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# Exploring the Origins of EU Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland through the Role of John Hume and the European Parliament

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This article explores the origins of the European Union (EU) peacebuilding approach in Northern Ireland through the role of the long-serving MEP and Nobel Laureate, John Hume. It gives particular emphasis to the part played by the European Parliament (EP) in this endeavour, which has been neglected in existing studies of the EU influence on Northern Ireland. The article shows how Hume helped to create better understanding, interest and ultimately engagement by the EU to support peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland. Local political shifts would prove decisive in creating the peace process that emerged in the region in the 1990s, but the article argues that Hume's efforts, stretching as far back as the 1970s, both encouraged these shifts and then provided the basis for much greater EU engagement in support of the peace process. This deepens our understanding of the EU role in aiding political change in Northern Ireland.

## Introduction

Various scholars have stressed the role that joint membership of the EC/EU<sup>1</sup> played in improving British–Irish relations in ways that aided the Northern Ireland peace process.<sup>2</sup> This undoubtedly fostered peace in the region, albeit in an indirect fashion. Rather than affecting relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland, the EU played a part in drawing the British and Irish governments closer together. In turn, alignment between London and Dublin produced a subtle change in the behaviour of political actors in Northern Ireland, aiding moves towards a settlement process.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, increased closeness and understanding between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland allowed them to become effective co-stewards of this settlement process.<sup>4</sup>

Other scholars have argued that the EU made a more direct peacebuilding contribution in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, providing generous funding to support reconciliation initiatives

<sup>1</sup> We use EC to refer to the European Community, EU to refer to the European Union, and EC/EU to refer to the overall project of European integration or where both of the two main phases in its development are relevant to the point being made.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen, eds., *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Clodagh Harris, 'Anglo-Irish Elite Cooperation and the Peace Process: The Impact of the EEC/EU', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 12 (2001), 203–14; Denis Kennedy, 'Europe and the Northern Ireland Problem', in Denis Kennedy, ed., *Living with the European Union: The Northern Ireland Experience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> P. J. McLoughlin, "'The First Major Step in the Peace Process'? Exploring the Impact of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on Irish Republican Thinking', *Irish Political Studies*, 29, 1 (2014), 116–33.

<sup>4</sup> P. J. McLoughlin, 'British–Irish Relations and the Northern Ireland Peace Process: The Importance of Intergovernmentalism', in Katy Hayward, Elizabeth Meehan and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, eds., *Divided Ireland: State, Nation and Politics across the Island* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

between the two communities in the region, and between the two parts of Ireland on a cross-border basis.<sup>5</sup> Ideas and specific mechanisms informing the political settlement that emerged from the Northern Ireland peace process also find their origins in the EU project. Cross-border cooperation itself was integral to European integration, and the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA) established formal institutions to develop further the activities already emerging between the two parts of the island by the 1990s. One of the new cross-border organisations that it created, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), was established specifically to coordinate such activities and the EU funding supporting them, and had an exclusive European remit.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the B/GFA created new intergovernmental institutions that reflected EU practices in the sharing of sovereignty, whilst the centrepiece of the accord, a power-sharing administration, similarly reflected the consensual and consociational modes of governance used on the Continent. The Belfast executive would also be elected by the D'hondt mechanism, which was used to allocate portfolios according to the share of seats in the European Parliament (EP).<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the existing literature has highlighted how, by harmonising laws and regulatory systems between the two parts of Ireland, European integration helped to depoliticise the Irish border. In this regard, again the EU can be seen to have played an indirect role in supporting the Northern Ireland peace process. The B/GFA marked the end of widespread violence in the region, facilitating the gradual dismantling of related security structures on the Irish border. Complementing this process, common membership of the EU and the creation of the Single European Market (SEM) allowed unfettered movement of goods, services and people across this frontier. This in turn reduced the political salience of the border for local communities, particularly nationalists, who had historically opposed Ireland's partition and saw it as a British imposition. What was previously the most militarised border within the EU became just like any other internal frontier. 'The result', says McCall 'was that the physical manifestation of the Irish border itself became barely discernible, except for a change in some road markings'.<sup>8</sup> Scholars emphasising this particular EC/EU contribution to the peace process have thus been well placed to explain why Brexit, which threatened to reverse many of the harmonising effects that EU integration had on the two parts of Ireland, has proven such a challenge to the successful working of the B/GFA.<sup>9</sup> The totality of these contributions helps make the case that the EU has had a significant influence on peace-making in Northern Ireland, albeit indirect in many of its effects.

This article seeks to complement the existing strands of literature emphasising the EU's contributions to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland since the 1990s. It raises many similar questions, but addresses them with a more wide-ranging historical analysis than any previous scholar. Indeed, through an original combination of previously unused EP, British and Irish archives, and interviews with relevant elites, the article thoroughly investigates the origins of the EU's progressive influence on Northern Ireland. Specifically, it aims to deepen our understanding of that role, tracing its influence back to the early 1980s to show that there was a more politically direct and consciously determined

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Giada Lagana, *The European Union and the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Cathal McCall, *Border Ireland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Katy Hayward and Mary Murphy, 'The (Soft) Power of Commitment: The EU and Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland', *Ethnopolitics*, 11, 4 (2012), 439–52, and Etain Tannam, 'The European Commission's Evolving Role in Conflict Resolution: The Case of Northern Ireland, 1989–2005', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42, 3 (2007), 337–56.

<sup>6</sup> Giada Lagana, 'A Preliminary Investigation on the Genesis of EU Cross-Border Cooperation on the Island of Ireland', *Space and Polity*, 21, 3 (2017), 298.

<sup>7</sup> Brigid Laffan, 'The European Context: A New Political Dimension in Ireland, North and South', in John Coakley, Brigid Laffan and Jennifer Todd, eds., *Renovation or Revolution? New Territorial Politics in Ireland and the United Kingdom* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2005), 173.

<sup>8</sup> McCall, *Border Ireland*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Katy Hayward, *What Do We Know and What Should We Do About the Irish Border?* (London: Sage, 2021); McCall, *Border Ireland*, 15–18; and David Phinnemore, 'Brexit and Northern Ireland', in Benjamin Leruth, Stefan Gänzle and Jarle Trondal, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Differentiation in the European Union* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 664–79.

effort to involve the EC in the region than has hitherto been appreciated. The evidence presented shows that this early effort provided the basis for the more notable contributions of the EU to support the Northern Ireland peace process, such as funding of reconciliation activities in the 1990s, and how it complemented the more organic process that saw European integration drawing the British and Irish governments together. Overall, the article suggests that the early effort to involve the EC in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland was bottom-up, rather than top-down, originated in the activities of the EP rather than the policies of the Commission, and specifically that it was instigated through the lobbying of Northern Ireland Member of the EP (MEP), John Hume.

