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The role of 'Europe' in Northern Ireland
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Author biography

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Abstract

'Europe' plays an important role in the minority-majority relationship in Northern Ireland as a potent political symbol. First, the European human rights regime has acquired a high symbolic value in the politics of Northern Ireland suggests that 'Europe' has created ample room for local actors to promote human rights in general in Northern Ireland. Secondly, the unexpected mobilisation of the Protestant/unionist community in response to PEACE funding is another opportunity Europe has brought about for local actors to act upon to address two issues: weak community infrastructure of the Protestant/unionist community and the rehabilitation of Loyalist ex-prisoners. As such 'Europe' has brought about new opportunities for local actors to exploit in order to achieve further development of Northern Ireland and reconciliation of the two main communities. These measures will also contribute to make 'Europe' more relevant to the citizens of Northern Ireland.'

1. Introduction

The current paper is based on the case study report the author produced for the EUROREG project (Ichijo 2006). EUROREG is a collaborative research project funded by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme and it looks into the effects of European economic integration on minority-majority relationship in nine cases across Europe.¹ The case study the author was responsible for was Northern Ireland.

The current paper argues that the interrelations between the minority-majority relationship in Northern Ireland and European integration should be viewed from two angles: EU integration, those developments that are directly related to the creation and the development of today's European Union, and the emergence of a European human rights framework. In fact, the paper notes that the latter has had more concrete impact on the conditions under which the minority (Catholics/nationalists) has lived since it appears to have had some influence on the introduction of fair employment legislation and anti-discrimination measures. EU integration has provided an environment in which the minority-majority relationship in Northern Ireland has been internationalised and Europeanised, which has helped to pave the way to the initiation of the current peace process. However its impact on regional development and the general socio-economic conditions of the minorities is much less clear. In order to illustrate these points, a variety of data will be discussed here.

The data have been collected through two channels: the fieldwork conducted in Northern Ireland from August to December 2005 in Northern Ireland and the desk research employing the Internet as the main tool. The main purposes of the fieldwork are to collect an as wide as possible variety of perceptions of actors who are involved in the minority-majority relationship issues about regional development, Europe, and their identity structure, and to collect socio-economic data which are otherwise unavailable.

The data thus collected is supplemented by various forms of data collected through the Internet. Because of the series of legislation enacted in response to the 'Troubles' and other issues, many statutory bodies in Northern Ireland are collecting statistical data regarding various aspects of discrimination which is of particular use for this report. Also since the conflict in Northern Ireland is one of the best-studied cases in the world, a wealth of information is available on the internet, in particular, CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet – <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk>) and ARK (Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive - <http://www.ark.ac.uk/>) have been very helpful.

¹ Further details of the EUROREG project as well as research reports are found at http://www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/content/home/research/research_projects/euroreg/en/.

2. European integration and the domestic-regional context of change

The minority-majority relationship in Northern Ireland at the end of WWII can be summarised as the dominant Protestant/unionist community enjoying a better standard of living while the minority Catholic/nationalist community faring worse. However, as we shall see later in the next section, changes to this seemingly deeply-entrenched situation are happening, and some of the factors that have effected these changes are discussed here. These changes are largely legislation-led, and if we were to seek external factors influencing/impacting on these changes, the general democratising tendency of the post-war world and the series of rulings by the European Court of Justice are perhaps the major ones. The economic impact of Structural Funds is hotly disputed by economists and experts in regional development, while the community/voluntary sector tends to take a favourable view.

Changes in legislation²

In response to the rise of Civil Rights movement, a series of legislation was introduced aiming to end the alleged discrimination against the minorities (mainly religious ones) in Northern Ireland:

November 1969: The Commissioner for Complaints Act (Northern Ireland) became law. The act allowed for the establishment of a Commissioner to deal with complaints against local councils and public bodies.

November 1969: The Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) became law. The main provision of the act was to make the franchise in local government elections in Northern Ireland the same as that in Britain.

July 1970: The Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act became law.

February 1971: The Housing Executive (Northern Ireland) Act became law. The Act provided for the establishment for a central authority for public sector housing in Northern Ireland and to also oversee the provision of grants for improvement to the private sector.

These laws directly addressed the main grievances aired by the Civil Rights movement, i.e., a universal franchise for local government elections (addressed by the 1969 Electoral Law Act) and the end to the perceived discrimination in the allocation of public sector housing and appointments (addressed by the 1969 Commissioner for Complaints Act and The 1971 Housing Executive Act). In terms of grievances in the area of employment, different pieces of legislation were introduced under direct rule (came in effect in 1972). These laws appear

² This section owes much to the 'discrimination/ Chronology of important events' page of CAIN (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/chron.htm>)

to correspond to the wider democratisation process in the postwar world that was expressed, for example, in the series of independence movement in Africa and Asia, and there was an unmistakable echo of the Civil Rights movement in the US in both the movement in Northern Ireland and the government's response to their grievances. That the UK government had already ratified the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by then may also constitute the background to the government's fairly quick response to the disturbances. These responses were then followed by a piece of legislation which aimed to address the perceived inequality in employment.

December 1976: The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act came into effect. The Act was introduced to give effect to the anti-discrimination provisions contained in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. The Fair Employment Act established the Fair Employment agency (FEA) which had two main functions: (i) the elimination of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion, and (ii) the promotion of equality through 'affirmative action'. The 1976 act was then strengthened by a new law, Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act of 1989. The 1989 act introduced compulsory religion monitoring by employers and permitted some forms of affirmative action such as setting goals and targets for improving employment patterns. It also explicitly outlawed indirect discrimination. The latest extension of fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland came with the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order (FETO) of 1998 makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone on the ground of religious belief or political opinion. This includes a person's supposed religious belief or political opinion and the absence of any, or any particular, religious belief or political opinion. The 1998 Order was amended in December 2003 to meet the requirements of the EU Employment Framework Directive.

Within ten years of the first organised, public expression of grievances from the minority (nationalist/Catholic) community, a series of legislation was put in place to redress what was perceived to be wrong. This as well as related policies introduced to solve the issue of equality did not solve the fundamental issue, the constitutional question, and therefore the 'Troubles' continued. It should be noted, however, that some institutional framework that was designed to remedy the perceived and experienced inequality amongst the communities have been in place for more than thirty years, the effect of which should be emerging now.

*The emerging European regime of human rights and Northern Ireland*³

³ This section owes much to CAIN's 'a chronology of the conflict – 1968 to present' page (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk>).

Since the bulk of legislation came into being before the UK joined the then European Economic Community in 1975, a clear link between these laws and EU integration is difficult to establish. However the development in legislation might correspond to the emergence of a European-wide human rights framework in the form of the operation of the European Court of Human Rights. The European Court of Human Rights was established in 1959 following the establishment of the European Commission on Human Rights in 1955, both institutions deriving their power from the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (signed in 1950, came into force in 1953). The UK government ratified the Convention in 1951, the first country to do so. In 1966, the UK government permitted UK citizens a right to petition the Commission directly in connection with any alleged human rights abuse. Both the Commission and the Court have been involved with the developments in Northern Ireland. What is interesting in this regard is it has been pointed out that since the Court and Commission have frequently dealt with the treatment of terrorist and suspected terrorists, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) among others was quick to exploit their propaganda values (Hill-Smith 2001).

When the UK government introduced 'internment' (detention without trial which had some ancient legal foundation) in 1971 as an anti-terrorism measures, it was almost exclusively used against the Catholic/nationalist community. The Republic of Ireland expressed its concern over the allegations of brutality against the security forces. The Irish government brought a case of torture of internees held in Northern Ireland against the UK government to the European Commission on Human Rights in 1974. In March 1976, the Irish government referred the UK to the European Commission on Human Rights over the case of alleged ill-treatment of internees in 1971. In September the same year, the Commission decided that the UK had to answer a case of ill-treatment of internees in 1971 before the European Court of Human Rights. The Commission found that the interrogation techniques did involve a breach of the Convention on Human Rights because they not only involved inhuman and degrading treatment but also torture. The case was then passed to the Court who made a further ruling on 18 January 1978. The Court decided that the Commission was wrong to use the word 'torture' but did agree that the internees had been subjected to 'inhuman and degrading treatment'.

