in Northern Ireland"; and the "accession of membership to the European

Communities”. In a book he had published the previous year he stated that “although it would be wrong to look at this as a panacea for the Irish problem, which will always remain one to be settled by Irishmen in Ireland, such influence as membership of the (European Community) will have is likely to be uniformly directed towards the path to a united Ireland” (FitzGerald, 1972, p. 104).

“Interdependence” was the key word. The Irish were conscious of their humble position in the world economy and of the need to find new markets. Public opinion was strongly in favour of membership because it expected to benefit from the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) and from European regional development funds. In a 1972 referendum 83 per cent endorsed the decision to join. At another level the Irish government indicated through a White Paper published in 1972 that its modest international profile enabled it to read the message of the effect of the progressive informal encroachments of international linkages on national autonomy, and so it drew the distinction between independence and sovereignty. It acknowledged that as “a very small country independent but with little or no capacity to influence events abroad that significantly affect us” Ireland enjoyed very little economic sovereignty.

That was a lesson that had been hard learnt during the course of twentieth century Anglo-Irish relations. An American analysis of the Irish economy in 1952 had concluded that the country’s dependence on Britain was so strong as to be incompatible with the status of political sovereignty. The era of protectionism was brought to a close with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement in 1965. Henceforth economic nationalism and self-sufficiency was to be replaced with close economic ties with the UK and ultimately within the EEC. The stark message was that “the national interest was the

only valid criterion in policy formulation. Everything else, even sovereignty, which was merely a means towards serving the national interest, must be subordinated to that decisive consideration. The other member states of the EEC had already “accepted the limitations involved on their own national freedom of action because they consider that their national interests are best being served by membership” (Lee, pp. 463–4. All quotations from the 1972 White Paper are extracted from Lee). The Irish intended to be *communitaire*. They demonstrated this at an early stage when they decided that they would stay in the Community notwithstanding any decisions the British made when the UK held a referendum in 1975 to decide whether to remain or not. Similarly it joined the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1978 when the British did not. They did this despite the fact that it had “the potential to drive a wedge between the two parts of the island” (Laffan and O’Mahony, 2008, p. 200). The extent to which they were successful is acknowledged in the conclusion to an Irish White Paper on Foreign Policy (1996): “Irish people increasingly see the European Union not simply as an organisation to which Ireland belongs, but as an integral part of our future. We see ourselves increasingly as Europeans.” This was the response to Lee’s historic sense of inferiority. Garvin puts it in perspective when he comments that Ireland’s engagement with Europe was part of “a very deep longing for an alliance, a friendship that was non-imperial and psychologically satisfying, combined with a culturally determined wish to be self-sufficient and to be true to no one but one’s collective self” (p. 200).

It might be said Ireland was simply following an international system that recognised the erosion of boundaries based on the universal recognition of territorial sovereignty through growing interdependencies: “Thus, while political systems are

boundary- maintaining, markets—although dependent for their creation upon political power and economic networks—are not.” The result has seen contradictory traits in the international system where in place of *spheres of responsibility* and *of abstention* we now have *functional regimes*. They “unbundle” the “package of rights inherent in territorial sovereignty....Functional regimes, it was hoped, would not only downgrade the importance of national boundaries, but could, through the expansion of transboundary co-operative networks, lead to ‘peace in parts’” (Kratochwil, 1986, pp. 43–50). In this and other respects “Europe” may serve as a new type of conflict management device.

Great Britain

There is little or no evidence that the UK entered the EEC with the same perspectives. According to Christopher Tugendhat, “the British entered the Community in an unemotional frame of mind” (1986, p. 33). It was not until a June 1975 referendum—an unusual occurrence in British constitutional practice—when in a large turnout the British voted 2:1 to accept the conditions of membership that it became clear that there was some enthusiasm for the idea of Europe. Nonetheless the poll disguises a culture of mistrust about “the continent”—evident in its refusal to get involved in the original European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 because, to quote Lord Plowden, “We’d won the war and we weren’t ready to form any special links with the continent” (p. 118). A change of mind and two rejected applications made during the 1960s did not enhance the UK’s love affair with the EEC. The Community was suspicious of the UK’s “Atlanticism” so that its 1962 application was vetoed by President de Gaulle because “in his view, Britain would constitute a Trojan horse for the United States, on the one hand

impeding Western Europe's emergence as a unified entity under French leadership, and, on the other, leading ultimately to an Atlantic community under American "hegemony" (Jordan and Feld, 1986, p. 114). It underlines what William Wallace (1991, pp. 67–80) detects as a fundamental Anglo-Saxon/European faultline which cuts across the main British political parties.