Hume was, to put it simply, profoundly inspired by the integrationist project's role in reconciling post-war Europe. Indeed, when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside David Trimble in 1998 in recognition of their joint role in negotiating the B/GFA, Hume's acceptance speech cited the EU as his exemplar: '[The] European Union is the best example in the history of the world of conflict resolution and it is the duty of everyone, particularly those who live in areas of conflict to study how it was done and to apply its principles to their own conflict resolution.'<sup>10</sup>

This is exactly what Hume did, seeing – ahead of any other actor – the ways in which the EC/EU could both inspire and practically aid the path towards peace in Northern Ireland. In stressing the vital role that Hume played in drawing the EC/EU into this effort, we draw on existing studies of his political impact.<sup>11</sup> These stress the significant influence that the EC/EU had on Hume's thinking, making reference to his early lobbying of the EP. However, a systematic analysis of the extent of Hume's efforts in the EP, including archival records and interviews with his early collaborators, had yet to be undertaken. This article fills this gap and demonstrates the remarkable effect Hume had in shaping and directing the EC/EU initiative on Northern Ireland, and the extensive networking activities which supported this.

Such an undertaking allows us to show that the genesis of the EC/EU's progressive influence on Northern Ireland began much earlier than suggested in the existing and broader literature on the topic. We also argue that it involved a more conscious effort than suggested – an effort initiated and led by Hume, but over time involving a range of other actors who he engaged in his lobbying efforts. We show how he drew from the example of Europe's post-war integration and reconciliation, and sought to apply its lessons to Northern Ireland. More specifically, we demonstrate the ways in which Hume sought to engage the EC/EU in such efforts. This involves an investigation of Hume's European activities from the late 1970s, and specifically his lobbying of the EP in the 1980s. We argue that the early and tentative EP interventions in Northern Ireland that Hume helped to generate laid the foundations for a more enthusiastic embrace of peacebuilding in the region by the Commission from the 1990s onwards.

### John Hume: Europhile, MEP and Master Networker

Violent conflict broke out in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s between the nationalist minority, a mainly Catholic population who sought to undo the partition of Ireland,<sup>12</sup> and the unionist and mainly Protestant majority that wished to uphold the Union with Great Britain. Socio-economic disparities reinforced the political and religious differences between the two communities, as unionists used their dominant position to discriminate against nationalists and maintain their subordination.<sup>13</sup> Although the UK government remained responsible for the region, the Irish government supported the minority's claims for an end to partition as the ultimate solution to the conflict. Whilst wary of

<sup>10</sup> Available at: [www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1998/hume/lecture/](http://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1998/hume/lecture/) (last visited 8 Aug. 2022).

<sup>11</sup> For example, see P. J. McLoughlin, *John Hume and the Revision of Irish Nationalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), ch. 11; and Gerard Murray, *John Hume and the SDLP: Impact and Survival in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Occurring in 1920–1, the partition of Ireland was itself a response to the demands of the mainly Catholic population for independence and the refusal of the Protestant minority in the northeast of the island to accept this. The line of partition was decided by the British government and created a new Catholic minority within what became Northern Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> For the most comprehensive overview of the Northern Ireland conflict and its historical origins, see Brendan O'Leary's magisterial three-volume study, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

antagonising London by openly lobbying international opinion in support of this end, Dublin hoped that Ireland's joining the EC alongside the United Kingdom in 1973 would decrease the relevance of the Irish border and ease the path towards the reunification of the island.<sup>14</sup> As already noted, the former tendency would aid the peace process of the 1990s, and some feel it will also enable the latter goal of Irish reunification, even more so in the light of Brexit.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1970s, the Irish government's outlook on the EC was supported by most nationalists in Northern Ireland, but naturally alienated unionists. The division of the two communities over the EC's role was made manifest when they had the first opportunity to directly elect representatives to the EP in 1979. The passionately pro-European Hume, then Deputy and later Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), was roundly endorsed by the nationalist electorate with 24.6 per cent of the vote. Ian Paisley, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), won the majority of unionist votes at 29.8 per cent by articulating a very different stance.<sup>16</sup> The fact that the EC was founded in Rome, and had a Catholic majority population, allowed Paisley to portray the integrationist project as yet another 'enemy' of 'Protestant Ulster'. He often described the EC as an instrument of the Vatican, and was thrown out of the EP for interrupting Pope John Paul II's address to the chamber in 1988, shouting: 'I renounce you as the anti-Christ.'<sup>17</sup> The stark differences between Paisley and Hume emphasise the profundity of the achievement wherein the two would later cooperate so effectively within the EP.

Remarkably, Hume had already taken steps to engage the EC in Northern Ireland even before his election as an MEP, when he was working as a political advisor to Ireland's EC Commissioner for Transport, Trade and Administration, Dick Burke. However, Hume's networking was not limited to an Irish context as his role with Burke allowed him to build his knowledge of and connections across a wider European space. His fluency in French also facilitated his engagement with key officials and representatives.<sup>18</sup>

Colm Larkin was a senior official of the European Commission but, as an Irishman, he took particular interest in Hume's efforts to address the Northern Ireland conflict in the EP. He worked closely with Hume over several years to support these efforts. Larkin is thus well positioned to highlight the attributes that made Hume such an effective networker, who was able to bring such a significant EC/EU influence to bear on Northern Ireland:

He was always alert to what was happening in the Commission and how it could relate to Northern Ireland . . . He had a warm straightforward style and as he was constantly being but-tonholed by people. He would break off his conversation with you to talk to someone else. He was very well liked and respected and ended up with a very strong support network throughout Brussels and Strasbourg.<sup>19</sup>

Hume's experience of and the contacts made with a wider European milieu whilst working for Burke also helped him to gain membership of the EC's Confederation of Socialist Parties (Confed.), the predecessor of the Party of European Socialists. Although Hume's party, the SDLP, would seem the natural option for the Confederation to adopt, there was competition from the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). Dirk Toornstra, as Secretary General of the Confederation, had to assess the two applications and decide which to endorse. As well as noting the limitations of the NILP's

<sup>14</sup> Laffan, 'The European Context', 173.

<sup>15</sup> Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, vol. III: *Consociation and Confederation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Available at: [www.cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re1979.htm](http://www.cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/re1979.htm) (last visited 17 Jul. 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Gladys Ganiel, "'Battling in Brussels": The DUP and the European Union', *Irish Political Studies*, 24, 4 (2009), 578.