The hunger strike of 1980 by the Republican prisoners also saw some involvement of the European Commission on Human Rights. In 1980, the Commission rejected a case brought on behalf of Republican prisoners taking part in the 'blanket protest' (in which prisoners refused to wear prison uniforms on the basis that they were political prisoners, not criminals) at the Maze Prison which started in 1976. The Commission found that the conditions were self-inflicted but the Commission also criticised the British government for being inflexible. On 23 April 1981, Marcella Sands, the sister of Bobby Sands, made an

application to the European Commission on Human Rights claiming that the British government had broken three articles of the European Convention on Human Rights in their treatment of Republican prisoners. Two Commissioners tried to visit Bobby Sands on 25 April 1981 but were unable to do so because Sands requested the presence of representatives of Sinn Féin. On 4 May 1981 the European Commission on Human Rights announced that it had no power to proceed with the Sands' case.

There were more instances where the Commission and the Court came in contact with the Northern Irish situation. For instance, in 1984, the Commission decided that the use of plastic bullets by security forces in Northern Ireland was justified in riot situations, while in November 1988 the court decided that, by detaining suspects for more than four days, Britain was in breach of the European Convention of Human Rights. This was one of a number of decisions by European courts that were decided against Britain. The UK government announced in December 1988 that despite the Court's ruling on detention, the UK would retain a seven-day detention period. The issue was again brought to the Court and in March 1991, the Court agreed to hear another complaint against the British government. The case involved the United Kingdom's derogation from the European Convention of Human Rights on the matter of the seven-day detention of suspects under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The European Parliament, to which Northern Ireland has been sending three directly elected members since 1979, has also become involved with the Northern Irish situation. On 19 April 1982, Stephen McConomy, an 11 year old Catholic boy, died as a result of the injuries he received when he was hit on the head by a plastic bullet in Fahan Street, Derry. His death led to calls for the weapon to be banned. On 13 May 1982 the European Parliament called on member states not to use plastic bullets. In 1983, the Political Committee of the European Parliament took the decision to commission a report on Northern Ireland to see if the then European Economic Community (EEC) could help find a solution to the conflict. The British government opposed what it saw as external interference in its internal affairs. In December, the Committee published its report on Northern Ireland. The report prepared by Nils Haagerup called for power-sharing and the preparation of a plan by the then EEC to aid the economic development of Northern Ireland. The report was passed by the Parliament on 29 March 1984 124 votes to 3. The report calls for a power-sharing administration in Northern Ireland together with an integrated economic plan. In October 1984, the use of plastic bullet again became an issue and Parliament voted in favour of a motion calling on the British government to ban the use of plastic bullets by the security forces in Northern Ireland.

Some scholars consider the 'Europeanisation' of the 'Troubles' through the interventions of the European Court for Human Rights, the European Commissioner on Human Rights and the European Parliament has played an indirect yet significant role in

bringing the peace process forward. This is a point that has been supported by the interview respondents, but since ‘human rights lived at the margins of Northern Irish political life’ prior to the Good Friday Agreement (Kavanagh 2004: 957), what is expressed in the existing literature tends to be personal reflection. As for its influence on the socio-economic conditions of the minorities, obviously, it remains unclear

EU funding

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was set up at British insistence when the first wave of EC/EU enlargement took place. The British government largely sees Structural Funds, including funding from the ERDF, as a form of rebate for its relatively large contribution to the EU budget. This is evident in its practice of non-additionality principle whereby the EU funding is treated to substitute the governmental spending, not to be counted as extra money (Keating and Jones, 1995: 108-9). The issue of non-additionality remains obscure. Officially it has ceased to exist though in practice non-additionality is practiced in relation to the transitional funds in the current Northern Ireland Office budget. What is clear now is that PEACE funding is allocated on the purely additional basis.

Between 1989 and 1999, Northern Ireland had Objective 1 status and received a total of just over £1.7 billion in EU Structural Funding (European Commission in Northern Ireland, 2004 a)⁴. To put this figure in a perspective: during this period, Northern Ireland’s share of UK Structural Fund was 16.4% while Northern Ireland’s population was about 3 % (the latest census figure from 2001 stands at 2.9%) of the UK population. Northern Ireland’s share of the EU total was 1.2 % (Gudgin 2000: 46). It may also be of an interest for a comparative purpose that ‘Northern Ireland’s allocation of Structural Funds has been around 70 per cent of the EU per capita average for Objective One regions since 1989’ (Gudgin 200: 46-7).

During the 1989-1993 period, Northern Ireland was the only region to be given Objective 1 status in the UK and allocated some £750 million from the EU structural funds. During the 1994-1999 period, it was one of three regions in the UK to have Objective 1 status and allocated £981 million from the Structural Funds. Additionally, a number of specially focused initiatives were applied to Northern Ireland. A further £175 million was allocated through up to 13 initiatives, including £124 million under INTERREG II. Moreover, in response to the peace process, the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (PEACE) was agreed upon at the Essen European Council of October 1994, and it was implemented in July 1995 with a budget of 500 million euros, of which Northern Ireland received 400 million euros. The rest was allocated to the border counties of

⁴ Around £750 million during the 1989-1993 period, and £981 million during the 1994-1999 period (European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom, 1999)

Ireland. PEACE I supported over 13,000 projects in Northern Ireland during the 1995-1999 period.

During the 2000-2006 period, with the average GDP per head in Northern Ireland catching up with the EU average (now above 80 per cent of the EU average), Northern Ireland no longer qualifies for Objective 1 status. However, the European Commission has agreed to award a transitional Objective 1 status to Northern Ireland for the 2000-2006 period and some 890 million euros are allocated under 'Northern Ireland Transitional Objective 1 Programme – Building Sustainable Prosperity' and a total of 890.5 million euros is allocated for the programme (European Commission, 2004a). In addition, recognising the success of PEACE I in that 'it successfully promoted inclusivity and reconciliation' (European Economic and Social Committee 2004: 2), the European Council in March 1999 decided to extend the programme for a further five years, from 2000 to 2004. The total EU funding for PEACE II is 531 million euros, of which around 80 per cent (about 425 million euros) is allocated for Northern Ireland. PEACE II is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), a body set up in December 1999 by the UK and Irish governments. Northern Ireland also shares an INTERREG III A funding of 134 million euros from the EU with Ireland (European Commission, 2004b) and receives 10.623 million euros through the URBAN II programme. In the case of PEACE, following a consultation exercise regarding an extension of the PEACE II programme in 2004, the European Parliament and the European Council agreed to extend the PEACE II programme for two further years till 2006. PEACE II extension was launched by the SEUPB on 3 June 2005 with a total budget of 144 million euros.

Structural Funds in perspective

Partly because of the now officially ceased practice of non-additionality, and partly because of the very nature of the Structural Funds, their impact on the Northern Ireland economy is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure. It is estimated that most of the 1980s and 1990s period, Structural Funding was a 'significant but small' addition to the Northern Ireland economy (Gudgin, 2000: 49). During most of the 1980s and 1990s, the average expenditure of the Structural Funds in Northern Ireland was around £150 million (1996 prices), which amounted to £100 - £170 per capita per annum. The expenditure rose to £250 million in 1996 due to the start of PEACE I, but it still accounted only for 1.7 per cent of Northern Ireland's GDP. In relation to public expenditure, the contribution from the Structural Funds was around 2 per cent for most of 1980s and 1990s, and it rose to around 3 per cent towards the end of the 1990s (Gudgin, 2000: 49).

3. Changing opportunities and constraints for minorities

There is a wealth of data which suggest that the overall socio-economic situation of the Catholics has been improving.