In addition British (and Irish and Danish) entry to the Community occurred at a time when global economic conditions had deteriorated: "the first stage of the Community's development coincided with the optimism and burgeoning prosperity of the 1960s. Britain's accession, by contrast, came just as that boom was about to end with the first oil shock, and its first year of membership coincided with the worst recession since the 1930s" (Tugendhat, 1986, p. 117). Nor was she entirely satisfied with the cost of membership. The Community represented the UK's first permanent peacetime engagement on the continent of Europe since the Reformation, and she was not in control. She was not tuned into the idealism that had launched the EEC; and, unlike her other alliances, the EEC was the only international organisation of which she was not a founder member. In these circumstances scepticism was not altogether unexpected.

Northern Ireland

The UK and Ireland joined the community at a time of worsening conditions in Northern Ireland and it was a factor in the negotiations leading to accession. Robert Ramsay, a senior Northern Ireland civil servant, was convinced that at this time "the threat from the French was decisive; the Stormont government was sacrificed on the altar of his [Heath's] European ambitions." This assertion is based on a key policy document

drawn up for the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, in meetings he was having with the British and Irish in the spring of 1972. Ramsay quotes from the document at some length where the French are contemplating “the worsening situation and the appeals to us from Dublin...the deterioration in the situation in Northern Ireland, if it continues will be likely to weigh heavily on the good functioning of the Community and, consequently, will affect ourselves, even if indirectly. Moreover, we cannot easily show ourselves to be disinterested in a matter which brings into conflict two friendly neighbouring countries” (Ramsay, 2009, pp. 102–105). Ramsay was alluding to the imposition of direct rule by the Heath government in March 1972 on the back of a security disaster known as Bloody Sunday when British paratroopers killed thirteen unarmed civil rights’ marchers. The Northern Ireland government had vigorously opposed direct rule.

Indeed “Europe” was one of the fissures in the internal politics of Northern Ireland from the moment that the UK sought membership. Generally, nationalists placed greater emphasis on the political significance of Community integration and believed that EEC membership could internationalise the Irish question. During negotiations they were to attack the Northern Ireland government’s supine role when it came to crucial decisions taken by the UK government. They noted, for example, that during the negotiations of 1961-63 the chief British negotiator, Edward Heath, refused to countenance a permanent Northern Ireland observer in his delegation. On the other hand unionists distinguished between the economic and political effects. They took some comfort from the fact that Ireland had no choice but to apply once the UK had applied; and that rather than lead to a

united Ireland, membership would mean that the Republic was merging once again with the rest of the archipelago (Aughey and Hainsworth, 1982, pp. 94–114).

More specifically there were four issues in the terms of entry that agitated the local politicians: they were (a) about Northern Ireland's peripherality—the “two seas” problem; (b) concerns about the future of agriculture; (c) concerns about the cost of living and especially the estimated rise in food costs; and (d) the Safeguarding of Employment Act (1947). The first three were non-contentious. The last said much about the sectarian nature of Northern Irish society and the “threat” from Europe. The Act had been passed ostensibly to give preference to local people in an area of high unemployment as well as “to keep out workers from the Irish Republic”. It acted as a sort of economic and political *cordon sanitaire* “because unionists worried about being “swamped by southern workers. In 1962 one unionist backbencher asked rhetorically “can anyone doubt that if our Safeguarding of Employment Act is granted a few more years to live it will only be a few years and that ultimately our British Ulster will crumble under peaceful penetration from the south” (p. 102).

In many ways this was the nub of unionist objections to the European adventure—it would expose the permeability of the Irish border. This sense of foreboding would have been enhanced by the actuality of membership itself because it illustrated a new asymmetry in Anglo-Irish relations whereby Ireland entered the Community with precisely the same status as the UK—in place of the old subordination the luxury of being a co-ordinate. But it was not a luxury which Northern Ireland was to enjoy. EEC accession coincided with the imposition of direct rule. Both indicated the new impotence of unionism.

