

SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR  
PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE BORDER  
COUNTIES OF IRELAND

- REVISITED -

Report to Jacques Santer  
President of the European Commission



1st October 1997

Northern Ireland's MEPs  
Ian Paisley  
John Hume  
Jim Nicholson

## PREFACE

The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties represents the clear will of Europe to offer support as we seek to solve the problems which beset us.

President Santer, when we met with him in Strasbourg in May of this year, sought our joint views on the Special Programme. He assured us that they would be taken into account by the Commission in the context of its mid-term review currently being carried out. He agreed that we should again call upon our three advisors, Hugh Logue and Howard McNally from the European Commission, and Robert Ramsay from the European Parliament, and that, as in 1994, they should organise widespread consultations throughout Northern Ireland. Such consultations should examine the extent to which the Special Programme, in its implementation so far, has achieved the objectives set out in 1994, and reach a view on its continuation and focus for the future in the light of lessons learnt in the past two and a half years.

The distilled assessment of the perceived effects of the programme, together with recommendations for its future development are set out in this report. The report highlights the aspects of the programme which have been particularly welcomed - especially the novel concept of district "partnerships". It also makes a number of recommendations on how certain aspects of the Special Programme could become even better known to the public whilst becoming more user-friendly in their application. The report contains proposals for re-focusing certain measures in the final years of the Special Programme, with the goal of achieving more effective results.

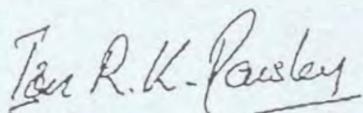
This report has our unanimous endorsement and we commend its recommendations to the European Commission, Parliament and Council of Ministers for adoption.

We wish to especially thank our three special advisors for the comprehensive manner in which they approached the task, and for their preparation of a concise and easily readable report.

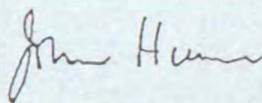
They, in turn, wish to acknowledge the extensive assistance and excellent co-operation given to them. In particular it is appropriate to mention the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr. M. Mowlam and her staff, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor A. Maginnis and his staff, the Northern Ireland Partnership Board, the Belfast Office of the European Commission, the Chief Executives and Councillors of the locations visited - Belfast, Ballymoney, Fermanagh, Omagh, Derry, Newry and Armagh, and across the border in Donegal.

It is our hope that this report will assist President Santer, Commissioner Wulf-Mathies and their services, in their review of the Special Programme.

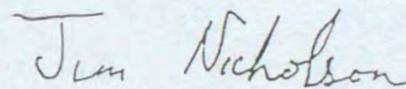
Finally, we wish to take the opportunity of the presentation of this report to invite President Santer and Commissioner Wulf-Mathies to return to Northern Ireland to relaunch what we believe can be an even more worthwhile second phase of Europe's Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.



I.R.K. Paisley



J. Hume



J. Nicholson

1. Introduction

1.1 The basic aim of this report is to make a joint political input into the mid-term review of the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation currently taking place within the Commission.

1.2 The reason for doing so is that in 1994 the then President of the European Commission, Mr Jacques Delors, found it useful, at the conceptual stage of the Special Programme, to have the considered and agreed views of Northern Ireland's three MEPs on how such a programme might best make a contribution to the twin objectives of reinforcing the peace process and fostering reconciliation. At that time, having consulted widely with government departments, District Councils, the social partners and the voluntary sector, proposals were submitted, many of which are reflected in the current programme. It therefore seemed appropriate - and the three MEPs were encouraged in this view by Mr Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, when they met him on 13 May this year - that the Special Programme should be "revisited" at the half-way point, in order to present to the Commission a distilled political assessment of the implementation of the programme so far, as well as proposals as to how it might be readjusted in the years 1998 and 1999.

1.3 We would emphasise that the report which follows is not intended to duplicate the very thorough Mid-Term Evaluation Report prepared by Coopers and Lybrand for the two national governments and the European Union which has, of course, served us as a most valuable source of detailed technical information. The nature of this report is different. It is intended to reflect, on the basis of our renewed and widespread consultations (see Annex 1), what people throughout Northern Ireland think and feel about the Special Programme - the validity of its underlying concepts; the strengths and weaknesses of its implementation so far; its impact on the political and inter-community scene; and its possible refocusing for the future. Such views, in

themselves, inevitably contain some differences of opinion and even contradictions. We have seen our role, as plenipotentiaries of the three elected representatives of Northern Ireland at European level, as one of taking all these diverse points of view into account and of presenting a succinct evaluation of the implementation of the first half of the Special Programme and of making recommendations for the future. This report has the unanimous agreement of Northern Ireland's three MEPs.

1.4 This report:

- sets out our overall findings;
- records a number of perceived general problems;
- analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the three main elements of the programme, namely the actions of government departments, Intermediary Funding Bodies and District Partnerships; and,
- makes recommendations as to the continuation of the Special Programme and its refocusing in the years 1998 and 1999.

2. **Overall Findings**

2.1 We have no doubt that the Special Programme has been very worthwhile, despite several setbacks in the general security and political situation which have been the background to its implementation.