Economic activities and employment

First, in terms of economic activity rate (which indicates the proportion of those who are working or actively seeking work in relation to the entire working age population), although Roman Catholics still remain less economically active than Protestants, the pattern of economic activity of both communities is affected in a similar way: increased feminisation.

Table 1: Economic activity rates 1971-1999 (working age)

Year	Males		Females		Both sexes	
	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)
1971*	92.3	89.6	47.3	43.1	70.3	66.6
1981*	89.3	85.2	55.9	50.1	73.2	68.1
1991*	84.7	80.5	61.8	53.8	73.6	67.3
1995	83.8	75.7	66.8	55.7	75.6	65.7
1999	81.0	76.7	68.1	59.1	74.9	67.8

P – Protestant; RC – Roman Catholic, * census figures, the rest is from the annual Labour Force Survey

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001)

As the table 1 shows, the economic activity rate (or labour force participation rate) of the Roman Catholics of working age has been consistently lower than the corresponding Protestant rate. Over the same period, the economic activity rates have fallen for both Protestant and Roman Catholics males and have risen for both Protestant and Roman Catholic females suggesting that both communities are affected by changes in the overall economic and industrial structures in a similar way, and the both communities are now facing the consequences of feminisation of workforce and the rise in male economic inactivity.

On the other hand, the composition of the economically active shows that Roman Catholics are more actively participating in labour market than in the past, which suggests that, if not all, some obstacles for Roman Catholics in participating in labour market have been removed. In other words, work is now more equitably distributed between two communities.

Table 2: Religious composition of the economically active, 1971-1999 (working age)

Year	Males		Females		Both sexes	
	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)
1971*	68.5	31.5	69.3	30.7	68.8	31.2
1981*	68.1	31.9	68.8	31.2	68.3	31.7

1991*	59.6	40.4	60.6	39.4	60.0	40.0
1995	58.1	41.9	58.5	41.5	58.2	41.8
1999	58.1	41.9	56.9	43.1	57.6	42.4

P – Protestant; RC – Roman Catholic, * census figures, the rest is from the annual Labour Force Survey

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001)

As the Table shows, the representation of Roman Catholics within the economically active population of working age has increased steadily from 31.2% in 1971 to 42.4 % in 1999.

Table 3 also shows that even in terms of unemployment, there has been some ‘improvements’ for the Roman Catholic population.

Table 3: Unemployment rates 1971-1999 (economically active 16+)

Year	Males		Females		Both sexes	
	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)	P (%)	RC (%)
1971*	6.6	17.2	3.5	6.9	5.5	13.8
1981*	12.4	30.2	9.6	17.1	11.4	25.5
1991*	12.7	28.4	8.0	14.5	10.7	22.8
1990	10.4	20.5	6.3	9.2	8.6	16.0
1995	10.1	20.0	5.5	10.4	8.1	15.9
1999	5.6	10.4	4.3	6.9	5.0	8.8

P – Protestant; RC – Roman Catholic, * census figures, the rest is from the annual Labour Force Survey

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001)

Roman Catholic unemployment rates have been consistently higher than those of Protestants, with this difference being most marked among males. Over the period 1990-1999, analysis of the Labour Force Survey estimates suggest that the Roman Catholic unemployment rate has fallen by 45.0% (from 16.% to 8.8 %) and the Protestant unemployment rate by 41.9 % (from 8.6% to 5.0%). Among males the percentage decrease was higher for Roman Catholics (49.3%) than for Protestants (46.2%). The converse was true among females with the Roman Catholic unemployment rate falling by 25.5% and the Protestant rate falling by 1.7%.

A detailed analysis of these figures is outside the remit of the current report. However, the overall picture these figures paint is that the Catholic/nationalist population is more involved with economic activity which indicates that the job market is more accessible to them than before and that their economic situation should be improving.

Moreover, it is not just the Catholics are doing the bottom jobs which the Protestants shun. They are increasing their representation in other occupation groups, too.

Table 4: Roman Catholic composition of occupations, 1991-1999 LFS

Standard occupation classification major group	1991 (%)	1993 (%)	1995 (%)	1997 (%)	1999 (%)

1	Managers and administrators	25.8	37.3	35.2	37.5	37.5
2	Professional occupations	39.9	40.8	40.3	46.2	45.2
3	Associate professional and technical support	42.6	41.0	44.1	43.3	43.3
4	Clerical and secretarial occupations	36.4	32.6	35.7	35.9	35.6
5	Craft and related occupations	40.4	42.3	44.5	41.6	45.2
6	Personal and protective service occupations	43.7	35.2	39.2	40.4	48.2
7	Sales occupations	35.6	35.9	36.5	36.9	36.0
8	Plant and machine operatives	33.9	38.9	39.2	40.7	38.2
9	Other occupations	42.8	36.3	39.9	38.4	40.3
Overall RC composition		38.2	37.7	39.1	39.6	41.0

Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001)

The overall representation of Roman Catholics among those stating an occupation has increased from 38.2% in 1991 to 41.0% in 1999. In 1999, Roman Catholic representation was lowest in clerical and secretarial occupation at 35.6% and highest in personal and protective service occupations at 48.2%. The largest increases in Roman Catholic representation were in SOC1 managers and administrators at 45.3% increase and in SOC2 professional occupations at 13.3% increase.

The monitored workforce 2004⁵

The Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) of 1989 required the Government to monitor the implementation of the Act on a continuous basis and the religious monitoring of the Northern Ireland workforce was introduced in 1990. Initially, all public sector bodies were monitored with private sector concerns employing 26 or more people. This was expanded in 1992 to include private sector concerns with 11 or more employees.

The overall Roman Catholic representation of monitored public sector concerns and private sector concerns with 26 or more employees have increased from 34.9% in 1990 to 39.6% in 1999, an increase of 4.7 percentage points. This was further increased to 42.3% in 2004.

When looking at the break-down between the public and private sectors, the Roman Catholic representation in the public sector increased from 36.0% in 1990 to 39.0% in 1999, and to 42.8% in 2004. In the private sector, the corresponding figure rose from 34.6% in 1990 to 39.9% in 1999, and to 42.0% in 2004. The overall picture is an increase of Catholic representation in workforce across Northern Ireland.

As a recent study (Osborne and Shuttleworth, 2004) has suggested that the employment profile of Catholics in Northern Ireland has substantially improved over the last decade, though there are still areas where they are underrepresented such as security.

⁵ This section owes to Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2001) and Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2006).

Catholics are over-represented in construction industry. The study largely attributes the equalisation between Catholics and Protestants to the increasing meritocratisation of Northern Ireland society, and considers the impact of fair employment legislation as well as the relatively peaceful environment since early 1990s essential in bringing about the changes.

Education

There are at least two sources of data to gauge where Protestant and Catholic communities are in the area of education. First, the Department of Employment and Learning has been collecting statistics regarding higher education in Northern Ireland. According to the latest data (2003), in 2001/02 27% of students at Northern Ireland higher education institutions did not provide details on their religious background. Of those who did, 55% declared themselves Catholic religion, 41% were Protestant religion and 4% were another belief. In 1997/98, 68% of students did not provide details of religious background so a realistic comparison is not possible (Department for Employment and Learning 2003: 9).

This figure at least shows that at present the Catholics are not systematically disadvantaged in gaining entry to higher education in Northern Ireland, but it is difficult to infer any more than this. A variety of observations and interpretations have been offered by the respondents during the fieldwork, which may suggest a further line of inquiry. Some argued that it is to do with a kind of ‘culture of learning’ which, according to them, is more often found in the nationalist/Catholic communities than the unionist/Protestant ones. According to this thesis, Catholics, who are no longer discriminated against on a formal basis, are now trying to climb up the social ladder by gaining education. Those who offer this type of explanation would point to the perceived increase in the number of Catholic doctors and lawyers, which is to some extent reflected in the table below. Others would attribute this to the tendency amongst the Protestant young people to leave Northern Ireland; they leave Northern Ireland to go to a university in mainland, and they would stay there. For them, it represents a kind of mainly Protestant brain drain rather than real advancement of Catholics, which would have serious consequences on the development of Northern Irish economy and industry.