The UK's 1975 referendum demonstrated that scepticism was alive and well in Northern Ireland. Only one other region of the UK polled a higher negative attitude towards the Community—though it has to be said that a small majority in Northern Ireland endorsed membership. The UK “Yes” vote was 67.2 percent. Only Shetland and the Western Isles voted “No” although Northern Ireland’s “yes” vote of 52.1 percent was the smallest pro-European vote among the national segments of the UK. That was an underlying trend. Its more strident voice was to be found in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) whose leader (and Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church), Rev. Ian Paisley, fought the first direct elections to the European Parliament as a “free and fearless Protestant and loyalist voice.” He topped the poll with an overwhelming vote which he attributed to a “twentieth century miracle” engineered by the mysterious providence of God. In a series of sermons, “The Common Marker Prophetically Considered,” his basic theme was that the EEC was part of the “growth of the Antichrist and is in the political sphere what the Roman Church is in the religious. Its main purpose is to assist Romanism in its campaign for world domination.” Hence his opposition to continuing membership is part of the Free Presbyterian eschatology (Bruce, 1986, pp. 226–9). In addition the DUP was fundamentally opposed to British membership because it entailed, they believed, loss of sovereignty and it challenged the distinctive Christian moral standards of Northern Ireland.

While this view may have modified somewhat in more recent times it remains the fact that the DUP topped the polls for the European Parliament at every election until 2009—when it was badly split. The position of what was then the largest party in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), was slightly more complicated. It

made a tactical error in 1979 in running two candidates. Only one was elected and he occupied the third (and last) seat. As a result there is a sense that the UUP has played second fiddle to the DUP in Europe. Their views were closer to the British prime minister's (Margaret Thatcher) Euroscepticism. In his foreword to the 1989 European election the party leader, James Molyneaux, identified with the "clear line [she drew] between cooperation and the surrender of sovereignty"; and he treated with contempt "Mr. Heath's lofty dismissal of nation states and their replacement by a supranational Euro State": his ambitions went no further than "improving economic cooperation and expanding commerce within a greater Europe and a wider world."

Both unionist parties shared the sceptical camp with their arch rivals, Sinn Fein (SF), the political wing of the IRA. In 1979 it urged its supporters to boycott the election; in 1984 its candidate said that he would use the European Parliament to attack the British presence in Northern Ireland and to highlight instances of British injustice and repression; and in 1989 SF advised negotiated withdrawal from membership because it had been "a disaster for Ireland". It was not until 2004 that SF won a seat—incidentally it won one in Dublin as well to add to its lustre as being an all-Ireland party and hence transcending partition.

SF's victory in 2004 was at the expense of the SDLP, a party that had come second to the DUP in every election since 1979. Unionists were aware that when directly elected contests for the European Parliament were instigated the Irish government had lobbied successfully to ensure that Northern Ireland returned three MEPs and that elections were held under the STV system of proportional representation. The third seat was to ensure that the minority community was represented at the European Parliament.

Rethinking Reconciliation

The SDLP's only candidate from 1979-2004 was John Hume, a committed European. At the 1994 European election he took 28.9 percent of the vote the highest the party had ever achieved; and in 1999 (on a higher turnout) he delivered the party's highest tally.

Hume was noted for what he called his single transferable speech, a variation on the theme of unity in diversity or *e pluribus unum*, both of which he extracted from US and European constitutional evolution. It became known as "Humespeak" and was synonymous with "Eurospeak" "and has been conducted in terms of "post-nationalism," "consent," "community," "interdependency," and an "agreed Ireland" with increased frequency throughout the 1980s and 1990s" (McCall, 1999, p. 107). At the heart of Hume's (1996) argument was that the Community was a highly successful model of conflict resolution and that its institutions could be replicated to assist in the British- Irish peace process:

Europe itself has suffered centuries of bloody conflict. In this century alone, the peoples of Europe have been locked in the savagery of two world wars with a bitterness and slaughter that go far beyond anything that we have experienced on this island. Yet, fifty years after World War II, as a result of an agreed process, that have been able to create one parliament to represent them, one community—and the Germans are still Germans, the French are still French. They have a unity in diversity (pp. 58–9).