2.2 These background factors of public security, political development and inter-community relations were at first favourable - and had, of course, provided, at the moment of the ceasefires in late summer 1994, the "window of opportunity" the programme was designed to exploit. The formal breakdown of the IRA's ceasefire in February 1996; the renewal of violence by various paramilitary organisations; and the inevitable heightening of inter-community tensions all contributed to a deterioration in the general environment in which the Special Programme began. Since our series of meetings in early July, hopes have again been raised, with the new IRA ceasefire, that a sustained peace may be enjoyed by all. We welcome the statement and share the hope

expressed by Commissioner Wulf-Mathies following the renewed ceasefire that "People will now be able to strengthen the co-operation started under the EU's Peace Programme in an open and positive atmosphere".

2.3 This is not the place to set out the respective views of Northern Ireland's three MEPs regarding the current political situation and how it might develop; we restrict ourselves to the expression of our conviction that the Special Programme can continue to be a background force for good, reinforcing whatever measure of peace is achieved and in stimulating reconciliation. Indeed, it would be a mistake to conclude that the setbacks described above, deeply disappointing though they were, ruined the validity of the programme's aims and objectives or destroyed the potential value of its continuation. Rather, the positive contribution made by the Special Programme to the general situation in Northern Ireland, whilst it could never hope to be a determining factor, given the depth and complexity of the region's inter-communal problems, has nonetheless been an important influence in favour of positive co-operation. We agree with the view expressed by many that without the mechanisms of the Special Programme, things could well have been worse. **Its contribution to the political process can be measured, above all, by the fact that all elected representatives across the entire spectrum of the political parties support it; are participating in it; and unanimously and unequivocally wish to see it continued.** This is a unique achievement.

2.4 The Special Programme has stimulated a very deep and wide community involvement, from both sides of the community. It has also gained the strongest EU identification of any European programme hitherto carried out in Northern Ireland and is perceived as having an impact on the marginalised in society in a completely new way, particularly through its emphasis on social inclusiveness. The extent to which "social inclusion", regarded as radical when proposed in our first report, is now accepted as integral, is testimony to the unique value and benefit of this Special Programme. It is a programme

dimension which may warrant consideration in other deprived European regions in the future.

- 2.5 There is general agreement that the Special Programme's most novel element, namely the concept of "partnerships", has been a particular success, engendering quite exceptional levels of enthusiasm and commitment.

The number of applications for participation in the programme has been extremely high (over 12,000) and the number already approved and the level of funds committed impressive - evidence of the impact made on public opinion and of the efforts made to implement the programme.

There is complete agreement with the clear view of all concerned that the programme with funding, at the same rate as in the first three years, should be continued in 1998 and 1999 and with the equally strong desire that certain elements of the Special Programme should be preserved in other EU and national programmes post 1999.

### 3. Perceived General Problems

- 3.1 Despite the overall positive impact which the Special Programme has made, inevitably there have been problems and criticisms. We highlight below those which appear to us to be the more important.
- 3.2 There is a prevalent and universal view that the various structures of the Special Programme are excessively complex, to the point of deterring people who should be reached by it from becoming involved. A parallel complaint which seems to us to be justified is that the programme is unduly beset with red tape, not least as regards the often complicated and non-standardised application forms.
- 3.3 The lack of information about the detailed implementation of the Special Programme and of a clear "voice" speaking on its behalf were the subject of widespread comment. The need was also felt for a publicly accessible master

database. Whilst from time to time the Special Programme or its component parts received good publicity, it was the considered view of several influential media figures that this coverage could be improved if greater care were taken to brief them comprehensively and to update them on a regular basis.

- 3.4 It is our impression that there has sometimes been a loss of thematic focus on "Peace and Reconciliation"; indeed some participants or would-be participants seemed to be unsure about how to define and interpret in practical terms the aim of "reconciliation" in particular.
- 3.5 This problem is compounded by the fact that an important element of the Special Programme's attempt to maintain the momentum for peace is directed at improving economic (especially employment) and social conditions, as projects in those categories often appear to the public to be part of existing mainstream programmes provided by government or the EU Structural Funds.
- 3.6 Looking at the lists of projects decided upon in the first tranche, it would appear to us that in the understandable initial rush to commit funds, in order to get the programme up and running, frequently not enough time was taken to make a careful selection of the projects put forward. This has had two drawbacks: a lack of consistent quality in the projects overall; and a lack of complementarity and co-operation between projects.
- 3.7 There is agreement that, for historical and cultural reasons, the Protestant community has not had the sort of localised structures which would have enabled them to plug in, without delay, to the mechanisms of the various sub-programmes. It should be emphasised that there is no question of unfair discrimination being the cause of the slower start which the Protestant community have made in many areas in their applications to, and participation in, the programme. The problem is recognised and there are indications that catching up is now taking place.

- 3.8 On the subject of inter-communal relations, we feel that the special and acute problems of those in both communities living in "interface" areas could have received more urgent attention.
- 3.9 We were concerned to hear, from several sources, that the need to prepare some applications in an acceptable form, for example by providing a professional preliminary evaluation, has frequently led to the need to engage consultancy firms (in some instances, it appears, set up for this purpose) at an undue cost in relation to the overall funding of the project concerned.
- 3.10 Another complaint, specific to rural areas, is that the "Robson criteria", used to measure deprivation, is believed to be to the disadvantage of such areas, principally as regards such indicators as "overcrowding" or "home/car ownership".

Regarding the above general observations, we would stress that the most important were those relating to the public's understanding of, and access to, the Special Programme, since that is fundamental to the programme's aims and objectives.