The Labour Force Surveys provide data on the highest level of qualifications obtained by Protestants and Roman Catholics between 1990 and 1999.

Table 5: Highest level of qualification 1990-1999 LFS (economically active)

Year	Higher*		A-levels		Trade Apprenticeship		GCSEs		Other		No formal qualification	
	P(%)	RC(%)	P(%)	RC(%)	P(%)	RC(%)	P(%)	RC(%)	P(%)	RC(%)	P(%)	RC(%)
1990	13.7	13.2	16.0	13.8	11.8	11.6	16.5	14.9	10.1	8.2	27.9	35.0

1992	14.7	16.5	16.6	16.2	11.1	11.5	15.7	16.0	9.1	6.8	32.3	32.8
1994	16.8	20.2	13.6	11.1	16.3	15.7	14.6	13.0	9.1	6.9	29.0	32.4
1996	18.9	19.2	10.7	12.8	14.9	17.2	17.4	17.8	10.0	7.8	23.8	21.2
1998	23.1	25.6	12.5	13.9	13.2	13.7	18.0	17.7	11.0	6.7	20.8	21.5
1999	24.8	25.8	15.2	14.8	12.5	12.9	17.3	17.6	10.1	5.6	19.0	21.9

* All qualifications above A-level.

The proportions of Protestants and Roman Catholics who obtained each of the various qualifications as their highest level of qualification were similar throughout the period 1990-1999. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics have experienced a steady increase in the proportions of their communities obtaining the highest level of qualification (all qualification above A-level). If anything, in the attainment of higher education, Roman Catholics are, albeit by a very small margin, outperforming Protestants in terms of the proportion of those who are economically active obtaining a degree or higher. In this sense, the more ‘problematic’ issue would be that about one in five in the workforce in both communities is without any formal qualification rather than about discrepancies between the communities in terms of educational achievement. This in turn might suggest a kind of ‘normalisation’ is taking place in Northern Ireland; if the issue is no longer about sectarianism but the poverty trap which transcends the community divide, Northern Ireland is, it could be argued, becoming a normal place with normal concerns for economy, education, and social welfare.

At the same time, segregation at school seems to be continuing. It is widely claimed that as much as 95 per cent of the population have gone through religiously segregated school systems. The Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey (2002) has found that 92 per cent of the Catholic respondents and 85 per cent of the Protestant respondents attended segregated schools, and that the majority of the respondents prefer to mix with people of the same religion. For 2002-2003, it has been reported that 94 per cent of Protestant children attend Protestant schools, while 92 per cent of Catholic children attend a Catholic school (Hayes et al. 2006). Whether segregation at school has any relation to the socio-economic conditions of both communities is unclear, but the same study has found that those who had attend an informally or formally-integrated school were more likely to reject traditional identities (British for Protestants and Irish for Catholics) and allegiances (unionism for Protestants and nationalism for Catholics) than those who had attended a segregated one; those who attended integrated schools are more likely to call themselves as Northern Irish and not to declare any particular political allegiance (ibid.). The authors warn against reading off a causality (educational integration nurtures a less polarised form of identity) from this study and calls for long-term, panel surveys. What is interesting from this report’s point of view is that the growth of Northern Irish identity was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

Political participation and group mobilisation

Given the long history of the ‘Troubles’, the identities of both the unionist and nationalist communities are well-established with their own political representatives, church institutions, schools, press, community groups, etc.

For the majority, unionist communities, there are two main political parties which have representatives at the European, UK, Northern Ireland and local council levels: the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The UUP, which ran a one-party Northern Ireland government until 1972, used to stand for the ‘establishment’ in Northern Ireland. Since the rise of the DUP in the 1970s, it has been drawing support from the Protestant/unionist middleclass. The DUP draws its support from rural evangelicals and urban working-class voters and it opposes the Good Friday Agreement. The recent trend has been the rise of the DUP, seen as radical and non-compromising, at the expense of the UUP which is largely seen as moderate, which has been seen both at the last Northern Ireland Assembly (2003) and last general elections (2005).

For the nationalist communities, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Sinn Fein have representatives at the UK, Northern Ireland and local council levels though Sinn Fein MPs are refusing to take their seats at Westminster since they do not wish to take the oath of allegiance. Sinn Fein has one MEP. The SDLP is a nominally social democratic party but has a middle-class support base. It supports Irish unification but rejects the use of violence as a means to that end. Sinn Fein is a radical socialist revolutionary party, and its stated aim is to realise all-Ireland socialist republic, draws its support from urban Catholic working class and republican rural areas. Although it is officially denied by Sinn Fein, it is widely assumed that it is the political wing of the IRA. As if to mirror the ‘radicalising’ tendency in the unionist side, the SDLP is losing to Sinn Fein, a tendency clearly shown at the last Northern Ireland Assembly and general elections. Since the DUP, now the largest unionist party in Northern Ireland, categorically refuse to negotiate with, let alone work with Sinn Fein, the reinstatement of Northern Ireland Executive has been deadlocked. There are a lot of speculations, especially in the media, as to why politics in Northern Ireland has recently been ‘radicalised’ and my respondents often attribute this to the general feeling of frustration that devolution has been suspended. However, the support level for political parties is largely seen as remaining volatile by scholars and no major scholarly analysis has been published.

Table 6: Number of political representatives by party in Northern Ireland as of June 2005

	DUP	UUP	Alliance	Others	SDLP	Sinn Fein
MPs *	9	1	0	0	3	5
Councillors*	182	115	30	28	101	126
MLAs+	30	27	6	3	18	24

MEPs#	1	1	0	0	0	1
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* Elections took place in 2005

+ Election took place in 2003

Election took place in 2004

(Source: Northern Ireland Elections)

As the Table 6 shows, in terms of political representation, both communities appear to be in the level playing field. Those who are underrepresented are not nationalists/Catholics but ethnic minorities who do not have any separate political representation.

Devolution

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 laid out the plan of a devolved parliament (Northern Ireland Assembly) and government in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Executive); an Assembly of 108 seats to be elected by single transferable vote using proportional representation; finance, personnel, agriculture, education, health, social services, economic development and environment are devolved to the Assembly and Executive. Unlike the Scottish Parliament, the Assembly does not have a tax-varying power. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland retains responsibilities for Northern Ireland Office for the areas that are not devolved to the Assembly such as security, policing, tax, and pension. According to Bogdanor (1999: 2-3):

Devolution involves the transfer of powers from a superior to an inferior political authority. More precisely, devolution may be defined as consisting of three elements: *the transfer to a subordinate elected body, on a geographical basis, of functions at present exercised by ministers and Parliament.* These functions may be either legislative, the power to make laws, or executive, the power to make secondary laws- statutory instruments, orders, and the like – within a primary legal framework still determined at Westminster.

The Northern Ireland Assembly therefore carries out the aforementioned legislative functions while the Northern Ireland Executive the executive ones. The current form of devolution is clearly different from federation which requires co-ordination and sharing of the authority of the central government and provincial government. ‘Home Rule All Round’, a policy that was pursued in the period up to the First World War which was not realised could be called ‘federal devolution’ because it was supposed to create subordinate units across the British territory of that time (Bogdanor 1999:3).

The members of the Executive are not to be appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as happened in the 1972-3 power-sharing period, but are to be selected

through a cross-community voting mechanism. This is a mechanism designed to ensure a cross-community agreement on important issues. All the members of the Assembly need to register their orientation (nationalist, unionist, or other). In deciding on important issues, instead of majority voting, cross-community consensus will be required. This is worked out following a rather complicated formula:

Parallel consent, i.e. a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionists and nationalists present and voting; or, alternatively, a weighted majority of 60 per cent members present and voting, including at least 40 per cent of unionists present and voting and 40 per cent of nationalists present and voting.’ (Bogdanor, 1999: 106).