The British-Irish quarrel was European in origin and Europe could help to find a solution. Further, Ireland had a contribution to make because as the only state in the EU

“to have been colonised rather than to have colonised, we should be able to promote an intelligent empathy with the under-developed countries whose people can benefit most effectively from European Union policies” (p. 117). He was attracted by an entity that had evolved from an agreement on coal and steel towards a Europe of the Regions, and one that had relevance to the Northern Ireland conflict. One was the growing integration of the European Union “based on the realisation that the democratic nation state is no longer a sufficient political entity to allow people to have adequate control over the economic and technological forces which affect people’s opportunities and circumstances.” The second was its expansion into Central and Eastern Europe “which has opened the prospect of the Common European Home” (p. 111).

He believed that Europe had contributed already to finding a solution to the Northern Ireland problem. The Anglo-Irish Agreement signed on 15 November 1985 brought much closer political and security cooperation between the two states and was registered at the United Nations as an international treaty. One of the most important aspects of the Agreement was the structures that had been agreed and these “reflected those of the European Union. That was no accident”:

The intergovernmental conference established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement was charged to address and resolve important problems in Northern Ireland and could work to promote co-operation and co-ordination of policies in both parts of Ireland for the benefit of the entire island. Comprised of ministers from both governments it was the equivalent of the European Council of Ministers. Its secretariat was analogous to the European Commission. The agreement also

provided for an inter-parliamentary tier comprising elected representatives of political parties in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Through this feature, broader considerations and criticisms than those of the two governments could enhance the operation and development of the process offered by the Anglo-Irish framework. This parliamentary tier had a role similar to that of the European parliament (p. 47).

While the structures may have replicated European institutions there is no evidence that Europe had officially endorsed such a policy. This became evident in the early 1990s when the British government was attempting to kick start serious negotiations among Northern Ireland's political parties. The SDLP proposed a six-member Commission which would appoint a cabinet to run the various Northern Ireland departments. Three of the Commissioners were to be elected by a single transferable vote for a three-seat Northern Ireland constituency—shades of the system for direct elections to the European Parliament. The other three Commissioners were to be elected by the British government, the Irish government and the European Community. But Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, was not prepared to consider it: "... I don't feel the European Commission has a duty to interfere in the internal problem of a country, of a province" (Murray, 1998, p. 191). We shall return to these competing perspectives.

European Input into the Peace Process

It is difficult to put precise dates on the life cycle of a peace process because much of what it entails is open to differing interpretations. One commentator has

suggested that the seeds were sown when Pope John Paul II visited Ireland in 1979. In a homily he delivered on 29 September before 250,000 people he pleaded “[O]n my knees I beg you to turn away from the paths of violence and return to the ways of peace” (Coogan, 1995, p. 194). Some time later a dialogue between a senior priest and Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, was entered into. There is evidence in Adams’s *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (1986) that republicanism was contemplating moving away from armed struggle towards a political process; and in 1988 Sinn Fein and the SDLP entered into prolonged discussions on the *means* and the *ends* towards Irish unity. These talks did not succeed but the fact that Sinn Fein was prepared to engage in such activity suggested that it was moving beyond the status of sect (that entailed reinforcing ones moral certitude by talking only among the saved) towards a more inclusive consideration of wider political realities. This was to be followed by further discussions, some of them covert, with the British and Irish governments (discretely), and then at a personal level between John Hume and Gerry Adams. By 1994 enough trust had been garnered to enable the IRA to declare a cessation of violence on 30 August followed by loyalist paramilitaries on 13 October. But trust was not embedded and the IRA returned to violence in 1996. It was only a massive general election victory by Tony Blair’s Labour Party in 1997 that conditions were considered to be ripe enough for intense political negotiations. This culminated in the Agreement of April 1998 that led to Irish republicans in government with unionists for the first time in Northern Ireland’s history. Over a decade later there was not yet unanimity that a peace *settlement* had been delivered.

