REPORT

on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland (2017/2225(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: Derek Vaughan
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EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

Northern Ireland ranks as one of the poorest regions in North Western Europe. This is explained in part by the decline in certain traditional industries. Northern Ireland was also affected by inter-community violence for several decades, known as the ‘Troubles’. The ‘Good Friday Agreement’ or Belfast Agreement of 1998 set a path towards peace, where the British and Irish governments and society north and south overwhelmingly agreed upon a power-sharing arrangement that would put an end to violence and segregation.

Following the signing of the ‘Good Friday Agreement’, the European Union has played an increased role in supporting the peace process in Northern Ireland. This support has taken two main forms. Firstly, the European Union forms the general political framework for relations between the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Secondly, the European Union’s cohesion policy has given special attention to Northern Ireland over the years in order to support economic and social development in the context of the peace process. With that in mind, the European Parliament wants to look into the impact of EU cohesion policy in Northern Ireland, with a view to setting out the way forward.

Northern Ireland benefits from various cohesion programmes, and in particular from the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, as well as from the PEACE Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland and the Interreg cross-border programmes.

In some cases, EU funds in Northern Ireland play the same role as they do in other European regions, by encouraging economic development and social progress. There are also some programmes which are tailored to the specific situation in Northern Ireland and are aimed at bridge-building between the two communities and across the border.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in Northern Ireland

The objective of the ERDF programme in Northern Ireland for the 2014-2020 period is to strengthen overall competitiveness. There is a particular focus on research and development technology transfer to companies in Northern Ireland, with EUR 113 million being invested in this area.

More than EUR 140 million is being used to increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, helping them access capital through a combination of financial instruments and subsidies. More than 6000 companies will have received financial and non-financial support, with the goal of creating 2800 jobs. A third goal is to promote alternative low carbon actions in Northern Ireland. EUR 47 million has been dedicated to increasing the energy efficiency in social housing as well as measures to promote low carbon and sustainable multi-model urban transport in Belfast.

Recent important projects funded under the ERDF in Northern Ireland include the Giant’s Causeway visitor centre, which contributes to the attractiveness of the area for tourists and thus boosts the local economy.

The total operational programme budget for the ERDF for the 2014-2020 period in Northern Ireland is EUR 522 091 481, with the EU contribution being EUR 313 254 888.
The European Social Fund (ESF) in Northern Ireland

The main objective of the ESF in Northern Ireland for 2014-2020 is to improve skills, particularly those of young people. The aim here is to combat poverty and social exclusion by reducing unemployment.

In particular, the operational programme seeks to improve the employability of 40,000 people, including the long-term unemployed. There is provision for career guidance, counselling and training for unemployed young people. Promoting apprenticeships is also an objective of the programme.

The total budget of the European Social Fund for Northern Ireland for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 513,382,725, with the EU contribution being EUR 205,353,090.

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) in Northern Ireland

The Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland is particularly important, in view of the continuing importance of the agricultural sector for the local economy. The programme focuses mainly on preserving and enhancing ecosystems, local development in rural areas and increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector.

In particular, farmers are receiving support to put 12% of the Northern Irish farmland under contract to preserve biodiversity, and 1,200 hectares of forests are being planted to mitigate climate change. During the 2014-2020 period, almost 20% of Northern Irish farms will benefit from investment support to restructure and modernise their businesses. In addition, 10% of farms and 25% of agri-food businesses will receive support to develop short supply chains and local markets. The programme will also create almost 30,000 training course places for farmers and other rural businesses. Furthermore, every rural dweller in Northern Ireland is expected to be covered by a local development strategy, while roughly 12% of the rural population are to benefit from improved services and infrastructure.

The total operational programme budget for Northern Ireland is EUR 760,100,000 for the 2014-2020 period, with the EU contribution being EUR 228,400,000.

The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) in Northern Ireland

The EMFF supports maritime and fishery activities and helps deliver the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Support is available for projects that deliver on sustainable economic growth in the sea fisheries and aquaculture sectors. In particular, funding is available for improvements to fishing vessels, including energy improvements and re-engining, for fish farming, fish processing and marketing, for investments in shore-based facilities, for services to the fishing industry, for job creation and training, and for the marine environment and inland fishing.

The total allocation to Northern Ireland under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 18,310,000, with the EU contribution being EUR 13,730,000.

The PEACE Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland

PEACE IV is a unique EU cohesion policy programme that aims to reinforce a peaceful and
stable society by fostering reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland, namely the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo. It seeks to support actions that will build trust and bring people closer together at a cross-community and cross-border level and that contribute towards a shared society for everyone.