<sup>18</sup> P. J. McLoughlin, 'The SDLP and the Europeanization of the Northern Ireland Problem', *Irish Political Studies*, 24, 4 (2009), 606.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Colm Larkin, 17 May 2016.

support, Toornstra was concerned by its link with the British Labour Party, which the Confederation had already found to be far from united in its support for the EC project: 'What I was looking for was strengthening the basis of the Confed. by bringing in parties who were pro-Europe',<sup>20</sup> Toornstra recalled. Hume proved crucial in making the SDLP's case: 'He was very much pro-Europe. And . . . a much stronger personality, a much more convincing personality than anyone I came across from the NILP.'<sup>21</sup>

It was this same combination of force of personality, conviction of argument and ardent pro-Europeanism that helped Hume win many allies in the EP after the SDLP's admission to the Confederation and his election as an MEP. Hume now sat with the largest and most powerful political bloc in the EP, and was promptly elected to their front bench, acting as the group's treasurer.<sup>22</sup> This suggests the favour which he had already won amongst the leaders of the European left. Hume immediately began to lobby his new political colleagues to support his efforts to bring EP influence to bear on Northern Ireland. Within six months of becoming an MEP, he was able to table a resolution calling for an investigation into the ways the EC could help the region. The eventual outcome of this was the 1981 Martin Report, but before considering that further, the context of Hume's lobbying efforts requires explanation.

### Internationalising the Northern Ireland Problem: The European Parliament

'The 1981 hunger strike proved to be a watershed in European perceptions of the Northern Ireland problem', writes Guelke, 'though this was not immediately apparent in the deliberations of the European Parliament.'<sup>23</sup> In 1980, and again in 1981, republicans incarcerated in Northern Ireland went on hunger strike in an effort to gain recognition from the British government as political prisoners. Reform of the prison regime and conditions was mooted as a way to defuse the crisis without conceding to the prisoners' demand for political recognition. True to her reputation, however, Margaret Thatcher refused to grant any concessions made under duress. As a result, ten republican prisoners fasted to death, causing huge protests and an upsurge of violence in the region.

In response to Thatcher's intransigence, Irish MEPs tabled resolutions in the EP criticising British policy in Northern Ireland. These were defeated by an amendment from the European Democratic Group that condemned terrorism but pointedly expressed that the EP was 'deeply concerned by the situation in Northern Ireland, including the hunger strikes'.<sup>24</sup> The very fact that the crisis had triggered such debate was significant. It heightened international interest in Northern Ireland, giving nationalists an opportunity to challenge British narratives, with MEPs from other regions willing to hear their voices. Indeed, EP archives show that members of Hume's Socialist group officially asked 'our Irish colleagues'<sup>25</sup> to explain to them the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict as a result of the hunger strikes. Similar deliberations would follow, with a debate on the use of plastic bullets by British security forces coming just two weeks after that on the hunger strikes.<sup>26</sup> Notably, this was a subject that the EP had twice previously refused any discussion of.<sup>27</sup> Irish government officials duly noted the changed attitude towards discussion of Northern Ireland in an EC context following the hunger strikes and began to document debates in the EP in a more thorough way, clearly hoping these might be subsequently steered towards ends that might produce a change in British policy

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Dirk Toornstra, 22 Feb. 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Barry White, *John Hume: Statesman of the Troubles* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1984), 205.

<sup>23</sup> Adrian Guelke, *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), 158–9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 159; EP resolution on violence in Northern Ireland, 7 May 1982, National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DFA) 2013/27/1566.

<sup>25</sup> 'Debates of the European Parliament: Hunger Strikes of Prisoners in the Long Kesh and Armagh Prisons', 18 Dec. 1980, Historical Archives EP, PE 1-755/80, 23.

<sup>26</sup> J. Lynch, 'E.P. Debate and Resolution on Plastic Bullets', 21 May 1982, NAI, DFA 2013/27/1566.

<sup>27</sup> Guelke, *Northern Ireland*, 159.

towards the region.<sup>28</sup> Despite the relative political weakness of the EP in the 1980s, documentary evidence shows how it provided a forum for the internationalisation of the Northern Ireland problem. The fact that politicians from different member states were debating – and criticising – British policy in the region was a source of considerable embarrassment to Thatcher’s government, which argued that the Northern Ireland conflict was a strictly internal matter. However, Guelke suggests that the development of the EP

was eroding the belief that a sharp distinction could be drawn between foreign and domestic affairs within the states of the Community or between Community affairs and political questions that were the responsibility of individual states. What put Northern Ireland at the fore of this process was the belief of many MEPs, reinforced by the hunger strikes, that the conflict in Northern Ireland constituted a blot on the European Community’s developing political image in the outside world.<sup>29</sup>

This was the context in which Hume was operating as he sought to make the EP a forum to involve the EC in efforts to resolve the conflict.

Hearing the EP debate controversies such as the hunger strikes was one thing, however. Converting this into action was quite another. While various MEPs expressed sympathies for the plight of people in Northern Ireland, there were strong political reasons for avoiding further engagement. First and foremost, there was the stance of the British government. Criticism of Thatcher’s handling of the hunger strikes in the EP<sup>30</sup> had already increased her sensitivity towards what she saw as interference in a strictly internal British matter. Toornstra stresses this reaction when recalling Hume’s earliest efforts to engage the EP in Northern Ireland: ‘the whole conflict was perceived by the unionists and by the Brits as a domestic affair. None of your concern.’<sup>31</sup>

Second, many EC officials felt they did not understand the conflict and were thus fearful of involvement.<sup>32</sup> Toornstra suggests that even member states with their own ethno-national divisions, most notably Belgium and Spain, were wary of any move which might set a precedent for unwelcome interference in their domestic affairs. This made Hume’s vision and his persistent efforts even more crucial in both educating EC actors on Northern Ireland and initiating action to address problems within a member state’s borders:

It was easier to get involved with a problem in Africa or Asia . . . than to focus on something which was happening within [the EC]. John was the first . . . to really not only identify but to really, really accelerate the thinking . . . if we really want to bring the Protestants, the Catholics, the Irish [nationalists] and unionists together through some kind of an umbrella format, then the umbrella format should be Europe. And that is, I think, the uniqueness of John, that he really not only saw that but he put his entire network, his entire energy and force into making that happen.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See the Anglo-Irish Section of the DFA, ‘The Northern Ireland Issue in the European Context’, Mar. 1982, DFA, 2013/27/1566.

<sup>29</sup> Guelke, *Northern Ireland*, 159.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see ‘Affaire des grévistes de la faim des prisons de Long Kesh (Maze) et d’Armagh, Irlande du Nord: telegram sent by the Parliament of Wallonia to Simone Veil’, 22 Apr. 1981; ‘Affaire des grévistes de la faim des prisons de Long Kesh (Maze) et d’Armagh, Irlande du Nord: private letter from the Comité de défense des prisonniers politiques Irlandais to Simone Veil’, 28 Apr. 1981, Historical Archives EP, PE1 P1 264/DHOM (Fonds des présidents: documents confidentiels).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Toornstra, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Tannam, ‘The European Commission’s Evolving Role’, 347.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Toornstra, 2021.