We turn now to the general perception of each of the three main elements of the programme.

#### 4. Government Departments

- 4.1 It is clear from the stocktaking exercise carried out by Coopers and Lybrand and from information made available to us by officials regarding the various programmes and individual measures that government departments have delivered and co-ordinated an enormous amount of projects and services under the Special Programme, and that central government, through the Department of Finance and Personnel, has played a key role in co-ordinating many varied activities carried out by other bodies. It remains a fact, however, that government departments are not perceived as playing a leading role in implementing the programme. Furthermore, whilst the Special Programme by

its nature called for prompt initiatives, government departments appear to have been slow to grasp this and to react accordingly. A parallel complaint which we encountered throughout Northern Ireland was that there was a lack of transparency and openness about central government's actions. Suspicions were often expressed that projects undertaken by departments and funded by the Peace and Reconciliation Special Programme did not really fall within the aims and objectives of that programme and should more appropriately have been funded from the relevant department's own budget, or from some other European Union fund. A striking example of this is the provision of two Advance Factories.

4.2 Considering that central government is responsible for implementing almost 50%, in budgetary terms, of the Special Programme and, additionally, contributes 25% of the total funds available by way of "top up", we consider this lack of public profile to be regrettable, for however important the final product may be - and we recognise that departments have been keen to exercise quality control and ensure accountability - the actual "process" of the programme's implementation, in terms of public involvement, especially at grass roots level, is a vitally important objective and requires greater attention.

4.3 Government has endeavoured to respond to the special nature of the programme by implementing measures through agencies and sectoral partners, in addition to government departments. This development has been a functional necessity, but it has in its complexity, coupled with a lack of comprehensive and sustained information, tended to obscure the public's understanding of what has been going on within the framework of the Special Programme.

4.4 It is our strong impression that there has been less community involvement in the decision-making related to projects piloted by government departments than in the case of Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFB) or Partnership projects. On the other hand it should be recorded that we have evidence that many

officials are now beginning to adopt a more "partnership" approach in their dealings with other bodies and community groups, in keeping with the fundamental objectives of the programme.

4.5 It would not be useful to attempt to comment in detail on departmental schemes funded under the Special Programme across the sweep of government actions. One of the difficulties of evaluation of central government actions is that, by their nature, many of them tend to have a longer lead-in time than other programmes, so their level of financial commitment at a given moment is likely to be lower and, consequently, their impact delayed and more difficult to assess. However, certain general points are worthy of emphasis.

4.6 Overall, the indications are that the level of commitment of funds is satisfactory; it is inevitable that measures involving infrastructural or capital projects should take longer than, for example, social measures, to bring to the point of funding commitment. If inadequacy of response is a factor, it appears to apply to the Department of Education, where a swifter and more imaginative response to the possibilities offered by the Social Inclusion Programme in adult education and integrated education might have been anticipated.

4.7 Inevitably in the context of EU funding, the issue of additionality was raised by several groups we met. It will be recalled that at the commencement of the programme the Government of the day gave a unequivocal commitment that their contribution to the Special Programme would be additional to the Public Expenditure allocations already agreed upon. The present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr. Mo Mowlam, has assured us that this commitment has been honoured; furthermore it is her aim to repeat this arrangement in the years 1998 and 1999.

(Another point raised in the context of funding was that the movement in the ECU: Pound Sterling exchange worked to the disadvantage of the recipients of grants, but this is, of course, a factor which can apply to any EU funding).

- 4.8 The Urban Regeneration Measures have been massively over-subscribed though the implementation appears to have been surprisingly slow. It is clear that this part of the Special Programme could usefully take up many times over the sum allocated to it. We consider these measures to be fundamental to the Special Programme, since they directly affect the living conditions, and thus the morale, of people in the most deprived urban areas.
- 4.9 On the employment front it is still a little early to assess the impact of the relevant sub-programme, but there are already signs that "Bridge to Employment", which is designed to fast-track training for the unemployed in areas where jobs are scarce and to prepare them to take advantage of employment opportunities, has been a particular success.
- 4.10 Some aspects of measures implemented directly by the Department of Agriculture were the subject of frequent criticism as regards their content, their lack of transparent additionality and poor presentation.
- 4.11 The Economic Development Sub-programme Measures have been heavily over-subscribed. One controversial aspect of the economic measures is the Interest Relief Subsidy to encourage productive investment by Small and Medium-sized Industries to create and safeguard jobs especially in the most deprived areas. The scheme was over-subscribed and has now closed. In favour of this scheme it is argued that it helped to create or maintain 6,000 jobs in some 200 companies. Its critics, however, argue that it benefitted above all the banks and larger companies and that many of the jobs accredited to the scheme would have been created or saved without intervention under this measure. It is our judgement that the measure is worth repeating but with improved guidelines. Anticipated investment in the most deprived areas has not materialised, so greater attention is needed on this aspect.
- 4.12 With many measures implemented by the Department of Economic Development, the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise

Development Unit, the general public is unaware that they are part of the Special Programme. Limited international contacts and connections have been made under the business education initiative, and the opportunity to have further action in this field should not be lost.

