

European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation

**PEACE III – DRAFT OPERATIONAL
PROGRAMME CONSULTATION**

“Shaping Peace III – Making it Work”

BY

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Introduction

As an MEP, I and my office has consistently articulated the view that the structures and priorities of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation require major reform if they are to command the confidence of everyone in Northern Ireland. From our considerable experience of dealing with a variety of stake-holders in the Programme ranging from small community groups to major organisations we have found that people, particularly those drawn from within the Protestant/Unionist community in Northern Ireland find engaging with the programme exasperating, confusing and overly-complex.

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that we are opposed to Technical Assistance consuming almost 10% of the resources coming from Brussels. As the European Union expands to include fifteen new member-states, it is essential that these available resources, in what is likely to be the final round of Peace funding are invested in strategic projects, with the maximum capacity to improve the standard of life for everyone in Northern Ireland. We do not want to see this vital money wasted on administration costs and unnecessary froth as has been the case in some instances up until now.

In our document “Shaping Peace III – Making it better” (Annex A) we set out our vision of how we wanted to see the Peace Programme shaped in the future. Specifically we identified four key priorities which we feel should be at the heart of the programme into its final phase, namely: *The Development of a Competitive Economy: The Improvement of the physical landscape: Unlocking our Educational Potential* and *Increasing the Confidence and Capacity of our Communities*.

We are pleased to see that elements of our recommendations have made it into the consultation document, but disappointed that other elements are missing. With regard to programme delivery we set out in our document a model for delivery which we believed and still believe would increase community confidence in the programme and guarantee fairness and consistency throughout the Province. Once again I welcome the opportunity,

to make our views known on the future direction of the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and hope that the recommendations made herein are reflected in the final operational programme. The degree to which our recommendations are implemented will reflect the degree of confidence or otherwise which the Unionist community will have in the programme into the future. This is our final opportunity to shape the programme in such a way that everyone can give it their full support and that it can deliver real, tangible and lasting benefit.

Consultation Questions Responses

Question 1: What are your views on the description of the region and the main evaluation findings and lessons from the previous Programme as presented in this section of the Operational Programme?

There are several observations which can be made in this regard. Firstly, paragraph 2 (page 6) of the document states “The EU has committed EUR225m towards PEACE III over the period 2007-2013 which together with national contributions will result in a total programme budget of EUR300m. **This funding will be additional to national spending.**” The issue of additonality is one which was raised in “*Shaping Peace III – Making It Better*” and on numerous earlier occasions. It is absolutely essential that this is indeed the case. If the programme is to have the impact which we all desire, it must not be subjected to government grab, whereby domestic priorities are financed with money from Brussels. We have seen on too many occasions in the past that in the mad rush to meet N+2 spending targets, Intermediary Funding Bodies have been prepared to allow such a situation to arise. The Managing Authority must take every possible step to ensure that such situations are not repeated in the Peace III programme. We also have concerns that the proposed model for delivery of Peace III, particularly at local level, will see councils using Peace III funding to fund staff costs.

We agree firmly with the assertion made in the document (paragraph 3) that Northern Ireland suffers from “continued overdependence on the public sector for output and employment”. As we have identified as one of our key priorities for the future of the programme the development of a competitive economy and the reduction of this over-reliance on the public sector we would expect this to be reflected in the final operational programme.

We welcome (paragraph 3, page 7) the acknowledgement of the isolation faced by minority Protestant communities living in border areas. Implicit in this acknowledgement also is the recognition that the Programme has an important part to play in developing

these communities and that predecessor programmes have so far failed to do so. That being the case it is reasonable to expect that single-identity work with such communities will be encouraged and engaged in to a greater degree than has been the case up until now.

Paragraph 4 (page 8) asserts that the programme has facilitated inclusiveness and helped to build capacity. That has not been the experience of many of the groups and individuals from within the Protestant and/or Unionist community that we have dealt with. Many of these individuals, who are oftentimes representatives of innocent victims of terrorism have found that because they have not been “cross-community enough”, they have been denied funding and support. This will need to be addressed in the Peace III programme. It is essential that the specific communities are allowed to engage with the programme at a pace they feel comfortable with. We expect such a realisation to be reflected in the programme.

With regard to the lessons drawn from Peace II (paragraph 5) there are several observations that can be made. Firstly we welcome the acknowledgement that the proliferation of measures, funding bodies, paying authorities and horizontal principles has proved to be overly complex and burdensome. We are on record as wanting a reduction in IFB’s and funding measures. We are pleased that this looks likely to be achieved. With regard to the assertion that there has been no bias within the programme: that has not been the experience of the groups that we have been dealing with. Even a cursory glance at the figures show that the Protestant/Unionist community which accounts for roughly 54% of the population of Northern Ireland has not received the same proportion of funding available. However, we welcome the acknowledgement that “continued efforts” will need to be made to encourage full participation in the Programme. In terms of reaching out to the under-represented Unionist community this will entail an increasing of the proportion of funding made available for single-identity work, with is in keeping with the working definition of Reconciliation derived by Hamber and Kelly.