The problem of overcoming the reluctance of those opposed to EC engagement in member states' internal affairs was something that also preoccupied Larkin. As an EC official, with intimate knowledge of its institutions and dynamics, he was crucial in helping Hume to strategise the most effective means to involve the EP in Northern Ireland. 'We looked at the tools available to MEPs such as Parliamentary Questions and decided the way forward was to submit a motion for a Resolution. . . . This was a mechanism which had been rarely used before.'<sup>34</sup> However, given the unwillingness of many member states to set such precedents, Hume and Larkin knew that they would have to provide justification and a persuasive rationale. As Larkin recalls:

I studied other Resolutions and . . . then looked at the [1951] Coal and Steel Treaty. There was that eureka moment. It jumped out of the page, that wonderful, almost biblical phrase: 'Resolved to substitute for historic rivalries a fusion of their essential interests . . . to establish a . . . community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts.' That phrase drafted in 1952 [sic] seemed to speak directly to the Northern Ireland situation and to the role of the European Commission. It gave a moral grandeur and purpose to seemingly banal decisions about coal and steel production. . . . The phrase figured in almost every future European initiative that Hume took [thereafter].<sup>35</sup>

Hume and Larkin had found an appropriate intellectual rationale for the initiative and, importantly, one that linked back to the founding ideology of the EC to provide a justification for this.

On 15 November 1979, Hume combined with two other MEPs from the Socialist group – Richard Balfe of the British Labour Party and Eileen Desmond of the Irish Labour Party – to table a motion calling on the EP to conduct a report on the impact of EC membership on Northern Ireland.<sup>36</sup> It is symbolic that an Irish, a Northern Irish and a British MEP jointly made the first of such calls. This shows the power of the EP's transnational organisation, which was able to bring three different individuals, from three different – sometimes antagonistic – jurisdictions together to speak on behalf of the same political group and interest.<sup>37</sup> The 1979 resolution constituted the first effort to strategically involve the EC in the Northern Ireland conflict. By including an Irish MEP in the motion, Hume was also communicating from the outset his steadfast belief that the Northern Ireland problem could not be resolved with a purely British political context and would require the involvement of the Dublin government.

### The 1981 Martin Report

Following the resolution by Hume, Balfe and Desmond, the Regional Policy Committee – of which Hume was a member – commissioned Simone Martin, a French MEP belonging to the Liberal and Democratic group, to conduct a report on Northern Ireland. The ensuing 'Martin Report' was published in May 1981.<sup>38</sup> By focusing only on the economic implications of EC membership and the measures required to raise the region up to average EC economic standards, the report avoided any implication of political interference. As Larkin explains:

The Commission and Parliament would be wary of taking sides. . . . We decided to set a very general incontrovertible [non-partisan] political objective – 'peace and stability' – and to argue

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Larkin, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Colm Larkin, 'Talk to the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) on John Hume, the EU and the Peace Funds – The Early Years', 27 Apr. 2018.

<sup>36</sup> 'European Parliament: Resolutions on Northern Ireland', 15 Nov. 1979, the British National Archives (hereafter TNA), CJ4/4294.

<sup>37</sup> Lagana, *The European Union*, 46.

<sup>38</sup> 'Report Drawn Up by Simone Martin on Behalf of the Committee on Regional Policy and Regional Planning on Community Regional Policy and Northern Ireland', European Parliament working document, 4 May 1981, Historical Archives EP, PE 81.265.

that this was intimately bound up with the achievement of economic progress and decent living conditions – hence a role for the European Commission.<sup>39</sup>

In this, however, the goal of economic development in an EC context was used to open the way towards a political influence from the Commission. Common economic interests were thus being engaged in ways that could evolve in a more political direction – much like the logic of the European integrationist project itself. Hume, hugely influenced by that project, clearly intended the same, but avoided overstating his ultimate political ambitions.

By avoiding any overt political agenda, the Martin Report was also able to win the support of Northern Ireland's two unionist MEPs – also essential if the Commission was to act on its findings. Despite their political differences, Hume and Paisley had mutual regard for each other's abilities and could be quite personable with one another when away from the tensions of Northern Ireland. Their membership of the EP also allowed them the space to develop their relationship away from the glare of the local media, always more interested in highlighting their differences and at times provoking these. Hume recognised that Paisley was a committed constituency politician, eager to show voters the tangible benefits that would follow from supporting him at the ballot box.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Paisley was also able to reconcile his anti-Europeanism with the very active role he played in the EP. As he famously declared: 'I'm going to get all I can for Ulster, every grant we can possibly get our hands on. Then when we have milked the cow dry, we are going to shoot the cow.'<sup>41</sup> As long as Hume's focus was on economic gain and avoided any obvious political dimension, he felt he could count on Paisley's support. Moreover, with Paisley's backing, Hume knew the more moderate Ulster Unionist Party MEP, John Taylor, would follow suit.<sup>42</sup> Always trailing the voluble and charismatic Paisley in EP elections, Taylor could not afford to lose further unionist votes by allowing him to gain sole credit for bringing home the European 'milk'.

Much the same logic also helped ensure that the UK government did not skim the milk which the EC transferred to the British Exchequer for use in Northern Ireland. London often sought to use European funds to cut its own expenditure in the region.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not there was additional (hence the term 'additionality') public expenditure in Northern Ireland after receipts from the EC was, at a deeper level, also inextricably bound up with the question of sovereignty, and the notion that a sovereign government alone has the authority to raise revenue and directly control expenditures within its national territory. Additionality was also central to the debate over the Martin Report in June 1981, with all three of Northern Ireland's MEPs emphasising that EC monies should supplement – rather than replace – UK government funding to the region. This allowed Hume to strengthen the arguments he had long made in suggesting that the EC, and the pursuit of common economic interests through its institutions, could help reconcile the people of Northern Ireland – just as it had done with the peoples of the Continent after the Second World War.<sup>44</sup>

The Martin Report was debated in the EP on 18 June 1981. Paisley's contribution was particularly surprising. He started by praising Martin for 'the diligent way in which she has prepared her Report'. Then, even more notably, after citing figures to support his case, Paisley denounced the UK government for using EC funds to offset spending in Northern Ireland:

That, I suggest to this House, is a public scandal, which needs to be publicly examined by this Community because not only is this a fraud by the United Kingdom Government on the people of Northern Ireland, it is equally a fraud on this Community, for the funds given to Northern

<sup>39</sup> Larkin, 'Talk to the National University of Ireland', 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Ganiel, "'Battling in Brussels'", 580.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Larkin, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Giada Lagana, 'A Preliminary Investigation on the Genesis of EU Cross-border Cooperation on the Island of Ireland', *Space and Polity*, 21, 3 (2017), 292.

<sup>44</sup> McLoughlin, 'The SDLP', 605.