- 4.13 In the realm of cross-border co-operation between public bodies, the relevant measures have been extremely successful both in terms of the quality of applications received and in the promotion of co-operation between the two jurisdictions. This co-operation involved all government departments, North and South, and all the available funding for these measures is now fully committed, with a reserve list already drawn up of projects which could benefit from future funding.
- 4.14 Mention was made to us that consideration should be given to a flagship project and specifically to earmarking 10 MECU as a European Union contribution to the Odyssey project, originally conceived of as being the main lasting "monument" in Northern Ireland in the context of the millennium festivities. In the event of this project going ahead, we see merit in support being provided by the Special Programme, provided that a distinct part of the overall complex can be clearly and uniquely identified as being the EU's millennium "gift" to Northern Ireland and/or the lasting reminder of the Special Programme 1995-1999; that its impact is not limited to the site in Belfast, but that it be of a kind which can be exploited through information technology such as the Peace Web (cf. section 5) to link up with other sites throughout Northern Ireland also with the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and other EU regions; and that it have a forward-looking unifying theme.
- 4.15 In general, there is no doubt that the Special Programme has involved a learning process for some Departments, particularly those accustomed to more traditional European programmes. Because of their available administrative structures and resources they have a distinctive role to play, especially at a more strategic level, and it will be important that they are encouraged to

develop and enhance those measures for which they will remain responsible and, above all, to improve their communication in this regard with the public at large.

## 5. Intermediary Funding Bodies

5.1 In the course of our visit we met representatives of the Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFBs), designated by the Department of Finance and Personnel, in agreement with the European Commission, which have implemented some measures. These were:

- Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust;
- Community Relations Council;
- Proteus;
- Youthnet;
- Rural Development Council;
- Rural Community Network;
- Cooperation North;

5.2 It is important to recognise that the speed at which the Programme became relevant to citizens and operational in delivering benefit is substantially due to the IFBs, and, in particular, to the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT). These bodies were able to produce an immediate response and the early programme benefitted from their many years of experience in their respective fields. In many instances, their work on the ground facilitated a bottom-up approach and permitted early identification of those targeted by the Programme. Notwithstanding this success, experience of the Programme's operation raises an important question which now has to be addressed: **if it had been realised at the outset that the district partnerships could become so effective, would so many intermediary funding bodies have been established?** The answer is almost certainly 'no'. Simultaneously, the issue arises of whether greater responsibility can be given to the district partnerships, without duplication by other bodies.

- 5.3 A fundamental requirement now is to delineate the operational responsibilities between the IFBs and the district partnerships. Consequently, we consider that the mandate of the IFBs and the district partnerships should be reviewed in the context of defining those tasks best achievable by each body. For example, those IFBs engaged in social inclusion might have their remit widened to permit greater access to the elderly. Organisations for the elderly told us of being sent from one programme to another without success in any of them. This should not happen. Similarly, the important focus of youth and interaction with local youth groups might be made a specific responsibility of district partnerships, with the existent Youthnet expertise incorporated within the Northern Ireland partnership secretariat and the Youthnet budget being allocated as dedicated and additional to the Northern Ireland partnership fund, thereby giving greater support to youth as well as reinforcing their allocation.
- 5.4 It might be asked, if it is recommended to incorporate Youthnet within district partnerships, why other IFBs, such as Proteus, should not be treated similarly. Whereas Youthnet answers a homogeneous need which pervades all districts, Proteus is dedicated to specific, not uniform, needs, for example in the education/training of ex-offenders, and together with NIVT in the support of victims. Our perception is that even more attention should be devoted to the needs of victims. However, as long as Proteus retains its disposition in favour of the socially disadvantaged, it constitutes a useful safety net and should continue in its present form.
- 5.5 Deficiencies of co-ordination of information access and provision were underlined on several occasions. Of the IFBs, the NIVT is aware more than others of the need to be genuinely inclusive, to be free of the so-called "golden circle" syndrome, of "being in the know", and of the need for greater access to information. Nonetheless, their information on eligibility and communication of outcome, particularly to unsuccessful applicants, was on occasions described as inadequate. Knowledge of the Peace and Reconciliation

Programme beyond the projects assisted is poor, a publicity policy is lacking and information supply is haphazard.

- 5.6 At a different level, the totality of activities of the IFBs, district partnerships and government departments remain uncoordinated. Transparent and efficient procedures for processing project applications to the Special Programme are essential. The closest we came to a single database of programmes/projects was within the NIVT. The IFBs, in collaboration with the NI Partnership Board, should develop a single clearing house system for all project applications. The IFBs might also undertake to re-examine procedures to ensure that the requirement for the activity to be "new" does not impede genuinely new actions by existing bodies; and also to quantify and review the amount of resources given to "prior appraisal" of projects.
- 5.7 The complementarity and synergy in the working relationship of the Rural Development Council and Rural Community Network was evident and was welcome. It is clear that a structure is coming into place which may ultimately assist rural economic development and complement EU initiatives in this domain. A substantial portion of the resources currently given to Department of Agriculture under the Peace and Reconciliation Programme might consequently be better deployed and more clearly understood as additional if they were incorporated in the allocation to these two IFBs.
- 5.8 It is essential that consideration of the "need for appropriate exit strategies under the Programme"<sup>1</sup> be set in place in the first quarter of 1998 and that a clear statement agreed by the British and Irish governments, together with the European Commission, be made before the end of 1998.
- 5.9 In advance of launching a second tranche of funding for the programme, it is essential that an appraisal be undertaken to identify areas that have benefitted

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<sup>1</sup> Draft Memorandum of Understanding between NIVT and the European Commission 5.10.95

from the IFBs, to ensure that more attention is focused on geographic areas where deprivation is high and which have a weaker Community infrastructure.