Question 2: What are your views on the overall objective and strategic objectives of the Programme? Is this the correct focus for the Peace III Programme?

The overall objective of the new Programme is defined as: “to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation”. While we have no objection to this policy statement we feel that it could be broadened out slightly to reflect the fact that the reconciliation process and the creation of a truly peaceful environment in which people feel safe, secure and respected has in many parts of Northern Ireland yet to commence. We also want to see a direct reference to the creation of a thriving economic environment in Northern Ireland as we believe strongly that a strong economy is the bedrock of a peaceful society.

Therefore we propose that the following amendments be made to the objective statement:

- **After “to” insert “commence and”.**
- **After “progress” insert “made”.**
- **After “reconciliation” insert “and a strong economy”.**

The new overall objective would therefore be **“to commence and reinforce progress made towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation and a strong economy”**.

In relation to the two strategic objectives we are disappointed that there is not the strong economic/educational focus which we called for in our earlier submission. We would like to see that situation reversed by the time the programme comes on-line. **In order to achieve this we propose the creation of a third strategic objective: Expanding the Economy. Key activities of this objective will facilitate the participation of women in the work-place, the re-skilling of the long-term unemployed/those affected by the decline of heavy industry, the development of R&D activities.** With these suggestions we feel that the sort of focus that a truly effective Peace III programme requires will be attained.

Question 3: What are your views on the Programme's approach to the five cross cutting themes?

In order to reflect the changes proposed, we suggest the creation of a sixth cross-cutting theme – Economic Expansion/Growth. We have stated on numerous occasions our contention that the creation of a strong economic environment is the key to building a truly peaceful and stable Northern Ireland. This being the case, **it is essential that it should be reflected in the cross cutting themes.**

Question 4: What are your views on the Programme's approach to project selection including the targeting of named areas and groups and the development of strategic projects?

We welcome **the principle** of strategic targeting of resources into areas of need. For example, a project which aims to re-skill and assist those affected adversely by the decline of heavy industry in East Belfast is a project to which we could give our wholehearted support. However, we do not favour any further targeting of resources to ex-paramilitaries. The fact that ex-prisoners have been a source of funding from Europe has been one of the major contributing factors in increasing Unionist disillusionment with the programme. **We are therefore supportive of the idea of targeting resources strategically providing that the strategic priorities are shaped in such a way as to maximise confidence within all communities and to deliver real and tangible benefits to everyone in Northern Ireland.**

With regards to single identity work, **we require an explicit acknowledgement** in the final operational programme that this work is of value and should be supported and encouraged, which is entirely in-keeping with the principles of reconciliation as identified by Hamber and Kelly.

Question 5: What are your views on the content of each priority?

We are broadly supportive of the contents of each priority and welcome the fact that under the “Acknowledging the Past” element of Priority 1, victims have been singled out for special attention. We would expect to see this remain within the final operational programme once published. We welcome the fact also that under Priority 2, our proposal for regeneration of run down and derelict public spaces has been taken on board. As was stated in “Shaping Peace III – Making it Better” – there can be no more direct and tangible evidence of the positive impact of European funding than for local communities to see previously dilapidated and dangerous open spaces transformed. We welcome the acceptance of our suggestion. We are pleased to see that the Technical Assistance budget has been reduced from 9% to 6% of available resources. This is something we have called for over a considerable period of time.

As we are proposing the creation of a third Programme Priority – Economic Expansion, it will be necessary to re-calibrate the amount of resources made available to each priority. We feel that the importance of economic expansion should be reflected in such a re-calibration.

Question 6: In your opinion what role, if any, should small grants play in the programme?

Small grants are a valuable part of the programme. They often provide new or inexperienced groups with their first foray into Peace funding. However, the problems encountered by successful groups when they receive funding in terms of auditing and accountancy requirements **cause more problems than they are worth.** Many new groups will never apply for major funding because they are put-off by their experience of small grants. Therefore, if the small grants element is to be maintained it will be necessary to relax, to a degree, the level of scrutiny required of those who are successful. It cannot be right or proper that a group that is awarded £7,500 for a one off event should be subjected to the same rigorous accounting regime as a group that has been awarded £75,000. We believe that it is possible, with the new proposed structures for the delivery of Peace III, for a small grants section to be part of a future programme that has less administration. We do however need to learn from the mistakes of the Peace II extension small grants programme. We believe that the CFNI has failed in their delivery of the Peace II extension small grants programme.

Question 7: What are your views on the indicative budget proposals? These are presented as a potential range of budgets. In your view, what is the correct balance between the two main priorities?

We believe that the level of funding used for Priority 3 Technical assistance should be reduced from the proposed level of €18 million. We believe that less money should be required to deliver the Peace III programme. We believe that a greater percentage of the budget (approximately €140 million) should be spent on Priority II of the programme 'contributing to a shared society'. In particular we believe that a very significant sum should be spent on the proposal 'creating shared public spaces'. This would ensure that the Peace Programme could have a lasting impact on society. As we are proposing the creation of a third main economic priority we propose that the remaining budget should be divided equally between this priority and Priority 1 Reconciling Communities. We do not want to see these priorities subjected to any government grab to support major projects such as the proposed National Stadium at the Maze site.