Ireland by the EEC are intended to be additional to the national government's contribution to the problem of Northern Ireland.<sup>45</sup>

The idea that Northern Ireland's staunchest unionist leader – and most vehemently anti-European – was calling on the EP not only to intervene but to expose the 'fraud' of UK government spending in the region gives evidence of the remarkable realignment that it was already producing. Moreover, Paisley's stance gave a mandate for other unionists to similarly engage with the EC. Indeed, much as Hume predicted, Taylor followed Paisley by thanking Hume for initiating the Martin Report and echoing the words of his fellow Northern Ireland MEPs by stressing their unity on the matter: 'When it comes to the economic and social problems, the three Northern Ireland MEPs, irrespective of their political divisions, have a common love and concern for the future of their province.'<sup>46</sup>

The comments from Paisley and Taylor are quite remarkable, showing how, within just two years of their election to the EP, they were able to find common ground with Hume in lobbying the EP to support Northern Ireland. Away from the polarising pressures of the Northern Ireland conflict, in Strasbourg, the region's three MEPs stood together and stressed their unity on the issue of EC aid. Again echoing the logic of the integrationist project itself, common economic interests were used to create political cooperation between staunch opponents.

The Martin Report called on the European Commission to open a special line in the European budget, unique to Northern Ireland. The German and Danish governments were reluctant to endorse this. However, further lobbying by Hume of his Socialist colleagues in the Confederation led to his meeting with the Danish Prime Minister, Anker Jørgenson, and then German officials in Bonn. The latter was arranged with help of Willy Brandt, the former German Chancellor, with whom Hume had also established a relationship through the Confederation. A compromise was reached, with more than £63 million being awarded to Northern Ireland over three years.<sup>47</sup> However, the political significance of this economic breakthrough also needs to be emphasised. Whilst centred on Hume, the Martin Report came to fruition through his collaborations with various EC actors – Commission officials like Larkin, key political figures like Toornstra, and MEPs from other political blocs. These proved essential when Hume had to personally convince the Danish and German governments to back Martin's proposals, and involve representatives from the United Kingdom, Ireland and other EC countries. Most important, however, was the fact that all MEPs from Northern Ireland were united in their support for the Martin Report. The fact that the region's nationalist and unionist politicians were seen to cooperate, despite their continued divisions over the future of Northern Ireland, in turn encouraged the various EC actors who worked to deliver the Martin Report. This unity of purpose established the basis for all subsequent EC/EU involvement in the region. The cooperation of Northern Ireland MEPs over their common economic interests had opened the door to an increasingly political dimension to EC engagement in the region.

### The 1984 Haagerup Report

After achieving the breakthrough of the Martin Report, Hume looked to build on this and immediately began lobbying the EC's Political Affairs Committee to move beyond economic matters and also consider the *political* aspects of the conflict. Like the Martin Report, the new investigation was supported by all three of the EP's largest blocs: the Socialist Group, the European People's Party Group and the Liberals, who provided the rapporteur, the Danish MEP Neils Haagerup. Hence, the Haagerup investigation built on the Martin Report and the goodwill towards Northern Ireland that it had generated from across the various political factions of the EP. Nonetheless, Haagerup's inquiry significantly

<sup>45</sup> 'Debates of the European Parliament – Community Regional Policy and Northern Ireland', 18 June 1981, Historical Archives EP, PE 1-165/81, 238.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor addressing the European Parliament, 'Debates of the European Parliament – Community Regional Policy and Northern Ireland', 1981, 269.

<sup>47</sup> White, *John Hume*, 230.

extended the scope of Martin's. As well as consulting all of Northern Ireland's major constitutional parties, Haagerup sought the views of the region's various civil society actors: leaders from industry, agriculture, the trade unions, churches and the education sector.<sup>48</sup> Haagerup also went beyond Martin by holding hearings in London, Belfast, and even Dublin. This was particularly welcomed by the Irish government, which immediately recognised the implications of the Haagerup investigation: 'for the first time a report on Northern Ireland will be conducted by a committee of the European Parliament which by definition is concerned with political affairs.'<sup>49</sup> In contrast, the British government opposed the move towards a wider political consideration of the Northern Ireland problem signalled by Haagerup. Contemporary press coverage highlighted the United Kingdom's unpopularity and relative isolation at Strasbourg and stressed Hume's role in 'engineering the defeat of the British'<sup>50</sup> in the lobbying efforts that produced the investigation. In turn, the British government vowed that it would not cooperate with Haagerup's inquiry, a move which brought further criticism. However, concerned that wholly rebuffing Haagerup would damage its other interests in an EC context, London was subsequently obliged to acquiesce in the investigation. First, UK archival documents show that the promise of further funding for Northern Ireland's struggling economy modified British thinking.<sup>51</sup> Second, concerned that refusing to cooperate with Haagerup would lead to a one-sided report, UK officials (though not ministers) were subsequently permitted to engage with the investigation.<sup>52</sup> British files show that the aim in this was that Haagerup 'be constantly reminded to keep his report focused exclusively on economic and social aspects of the situation'.<sup>53</sup> Again, economic interests – here the UK government's eagerness to gain financial aid for the conflict-damaged region – helped create an opening to greater political influence for the EP in Northern Ireland.

The two Unionist MEPs, however, proved stauncher. Having initially cooperated with Hume to stress the common economic problems faced by Northern Ireland, Paisley and Taylor now felt that the process of EP engagement was leading in directions that would also work towards political and constitutional change. Unlike the UK government, they refused any cooperation with Haagerup's investigation. Paisley and Taylor also tabled motions in the EP for investigations into other European regions with ethnic challenges, such as Corsica and South Tyrol, all in an effort to embarrass the EC and force it to back down.<sup>54</sup> In time, Paisley and Taylor would work again with Hume in the EP to advance their common economic interests, but on Haagerup they remained defiant.

Despite the UK government's hopes of steering Haagerup towards a purely socio-economic investigation, just ten pages from a total of ninety in his report focused on such matters. The rest provided a detailed explanation of the Northern Ireland conflict which, while avoiding explicit political recommendations, strongly supported closer British–Irish cooperation as a means to political progress. Haagerup also echoed the recommendations of the New Ireland Forum, a convention of constitutional nationalist parties from both parts of Ireland that the Irish government had established at the same time of the EP's investigation. A key assertion of the New Ireland Forum Report was that the political identities of both communities in Northern Ireland 'must have equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection',<sup>55</sup> suggesting that the British and Irish governments should jointly work to create such arrangements. Haagerup similarly argued for efforts to find 'how the Irish dimension of Northern Ireland could find many more legitimate and visible expressions than is the case today', mooted 'the establishment of joint British–Irish

<sup>48</sup> Lagana, *The European Union*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> 'European Parliament Political Affairs Committee Decision to Prepare a Report on Northern Ireland', 30 Aug. 1983, NAI, DEA 2013/27/1517.

<sup>50</sup> 'Putting the Euronose out of Joint', *The Irish Times*, 15 Mar. 1983, TNA, CJ4/4294.