Moreover, the question of the degree of reconciliation achieved remains an open one and it is necessary to address the need for a peace-building framework more fully.

5.10 The need to improve communication within and between the various elements of the programme and the clear desire of many to have a development in place which can be identified as a legacy of the peace programme (in addition to Peace and Reconciliation) might both be satisfied by the creation of a Peace Technology Web. Several potential sites already exist.

5.11 Apart from the benefits of linkage permitting greater interaction and networking, and offering further opportunities for collaborative action, it can do more. It can build on the evident desire for learning, with the ability to adapt organisationally and culturally to accommodate both other viewpoints and technological change. It can also enhance the technological competence of all involved and thereby equip them in core skills for the modern world. The web can be utilized to incorporate a greater entrepreneurial capability, taking more account of markets and business development and it can be used to link all projects to the wider international world and enable participants to view their region in the global world of today.

In general, the IFBs represent an important initiative in targeting special needs and they have operated in a transparent and open manner.

## 6. Partnerships

6.1 There can be no doubt that the partnership element of the Special Programme has been a major success. The concept had been conceived of as an experiment, initially in the economic development context, later extended to other social spheres, with the objective of stimulating co-operation between

communities and between different interest groups, including District Councils, at local level. It is an experiment which has worked. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that the partnership concept is the element of the Special Programme which has made the biggest impact on public opinion, has done most to raise the profile of the European Union, and has made the most obvious contribution to the programme's basic objectives of "Peace and Reconciliation". This is acknowledged by elected representatives, government departments, non-governmental organisations, the trade unions, business and commercial interests and grass-roots community groups.

- 6.2 It should be appreciated that the partnership concept initially faced several obstacles of both a presentational and practical nature. Firstly, elected representatives on local councils faced the challenge not only of setting aside their normal democratic inter-party rivalries, but of sharing responsibilities with non-elected organisations. For their part, many of these organisations were, at the beginning, sceptical of the willingness and ability of councillors to co-operate with them.
- 6.3 Secondly, since partnerships were such a novel concept, it inevitably took time to arouse interest at grass-roots level, to impart detailed information and to help local people bring forward proposals for projects which fitted the Special Programme's criteria.
- 6.4 For all these reasons partnerships were relatively slow to get off the ground. However, in all the 26 District Council areas, the partnership concept, once assimilated, has made remarkable progress within a short time, particularly as regards the encouragement of all the participants to work together and the powerful message received at local level that something entirely new and "inclusive" was happening, at the instigation of the European Union. In other words, the "process" engendered by the Special Programme in the domain of partnerships has been an unique success.

- 6.5 This success can be attributed, above all, to the willingness of all the participants to set aside their respective reservations and to devote quite exceptional energy and application to the task in hand. All concerned acknowledge that this basic co-operative attitude was made possible because the partnership concept itself was novel in its insistence on across-the-board participation and because this requirement was imposed by the European Union, which was perceived as a benevolent, non-partisan agent in the Northern Ireland situation.
- 6.6 Councillors have freely recognised, through their work in local partnerships, that this kind of co-operation with voluntary and community bodies has brought them fresh insights into the problem of the disadvantaged in their own areas and, equally, into the possibilities of alleviation which may exist through co-operation. Local Government politicians have openly declared that in their work in the partnership framework they quickly learnt to leave their habitual, often acute, political differences at the door of the partnership meeting room and to "play fair" both with their usual opponents and with the non-elected representatives in that privileged context. For their part, representatives of the voluntary sector have come to a new respect for elected representatives, through seeing at first hand the problems of Local Government and the degree of commitment made by councillors in the normal discharge of their duties. Moreover, at grass-roots level there has been a new feeling that the partnership approach can bring advantages to disadvantaged groups in the community hitherto unreached by traditional mainstream programmes.
- 6.7 It is clear that one of the major advantages of the partnership structure is that the involvement of the 26 District Council and of government departments at the level of the Northern Ireland Partnership Board (NIPB) provides the overall "mix" of interests with ready-made organisational and accounting frameworks, whilst the other elements in that "mix" significantly enhance the bottom-up approach which is a fundamental aim of the Special Programme. So successful has the partnership approach proved throughout the region that

many people, without prejudice to negotiations about an overall political settlement, have drawn attention to its longer term possibilities.

- 6.8 When we look beyond the process of the partnership approach to the actual projects on the ground the picture so far is not as impressive. In many ways, however, this is not surprising, as the very nature of the process could have been expected, initially, to produce somewhat fragmented results. In an effort to fulfil the objective of maximum grass-roots involvement in the Programme, the partnerships in their early days tended to invite applications from as many local interests as possible, without themselves wishing to "impose" preconceived ideas about the bottom-up approach or how it should be developed in a programmed way. This tactic brought, in one sense, an immediate positive result, in that it generated an extremely wide interest in the Special Programme and stimulated applications from many groups which had never before had access to mainstream programmes at either EU or national level. However, a price has been paid for this breadth of appeal and participation, in terms of the quality of some individual projects and of the general coherence of the partnership programmes. Overall, there have simply been too many small, ill-defined and unrelated projects, with too little prospect of making a lasting impact.
- 6.9 It must at once be said that both the NIPB and the individual partnerships are very conscious of this deficiency and are actively considering how best to take initiatives which will ensure over the next two and a half years a better focusing of the partnerships on more sustainable and coherent programmes, without sacrificing the spirit of community involvement already established.
- 6.10 We agree with the general view that the time has now come, given the degree of maturity achieved by the individual partnerships, to stimulate co-operative ventures between partnerships. This would facilitate more ambitious projects not otherwise possible within smaller catchment areas. It would also reduce the risks of virtually identical projects being set up superfluously in

neighbouring partnership areas and of “beggar my neighbour” actions by individual partnerships.