It is different from the funds and programmes mentioned above in that funding is not managed by national or regional bodies, but by the Special EU Programmes Body (Foras Um Chlár Speisialta An AE/Boord O Owre Ocht UE Projecks). This is a special cross-border body set up in the context of the Good Friday Agreement and which is recognised both by the United Kingdom and by the Republic of Ireland. The programme focuses on *four objectives*.

The objective of **shared education** aims to increase the level of direct, sustained and curriculum-based contact between pupils and teachers from all backgrounds. The aim is for 350 schools and 144 000 pupils to engage in shared education activities. There is also provision for teacher training.

With regard to **children and young people**, the programme aims to invest in good relations and mentoring actions in order to increase interaction between children and young people from all backgrounds, promote respect for diversity and enhance their desire to form positive relationships. Distinctive actions are available for the most marginalised, most vulnerable and hardest to reach. Over 43 000 children and young people will gain new skills and competencies. These actions involve local authorities and communities as well as statutory and voluntary organisations.

Through the creation of **shared spaces and services**, the aim is to transform community relations in the Programme area and in particular in Northern Ireland. This also encourages increased economic and social cross-border and cross-community engagement. In terms of services, the programme targets victims and survivors of the conflict, for instance by addressing trauma, assessing physical and mental health needs and helping families cope with the history of the conflict.

By **building positive relations**, the goal is to create respect on a cross-community and cross-border basis. This includes conflict resolution and mediation, local and regional projects to build mutual trust and understanding, projects to explore history in a sensitive manner, activities in sport, arts and culture as well as projects to facilitate personal interaction and mobility between residents from divided neighbourhoods.

The total operational programme budget for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 269 610 967, with the EU contribution being EUR 229 169 320.

**Interreg Programmes in Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland participates in an Interreg V-A programme together with adjoining parts of the Republic of Ireland and western Scotland. The Special EU Programmes Body also manages this programme.

The programme focuses on four areas that are crucial for job creation and growth: cross-border initiatives for research and innovation, the preservation of the shared environment, sustainable mobility across borders, and cross-border health and social care services. The schemes to promote cross-border public transport and access to modern health care in border...
regions are particularly important.

The total operational programme budget for the Interreg V-A programme Northern Ireland-Ireland-Scotland for the 2014-2020 period is EUR 282 761 998, with the EU contribution being EUR 240 347 696.

Northern Ireland is also eligible for funding under Interreg V-B (transnational: Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme, North West Europe Programme and Atlantic Area Programme) and Interreg V-C (interregional, i.e. Europe-wide).

**Fact-finding mission to Northern Ireland**

In order to assess the impact of cohesion policy in Northern Ireland in greater detail, the Committee on Regional Development sent a fact-finding mission to Northern Ireland from 21 to 23 March 2018. During that fact-finding mission, the Members met various stakeholders in order to collect information on cohesion policy in Northern Ireland, and visited several projects financed with the assistance of cohesion programmes. Those included urban projects in Belfast, cross-border projects in the Derry/Londonderry area and rural projects in the Giant’s Causeway area.

In particular, Members visited the Skainos Centre in East Belfast and the Girdwood Hub in North Belfast, which are examples of cross-community, shared spaces. In Derry/Londonderry, the mission participants visited the North West Regional Science Park (Catalyst Inc), which helps small and medium-sized businesses in the knowledge economy to grow. At the Giant’s Causeway, the committee representatives visited the Visitor Centre, which is important for attracting tourism to the area, but also heard from three local businesses and initiatives which had obtained EU funding to assist the development of the local economy. In Belfast, meetings were also held with the Commission office, the Special EU Programmes Body, the Department of Finance and the Department for the Economy.

The meetings and project visits are described in detail in the mission report, which is published separately.

**Conclusion**

The rapporteur’s overall conclusion on the impact of cohesion policy on Northern Ireland is that the policy has had a resoundingly positive effect on life in Northern Ireland, particularly in deprived urban and rural areas, and with regard to cross-community relations. The European Union’s cohesion policy has helped to improve the economic and social situation of Northern Ireland following the implementation of the peace process, meaning that Northern Ireland now has much less of a development deficit than a few decades ago.

With regard to cross-community relations, the PEACE Programme is particularly important. It is administered by an independent body which is separate from national or regional authorities, and has a special focus on creating links between the communities of Northern Ireland and across the border. These links would have been difficult to achieve in the absence of the EU-sponsored Peace Programme.