<sup>51</sup> 'Visits to Northern Ireland by MEPs', 4 Mar. 1983, TNA, CJ4/4294.

<sup>52</sup> 'European Parliament: Resolutions on Northern Ireland', 7 Mar. 1983, TNA, CJ4/4294.

<sup>53</sup> 'The European Parliament and Northern Ireland', 18 Mar. 1983, TNA, CJ4/4294.

<sup>54</sup> Guelke, *Northern Ireland*, 127–8.

<sup>55</sup> Dublin Stationery Office, *New Ireland Forum Report*, article 5.2 (4).

responsibilities in a number of specified fields, politically, legally and otherwise’, as a means to this end.<sup>56</sup> Both the New Ireland Forum and the Haagerup Report also used similar language in repeatedly referencing the ‘alienation’<sup>57</sup> of Northern Ireland’s Catholic minority – a term consistently and vehemently rejected by Thatcher<sup>58</sup> – and advocating a process of reform to help address this.<sup>59</sup>

The similarity of ideas between the New Ireland Forum Report and the Haagerup Report is no coincidence. Hume was a major figure in shaping the Forum’s conclusions,<sup>60</sup> and his persistent lobbying of the EP undoubtedly transmitted similar thinking to the Haagerup investigation. Also, he was now strongly supported in his efforts by the Irish Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald. Upon his election in 1981, FitzGerald had stated that his government’s primary focus would be to end the Northern Ireland conflict,<sup>61</sup> and he convened the New Ireland Forum precisely to achieve that end. Like Hume, he was also an ardent Europhile and has similarly argued the part the EC might play in helping to resolve the Northern Ireland problem.<sup>62</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that FitzGerald later suggested that the Haagerup inquiry ‘was initiated with some encouragement from us at a top level, but not officially’, and admitted that his government had ‘various contacts at the time’ with the rapporteur.<sup>63</sup> Irish archival records similarly show that FitzGerald’s government made considerable efforts to ensure that Haagerup was aware of its views on Northern Ireland and the work being conducted by the New Ireland Forum.<sup>64</sup> It is also notable that, in the same time period, FitzGerald had sanctioned his officials to approach their British counterparts with ideas for a new, joint approach to managing the Northern Ireland problem – an outreach that would eventually culminate in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), which reflected many of the ideas mooted in the Haagerup Report.<sup>65</sup> Clearly, FitzGerald hoped the findings of the Haagerup Report would reinforce those of the New Ireland Forum and add to the pressure building on Thatcher after the hunger strikes to reach an accommodation over Northern Ireland.<sup>66</sup>

The Haagerup Report did not, of course, solely reflect the views of Hume and the FitzGerald government, and clearly recognised the EP’s strict limitations regarding Northern Ireland: ‘It is not up to an outside body like the European Parliament to appear to “dictate” anything resembling political proposals regarding the Northern Ireland situation.’ Nonetheless, Haagerup subtly pressed the case for considering ideas that were notably similar to those that Hume and the FitzGerald government were advocating. Also, Haagerup’s language strongly suggested that his report marked a turning point for the EP’s engagement in the region:

. . . the European Parliament has assumed a degree of responsibility for economic and social development of Northern Ireland by deciding to draw up a report on the whole problem . . . This is a unique decision. The aim has been not only to get to know the situation in

<sup>56</sup> ‘Report Drawn Up on Behalf of the Political Affairs Committee on the Situation in Northern Ireland’, 19 Mar. 1984, Historical Archives EP, PE 1-88.265, 73.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, esp. p. 72. Compare this discourse of ‘alienation’ to the language used right throughout in Dublin Stationery Office, *New Ireland Forum Report*.

<sup>58</sup> McLoughlin, ‘“The First Major Step”’, 118.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Report Drawn Up’, 74.

<sup>60</sup> McLoughlin, *John Hume*, 116–25.

<sup>61</sup> Dáil Éireann Debate, 30 June 1981, vol. 329, no. 1.

<sup>62</sup> See Garret FitzGerald, *Towards a New Ireland* (London: C. Knight, 1972).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Katy Hayward, ‘Reiterating National Identities: The European Union Conception of Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 41, 3 (2006), 268, 279.

<sup>64</sup> See ‘Visit of Niels J Haagerup MEP – Steering Note’, NAI, DFA 2013/27/1517, and in particular the report of the Irish Ambassador to the EC, J. Lynch (dated 11 May 1983), of his lunch meeting with Haagerup shortly after the latter’s appointment as rapporteur. In the same file, also see the report by Michael Lillis, one of the most senior officials in the Irish government dealing with Northern Ireland, and a personal confidant of FitzGerald, of his lunch meeting with Haagerup (dated 1 June 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Garret FitzGerald, *All in a Life* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991), 473ff.

<sup>66</sup> Hayward, ‘Reiterating National Identities’, 268.

Northern Ireland better – an objective it is hoped that this Report can meet in part – but also to do something about the background to the tragic and continued violence.<sup>67</sup>

Despite British hopes, Haagerup had signalled that EP interests in the region were not going to diminish. Moreover, the concluding paragraphs made clear his view that the wider EC needed to engage with the problem: ‘There is no escaping the responsibilities of the European Community.’ However, again acknowledging the limits of its influence, Haagerup ended his report by declaring that the EC could best honour these responsibilities ‘in the context of the comprehensive Irish–British understanding, which remains the core of . . . any lasting improvement of the situation in Northern Ireland’.<sup>68</sup>

The EP debate that followed the Haagerup Report was widely interpreted as a triumph for Hume’s lobbying of European opinion.<sup>69</sup> Although Paisley and Taylor voted against, a resolution endorsing its findings passed nonetheless after all but one Tory MEP abstained.<sup>70</sup> It is clear that Thatcher’s government was sensing the political wind prevailing in the EP on Northern Ireland and was reluctant to be seen to actively oppose the economic support that might flow from Haagerup. More importantly, a year after the report was issued, Thatcher signed the AIA.

There is no direct link between Haagerup and the AIA, and the credit for the latter is primarily attributable to FitzGerald’s persuasive efforts, conducted over many years in the early 1980s, to convince Thatcher to sign such an accord. The Taoiseach was also supported by Hume in this, who was made privy to the secret talks between London and Dublin, advising the latter throughout.<sup>71</sup> If other outside actors deserve credit, Washington would come ahead of Brussels, as FitzGerald and Hume both lobbied the Reagan administration to use its influence with Thatcher to encourage her to compromise.<sup>72</sup> Nonetheless, scholars like Guelke, who have examined both US and EC/EU influences on Northern Ireland, argue that Haagerup, and particularly the EP debate in its findings, similarly helped nudge Thatcher towards a deal with Dublin.<sup>73</sup>

In addition, the AIA clearly reflected the conclusions of Haagerup by establishing a British–Irish framework for dealing with Northern Ireland. For the first time, the Dublin government had a voice in affairs north of the border. Hume would later call this ‘the first major step in the peace process’.<sup>74</sup> The British and Irish governments now endorsed an avowedly EC-style, cross-border approach to peacebuilding, promising to ‘consider the possibility of securing international support for this work’.<sup>75</sup> The message was clear: London and Dublin would welcome further EC funding to support cross-border efforts towards peacebuilding.