7. The Border Counties and Cross Border Aspects

- 7.1 We are gratified to record that the MEPs representing the six border counties expressed a clear wish to be part of this programme re-visit exercise. Their views and the views of their constituents, including County Managers, were given at meetings on both sides of the border. As in Northern Ireland, the programme has been universally welcomed.
- 7.2 Cross-border co-operation and cross-border contacts have much improved since the programme guidelines were prepared. The County Managers in the Republic of Ireland were particularly positive and complimentary about the programme and the friendly co-operation which now exists with their Northern counterparts. The overall aim of the programme to promote cross-border reconciliation and to exploit the opportunities for increased cross-border development arising from the new situation should be continued. The full potential for greater cross border linkage between those district partnerships contiguous to the border and the Task Forces in the border counties is not being realised. The Co-operation between Public Bodies measures should continue to receive new funding in the second tranche.
- 7.3 The impact of the Urban and Village Renewal and Tourism measure is manifest: in some cases virtual restoration of villages or small towns has been undertaken. The positive benefit from enhanced self image and increased tourism is there to be seen. Such transformations inevitably mean the concentration of resources in one location. This may be warranted, and indeed consideration should be given to providing greater resources to this aspect of the programme. One potential source of such extra funding might be to re-allocate, in view of the first tranche underspend, some of the funds hitherto given to the cross-border community reconciliation measure.

## 8. Recommendations

We believe that there is an overwhelming case for the European Union to continue the funding at the same rate, i.e. 100 MECUs, in each of the final two years of the programme. In light of the above reflections we wish to make the following recommendations as to how the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation might be refocused and reinforced in the years 1998 and 1999:

### 8.1 General Aims and Objectives

The rationale for the Special Programme remains valid. The EU should therefore re-emphasise the original objectives of maintaining the momentum for peace and fostering reconciliation.

8.2 Furthermore, in practical terms, applications need to have "reconciliation" at the core of their justification. This must remain at the forefront of the entire programme. In this regard the desirability of having submissions incorporate cross-community elements wherever possible should be stressed, whilst recognising that some local areas, by virtue of their make-up, may need first to be established as community organisations before joining in the wider cross-community effort.

8.3 We are of the opinion that the balance struck between the cross-community and socially inclusive elements of the Special Programme on the one hand and economic, especially employment, elements on the other, is about right - but clarity on these issues will continue to be important.

### 8.4 Organisational Structures and Co-operation

We recognise that there is a general need to improve the overall co-ordination of the various aspects of the Special Programme and to facilitate greater co-operation between the many different bodies involved in its delivery to the public. However, we would not be in favour of the creation of a new over-

arching body, as we believe the existing structures are already dauntingly complex. Rather, we would recommend a wider co-ordinating role for the Northern Ireland Partnership Board, especially since we believe the “partnership” element of the Special Programme should be extended. The Partnership Forum should be provided with a small secretariat to be funded from the Technical Assistance Sub-programme.

#### 8.5 Simplification

As we are satisfied that the European Union does not require the bureaucracy and degree of documentary complexity which is currently overloading the programme, we believe that the operational maxim of the second phase of the programme must be “simplify, simplify”.

#### 8.6 Delivery Systems

This is undoubtedly one of the most important facets of the entire operation, since it is here that the Special Programme touches the public.

8.6.1 Improvement should begin with better dissemination of information about the programme. Care should be taken to have all information expressed in plain, straightforward language. Application forms, particularly those relating to the exploratory stage, should be simplified and, as far as is possible, harmonised. Efforts should also be made, in the light of experience already gained, to harmonise the criteria used for grant eligibility under the various parts of the Special Programme and in different geographical areas, in order to avoid inconsistent decisions and “shopping around” by applicants.

8.6.2 A general recommendation on our part, which applies to all aspects of the Special Programme as delivered, is that all the bodies involved should strive to achieve, in the final two years of implementation, more **strategic goals**, principally by moving from the approval of individual and often disparate **projects** towards more co-ordinated

programmes, which will have an increased impact locally and a better chance of being sustainable in the longer term. However, this switch in emphasis will have to be carried out swiftly as the time available will not permit a long period of preparation for such a change.

8.6.3 Conceptually the programme, in its essentials, is built on two axes, one geographic (District Partnerships), the other thematic (IFBs and Central Government). This is well understood by its participants.

We believe that from this basis greater co-ordination in programme planning, along with simultaneously reduced complexity, are attainable.

#### 8.7 Information and Public Relations

8.7.1 The architecture of the programme should be modified so as to provide one overall Clearing House for information. The current development of data banks should be co-ordinated and put on-line in order to provide the basic tool of this Clearing House.