As for the future of cohesion policy in Northern Ireland, your rapporteur considers that cohesion funding should be maintained post-2020 if possible. The successors to the current
PEACE Programme and the Interreg V-A programme in Northern Ireland and the border areas should have an even greater priority in this respect, as funding for cross-community and cross-border projects should continue.
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland
(2017/2225(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland,

– having regard to the provisions of the 1998 Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement),

– having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A8-0240/2018),

A. whereas EU cohesion policy in Northern Ireland operates through various instruments, including the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the PEACE Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Region and the cross-border Interreg programme;

B. whereas it is clear that Northern Ireland is a region that has benefited greatly from the EU’s cohesion policy; whereas the commitment to future funding in the Commission’s draft multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 is very welcome;

C. whereas, in addition to the more general cohesion policy funds, Northern Ireland has benefited in particular from special cross-border and inter- and cross-community programmes, including the PEACE Programme;

D. whereas EU cohesion policy, particularly through the PEACE Programme, has decisively contributed to the peace process in Northern Ireland, supports the Good Friday Agreement and continues to support the reconciliation of the communities;

E. whereas following the creation of the first PEACE Programme in 1995, more than EUR 1.5 billion has been spent with the dual aim of promoting cohesion between communities involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, as well as economic and social stability;

F. whereas the success of EU cohesion funding partly derives from the fact that it is seen as ‘neutral money’, i.e. not directly linked to the interests of either community;

1. Underlines the important and positive contribution of EU cohesion policy to Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of assisting the recovery of deprived urban and rural areas, of tackling climate change and of building cross-community and cross-border contacts in the context of the peace process; notes in particular that assistance to deprived urban and rural areas often takes the form of support for new economic development that promotes the knowledge economy, such as the Science Parks in Belfast and
Derry/Londonderry;

2. Emphasises that more than EUR 1 billion in EU financial assistance will be spent on economic and social development in Northern Ireland and the neighbouring regions in the current financing period, of which EUR 230 million will be invested in the Northern Ireland PEACE Programme (with a total budget of almost EUR 270 million) and EUR 240 million in the Interreg V-A programme for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland (with a total budget of EUR 280 million);

3. Considers that the special EU programmes for Northern Ireland, especially the PEACE Programme, are of key importance for sustaining the peace process, as they foster reconciliation and inter- and cross-community and cross-border contacts; notes that cross-community and cross-border social hubs and shared services are particularly important in this regard;

4. Welcomes the important steps forward that have been taken in Northern Ireland under the PEACE Programme, and acknowledges the work of all parties in this process;

5. Sees that inter- and cross-community trust-building measures, and measures for a peaceful coexistence, such as shared spaces and support networks, have played a key role in the peace process, as shared spaces allow the communities in Northern Ireland to come together as a single community for joint activities and develop mutual trust and respect, thereby helping to heal the divide;

6. Emphasises the importance of community-led local development and of the bottom-up approach, which encourages all communities to take ownership of projects, thus enhancing the peace process;

7. Notes the attachment of all stakeholders in Northern Ireland to the continuance of EU cohesion policy goals in the region; stresses, in this regard, the importance of coordinated multilevel governance and the partnership principle;

8. Is of the opinion, nevertheless, that more must be done to increase general awareness and visibility of the impact and necessity of EU funding in Northern Ireland, in particular by informing the general public about the impact of EU-funded projects for the peace process and the economic development of the region;

9. Welcomes the fact that management and control systems in the regions are functioning properly and that EU financial assistance is therefore being spent effectively; stresses, nevertheless, that in addition to compliance, the underlying objectives of the PEACE Programme must always be taken into account when assessing the performance of this programme;

10. Without prejudice to the ongoing EU-UK negotiations, believes that it is crucial, post-2020, for Northern Ireland to be able to participate in certain special EU programmes, such as the PEACE Programme and the Interreg V-A programme for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland, as this would strongly benefit sustainable economic and social development, particularly in disadvantaged, rural and border areas, by reducing existing gaps; urges, furthermore, in the context of the post-2020 MFF, that all relevant financial instruments be used to enable the continuation of the objectives of cohesion policy;
11. Considers that, post-2020, 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; fears that an end to these programmes would endanger cross-border and inter- and cross-community trust-building activities and, as a consequence, the peace process;

12. Emphasises that 85% of funding for the PEACE and Interreg programmes comes from the EU; considers, therefore, that it is important that the EU should continue to reach out to the communities in Northern Ireland post-2020 by playing an active role in the administration of the available EU cohesion and inter- and cross-community funding in Northern Ireland, thereby helping them to overcome societal divisions; in this context, believes that funding should be maintained at an adequate level post-2020; stresses that this is important to allow the peace-building work to continue;