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister are to be elected by the Assembly by parallel consent, not to be appointed by the British government. Because of the use of parallel consent, each party is encouraged to put forward a candidate who is more likely to be accepted by other parties, therefore eliminating the possibility of electing Gerry Adams, for instance, as First Minister. The cross-community element is new in the UK setting, but Bogdanor points out that there is a similar provision in the Belgian constitution of 1994 in which for certain key issues, the elected members of the parliament will be divided into French-speaking and Flemish speaking groups (Bogdanor, 1999: 107).

The plan laid out in the Good Friday Agreement places devolution to Northern Ireland in the wider Anglo-Irish context. It requires north-south co-operation within Ireland, and in order to fulfil this obligation, the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was established on 2 December 1999. This is a forum to bring Ministers from the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Government together to foster cross-border co-operation. It covers 12 areas, of which six have North/South Bodies – water, food safety, trade and business development, special EU programmes, language, fisheries – and remaining six – transport, agriculture, education, health, environment and tourism – are identified as ‘Areas of co-operation’.

The third strand of the Good Friday Agreement deals with the relationship between Britain and Ireland. To pursue this objective, the British-Irish Council was set up in order to bring about co-operation in areas of mutual interest, including the Misuse of Drugs, Environment, the Knowledge Economy, Social Inclusion, Telemedicine, Tourism, Transport and Minority and Lesser-Used Languages.⁶ To date the Council has met seven times at summit level, in London in December 1999, in Dublin in November 2001, in Jersey in June

⁶ More details can be found at the British-Irish Council’s web site: <http://www.britishirishcouncil.org/>

2002, in Scotland in November 2002, in Wales in November 2003, in Guernsey on 19 November 2004 (the main topic: tourism) and in Isle of Man on 20 May 2005 (the main topic: telemedicine). The next ministerial level meeting is planned for early 2006. Summit meetings will normally take place twice a year, with participating Administrations represented by the head(s) of that Administration or a substitute.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has now been suspended for more than three years. The last suspension was called by the Secretary of the State for Northern Ireland on 14 October 2004 to 'protect the Good Friday Agreement'. The suspension can be attributed to the unionists' continuing suspicion over the republicans' commitment to peace. In 2004 Sinn Fein's office in Parliament Building at Stormont was raided by the police for a spying allegation and the then First Minister David Trimble threatened to resign the Northern Ireland Executive unless Sinn Fein MLAs were excluded from the Executive. As a result, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has assumed responsibilities of Northern Ireland departments instead of the Northern Ireland Executive. The operation of the NSMC has also been affected by the suspension. Following the introduction of suspension, the British and Irish Governments, by an exchange of notes on 19 November 2002, agreed that, 'Decisions of the North/South Ministerial Council on policies and actions relation to the Implementation Bodies, Tourism Ireland or their respective functions shall be taken by our two Governments. No new functions shall be conferred on the Implementation Bodies'. These arrangements were designed to ensure that the Bodies would continue to fulfil their important public functions on a 'care and maintenance' basis, pending the restoration of devolved government to Northern Ireland.

Community development

Both communities have numerous community organisations. There is no precise statistics available, but according to Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Actions, they have more than 1,000 members and represent the interests of more than 5,000 such organisations in Northern Ireland.

A study carried out to examine local governance in Northern Ireland notes that 'the community/voluntary sector in Northern Ireland has been very active since the beginning of "the troubles", partly filling the political vacuum' (Harrison 2005: 48). This analysis concurs with observations put forward by many respondents. The study notes that several developments in the 1990s have invigorated the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland, one of them is the PEACE programmes. Because of its voluntary sector's vibrancy which partly draws from a history of activism in some communities dating from the 1970s, Northern Ireland is now 'seen in some quarters as a model of active citizenship' (Harrison 2005: 48). Although this study is not concerned with the minority-majority relationship in

Northern Ireland as such, it raises an issue which was brought up time and again by the respondents during the fieldwork: weak community infrastructure.

During the fieldwork, the issue of weak community infrastructure surfaced time and again and it has been often claimed that the nationalist community is better organised than the unionist one. This observation often surfaces within the context of the PEACE funding: because the nationalist community is organised better than the unionist one, they are more successful in securing PEACE funding. The concern for apparent disparity in the distribution of PEACE funding between nationalist/Catholic and unionist/Protestant communities has been addressed by the Special European Union Programmes Body, and it has found, by using the postcode as proxies for religion, that Catholic communities have received more PEACE funding relative to their population size than the Protestant communities (SEUPB 2005). Specifically, for the PEACE I period (1995-1999), while the Catholics made up 43.2 per cent of Northern Ireland's population with the Protestants accounting for 56.8 per cent, the Catholic communities are estimated to have received 55.8 per cent of PEACE I funding with the Protestant communities receiving 44.2 per cent. For the PEACE II period (2000-2006), with the population ration between Catholics and Protestants being 45.2 per cent to 54.6 per cent, the ration of the share of funding is estimated at 51.4 per cent to 48.6 per cent. There is a methodological concern with the study in that it used the postal code as proxies since there is no data as to the community background to project proposals. In addition, a question has been raised in relation to this study; the funding is supposed to be distributed according to the needs, not according to the population break-down. Those who would object to the commissioning of the study would argue that since nationalist/Catholic communities were traditionally disadvantaged, they have had greater needs for funding than unionist/Protestant communities.

This is perhaps one example in which 'Europe' has triggered an unintended kind of political mobilisation. While the purpose of introducing PEACE funding is to support the peace process and to facilitate the coming together of two dominant communities in Northern Ireland, the way funding is seen to be distributed has fostered resentment on the unionist part, which has then taken up by some unionist politicians, especially by the DUP. The DUP MEP, Jim McAllister, has been publicly campaigning for a 'fairer distribution of PEACE funding' and one of the UUP politician respondents (R1) expressed a similar understanding to McAllister's during the interview. The reaction from the unionist side to this issue was sufficiently strong to make the EU Special Body in Northern Ireland commission a report. A European Commission Official on the secondment to the Northern Ireland Office (R28) also mentioned McAlister's campaign (as an example of 'abuse' of 'Europe' by British politicians) during the interview. While discussing this 'perception/reality', a few respondents (R11, R27, R30) have pointed out the high level of politicisation of people in Northern Ireland as an

explanation of why this ‘problem’ emerged. According to them, many supposedly neutral issues are often turned into sectarian/community issues in Northern Ireland because the group identity structure is strong. This episode illustrates one possible way in which community development and ‘Europe’ can entangle on the ground.

4. Local actors’ responses and perceptions

Group identity is seen as important and significant in the lives of people of Northern Ireland. It is largely felt that one’s community background still matters so much so that a joke goes that even the ethnic minorities are often asked if they are Catholic Chinese/Indians/Travellers/etc or Protestant ones. The same joke applies to the atheists. As some of the respondents have pointed out it is not enough to declare oneself to be an atheist to escape the daily constraints based on sectarianism. One would be asked to identify if one is a ‘Catholic atheist or Protestant one’. These episodes are introduced by the respondents to emphasise that sectarianism in Northern Ireland is not a religious issue but a cultural, or even ethnic, issue. The respondents also report that in socialising occasions some questions are asked without fail to identify others’ community background. These questions are typically about their current address or the schools which they attended. Given that segregation at schools is continuing and not weakening, schools are powerful makers of one’s background.

Although the strength of group identity felt in daily life is often stressed by the respondents, the experience of discrimination based on community background does not appear to be a major source of grievance at the moment. If the issue of discrimination against Catholics is brought up, it is typically framed with some adverbs like ‘historically’ or ‘traditionally’, suggesting that the perception that things have changed now is strong and widespread. One of the respondents (R8) has observed: ‘We now have more Catholic doctors and lawyers.’ This is perhaps because the series of legislation has been put in place to address the grievances put forward by the Civil Rights movement and that there is a feeling that discrimination along sectarian lines has been made illegal and largely de-institutionalised. Notable exceptions to this would be the police force and the military establishment, both of them are regarded predominantly Protestant by both communities.

