

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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DRAFT NOTICE TO THE MEMBER STATES

laying down guidelines for an initiative in the framework of the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland

(presented by the Commission)

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1. At its meeting on, the Commission of the European Communities decided to establish a Community initiative in the framework of the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland; within the meaning of Article 11 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 4253/88, as amended by Regulation (EEC) No 2082/93(1), and Article 3 of Regulation (EEC) No 4254/88, as amended by Council Regulation (EEC) No 2083/93(2).
2. This initiative applies to Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland (hereafter referred to as the border counties):

I. Background and Objectives

3. Arising from the cessation of violence and the developing peace process in Northern Ireland, a special Commission Task Force was established in September 1994 for the purpose of looking into further ways of giving practical assistance to Northern Ireland and the border counties in consultation with the two Member States directly concerned. In particular, the Task Force was requested to consider ways to develop and refocus the policies of the European Union to help those who have been most affected by the conflict to live together in mutual respect and economic prosperity.
4. The Task Force adopted a broad and open consultative approach. The MEPs for Northern Ireland and the border counties were in close touch with the Task Force. Extensive consultations took place and valuable input was received from many different quarters, including local authorities, business, trade unions, voluntary and other groups. The input from this consultative process was of great interest and indispensable for the work of the Task Force.
5. The report of the Task Force, which was submitted to the Commission in December 1994, considered the new opportunities and additional needs arising from the cessation of violence and the developing peace process and noted that the improved climate on the ground and renewed prospects for peace and reconciliation should provide new opportunities, especially for the vulnerable sections of the population. The report noted nonetheless that, while providing new opportunities for employment and job creation, the peace process will also create additional needs, such as the redirection of redundant skills. However, the new momentum for peace provides above all the potential for a lasting and meaningful reconciliation between the divided communities.

(1) OJ N° L 193, 31.7.1993, p. 24.

(2) OJ N° L 193, 31.7.1993, p. 36.

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6. The Task Force concluded that the European Union has a clear interest and vital rôle to play in maintaining the momentum for peace by means of a special support programme for Northern Ireland and the border counties. The central objective of the programme should be reconciliation; it should benefit all communities in an equitable and balanced way, while focusing more particularly on those areas and sections of the population suffering most acute deprivation, and it must have an immediate and visible impact on the ground. The positive effect of the European Union's involvement in promoting lasting peace and reconciliation between its citizens should ultimately benefit not only the region most affected, but the European Union as a whole.
7. The Task Force recommended that the main element of a special support programme should be a new Community Initiative for Northern Ireland and the border counties.
8. The report of the Task Force formed the basis of a subsequent Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, in which the Commission supported its recommendations. The principle of a special programme for Northern Ireland and the allocation of financial resources of 300 million ecus for the period 1995-1997 were subsequently endorsed by the European Council at Essen on 9 & 10 December 1994.
9. A key element of the report of the Task Force and the subsequent Communication to the Commission was the need to promote social inclusion. Community conflict and divisions have been a major element of social and labour market exclusion in Northern Ireland. They have tended to divide the labour market and have thus impeded its effective functioning and have limited opportunities for employment growth. In order to combat this exclusion and promote integration of the labour market, it is therefore necessary to support action to address the underlying problems in Northern Ireland's social and economic fabric. The fundamental problem of understanding and communication should be approached by the development of a reconciliation process which builds on the existing solidarity within communities in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, both urban and rural.

The severity of the exclusion problem in Northern Ireland, combined with the unique opportunities for change and improvement offered by the cessation of violence, call for radical solutions. Tackling the root cause of these problems will require a flexible combination of economic and social measures across a broad range of fields, including early childhood education, health, housing and cross-community cooperation.

II. Priorities for action

10. On the basis of its consultations and subsequent deliberations, the Task Force identified five priority areas which should be addressed in the context of the consolidation of the peace process :
 - employment,
 - urban and rural regeneration,

- cross-border development,
- social inclusion,
- productive investment and industrial development.

11. In its Communication to the Council and the European Parliament, the Commission indicated the key issues to be addressed in the framework of these priorities :

(i) Employment

This would include measures to boost economic growth and employment and would support and enhance the expected growth in sectors such as tourism (including agri-tourism). It should also support the redirection of redundant skills as well as reinforce efforts for the long-term unemployed and the young, and provide for the greater participation by women in the labour force.