8.7.2 Additionally, the Public Relations needs of the programme should be re-assessed by both the European Commission and government authorities, with the aim of improving communications with the news media and with the public at large.

8.7.3 The identification of projects and programmes with the European Union should be strengthened at all levels including, for example, the prominent use of EU logos, flags, etc. Where more than one fund is involved in the financing of a particular project, there should be a clear identification of the EU element.

8.7.4 As to the role of government departments in the Special Programme, this could be spelt out and "championed" by Ministers, who could distinguish between it and other departmental or EU programmes.

8.7.5 The opportunity should be taken, once decisions regarding the continuation of the Special Programme have been taken, to re-focus public awareness by means of a high-profile event, such as an information seminar in Northern Ireland in early 1998 at which the President of the Commission and Commissioner Wulf-Mathies would re-launch the programme.

8.7.6 The Peace Technology Web referred to in Section 5, if established, would help programme operators to achieve a better delivery system and participants to secure improved access to information, as well as permitting the public to be better informed.

#### 8.8. Financial Aspects

8.8.1 Our most important recommendation is that the percentage of the Special Programme's funding devoted to the partnerships be increased from 15% to 25%. As to where the money should be taken from, we believe that an examination of departmental programmes within the Special Programme should urgently be carried out in order to identify those measures which are similar to on-going programmes outside the Special Programme and which have but tenuous links to the fundamental objectives of "Peace and Reconciliation". A cull of such measures should yield a significant portion of the necessary 10% for the proposed transfer in favour of the partnerships.

8.8.2 As for the IFB programmes, we recommend that, subject to the following two modifications, the present funding arrangements remain unaltered. The two changes proposed are, firstly, that the greater part of the allocation hitherto made to the Department of Agriculture for rural development should be given to the Rural Development Council and the Rural Community Network; and, secondly, that the Youthnet, its budget and staff be directly attached to the executive of the Northern Ireland Partnership Board.

8.8.3 As regards the Odyssey Project, should it proceed, a maximum of 10 MECU should be allocated to it from the Special Programme, all of it to be drawn from the Central Government share.

8.8.4 Economic growth and job creation measures were criticised by some as not being close enough to the objectives of "Peace and Reconciliation". However, we believe that in the circumstances of Northern Ireland their inclusion is justified and that they should therefore be maintained. Indeed more could be done within the Special Programme to foster business links with the United States as a follow-up to President Clinton's initiatives in this field.

8.8.5 Interest Relief Study

We recommend that this measure be repeated, but it should target firms which employ fewer than 50 people, and are located in areas of social and economic deprivation. Advance notice of the relaunched scheme should be widely publicised and preference given to firms which have not previously benefited.

8.8.6 Co-operation with other funds

We saw little evidence of co-operation with the administration of other funds such as national lottery funds, the Millennium Fund or the International Fund for Ireland. We believe that opportunities should be sought to achieve complementarity of funding, especially for bigger projects.

8.9 Partnerships

8.9.1 The partnerships should be allowed to increase their activities in line with their proposed increased budget. However, given the demands made on the time and energies of partnership members, care must be taken not to overburden them.

- 8.9.2 Partnerships should consciously move from their initial phase of stimulating interest as widely as possible and creating a “feel good” atmosphere by supporting as many projects as possible, to a more qualitative and targeted approach. They should provide greater leadership, taking the initiative in switching from scattered, unrelated projects to thematic programmes, as well as facing up to the tough decisions this will involve.
- 8.9.3 There is room for co-operation between partnerships, e.g. through projects or programmes carried out jointly in two or three district partnership areas. We recommend that in order to stimulate such co-operation a certain amount, say 20%, of the funds made available to partnerships generally should be set aside for this purpose and be subject to joint bids from partnerships on a competitive basis. Partnerships should also be free to tap into other funds such as the National Lottery Fund, the Millennium Fund and the International Fund for Ireland.
- 8.9.4 Partnerships should take a more active role in developing programmes to cater for youth, as envisaged with Youthnet (cf. paragraph 8.8.2). More generally they should seek opportunities for closer co-operation with the IFBs.
- 8.9.5 Also in the interests of improving the performance of partnerships, work should be carried out to produce a set of “best practice” indicators.
- 8.9.6 In order to effect administrative savings it is recommended that where appropriate the partnerships use as their secretariats staff engaged in similar work relating to EU programmes such as INTERREG as, for example, the Magherafelt and Dungannon partnerships have done.

## 8.10 Intermediary Funding Bodies

8.10.1 The financial aspects are dealt with in paragraph 8.8.

8.10.2 The delivery mechanisms are dealt with in paragraph 8.5 above.

8.10.3 The Clearing House recommendations are dealt with in paragraph 8.6.1 above.

8.10.4 The particular role of IFB operators, and the need to enhance management practices and to cope with issues such as sustainability and "exit" strategies, lead us to recommend that they be given appropriate training courses to be financed under the Technical Assistance Sub-programme.

## 8.11 Border Counties and Cross Border Aspects

8.11.1 The potential synergy that exists between the Urban and Village Renewal and Tourism Programme and the complementary Area Development Management (ADM) activity can best be achieved by the fusion of these two roles, in a form similar to that of the Northern Ireland Partnership structure.

8.11.2 The extra resources which we believe should be made available to the Urban Village Renewal Programme might be found in the Border Counties section of the Cross Border Community Reconciliation measure.