If anything, there is a sense expressed by respondents from all categories that those who may be facing systematic discrimination in today’s Northern Ireland are people from ethnic minorities. There is a clear concern that attacks on ethnic minorities are on the rise but that the issue is largely ignored because of the perception that the problem lies between nationalist and unionist communities. For example:

R6: I think the issues around ethnic minority communities are coming to the fore right now. We have seen some substantial decrease in Protestant-Catholic violence, but as it decreases, the number of attacks on ethnic minorities is increasing. I do not think that is a coincidence, that to have lower on the one and higher on the other.

R21: People say ethnic minorities have got much better but there has been an increase in attacks. And the ethnic communities are not seeing the benefits of peace. It is a case when they have become more vulnerable. People have turned attention away from it.

Equally, respondents from all categories have acknowledged that there is a concern that unionist/Protestants are facing decline both in terms of population size and share of power in today's Northern Ireland. Some unionist political representatives have stressed this as a sectarian issue. For instance, a unionist politician (R1) speculated:

To a degree, I think, some government officials were, I have that perception anyway, some officials were preparing other communities (Catholic/nationalist ones) to put applications in and advising them, and meanwhile nothing was happening in my (Protestant) community.

The fear of the unionist communities that they are being abandoned by the British government is clearly echoed in this statement. On the other hand, other unionist political representatives and unionist community leaders have chosen not to present the concern for the decline of the unionist communities in a sectarian fashion but framed it in a more neutral language of structural change in economy such as the decline of shipbuilding, traditionally Protestant economic activities.

The strength of group identities that persists in today's Northern Ireland is also seen a discourse framework used by, if not all, many respondents. For instance, a civil society leader categorically states:

R10: Identity, political identity is at the centre of conflict there. British and Irish nationalism. Victimhood is at the centre of the nationalist identity. Loyalists are ideologically invisible because they are part of the 'master race'. But some of them are not property owners and are the losers as much as the nationalists.

When discussing community activities, the present situation is invariably explained with reference to the way respective religion organises life. The unionist/Protestant community is

described as being fragmented as an inevitable reflection of the nature of Protestantism. Protestantism has many churches (denominations), and it emphasises individualism and self-help, therefore, the respondents would explain, the unionist/Protestant community's cohesion is weak and it is making the most of the opportunities provided by the government and the EU. On the other hand, this culturalist explanation goes, the Catholic/nationalist side is united because there is only one church and there is a tradition of mutual-support which derives from both the Catholic theology and the legacy of discrimination against Catholics. According to the respondents, for instance, Catholic middle-class does not abandon the less well-off when they become rich and stay in the community to bring the whole community up, which has arguably contributed to the general improvement of life for Catholics. In contrast, because the Protestants are more self-reliant, the gap between the rich and poor within the community is growing. A typical explanation has been offered by a nationalist (Catholic) politician (R4).

Well, there's a great cohesion within the nationalist community than there is in the unionist community at a social level. After all the unionist community, if you look at them in terms of its organisational base, compared to the nationalist community, there is only one church in the nationalist community. And they had all sorts of different churches and the essence of Protestantism is dissent. So that's the principle, that people disagree. There are a whole lot of different Protestant community actors in Northern Ireland. And the cohesion in the nationalist community is from the church organisation, not from the political organisation. But the fact that there is only one church, which is very social in its organisational base as opposed to the Protestant or unionist community which is very desperate. So it's no surprising, I don't think, it needs no more explanation than that.

This view is repeated by a unionist (Protestant) politician (R1):

Protestants tend to be very self-reliant and they generally believe in looking after themselves. Many of them are not even aware of the government's benefits they are entitled to. The nationalist community is basically a Catholic community and it is one denomination. So therefore they can easily get some direction from the church. They are one cohesive community. The Protestant community is very diverse, a community of individual freedom and choice. There are certainly four main church denominations, and even below that there are smaller church groupings. So it is a much more diverse community, people have a wide range of ideas. They tend to concentrate on their family and themselves. So they are not as cohesive as, to look after their own community.

This discourse framework is very strong and frequently used. Some exceptions are also observed during the fieldwork. Interestingly a unionist project beneficiary (R27) and a nationalist civil society leaders and project beneficiary (R14, R29) did not resort to this framework to explain the perceived problem. The overall tendency indicates, however, that group identity is one of the most important frameworks for people in Northern Ireland to make sense of what is going on.

Given the apparent strength of group identity, the European layer of identity seems to have made very little advance in Northern Ireland. The development officials and some politicians who are in the position to know about assistance available from the EU, the Council of Europe, and other European level networks, invariably claim a sense of being European for themselves, but would add that for the people on the ground, 'Europe' would mean very little. There is an interesting pattern here. Amongst those who are in touch with European bodies there is a tendency to categorise being concerned with one's community background as parochial and narrow-minded and feeling and being European as open-minded. 'People here are so narrow-minded. There is a wide world out there but they do not look out for it' is a typical expression of this attitude (especially R8 and R16). There seems to be a gender dimension to this, too, since this view is most forcibly aired by female respondents with experiences of living abroad and studying European issues. It appears for those respondents 'Europe' somehow represents an ideal free society, an escape from what seems to be a rigidly compartmentalised world in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, the male counterparts do not express this type of dichotomous views. They (in particular R2, R5 and R24) are concerned that what they call 'obsession' with the constitutional issue is paralysing politics in Northern Ireland and therefore it has some effect on the development of economy and industry, but 'Europe' does not particularly signify cosmopolitan attitudes or open-mindedness.

A few development officials and politicians (especially R2, R3, R21, R22, and R28) point out in this regard that publicity of the benefits of European funding has been on the back burner since there is no budget allocated for it. Some would think, therefore, this is a failure on the European side for having disregarded the importance of positive publicity. However, my respondents invariably observe that even among the project beneficiaries the sense of being European is weak because for those people money is money wherever it comes from.

In terms of the perceptions of 'Europe', there are clear discrepancies among the actors interviewed. Political representatives and development officials on the whole are ready to evaluate the contributions from 'Europe' positively in terms of regional development in Northern Ireland, addressing the problems brought by the 'Troubles' and bringing in a new normative framework. According to them, the EU's Structural Funds have at least speeded up

works on regional infrastructure, if not have introduced something completely new. One of the respondents, a development official (R2), has described the Structural Funds as ‘an accelerator’. These works, however, would have been done by the UK government in any case, other respondents (R4, R15) would add.

In discussing the impacts of the Structural Funds to Northern Ireland, many respondents are inclined to be more critical towards the UK government than towards the Commission. In other words, if the Structural Funds have not been as effective as they have been envisaged, the fault lies with the UK government, not with the EU according to those respondents. This perception often surfaces in comparing the situation in Northern Ireland with that of the Republic of Ireland. Respondents from all categories have gone out of their way to explain (to me, the outsider) that because of the non-additionality principle adopted by the UK government, i.e, the Funds is used to replace the already assigned monies, the development of infrastructure in Northern Ireland is now lagging behind that of the Republic. The issue of non-additionality is highly technical but it is well-enmeshed in the respondents’ world – not only civil servants and politicians, but also project beneficiaries would single out ‘non-additionality’ as a ‘problem’. In the Republic, as the respondents maintain, the Structural Funds have been added to national expenditure and therefore they have produced a spectacular progress in improving roads, the swage system, railway, ports, and so on. The perception therefore is that if regional development in Northern Ireland is not moving fast, the blame lies with the UK government than with the EU. One nationalist politician (R30) has commented that being funded by the EU has strengthened, to some extent, the sense of having been unfairly treated by the British government among the Catholic/nationalist community.

