

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Secretariat paper F/003 - Parity of Esteem.

The Alliance Party response.

The concept of parity of esteem has been used increasingly in recent years. It is in many ways a helpful way of looking at our problems, but it is also a somewhat vague concept, which may be used in different and confusing ways. There may be agreement that there should be parity of esteem, but there remains scope for debate as to what proper parity of esteem consists of, and even as to who, or what, there should be parity between.

We would note the following points:

Parity of esteem is particularly relevant to cultural and symbolic issues. Political questions are too complex to readily admit to such terminologies.

Parity of esteem pertains in the first place to the right of individuals to freely enjoy, adopt or espouse such aspects of their cultural, religious, or political sense of identity as may be important to them. In the second place it pertains to the need to ensure proper recognition and fair treatment for the main traditions in Northern Ireland and throughout the island.

We prefer the use of the term tradition to the term identity. Unionism and nationalism are continually evolving, contain many sub divisions, and mean different things to different people. They are traditions, not identities.

There is of course a third main tradition, North and South. That is the tradition of those do not wish to be categorised as unionist or nationalist, and whose values and political philosophies are based on other issues than the border. That liberal, radical and dissenting tradition should not be ignored.

*Terms of reference:*

Subject to the above the suggested terms of reference are satisfactory so far as they go. They should however be extended to include a more comprehensive study of the steps necessary to make the Republic a properly pluralist and inclusive society. The items listed under the terms of reference should therefore be related to the Republic as well as to Northern Ireland.

30/11/94