8.11.3 The criteria governing the establishment of grant-aided cross border business links should be relaxed to involve partners in the Republic from outside the border counties. Preference should, however, be given to border county applicants. Co-operation North, whilst continuing work with the Irish Business and Employers Confederation

(IBEC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), should endeavour to engage district partnerships in joint programmes and thereby deliver greater economic depth coherence to this worthwhile activity.

## 8.12 Post-1999 future

8.12.1 On the assumption that funding for the Special Programme will cease after the 1998-1999 period, thought should obviously be given to the best "exit strategies" to be adopted under the various facets of the programme. Care must be taken to avoid the approval of ephemeral projects and the creation of artificial jobs which would simply wither away once funding has been terminated.

8.12.2 "Sustainability" is a key word in this regard, but a problem of terminology should be mentioned here: some organisations embrace the notion of sustainability, but seem to mean by that that their particular projects should be rendered sustainable by means of funding from other sources after 1999; whereas we take the term to mean that the project concerned is either a once-off, stand-alone action which will not need to be repeated, or one which will be self-financing in the future.

8.12.3 In the light of these realities painful decisions will have to be taken by those whose responsibility it will be to approve both new and repeat applications for funding. The sooner this is explained to the public by those with responsibility and faced up to by all concerned, the better.

8.12.4 That is not to say that the Special Programme, which is a novel experiment designed to meet the special needs at a time of special opportunity, should pass into history as having simply been a positive influence in Ireland, North and South, in the years 1995-1999. There are certainly lessons to be learnt from the experiment, not only from a

cost-benefit analysis of various measures, but from an examination of the effectiveness of their methods of delivery - the partnership concept being the prime, but by no means the only, example. These lessons must not be lost sight of, either by the European Union or by national governments, and it will be for serious consideration on how to incorporate appropriate elements of the Special Programme into future mainstream measures.

## ANNEX

The three advisors met or had contact with the following individuals, groups or organisations:

- The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlan
- Department of Finance and Personnel
- Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland
- Department of Environment
- Department of Education
- Department of Economic Development
- Northern Ireland Partnership Board members
- Representatives from all the 26 District Partnerships throughout Northern Ireland
- Elected councillors from all political parties
- Solace and (virtually all) 26 chief executives of the City and District Council
- Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
- Community Relations Council
- Proteus
- Youthnet
- Rural Development Council
- Rural Community Network
- Cooperation North
- Area Development Management Ltd (ADM)
- Combat Poverty Agency
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
- Northern Ireland Growth Challenge
- LEDU
- IDB
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Londonderry Development Office
- Editor and journalists from the main local papers
- European Commission
- Coopers and Lybrand
- Belfast City Development Committee
- Fishing Industry representatives
- Northern Ireland Seafood
- Main churches
- Rev. R. Magee
- Reception given by Armagh District Council
- Tar Abhaile Drop-in Centre
- Educational Guidance Service for Adults
- ICTU
- Derry City Marketing and Recreational and Leisure Committees
- Ballymoney Showground
- Nerve Centre
- Queens University Outreach Centre in Armagh

- Community Centre work in Londonderry
- Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT)
- Reception for six counties in Republic of Ireland with Pat "The Cope" Gallagher MEP and Joe McCartin MEP plus County managers, chairman and staff
- Lord Mayor of Belfast reception, invited guests included:
- Gt Shankill Partnership
- UNISON
- NI Centre in Europe
- Laganside Corporation
- Ulster Farmers Union
- NISRA
- Equal Opportunities Commission
- NI Housing Executive
- Ulster Peoples College
- Institute of European Studies
- CBI
- Arts Council of NI
- Flax Trust
- Tourism & Hospitality Training Council
- NI Economic Council
- NIPSA
- Help the Aged
- NI Tourist Board
- NI Chamber of Commerce
- Youth Council for NI
- Training & Employment Agency
- North West Health Trust
- Queens University
- Falls Community Forum
- LEDU Belfast Office
- First Trust Bank
- Gt Shankill Community Council
- United Dairy Farmers
- Intercom
- University of Ulster, Coleraine
- Probation Board for NI
- Falls community Council
- Counteract
- Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre
- Belfast European Partnership Board
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Ultach Trust

- 7.4 The community-led development role of the Area Development Management is complementary to that of the Urban and Village Renewal and Tourism Measure within sub-programme 2C. The fusion of the respective roles could, in our view, enhance the social inclusion dimension of the latter, whilst simultaneously strengthening the sustainability of future Area Development Management activity post-1999. For fusion to properly occur, the *ad hoc* nature of the Committee for Urban Village Renewal requires to be formalised in a manner similar to that of the NI Partnership Board Structure.
- 7.5 Difficulties have been experienced by those attempting to establish business links within the qualifying area of the six border counties in the Republic. In future, good business and job creating projects involving a Northern Ireland partner and a partner outside the border counties of the Republic of Ireland should be considered eligible.
- 7.6 Since recognition of European assistance, most notably to infrastructure projects, is very prominently presented in the Border Counties, the further refinement to distinguish Peace and Reconciliation funding projects from other funding, notably INTERREG, is more difficult to discern. A clearer identity for the Special Programme is required.
- 7.7 The issue of transparency, whilst not as acute as north of the border, is nevertheless present, not least in comprehending the overlapping roles of the County Councils and ADM. The fusion of their activity would assist.