Business leaders tend to take the view that the Structural Funds are not the answer to the perceived weakness of Northern Ireland, namely over-reliance on government spending. They are more likely to compare how the Funds have been used in Northern Ireland to how they have been used in the Republic of Ireland, and would argue that they have not been most effectively used in developing Northern Irish economy and industry. They would emphasise the positive effect of ‘spill-over’ from the booming Republic in Northern Ireland and argue that the development of all Ireland economy and industry is the only viable option for Northern Ireland to survive in an increasingly competitive global market.

Some political representatives have pointed out the ‘pump priming’ aspect as a positive and concrete contribution of Structural Funds in the deprived areas in Northern Ireland. According to this view, some areas in Northern Ireland have managed to get out of severe deprivation because ‘European money came first, which was matched by the government, which then attracted private investment’ (R18). The Structural Funds per se did not life these areas out of poverty, according to this view, but they encouraged the private sector, a sector where the key to real growth lies according to political representatives,

development officials and business leaders, to come and invest, which has resulted in the reduction of unemployment in certain areas and the creation of wealth. In this scenario, Europe is seen as a force of good by politicians of both persuasions, something that opened up a new window for improvement in deprived areas.

Politicians, development officials, business leaders and civil society leaders also see the EU favourably in its efforts to address the problems brought by and the legacies of the 'Troubles'. PEACE funding is additional to the UK expenditure and it is appreciated that new opportunities have been brought to Northern Ireland in the form of PEACE funding though many of them admit that it is too early to assess the concrete results from the implementation of PEACE funding. Many would comment without any hesitation that the EU's efforts in bringing peace in Northern Ireland and PEACE funding in particular has been 'good' and 'beneficial' to Northern Ireland. This view is often articulated in a normative context. One MEP puts it: 'Europe has always been good to us. Our case is always heard sympathetically' (R25). This sentiment has been echoed by a project beneficiary 'Europe has made it (reconciliation work) possible' (R29). The human rights issues have also mentioned as a prime example of positive influence of 'Europe' in Northern Ireland. It is widely acknowledged (particularly by R4, R11, R12 and R21) that the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, and European Convention for Human Rights have had a significant input in bringing about the current set of laws which bans discrimination in housing, education, employment, etc on any ground including religion. 'Europe' in an all-encompassing sense is therefore seen as a guarantor of equality, human rights, and perhaps a civilised society by those respondents, but they acknowledge that this aspect is not felt on a daily basis by men and women in the street of Northern Ireland.

In relation to the above, there is a sense among the development officials and some community leaders that the unionist/Protestant community and their political representatives are unjustifiably ungrateful towards Europe, while the nationalist/Catholic counterparts are.

In exploring the perception that the EU funding has presented a new opportunity structure, an interesting perception has emerged: that the EU funding is distributed favourably towards the Catholics and the Protestants are losing out. As touched upon earlier in this report, this perception in relation to PEACE was taken seriously by the government and the EU representatives in Northern Ireland, and a report has been published which to some extent ascertain this perception. Political representatives of a unionist persuasion would highlight this to emphasise that the unionist/Protestant community is losing out in the current peace process, and in this case the EU inadvertently accentuates this grievance. The unionist/Protestant grievance has of course been brought forward due to many factors, many of which have come about as a result of more equality being achieved between the two main communities. It is felt by my respondents that Catholic middle class is expanding steadily

and the poor in the nationalist/Catholic community is increasingly becoming better off, some section of the unionist/Protestant working class is trapped in poverty and deprivation. There is a shared sense that the situation is fluid and the conventional scheme that holds the Catholics as the underprivileged and down-trodden and Protestants as the privileged and the top dog no longer works. The PEACE funding, in this context, is providing ‘a new opportunity structure’ for the unionist/Protestant community to claim a position of being an underdog, which translates into demand for more assistance and protection for the unionist/Protestant communities. Naturally, the nationalist/Catholic political representatives would dismiss this newly emerged grievance as a sign of the unionist/Protestant politicians’ inability to face up to the reality – many indicators suggest that the nationalist/Catholic community is still behind the unionist/Protestant community, though the gap is closing. Civil society leaders are concerned with the emergence of this perception especially since the aim of PEACE is to bring the two main communities closer together, not to reinforce the divide.

Project beneficiaries, on the other hand, hold a much more down-to-earth view of the EU funding, and their view is not necessarily favourable. The immediate reaction to the EU funding is that it is bureaucratic and cumbersome. From the point of view of those who are receiving funds and carrying out projects, the EU money is more of a problem than an opportunity. Some would even argue that the regulations attached to EU money prevent them from doing what they would like to do – to help out the communities to help themselves, and some of them have decided not to go for EU funding any longer. If not put off by bureaucracy, some would argue that the EU funding is well-meant but not well-thought-out in that it is driven by ‘short-termism’, meaning that results have to be produced within a short funding cycle of up to five years. The typical funding period of five to six years for PEACE was criticised as being too short for getting anything up and running, especially when a small community group wants to apply for funding to bring about concrete results. They would acknowledge that additional funds have been made available but see it insufficient in bringing about the kind of changes the funding is envisaged to bring. On the ground, actors are aware of the role performed by the EU, but it is subjected to a very critical evaluation. They are on the whole very sceptical if the availability of the EU funding on the community level has had any impact on the existing identity structure.

There is, however, a sense that things have got better in Northern Ireland. It is one of the fastest growing regions in the UK, as many respondents happily point out, albeit based on a huge public sector. Sectarian violence has subsided and tourism is seen as a growth area. Belfast certainly has air of confidence with new buildings dotted around the city and with a property boom. Some respondents would acknowledge the role of ‘Europe’ in achieving this on a more idealistic or normative level, and many of them have not seen any European direct impact on people’s identity structure.

Some respondents (especially R4, R11, R16, R17, R21, R22) would focus on the Local Strategic Partnerships which have been introduced with PEACE as a possible contribution from Northern Ireland to the enlarged Europe. Under PEACE II, each local council is obliged to form a Local Strategic Partnership, a decision making body in regard to PEACE funding which draws from the elected representatives, statutory bodies, voluntary sectors and businesses and from both communities. In other words, the LSP is a mechanism through which PEACE funding is dispersed. The members meet on a regular basis to evaluate applications and to decide which projects should be funded. Some of the respondents evaluate the establishment of LSPs in Northern Ireland especially when the local assembly remains suspended as a way of involving 'ordinary people' in politics; some would think that the LSP is a great model for local governance which emphasises inclusion, and that this is something Northern Ireland in its search for peace can share with other parts of the EU, and the world, which are also seeking the ways of bringing peace and stability. Below are some of positive evaluations aired by my respondents.

R4: Local Strategic Partnerships in Northern Ireland are very good examples of mobilising different sectors of a community. Public representatives, community representatives and statutory and business representatives come together and work out how best to use the funds available for local people. Now these schemes can be transferred. These mechanisms could be transferred to other places and I know the EU is quite impressed by the ways in which the LSPs have been developed and they want to use that model in other parts of Europe, especially in the new countries where, because of the communist, totalitarian approach, the local institutions were suppressed and were not allowed to deliver. Here are some good examples of that happening. Let's see Northern Ireland experience can be transferred and I think it can.

R16: Some of them (LSP members) are ex-paramilitaries, once in jail, once killing each other. It is the very much bottom of society. So for the first time people respected ordinary community people and brought them on board, while before it was top-down from the central government. So my mother has sat a board to assess projects and stuff. The ordinary persons with no qualifications were involved. Community people, community leaders who know what is needed for community but that was the first time to be consulted and included as well as statutory bodies, businesses, the usual suspects.

AI: Is an LSP a lot of work?