It is useful at this stage to consider the concept of the “ripe moment,” first devised by William Zartman (1989). One analyst suggests that it is “composed of a structural

element, a party element and a potential alternative outcome—that is, a mutually hurting stalemate, the presence of valid spokespersons, and a formula for a way out” (Schulze, 1997, p. 93). But she refines this by suggesting that “there probably is no such thing as one ‘ripe moment’ but that there are a number of ‘moments’ which makes resolution more likely than others...it is more useful to consider the ‘ripe moment’ as a process rather than a specific point in time—such as the ceasefires of 1994.” We want to examine some of these “moments” within a European context. In that respect it is worth while recalling some words from a speech given by European Commission President, Romano Prodi, in Paris in May 2001; “the genius of the founding fathers lay in translating extremely high political ambitions...into a series of more specific, almost technical decisions. This indirect approach made further action possible. Rapprochement took place gradually. From confrontation we moved to willingness to cooperate in the economic sphere and then on to integration.”

To examine the role of joint membership of the EU on managing the conflict we need to pay some attention to political conditions on the ground. The imposition of direct rule in 1972 led to the short-lived experiment of power-sharing from January to May 1974. The British government was wary of any further bold constitutional innovations for the rest of the decade and the result was political stasis and continuing insecurity. A change of direction began in 1980 when a series of British-Irish summits (encouraged by U.S. diplomacy) were undertaken culminating in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. This marked the end of a decade of instability in British-Irish relations, the effects of which were felt even at the European level (as when Ireland refused to endorse EU trade sanctions during the Falklands/Malvinas war (Arthur, 1983,

p. 172). Yet meetings of the European Council were used to build positive and cooperative intergovernmental relationships: “The momentous Milan European Council in 1985 opened the way not only for the Single European Act (SEA) but also the Anglo-Irish Agreement” (Laffan and O’Mahony, 2008 p. 201).

The success of the Milan meeting demonstrated the new realism in Irish foreign policy that “involved elevating the economic dimension...and demoting the principles of nationalism, self-identity, the right to self-determination, anti-imperialism and religious liberty” (O’Corcora and Hill, 1982, p. 260). Common membership had removed much of the claustrophobic bilateralism of the ancient quarrel. One Irish official on the staff of the European Commission commented that the “effects of common United Kingdom and Irish membership of the Community and particularly their attitudes to the emerging Community are so great that Anglo-Irish relations can hardly usefully be discussed except in that context...it substitutes an agreeably wider embrace for what has been an excessive intimacy” (Gallagher, 1985, p. 35). In short, Europe created a positive psychological space shorn of negative historical baggage. It enabled the Northern Ireland problem to be internationalised.

The fruits were evident in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. It has been referred to as “a unique experiment [which] may itself serve as a future precedent for the protection of cross-border minorities and neighbouring States’ cooperation including the field of security”. He quotes an Irish academic lawyer’s opinion that “it will be seen by international lawyers as an important new legal model for consideration, adaptation and possible application in other similar international situations of disputed sovereignty over territory” (Symmons, 1990, pp. 221–2). The Agreement was a short document of only

thirteen articles and was boosted by a strong institutional framework (shades of Hume's assertion earlier). Article 2 (a) established a British- Irish Intergovernmental Conference which would be concerned with Northern Ireland and with relations between "the two parts of the island of Ireland" and would deal "on a regular basis with: (i) political matters; (ii) security and related matters; (iii) legal matters including the administration of justice; (iv) the promotion of cross-border co- operation". Article 10 (a) realised the potential of promoting economic and social development to regenerate a beleaguered economy by "considering the possibility of securing international support for this work". The governments of US, Canada and New Zealand contributed to an International Fund for Ireland (IFI)—Europe was to follow later. The sums were relatively small but, as an earnest of international good-will, the symbolism was significant. The special problems of the Northern Ireland conflict were recognised in the decision to spend approximately three-quarters of the resources there, with the remainder going to the six border counties of the Republic. In the fourteen years following its foundation the IFI was associated with investing £1.1 billion. The British and Irish parliaments ratified the Agreement in separate votes and it was registered under Article 102 of the UN Charter. In many respects it was a forerunner of the 1998 Belfast Agreement.

