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Tuesday, November 25, 2008

# EU funds may be available for Maze conflict resolution centre

DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor

EU SUPPORT could be provided for the building of a conflict resolution centre at the former Maze prison site in Co Antrim.

European Parliament president Hans-Gert Pöttering made the announcement at Stormont yesterday while on a visit to Ireland.

"It is very useful to have a centre where you study the development of the reconciliation process," he said.

"We should learn from history, from the good developments, from the bad development.

"We should give the lessons we take from history to future generations and I would welcome the building of such a centre."

The issue is one of those dividing the main nationalist and unionist parties in the Executive. Unionists have voiced opposition on the grounds of cost and on fears that republicans could turn a restored Maze prison H-block into a "shrine to terror".

European financial support for the project could ease the difficulties over the development of the entire Maze site.

Culture Minister Gregory Campbell has promised to issue a statement on the project, but this has been held up by the failure of the Executive to meet between mid-June and last week.

Sinn Féin MEP Bairbre de Brún welcomed Mr Pöttering's announcement.

"We are now looking at creating a Europe-wide network of regions and cities that are coming out of conflict or that are living with conflict and exclusion," she said.

"The European Commission has enthusiastically backed the creation of such a network."

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First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness briefed Mr Pöttering on political developments and on the impact of the downturn.

Mr Pöttering also addressed Assembly members in the former senate chamber at Stormont.

Mr Robinson said: "Since devolution we have actively engaged with Europe in order to maximise the best possible benefit for Northern Ireland. At this time of economic instability we are determined to ensure financial and other support from all possible sources including the EU.

"This visit by President Pöttering is the latest demonstration of Europe's continued interest in this region and it serves to further develop and strengthen our EU-Northern Ireland relationship which will ultimately bring rich benefits," the First Minister said.

Mr McGuinness said: "The significance of President Pöttering's visit is underlined by the fact that around four out of every five legislative decisions affecting people and businesses here are agreed jointly by the European Parliament, which he heads, and the European Council of Ministers."

Mr Pöttering, accompanied by Junior Ministers Gerry Kelly and Jeffrey Donaldson, later visited St Joseph's Primary School in Lisburn, Co Antrim, and the Suffolk and Lenadoon Interface Group in west Belfast.

The Northern leg of his visit concluded last night with a dinner hosted by Mr Robinson and Mr McGuinness in Parliament Buildings.

Mr Pöttering travels to Dublin for talks on the Lisbon Treaty and other issues later this week.



This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

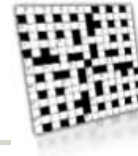
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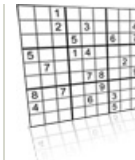
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