(ii) Urban and rural regeneration

This would involve the promotion of wide-ranging local development and of social and economic regeneration, in particular through the improvement of the social and physical environment in the worst-affected urban areas, towns, villages and rural areas.

(iii) Cross-border development

This would involve a wide range of measures to exploit the opportunities for increased cross-border development arising from the new situation.

(iv) Social inclusion

This would aim to promote pathways to reconciliation by encouraging grassroots, cross-community and, where appropriate, cross-border cooperation, especially in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland and the border counties as well as action to address the specific difficulties faced by vulnerable groups and others at a disadvantage such as victims, children, young people, and those previously caught up with violence including prisoners and ex-prisoners. It would combine economic and social measures including contacts and exchanges following models which have been successful in other Community programmes. It should be flexible and responsive to change and constitute a framework of support for relevant actors (neighbourhoods, communities, youth services, NGOs, grassroots organisations, women's groups, local authorities, etc) to build their reconciliation package.

(v) Productive investment and industrial development

This would aim to enhance existing facilities to promote productive investment, industrial development and services, particularly the development of SMEs, thus promoting competitiveness.

III. Eligible Measures

12. In this section an indicative list of eligible measures is proposed in the framework of the five priority areas mentioned above. Further measures related to the priority areas but not included in the list may also be considered for support :

(i) Employment

- development of mechanisms to anticipate industrial change, including skill and labour market observatories;
- improvement of training, guidance and counselling services, including training of trainers, development of equal opportunities modules;
- innovative training schemes, especially those aimed at women, including combined training, education and work experience for young people;
- improvement and development of training delivery for employed persons, including management development;
- work placement; community employment schemes combining good quality training and work experience;
- local employment initiatives, especially those which tap new sources of employment (e.g. environment, care services);
- initiatives aimed at helping young people, in particular, to develop entrepreneurial and work skills;
- setting up of specialised placement centres with links to employers, drawing on up-to-date information on job, skill and qualification needs and provision of career and training information and guidance, counselling, retraining, support for self-employment with a view to redirecting redundant skills;
- provision of care services for dependants with a view to increasing access to training, education and employment opportunities;
- strengthening innovation and RTD, especially among SMEs, including the building of closer links between educational establishments, research centres and firms;
- promotion of tourism, including agri-tourism and heritage tourism;
- management training for SMEs.

(ii) Urban and rural regeneration

- development, training and capacity building related to urban and rural regeneration;
- investments to remedy the physical problems of the peace lines;
- pedestrianisation of selected areas;
- provision of parks and children's playgrounds;
- village renewal, landscaping, the clearing and development of derelict sites;
- measures to meet the needs of rural dwellers, including small rural infrastructures;
- community development, including the creation of local partnerships to develop and manage integrated development plans;
- support in the modernisation of commerce in urban and rural areas;
- provision of facilities for small businesses;
- support for development of social, cultural and artistic activities.

(iii) Cross-border development

- enhanced trade, economic and agricultural cooperation;
- upgrading of infrastructures through reinstating closed cross-border roads & bridges and improving energy links;
- joint animal health, food & forestry actions;
- cooperation between local authorities, health boards, business (in particular SMEs), education and training providers, health establishments, voluntary organisations and other groups;
- support for joint-venture companies (marketing, RTD) on a cross-border basis.

(iv) Social inclusion

- the development of grassroots capacities and cross-community partnerships promoting reconciliation, e.g. in the fields of culture and the arts, leisure, sport, the environment, care, informal education, equal opportunities. Such partnerships should be locally driven, involve all relevant actors, and offer a practical opportunity for both communities to get together and build reconciliation as well as be designed and managed on a cross-community basis. Action under this heading will also require support for :
 - the study of problems and opportunities at neighbourhood and cross-community level,
 - the development of capacities and skills of local neighbourhoods in the field of community development,
 - the establishment of common interest plans in the social and economic fields involving cross-border areas,
 - support for women's groups and activities, both at individual neighbourhood and cross-community level, including the promotion of activities which bridge the generation barrier,
 - dialogue and exchange between local authorities, local communities and NGOs.
- measures to promote the full inclusion of children and young people, including the provision of pre-school education and child care and incentives to develop integrated schooling especially at secondary level, family support services and the building of home/school/community/business links, more remedial support, effort to increase levels of educational attainment and action to promote common cultural aspects as well as acknowledgement of cultural diversity;
- measures to improve the accessibility and quality of services for vulnerable groups and people at a disadvantage, including training of trainers, improved research and diagnosis of exclusion problems, the promotion of self-help activity and outreach services;
- measures to promote the full inclusion of vulnerable groups and those at a disadvantage (including victims of violence and former offenders),