An impediment to the burgeoning British-Irish relationship could have been a report (Haagerup) from the previous year but that needs to be set in context. An EP Resolution of May 1981 had established the parameters of EU influence on the conflict when it recognized that the Community had "no competence to make proposals for changes in the Constitution of Northern Ireland". That was of fundamental importance. Haagerup was concerned with modest ambitions—essentially to see how the EU could

assist in addition to the economic support already rendered within its regional policy and social fund. Its *sine qua non* was adumbrated on the importance of increasing cooperation between the British and Irish governments. So it was concerned with recommending power-sharing within Northern Ireland and in creating an integrated economic plan for the region. In that respect it complemented the 1985 Agreement. Accordingly the only unique and independent contribution the EU can make is to “provide the inspiration for the people of Northern Ireland to oppose and reject violence” (Hayward, 2006, p. 272).

This was an important exhortatory message to send because with the passing of the Agreement in 1985 and the British government’s determination to withstand unionist rejection of the Agreement the conflict was entering into a new phase where the political process was beginning to subordinate the armed struggle. The position of the Community was unequivocal: it was not in the business of talking to the “extremes”: “[I]n contrast to the Council of Europe, whose explicit focus on human rights led it to act in relation to controversial issues in the Troubles such as the use of internment, the EU was unwilling or unable to engage with those on the margins of the political sphere until the late 1990s” (p. 279). The change is implicit in the 1998 Agreement when the “extremes” (SF and the DUP) become part of a new Northern Ireland Executive; and after 2007 when those two parties control the Office of First Minister/ Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).

If we can assume that the life cycle of a conflict entails analysis, negotiation and implementation and that the Northern Ireland conflict enjoys a new political dispensation it is helpful to analyse the continuing role of the EU’s indirect incremental approach “under four headings: the EU as a political arena, EU policies and reports on Northern Ireland, the EU as a model of negotiated governance and the EU in Northern Ireland”

(Laffan and O'Mahony, p. 202). It may not be surprising that the three political parties who consistently returned members to the EP (DUP, SDLP and UUP) retained their initial positions toward the Community in the years after 1979. John Hume did most to appropriate the idealism of the European founding fathers through his membership of the EP's Socialist Grouping whereas the unionist parties displayed differing levels of scepticism. But that could not disguise the fact that the "EU was not just an external party to Northern Ireland but an additional arena of politics above the UK and Irish states; Northern Ireland was part of this evolving and increasingly complex layer of politics and economics" (p. 203). So, one of the more heartening aspects of membership of the EP was the degree of collaboration among the three MEPs on policy issues relevant to Northern Ireland such as agriculture and programmes of social and economic improvement in Belfast and Londonderry. One of their more notable collaborations centred on the creation of the Peace and Reconciliation fund, an issue to which we shall return. One of the less publicised ventures was an exercise in Track Two Diplomacy that led to the establishment of a Northern Ireland Centre in Europe (NICE) in 1991 following two discreet meetings (under the auspices of academics) in the US and France in January and August 1990 with the four constitutional parties in the run up to the establishment of the SEA. NICE was a proactive exercise, an example of civil society at work and the product of positive engagement by politicians who were reputed to be ruled solely by negative instincts (Arthur in Popiolkowski and Cull, 2009, pp. 24–9).

Policies, reports and debates fall loosely into three categories—the controversial, politically sensitive cross-border issues, and the functional—none of which are totally self-contained. We have discussed the impact of the Haagerup Report that caused some

controversy among unionists. Earlier debates and decisions indicated that the Parliament was paying closer attention to aspects of the conflict. One was a debate on the hunger strikes in 1981, and the second was a condemnation of the use of plastic bullets in 1982. The cross-border dimension was in place as early as 1975 with the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and an EU regional policy keen to alleviate obstacles to the development of border areas. Hence a 1983 Economic and Social Committee (ESC) report on Irish Border Areas recommended a strengthening of cross-border initiatives. In addition the Commission ranked Northern Ireland and the Republic as priority areas for structural fund monies, and Northern Ireland was recognized as a region deserving of special treatment (Objective One status). By the 1990s a Community Initiative called INTERREG was designed specifically to promote cross-border cooperation and integration across the Community. We shall discuss its implications later.

