

FORUM FOR PEACE & RECONCILIATION

CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

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A. THE PEACE INITIATIVE, INTERREG II & OTHER FUNDS

1. BACKGROUND ISSUES

1.1 AIMS OF INTERREG II

INTERREG II is intended to "-- assist border areas to overcome development problems and to encourage cross border cooperation." Several types of action are proposed, including "the establishment or development of public, private or voluntary bodies aiming to facilitate cross border contact in the economic and social spheres, and measures to promote cooperation -- particularly the sharing of resources and facilities on a cross border basis" (EU Guidelines to the Community Initiatives).

The Guidelines further state: " The participation of regional and local authorities and other partners, including those representing SMEs, in devising and implementing such measures is clearly very important for their success.....[and] should involve a high degree of cross-border co-operation".

1.2 OVERLAP ACROSS DIFFERENT INITIATIVES

Two EU Initiatives, INTERREG and the Peace Initiative, appear to have overlapping objectives. Under the previous round of Community Initiatives, in 1991/93, there was a degree of overlap and confusion in the area of community development across three sources of funds: INTERREG I, LEADER I and the International Fund for Ireland. At that time it was difficult for those living in remote areas to obtain a full understanding of INTERREG I, because all aspects were handled from Belfast and Dublin.

1.3 UNDUE COMPLICATIONS IN CROSS BORDER PROJECTS

Discussions are currently advanced on the possible creation in a remote part of the border region of a "Core Group" consisting of local community associations, the two neighbouring Councils, and the state agencies of both administrations that have interests in the area. It is hoped that this Core Group can work toward the preparation of an economic development plan for the entire area, encompassing both sides of the border.

People of widely-varying backgrounds on either side of the border in this area are enthusiastic about the project because of the perceived economic benefits to their respective communities.

The two Governments have delegated authority for the individual sub-programmes of INTERREG II to individual Departments, rather than to one body that could handle all aspects of the Initiative. The Core Group mentioned above will therefore have to deal with perhaps five government departments in Belfast and another five in Dublin, and also the International Fund, as well as state agencies such as Fas, Forbairt, the County Enterprise Boards, LEDU, IDB, T & EA, etc. That is a formidable complication, not faced under INTERREG I because there were few cross border projects.

Thus INTERREG II, the very Initiative that is intended to assist cross border cooperation, may be itself a major obstacle to such cooperation because of the proliferation of bodies that have to be consulted in order to put a wide-ranging project together.

1.4 EMPOWERING PEOPLE

It has often been stated that peace is about people, not territory: the Peace Process will stand or fall on the determination of the people who live in the worst-affected areas to persevere with it. Many of those people feel alienated from society, from decision-making processes. A stated aim of the new EU Peace Initiative is to address their sense of marginalisation.

The governments must trust people to create the conditions for peace. Merely handing over funds is insufficient: it is necessary to devolve some power over spending-decisions to local councils, community groups and representative organisations. They must feel they own the funds and are responsible for using them in the best manner. In short: subsidiarity.

2. THEREFORE?

The above background calls for two actions by Government:

2.1 Eliminate the overlap amongst the various funds and between INTERREG II and the Peace Initiative in particular.

2.3 Create a joint structure, between the two Governments, to devolve a degree of decision-making on INTERREG II and the Peace Initiative to Councils and local communities, in a manner that will help to enhance the quality of spending decisions, to avoid further alienation of deprived urban and border region communities, and to ensure that the promotion, advice, assistance and management structures are focussed entirely and solely on the convenience of the users of the funds (the customers).

B. ACTING AS PERSUADERS

1. BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS

1.1 - Much of the foregoing stresses the primacy of people in the Peace Process.

1.2 - It is in the interests of all peoples on this island that, irrespective of political objectives, there should be a greater mutual understanding of differing viewpoints, mindsets and beliefs.

1.3 - Those who wish to see the two parts of Ireland united have a special responsibility to work at understanding and winning the hearts and minds of northerners, of all persuasions.

2. THEREFORE?

It is suggested that members of the Forum should consider two suggestions, i.e.:-

2.1 Members of the Forum, other political leaders, and media editors, should:

work at visiting the north regularly, spending time in particular with those who are outside the political process, in rural and urban centres, both east and west of the Bann.

2.2 Government as a whole, and each Department, should 'think N.Ireland' i.e.:

assess the impact on relations with N.Ireland of daily business and of each new policy; just as policy is "gender-proofed", for example, it should be "North-proofed".

Harford Robb.
Joint Cross-border Chair in Business Enterprise.
9 February, 1995.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

THE ROLE OF THE JOINT CROSS-BORDER CHAIR

The Joint Chair in Cross Border Business Enterprise at University of Ulster & University College Dublin was established in 1993 with the objective of assisting SMEs to cope more effectively with the Single Market, and to enable the universities to play a full role in the development of an increasingly single-island economy.

The Chair was funded by INTERREG I via the N.Ireland Department of Economic Development and the Irish Department of Finance.

When appointed for one year (since extended) in late 1993 Harford Robb was asked to develop proposals and secure INTERREG II financing for a further four-year appointment of a suitable candidate. Subsequent delays in the launch of INTERREG II leave the future of the Chair not yet certain.

Harford Robb, who for much of his career was a partner in Arthur Andersen & Co, left his native Belfast in 1956 and has since lived and worked in several countries, including Ireland from 1968 - 1980. He was a founding member of Co-operation North. He now spends equal amounts of time on either side of the border and lives in both Belfast and Dublin.

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