R17: Yes, but we were warned. It is a working board and we are hands-on in terms of distributing PEACE funds. However we hope we have taken a very strategic decision in terms of focus and interpretation. We hope we will leave a legacy of a much better skilled community and, communities that are starting to bridge. Because we are living in a very divided society, and the division is not just along the religious and political lines. Sometimes what gets lost in the whole thing is the class division. Because there is so much focus on the political and religious division, we tend to forget that there is quite a pronounced class division in Northern Ireland. What many of our programmes seek to do is to form bridges, to build up bridging capital between communities. First of all between individuals in communities and then, wider groups within communities to come to work together towards very common goals. The women's sector has been particularly good in doing that. They perhaps recognise that we are all in the same boat. They can see the communality stretching across religions and political divides.

Europe in these instances is seen as a catalyst for people in Northern Ireland to come up with a new, possibly progressive, form of governance, and Europe also seen as an arena where Northern Ireland can start making positive contribution after years of violence.

Some community leaders and project beneficiaries have also pointed out that their experience of dealing with conflict situations and efforts towards the solution of the conflict are the most important assets Northern Ireland can export to the world. Some of the PEACE funded projects (including the one carried out by R29) are indeed extending their activities to Middle East and elsewhere trying to 'share the experiences and lessons' they have learnt in Northern Ireland. On the local government level, there have been conscious efforts to share their experiences about urban/community regeneration with other local governments elsewhere. The official from the City of Belfast Council (R16) has explained that Belfast has been playing a leading role in establishing a network amongst local governments across the EU with an aim of spreading best practice in urban regeneration. One project beneficiary (R27) who is receiving URBAN funding has also been involved with a cross-European network of community development groups to share experiences and learn from each other. There is a sense therefore on the community level that 'Europe' has contributed to the empowerment of communities, and to the building of confidence of the deprived people.

On the other hand, there is a deep sense of antipathy towards conventional politics which verges on a sense of hostility on the side of civil society, business, and community groups. Especially because of the suspension of the Assembly and the continuing deadlock over the formation of next Executive, conventional politics are seen as getting nowhere, and

some civil society leaders even regard some political parties as hindrance of their work. For instance, a voluntary/civil sector activist complains:

R7: I could not give you a specific example but they would say like ‘there is no need for us to work together’ and if the ceasefire happens or the marching season comes, that’s that. No more co-operation and if there is no more co-operation, the money does not get to the project. There is a lot of political pressure. Because this is a very polarised community.

Business leaders are trying not to have explicit connection with any political parties and they tend to be very critical of the politicians. According to a business leader:

R5: In Northern Ireland for 35 years politicians talked about one thing and all other issues have not had a degree of focus they would have in almost anywhere else in the world. I think this is one of the crucial problems we have here. But that’s life.

AI; But still the economy is going strong.

R5: Yes it is and I cannot help thinking how much better we would be if people had concentrated on this.

The fieldwork has presented a complicated picture of political mobilisation in Northern Ireland. On the one hand, the perception that society in Northern Ireland is highly politicised is strong and PEACE funding is one example which has been politicised by actors in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, there is also a widespread distrust and apathy towards conventional politics. Almost all of the respondents are also pessimistic about the resumption of devolution since the positions of the DUP and Sinn Fein, the leading political party for, respectively, the unionist and nationalist communities are so entrenched that the formation of the Executive is seen impossible. At the same time, Northern Ireland economy is also facing the same challenges any other economy would face in the contemporary world, and there is a strong sense that politicians are not doing enough to prepare Northern Irish society for these challenges. There seems to be a curious ‘de-nationalisation’ of Northern Ireland going on – the framework of Northern Ireland which devolution is supposed to strengthen is losing its meaning in the eyes of my respondents, but the alternative is not the UK framework. It may be much more localised one as seen in the networking efforts in the URBAN programmes or by the Belfast City Council; or it is more globalised as pursued by business leaders. The legally minded respondents emphasise the significance of the European framework, too.

5. European integration, ethnic-national identity, territory

In considering the minority-majority relationship in Northern Ireland in relation to the processes of European integration, three points should be made. First, the emergence of the European-wide human rights regime is seen as having played an important role in changing the situation surrounding the minority (nationalist/Catholic population). It has had its effects in various ways. The emergence and consolidation of the European-wide framework based on the European Convention on Human Rights has most likely influenced the introduction of a series of legislation promoting equality in Northern Ireland. Obviously a direct causal link is impossible to establish, but the changes in legislation can only make sense within the framework of the emergence of European human rights norms, which in turn probably influenced and is influenced by a much wider democratising tendency of the postwar world. It has also had an impact on making the equality issue in Northern Ireland international or European. The publicity value of taking the British government to the European Court of Human Rights has been appreciated by the nationalist/Catholic side, and has been made use of.

Closely related to this, the general 'Europeanisation' of the conflict in Northern Ireland has also led to some measures taken by the British and Irish governments as well as the European bodies. Europeanisation in this regard has many dimensions. That the European Parliament has involved itself with the search for a solution, most notably manifested in the publication of the Haagerup report, has given a new channel for both the majority and minority to air their grievances and to create a new space to search for solutions. That both the UK and the Republic of Ireland joined the then EEC at the same time has also had an impact. The European Council meetings have been used by both the British and Irish governments as opportunities to increase contact, and to start discussing what to do. As those who are/were closely involved with the current peace process would testify, the Europeanisation of the conflict in Northern Ireland has been an important factor in bringing devolution back to Northern Ireland and realising power-sharing.

The role of Structural Funds in the development of Northern Ireland and the minority-majority relationship is more obscure. Economically, there have been several studies that have concluded that the real economic impact of EU Structural Funds has been very small. Symbolically, especially when compared to the experiences of the Republic of Ireland, they can be used as a reference point to highlight the incompetence of the British government or the lack of interest in keeping Northern Ireland within the UK. This seems to have strengthened the 'Europe has always been good to us' discourse implying the continuing neglect by the British government particularly in the nationalist/Catholic community while it may have strengthened a seize mentality on the part of the unionist/Protestant community that

they are now being abandoned by the mother country. The PEACE funding has especially triggered some defensive political mobilisation on the part of the unionist/Protestant side which the EU representative took very seriously. On the other hand, given the prevailing feeling that conventional politics in Northern Ireland is deadlocked, these perceptions are not translated in clear political mobilisation on neither side. The signs are that a lot of energy has been channelled to the community/voluntary sector and in this sense, PEACE and URBAN funding in particular is seen as having contributed to the empowerment of people.

In terms of the demands in relation to regional development by the minority and the majority, they seem to converge. This is because the socio-economic conditions of the minority have by and large improved largely due to the series of legislation banning discrimination, and moreover, the place of Northern Ireland in the global world is now increasingly recognised as the most important issue. Given the increased competition both from Eastern Europe as well as India and China, development officials, politicians and business leaders have emphasised the importance of adjusting Northern Irish economy and industry to the needs of the globalised world. Two issues are frequently brought up: the importance of developing an all-Ireland economic and industrial structure and of moving towards knowledge-based economy. Because the weakness of Northern Irish economy, i.e., it is heavily dependent on public expenditure, is widely acknowledged, there seem to be convergence of all kinds of interests. Perhaps this is yet another case in which the market works as a powerful leveller.

The predominant pattern of identification in which the majority of the unionist/Protestant background claim British identity as their primary identity and the majority of the nationalist/Catholic background prioritise Irish identity is well entrenched. Although some surveys report that there is a small proportion of the Northern Irish population which claim Northern Irish identity, this has not surfaced during the fieldwork. The relationship between ethnic/national identity and European identification is perhaps summarised that while many would claim that people are aware of Europe, the level of identification with Europe remains weak, mostly because it is seen and felt irrelevant to their daily life. For those 'Europe' is relevant, it often represents a 'wider world' in which the respondents can escape the rigidly compartmentalised social structure. Ethnic/national identification is not necessarily rejected by those respondents but it is often seen as a factor to make people parochial and narrow-minded. There is a sign that Europe is used by various actors as a stage to open up or promote their ethnic/national identity, but it does not seem to have an effect on strengthening the sense of being European.

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