13. Calls on the Commission to promote the Northern Irish experience with cohesion funding, especially with the PEACE Programme, as an example of how the EU is addressing inter-community conflicts and community divisions; stresses, in this regard, that the Northern Irish reconciliation process is a positive example for other areas in the EU which have experienced conflict;

14. Stresses that good practices with cohesion funding and the PEACE Programme should be taken as the EU model and promoted in order to overcome mistrust among communities in conflict and to achieve lasting peace in other parts of Europe and even worldwide;

15. Considers that it is essential that the people of Northern Ireland, and in particular young people, should continue to have access to economic, social and cultural exchanges across Europe, particularly to the Erasmus+ programme;

16. Notes the Commission’s intention to propose the continuation of the PEACE and Interreg programmes in its proposal for the MFF 2021-2027; notes, in addition, 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, as well as Interreg V-A, for the post-2020 period 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 MFF;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States and their regions.
15.5.2018

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY CONTROL

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland
(2017/2225(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Derek Vaughan

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Budgetary Control calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

– having regard to the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland,
– having regard to the provisions of the 1998 Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement),

A. whereas Northern Ireland has benefited greatly from EU cohesion policy;

B. whereas, in addition to the more general cohesion policy funds, Northern Ireland has benefited in particular from special cross-border and inter-community programmes, including the Northern Ireland PEACE programme; whereas these programmes have contributed decisively to the peace process in Northern Ireland and to supporting the Good Friday Agreement, and continue to support the reconciliation of the Catholic and Protestant communities;

C. whereas following the creation of the first PEACE programme in 1995, more than EUR 1.5 billion has been spent with the dual aim of promoting cohesion between communities involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, as well as economic and social stability;

1. Emphasises that more than EUR 1 billion in EU financial assistance will be spent on economic and social development in Northern Ireland and the neighbouring regions in the current financing period, of which EUR 230 million will be invested in the Northern Ireland PEACE programme (with a total budget of almost EUR 270 million) and EUR 240 million in the INTERREG V-A programme for Northern Ireland, Ireland and
Scotland (with a total budget of EUR 280 million);

2. Acknowledges the significant role that EU cohesion policy has had in sustaining peace in Northern Ireland and in facilitating cross-community reconciliation;

3. Welcomes the fact that management and control systems in the regions are functioning properly and that EU financial assistance is therefore being spent effectively; stresses, nevertheless, that in addition to compliance, the underlying objectives of the PEACE programme must always be taken into account when assessing the performance of this programme;

4. Is unable to anticipate what solution will be found for Northern Ireland post 2020, in the context of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, but stresses the importance of a solution for the region which allows the important work of peacebuilding to continue;

5. Is convinced that it would be in the interests of the United Kingdom, Ireland and the entire European Union to continue financing the Northern Ireland PEACE programme and the INTERREG V-A programme for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland with a view to supporting a peaceful and prosperous development of these regions; calls on all parties to be imaginative in how funding for these important objectives can be obtained;

6. Emphasises that 85% of funding for the PEACE and INTERREG programmes comes from the EU and that projects funded by these programmes could be jeopardised if EU funding is discontinued;

7. Welcomes the UK Government’s proposal of August 2017 to explore a potential successor to PEACE IV for the post-2020 period with the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government; highlights the positive response set out in the Joint Report of December 2017, in which both the negotiators of the European Union and the UK Government agreed to examine possibilities for future support of the PEACE and INTERREG funding programmes; notes moreover the Commission’s intention to propose the continuation of these programmes in its proposal for the next multiannual financial framework.

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1 Northern Ireland and Ireland: position paper, paragraph 17, August 2017.
2 Joint report from the negotiators of the European Union and the United Kingdom Government on progress during phase 1 of negotiations under Article 50 TEU on the United Kingdom’s orderly withdrawal from the European Union, paragraph 55, December 2017.
**INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION**

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| **Members present for the final vote** | Zigmantas Balčytis, Jonathan Bullock, Martina Dlabajová, Raffaele Fitto, Ingeborg Gräßle, Cătălin Sorin Ivan, Georgi Pirinski, Claudia Schmidt, Derek Vaughan, Tomáš Zdechovský |
| **Substitutes present for the final vote** | Brian Hayes, Julia Pitera |
### FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

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+ : in favour
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0 : abstention
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| Substitutes present for the final vote | Martina Anderson, John Howarth, Elsi Katainen, Tunne Kelam, Ivana Maletić, Bronis Ropė, Milan Zver |
| Substitutes under Rule 200(2) present for the final vote | Jonathan Bullock, Andrej Grzyb |
## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

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Key to symbols:
+ : in favour
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