



## NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROGRAMME

The purpose of the EU PEACE programme is to support peace and reconciliation and to promote economic and social progress in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

### LEGAL BASIS

The legal basis for the fourth PEACE programme covering the 2014-2020 programming period is Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of 17 December 2013 and Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of 17 December 2013.

### BACKGROUND

The peace process in Northern Ireland has been receiving financial support from the EU since 1989, through both EU regional policy and EU contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (IFI).

Following the recommendations from a special Commission Task Force, the PEACE I programme (1995-1999) was approved on 28 July 1995. In March 1999, the European Council decided that the special programme should continue until 2004 under the name of PEACE II. The programme was subsequently extended until 2006. PEACE III, covering the 2007-2013 programming period, carried on some of the priorities of the previous programmes, and all project activities ceased on 31 December 2015. A declaration of the programme's closure was submitted to the Commission by 31 March 2017.

A new programme (PEACE IV, 2014-2020) was officially launched on 14 January 2016, with a strong emphasis on investment targeted at children and young people.

### OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

The PEACE programme has been implemented as a cross-border cooperation programme (in the context of European Territorial Cooperation — ETC) between Ireland and the UK, and has two main aims:

- Cohesion between communities involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland;
- Economic and social stability.

The programme addresses the specific problems caused by the conflict with the aim of creating a peaceful and stable society. To this end, it builds upon two main priorities



(reconciling communities and contributing to peace) and four main objectives for the 2014-2020 programming period:

- Shared education;
- Helping children and young people;
- Creating shared spaces and services;
- Building positive relations at a local level.

## **FINANCING**

Between 1995 and 2013 there were three PEACE programmes, with a financial contribution of EUR 1.3 billion. While PEACE I (1995-1999) and PEACE II (2000-2006) received funding from all the Structural Funds, PEACE III (2007-2013) was funded solely by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The PEACE IV programme for the 2014-2020 programming period has a total value of EUR 270 million. The ERDF contribution to the programme is approximately EUR 229 million (85%), and around EUR 40 million (15%) will come from match-funding (i.e. non-EU sources which may include national, regional and local government funding). 94% of the PEACE IV programme resources will support social inclusion, combating poverty and labour mobility (the remaining resources will be allocated to technical assistance).

## **ELIGIBILITY AND MANAGEMENT**

The area eligible for inclusion in the fourth PEACE programme consists of Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (the latter comprises counties Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal).

Overall management and delivery of the programme is handled by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), and financing is administered by local partnerships and non-governmental organisations.

Furthermore, in 2007 the Commission established the Northern Ireland Task Force (NITF), which operates under the authority of the Commissioner for Regional Policy and in close cooperation with the Northern Ireland authorities. The NITF aims to improve competitiveness and create sustainable employment, and covers several policy areas, such as agriculture, competition policy, education and culture, energy, etc. The NITF's actions also aim to contribute to the overall success of the projects under the PEACE programme.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

The PEACE programme has provided opportunities for participation and dialogue, and has brought decision-making and responsibility for community development closer to the people (i.e. it has applied a 'bottom-up' approach). It has funded a wide range of projects, including projects to support victims and survivors, young people and SMEs, infrastructure and urban regeneration projects, and projects in support of immigrants and of celebrating the ethnic diversity of society as a whole.



Importantly, this programme is now seen as an example of peace-building policy to be shared throughout Europe and other regions.

## **FUTURE OF THE PEACE PROGRAMME**

In a referendum held on 23 June 2016, the majority of voters (51.9%) voted for the UK to leave the European Union. After Brexit, the status of the UK will change, which will also have an impact on EU policies, including cohesion policy and the PEACE programme.

Northern Ireland benefits significantly from EU funding and the UK's withdrawal raises concerns in the longer term for a range of sectors in Northern Ireland, as well as for the peace process and cross-border cooperation beyond 2020. (Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK that has a land border with another Member State: in practical terms, after Brexit there will be an external border of the EU on the island of Ireland.)

In its proposals on the post-2020 cohesion regulations, the Commission has put forward the idea of continuing the PEACE ('PEACE Plus') programme. It is proposed that, given its specificities, the programme should be managed in an integrated manner with the UK's contribution being integrated into it as external assigned revenue. Moreover, the SEUPB, when identified as the managing authority, is to be considered as located in a Member State. The proposals come under the ordinary legislative procedure and Parliament adopted its first-reading position in March 2019.

On 25 March 2019, the European Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation (EU) 2019/491 in order to allow for the continuation of the territorial cooperation programmes PEACE IV. It will apply in the event of withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU without a withdrawal agreement. This regulation will enable the effective continuation of the PEACE IV programmes in the new legal framework.

## **ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Parliament has always supported the EU financial contributions to the PEACE and IFI programmes. In its legislative resolution of 15 June 2010 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning European Union financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007-2010)<sup>[1]</sup>, Parliament emphasised that the IFI should complement the activities financed by the Structural Funds, and especially those of the PEACE III programme operating in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. Parliament calls formally on the Commission to ensure this coordination.

Parliament, in its role as co-legislator on the cohesion package (in this context, on the Common Provisions Regulation and the Regulation on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal), has strongly supported the continuation of the PEACE programme in the 2014-2020 period. Furthermore, in its resolution of 13 November 2014, Parliament underlined the importance of the PEACE programme in building up progress, economic and social cohesion and reconciliation between communities.

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[1]OJ C 236 E, 12.8.2011, p. 173.



Following the outcome of the UK referendum, the European Parliament, in its resolution of 5 April 2017, expressed concern at the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and highlighted the need to safeguard peace between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

In its resolution of 11 September 2018 on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland, the European Parliament noted the Commission's proposal to continue the PEACE and Interreg programmes, as well as the UK position paper on the future of Cohesion Policy (of April 2018), in which the UK states its willingness to explore a potential successor to PEACE IV with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the EU, in addition to its engagement to honour commitments to PEACE and Interreg under the current multiannual financial framework (MFF). Parliament considers that 'without prejudice to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations, EU support for territorial cooperation, especially regarding cross-border and cross-community projects, should be continued in view of the achievements of the special EU cohesion programmes for Northern Ireland, namely the PEACE Programme and the Interreg programmes, which are particularly important for the stability of the region'.

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