This led to the establishment of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), with the EC as one of the main contributors. Symbolically, this expressed the EC’s approval of Thatcher’s shift to an intergovernmental approach to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. Again, Haagerup and the EP debates which preceded it were not the sole reason for this shift, but they undoubtedly contributed to this. By involving Dublin in the governance of the region, Thatcher hoped to end the international criticism of British policy that had grown throughout the early 1980s. Agitation over Northern Ireland in the US Congress and debates over the problem in the EP had damaged the United Kingdom’s political reputation. The AIA sought to rehabilitate this.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Report Drawn Up’, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Debates of the European Parliament – Report on the Situation in Northern Ireland’, 29 Apr. 1983, Historical Archives EP, PE 1-88/267, 200–6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, vol. III, 103. For more detail on these talks, see John Coakley and Jennifer Todd, *Negotiating a Settlement in Northern Ireland, 1969–2019* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), ch. 3.

<sup>72</sup> FitzGerald, *All in a Life*, 527; McLoughlin, *John Hume*, 127.

<sup>73</sup> Guelke, *Northern Ireland*, 160.

<sup>74</sup> Cited in McLoughlin, ‘The First Major Step’, 116.

<sup>75</sup> The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom, article 10, available at: [www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/aia/aiadoc.htm](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/aia/aiadoc.htm) (last visited 2 Nov. 2021).

### The Northern Ireland Peace Process

As noted, the role of the EC/EU, and more specifically of the Commission, in supporting the emergence of a peace process in Northern Ireland in the 1990s has already been documented in the existing scholarly literature. Most noted is the hugely generous aid package provided to support peace and reconciliation initiatives in the wake of the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994. This came to be known as the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland.<sup>76</sup> However, to focus on this alone would suggest that the EU was merely responding to the ending of violence. Instead, as demonstrated, the basis for the EU's engagement in the region had already been established ten years earlier and lobbying efforts in the EP had created both greater understanding of and considerable goodwill towards Northern Ireland in Brussels. These early efforts had also produced direct linkages between Northern Ireland and the EU, which would prove beneficial from the 1990s onwards.

For example, Carlo Trojan was the EU Commission's observer on the IFI Board, serving in the role for eleven years, and working closely with the IFI's long-time president Willie McCarter.<sup>77</sup> Trojan became Deputy Secretary-General of the European Commission in 1987 and Secretary-General in 1997. This meant that there was a senior official working in the Commission throughout the 1990s who had direct experience of Northern Ireland politics. Indeed, by the time of the ceasefires, Trojan was already acquainted with the efforts of peacebuilding in the region and, having won the trust of the EU President, Jacques Delors, over many years, was in a position to steer the Commission to better direct its support for Northern Ireland. This resulted in efforts to bring together the public and private sectors in a consensual approach towards economic growth and increased social cohesion within Northern Ireland. Trojan's time on the IFI Board clearly gave him a deep understanding of the Northern Ireland problem and thus the need for such a localised approach. 'Even when violence originated and occurred at the national, international, and regional levels', Trojan reasoned, 'its impact was felt most keenly and directly in Belfast and Derry's neighbourhoods, small towns, and . . . border villages.'<sup>78</sup>

At the grassroots level, cross-border and cross-community initiatives had already been started by the IFI and, through Trojan, were implemented with an EC/EU input. Community groups in Northern Ireland worked to restore normality in the most deprived areas, thus establishing the basis for increased cooperation with their southern counterparts through the new PEACE programme. This approach also matched Delors' move towards a more regional approach to EC/EU policy and funding, itself a means to counter the likely effects of the SEM, the creation of which threatened to exacerbate disparities between the richer, more competitive regions and poorer, peripheral areas.

A Commission Task Force for Northern Ireland was established at the beginning of 1994. As Trojan recalls:

We worked in close cooperation with the three Northern Ireland MEP's – Ian Paisley, John Hume, and Jim Nicholson<sup>79</sup> – who paid a joint visit to this effect to the President of the Commission. The very fact of this joint démarche of three gentlemen . . . was exceptional in itself. Within the Task Force . . . we consulted widely with grassroots organisations of both communities and of both sides of the border and produced a proposal issued on 14 December 1994, in time for endorsement by the European Council at Essen. The member states ratified the programme with a budget of £240 million, with the British and Irish governments agreeing to donate a similar amount.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Also commonly known as the PEACE founding, the PEACE package or the PEACE programmes.

<sup>77</sup> Giada Lagana, Niall O'Dochartaigh and Anita Naughton. *The European Union and the Northern Ireland Peace Process*. Policy Report – The Whitaker Institute for Research and Innovation (2019).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholson replaced Taylor as the third Northern Ireland MEP at the 1989 EP elections.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Carlo Trojan, 29 Jan. 2016.

This shows how the Northern Ireland Task Force built upon the collaborations between the three MEPs and the British and Irish government that had already emerged with EP encouragement in the 1980s. Consultations on the ground in the region were held by a delegation of three EU officials, nominated by the three Northern Ireland MEPs, who were fully and cooperatively involved throughout the whole process. The task of the EU officials was to take soundings from a variety of groups across Northern Ireland and the Irish border regions on issues of EU assistance in job creation, social inclusion and economic development. They consulted a wide range of public and private actors, and reported back to the Task Force Chairman, Trojan.

Trojan also describes the empowering nature of the EU's work, which was not restricted to a mere transfer of monies, but aimed at developing policies that would engage civil society and help close the gaps in economic and social development across the island of Ireland. Like the three MEPs, Trojan knew that there was significant commitment among both voluntary and private sector actors to bridge the religious divide and aid community development in Northern Ireland. They therefore worked together to design a support package that facilitated a genuine 'bottom-up' approach.

This approach also showed how the Commission built upon EP efforts in the 1980s like the Martin and Haagerup inquiries. The Martin Report had first brought the three Northern Ireland MEPs together to support common economic interests and, whilst Paisley and Taylor rejected Haagerup's approach, he had consulted with local civil society actors, arguing that their mobilisation was essential to any peace-building role the EC/EU might play in the region. Thus, whilst EU involvement with Northern Ireland certainly increased in the 1990s, it developed from and drew upon the more tentative engagements seen in the previous decade: the EP discussions of the problems that Hume had prompted; the Martin and Haagerup reports; the increased understanding of the region that the EC gained through these investigations; the role that the Haagerup Report played in nudging the Thatcher government towards signing the AIA; the new cross-border and intergovernmental institutions established by the AIA; and finally the EC/EU's involvement with grassroots actors in Northern Ireland through the IFI. All of this helped shape the EU funding package that followed the ceasefires of 1994. So successful was this funding that the EU decided to renew it after the initial five-year plan, making only minor changes to the collaborative and locally-led delivery mechanisms used the first time round.