In addition to the rhetoric of integration Laffan and O'Mahony (p. 211) suggest that participation in the EU offered alternative models of politics and political order. Since these go to the heart of much of what is discussed in this article it deserves to be quoted at length:

First, the iterative and intensive EU Treaty negotiations, with no final settlement in prospect, underlined the adequacy of partial agreement. Second, the investment in the EU in building institutions drew attention to the importance of institutional innovation in promoting collective action and in socializing political actors into new procedures and norms of policy-making. Third, the emphasis in the Union of

problem-solving pragmatic politics was a useful antidote to the zero-sum bargaining of politics in Northern Ireland. Fourth, the sharing of sovereignty in the EU highlighted the divisibility of sovereignty in contemporary Europe. The language and style of politics in the EU—partnership, problem-solving, innovation, unending negotiations—offered a way of doing things which characterises the implementation of the [1998] Agreement as it becomes a living settlement. The institutions of the Good Friday Agreement...echo a number of the institutional and procedural features of the EU.

This is as pithy a statement on the changing *mores*, political culture, political institutions that have overtaken Northern Ireland as one is likely to find. It has released opportunities for the identification of areas. The Peace and Reconciliation Fund (1995–99) “enabled people to see the potential for cooperation when the dynamic was changed. It was an important validation and endorsement of the ceasefires and created political space for new developments. It forced politicians and wider civil society to take on the responsibility of resource allocation” (p. 212).

The 1998 Agreement was about inclusivity, about process, about setting the conflict in its wider temporal and spatial context to fashion a solution. The implementation period has not been without its problems but the actors have learnt from their past mistakes and their new understandings. They have resorted to the use of technical committees to deal with highly contentious issues such as a root and branch reform of policing. They have engaged in constant negotiation and renegotiation. They have made use of investment opportunities such as the IFI and have built on those

through the creation of the EU Peace programmes in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties—the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace I) and the Programme for Peace and Peace and Reconciliation (Peace II)—that were designed to complement the political efforts at peacebuilding but also were a specifically designed conflict transformation tool providing all levels of society, but particularly those at the grassroots ‘with an unprecedented opportunity for meaningful involvement in the transformation of the Northern Ireland conflict. Peace I and II ran from 1995 until 2006 and delivered 1062 Euromillions through the use of a social inclusion agenda and decentralised local delivery mechanisms (Buchanan, 2008, pp. 387–409). Peace III is designed to run until 2013. That demonstrates above all the tenacity and commitment of the European project and fulfils Romano Prodi’s assertion for the founding fathers’ genius for the indirect approach.

Conclusion

In 1973 a Brussels think tank *Pro Mundi Vita* perceived the Northern Ireland conflict as a bitter communal struggle based on religion and national identity: “One has to go back to the seventeenth century to find [a war] in which both sides find their focus of cohesion and of antagonism in a version of the Christian faith.” The language is bewildered and forlorn. This was a conflict that did not belong to the modernising thrust of the new Europe recently escaped from the horrors of the two great European wars. In the intervening years other conflicts on the European mainland surfaced, testimony to the entrapped and frozen violence of deeply entrenched ethnic divisions.

The intractability of the Northern Ireland conflict seemed to fit that pattern. But through the pursuit of a policy of “peace in parts” and recognising the changing nature of statehood in Europe policies and attitudes were revisioned and reformed; the political lexicon was adjusted; the political culture restructured; and there was a fundamental shift from zero-sum to win/win. This article has attempted to identify some of the factors that induced a new realism and pragmatism. It is aware that some of the more significant dynamics have been ignored—not least the role of American diplomacy and the lessons learned from other conflicts— but it is impossible to disagree with the conclusion of Laffan and O’Mahony (p. 217):

Without the embeddedness of both states in the wider system of European integration and without the model of politics offered by the EU, it is unlikely that both states and other political actors could have found the political capacity and institutional models to craft the Good Friday Agreement. The EU made an essential contribution to the changing relations between Britain and Ireland and to conflict management in Northern Ireland.

There are those that maintain that Europe is “turning away from power, or to put it a little differently, it is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity, the realization of Emmanuel Kant’s “perpetual peace” (Kagan, 2003). This is meant to be a critique. In fact it can be read as a perfectly reasonable

appreciation of the positive role that Europe can play—and has played in relation to the Northern Ireland conflict.

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