Question 8: What are your views on the proposed implementation arrangements for Peace III?

With regard to the implementation arrangements we welcome the streamlining of the structures from what had existed prior to now. As we have already stated, and as has been finally acknowledged in the consultation document, the excessive number of funding streams, funding bodies and horizontal principles have proven overly complicated and burdensome. Our position with regard to the implementation arrangements that we would like in place was outlined in “Shaping Peace III – Making it Better”, we are pleased that there are some elements contained in the recommendations in the consultation document. However, we believe that in order to increase public confidence and accountability it will be necessary to increase the proportion of elected representatives on the Monitoring committee to the point of public representatives constituting a majority stake on the committee. We also want to see the powers of the monitoring committee increased, in order that it will have a direct decision-making power over the determining of which key strategic projects/areas of intervention are to be developed. For too long, unaccountable civil servants and sectional interests have had a preponderance of the power in shaping and developing the programme’s priorities and delivery mechanisms. Local representatives know better what is needed on the ground and what areas require support.

Under the current proposals, the principal delivery mechanism will be a Joint Technical Secretariat organised through the SEUPB. We have concerns that this will result in a large number of people being employed within the SEUPB at a time when the amounts of money coming through the Peace Programme from Europe is falling. It is important that SEUPB does not merely empire build in order to deliver the Peace III programme.

We believe that local delivery mechanisms should be used to deliver Priority 1- Building positive relationships at a local level. We do not however believe that the new councils will be set to deliver Priority 1 in time to meet N+2 spend requirements. We believe that 15 local action groups, similar to the structure of the Leader Action Groups, should be set

up to deliver Priority 1 at a local level. This group would include local political, voluntary and community representatives. These 15 groups should mirror the desired number of councils following the review of public administration.

We support the development of a project pipeline of strategic projects that can be funded in the short term. This will help prevent problems with meeting N+2 target spends in 2009. We do however have concerns regarding the process by which projects are selected. It is important that groups do not spend significant amounts of money and time developing projects that are not likely to be funded. SEUPB need to be putting in place processes to select strategic projects that fit within the operational programme guidelines and work with these projects to ensure that they receive funding when they reach steering committee level. We do have concern that previous intermediary funding bodies, which have experience in previous Peace programmes, will be the only organisations that are successful in receiving funding through the project pipeline approach. In order to ensure that there is some confidence restored and maintained in the Peace III programme it is vital that strategic large scale projects are funded for the Protestant/Unionist community. Strategic projects that we envisage that the SEUPB can work with include funding for isolated border Protestant Communities (following on from the DSD funding) and projects organised through the Orange Community Network and victims organisations.

Question 9: Do you have any views on the identified Equality Impact of the Programme?

We fundamentally disagree with the conclusions reached in regard to the community uptake analysis (page 10-11) which, based upon the Noble Index of Deprivation states: “given the commitment of the Peace II Programme to targeting social need, a disproportionate uptake in relatively disadvantaged areas – where the Catholic community is in the majority – would therefore be expected”. The principle objection which we have to the usage of the Noble indicators is that they disguise pockets of deprivation which are surrounded by areas of plenty, because the Census Output Areas used in arriving at the data are local government wards. The best example of this is presented in the case of Taughmonagh housing estate in South Belfast. This is an area with many social problems and a high rate of deprivation, yet it forms part of the Malone Ward of Belfast which is in the highest quartile in terms of affluence and wealth in Northern Ireland. Clearly the prevailing social conditions in Taughmonagh are not reflective of those which exist in the rest of the Malone area, yet the deprivation experienced there is to a large extent disguised because it is in effect an isolated area of need surrounded by a larger area of plenty.

We recognise that in the revised programme, with a reduced amount of available resources, it will not be possible to identify and target groups specifically as has been the case up until now. However we are keen that groups which cater for the interests of women, the disabled, farming families and children must be given special attention in the new programme, as part of the three proposed measures we have identified here.

Conclusion

We welcome some elements of this draft operational programme. We welcome the fact that victims have been singled out for special attention and that our suggestion for physical regeneration projects has been taken on board. Furthermore, we are pleased that the level of Technical Assistance has been reduced to 6% of overall programme spending. We want to see a Peace Programme that can play its part in delivering real and lasting stability in Northern Ireland and will leave a positive legacy once the programme ends. To that end, we believe a stronger economic focus is called for than presented in the draft operational programme. Furthermore we want to see an enhanced role for political representatives, along the lines outlined in our previous document “Shaping Peace III – Making it Better”. We also endorse the recognition that isolated minority Protestant communities require help and support, that is why we feel an explicit acknowledgement of the vital role played by single-identity projects in these areas is essential. For people who have been living under threat for nearly forty years, the cross-community reconciliation process is a long way off indeed. They need to be encouraged down this road by building capacity inside their own communities. Reconciliation can only occur when people feel safe, secure and respected.