In total, there were four more iterations of the programme (labelled PEACE II-IV) running right through to 2020. Even when the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU during the fifth round of the PEACE programme, agreement was made to continue funding cross-border reconciliation efforts in Ireland until 2027. It has become a powerful reminder of the ongoing role of the EU in peacebuilding, and indeed the very philosophy of the integrationist project, with intergovernmental and cross-border dimensions manifest in all the PEACE programmes. Moreover, the PEACE initiative established its own administrative body, facilitating immediate disposal of its monies and finally resolving the contentious issue of additionality that plagued debates on EC funding for Northern Ireland in the 1980s.

## Conclusion

This article contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating how EP lobbying and other initiatives occurring in the 1980s established the basis for the more active engagement and visible support of the EU for Northern Ireland during the peace process of the 1990s. By detailing these activities, it shows that the EC/EU did not simply react to change in Northern Ireland, but played a proactive role in its occurrence. Moreover, it was the EP, rather than the Commission, that was most important to these early European efforts, particularly through the Haagerup Report and the part it played – albeit indirect – in nudging the Thatcher government towards the AIA. Various scholars have noted how this accord, and the increasing role played by Dublin in the affairs of Northern Ireland thereafter, helped trigger the changes that led to the peace process.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, vol. III, 148; McLoughlin, 'The First Major Step', 120–22; Jennifer Todd, 'Institutional Change and Conflict Regulation: The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) and the Mechanisms of Change in Northern Ireland', *West European Politics*, 34, 4 (2011).



Of course, a variety of political forces helped produce the AIA, not least the efforts of the FitzGerald government and the sympathetic British officials who helped persuade Thatcher that enhanced British–Irish cooperation was the way forward for Northern Ireland. The Reagan administration also encouraged this course of action, but Haagerup, and the strong endorsement of his report by the EP, certainly played a part in producing the biggest shift in British policy towards Northern Ireland since partition. The findings of the Haagerup Report and the Martin Report before that also increased awareness and goodwill towards the region in the EC that would aid the EC/EU's greater involvement in Northern Ireland in the 1990s, its initiatives building on the learning of the previous decade, including involvement in the IFI, which supported the operation of the AIA.

The emergence of a more regional and cross-border approach to funding across the EC/EU also interacted favourably with developments such as the AIA and the establishment of the IFI. The PEACE programmes clearly built upon previous experiences and sought to perfect the 'bottom-up' approach to peacebuilding begun in the 1980s. To say that EP activities in this decade were decisive in terms of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland is an overstatement. However, it is clear that the EP's increased engagement with the region from this period, even if prompted by the ceaseless lobbying of Hume, was one of the many factors helping to internationalise the problem and push the British government towards a more progressive policy for the region. The fact that Thatcher's shift in policy would also involve another EC member, the Republic of Ireland, was also fortunate. Joint membership of the EC/EU was crucial in drawing London and Dublin together in their understanding and cooperation over a common problem. This, in turn, was essential to the changes that led to the peace process. Nonetheless, in terms of direct effect, Hume, and his lobbying efforts in the 1980s, were vital to engaging first the EP and in turn the Commission in this process.

Hume would undoubtedly have been devastated by the United Kingdom's vote to leave the EU in 2016 and the serious threat which this posed to the Northern Ireland peace process. However, by a remarkable coincidence, the figure chosen to lead the EU's negotiation of the United Kingdom's withdrawal had first-hand and detailed knowledge of Northern Ireland. In the years immediately after the B/GFA, Michel Barnier oversaw EU peace funding for the region. He thus followed in the footsteps of other senior Commission figures like Carlo Trojan, whose early engagement with Northern Ireland through the administration of European monies gave them personal insight into the EU role in the region. As with Trojan, this led Barnier to have an enduring commitment to Northern Ireland, which was undoubtedly reflected in his role in the Brexit negotiations. Of course, Barnier was not acting independently in doing so. The Irish government also lobbied the EU extensively after Brexit to ensure that the B/GFA would receive the highest priority in this process and that member states united in their support of this approach.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that Barnier has such a personal affiliation with Northern Ireland gave Dublin much comfort. The depth of Barnier's commitment is evident in an anecdote from Hume's first ally in his efforts to bring an EC/EU influence to bear on the region. After the B/GFA, Colm Larkin was seconded by the Commission to serve as a special advisor on EU affairs to the new Northern Ireland Executive. He would later work with the Central Bank of Ireland, a role in which Larkin had meetings with Barnier, then EU Commissioner for Financial Services, and recalls one of their early meetings:

One day when he heard I had been involved in the early days of the Northern Ireland Executive he took me to one side and told me of his great interest in Northern Ireland, his support for the Good Friday Agreement and the pride he took in the work he had done previously as Regional Policy Commissioner on the EU Peace Funds. He really cared. . . . That was in 2007, long before Brexit.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Neil Dooley, 'Frustrating Brexit? Ireland and the United Kingdom's Conflicting Approaches to Brexit Negotiations', *Journal of European Public Policy* (forthcoming).

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Larkin, 2016.

This anecdote helps us to understand how, as Coakley and Todd argue, ‘it is the EU rather than the United Kingdom or United States that has become the effective guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement in the new world of Brexit.’<sup>84</sup>

This article helps explain the origins of the particular affiliation that the EU has with the region, which in fact prefigured the peace process. Although its role in Northern Ireland was consistent with the founding ideals of European integration, it needed Hume – aided by figures like Larkin and sympathetic Irish government actors particularly – to constantly lobby and initiate a process of EC engagement. And the more the EC/EU involved itself, the more even those actors wary of this – particularly unionists and the British government – responded positively, even if only initially to maximise the economic benefits of engagement. The more EC/EU involvement encouraged such shifts, the more that its own elites saw the value and vindication of the EC’s founding principles as applied to a more localised conflict. Amidst the Eurosclerosis of the 1980s, and a generation after its formative achievement in helping to reconcile post-war Europe, the EC had lost sight of its tremendous capacities for peacebuilding, both practical and inspirational. Hume, and his determined efforts in the EP to support peace-making in Northern Ireland, certainly helped to revive this foundational ideal.

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<sup>84</sup> Coakley and Todd, *Negotiating a Settlement in Northern Ireland*, 554. The US role in the negotiation of the GFA under the Clinton administration was seen by nationalists and republicans particularly as providing a guarantor role to ensure the UK government would deliver on the commitments made in the accord.

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