including specialised guidance and counselling, psychological support, accommodation, social advice and assistance, second chance education; developing innovative model actions for reconciliation, including support for international activity aimed at enabling community, cross-community and cross-border initiatives to exchange views and learn from other conflict resolution situations and enabling communities to break out of their isolation.

(v) Productive investment and industrial development

- Marketing support (particularly to SMEs)
- Development measures to strengthen RTD and its applications (especially in SMEs)
- Access to Seed and Venture Capital Funds
- Interest subsidies to SMEs through the EIB
- Measures to improve linkages between large firms and SMEs and to promote local supplier networks.

IV. Community Contribution to the Financing of the Initiative

13. The operational programme under the initiative will be financed jointly by the Community and the Member States concerned. The Community contribution to the financing of the initiative amounts to 300 million ecus for the first three years, from 1995 to 1997. Further financing for the last two years will be subject to a review on the basis of a Commission report. Loans may also be made available by the European Investment Bank. The Community will finance up to 75 % of the cost of measures under the initiative.

The Commission considers that in order to maximise the benefit from this initiative, there should be an indicative allocation of assistance between the areas concerned: Northern Ireland, on the one hand and the border counties on the other. The Commission also believes that genuine cross-border activities are an essential element for the success of the programme and, therefore, an appropriate amount of assistance should be assigned to these activities. In the Commission's view, and as an indicative target, this would mean that up to 80% of funding would be available for activities in Northern Ireland and not less than 20 % for activities in the border counties. Moreover, at least 15% of the overall amount will be devoted to activities which are carried out in a cross-border context.

V. Implementation

14. The Member States concerned must submit detailed proposals for an operational programme, which could include one or more global grants, within four months of the date of this notice, outlining activities in Northern Ireland, activities in the border counties and activities which are to be carried out in a cross-border context.

The proposals must include an appreciation of the situation indicating the objectives to be attained and should include a timetable, criteria and procedures for implementation, monitoring and assessment. During and at the end of the planning period the Commission shall evaluate the results of the programme, in partnership with the Member States concerned. The European Parliament, the Management Committee on the Community initiatives and the appropriate monitoring

committees shall be informed of the results of such evaluations and the action taken in response to them.

The proposals will need to be prepared with the appropriate involvement, possibly in the form of a consultative platform, of local authorities, business, trade unions, community groups and voluntary organisations. Such a mechanism for consultation should continue to have a role during the implementation and follow up of the programme.

15. Community assistance may be granted either to a central government administration or, for example, in the form of global grants, directly to decentralised organisations responsible for implementation and designated by the Member State concerned, including local authorities, voluntary bodies, community groups and organisations responsible for managing cross-border actions which involve expenditure in both Member States.
16. Since an integrated approach for the implementation of this initiative is considered both desirable and necessary, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the consistency and complementarity of the initiative with existing supports (notably the SPD for Northern Ireland, the CSF for Ireland and existing Community Initiatives) and also with other organisations such as the International Fund for Ireland. At the level of sub-programmes and/or measures, the monitoring arrangements (sub-committees) should reflect the matter under consideration.

The aim should be to ensure that, during implementation, the management of the programme, through the Monitoring Committee, will facilitate genuine bottom-up involvement by empowering local agencies and groups to participate in the direction and control of spending, thereby providing a real input for local interests. As during the preparation stage, in addition to representatives from both governments, local authorities, business, trade unions, community groups and voluntary organisations will also be involved.

While this initiative will have a separate and distinct identity it will report on a regular basis to both the SPD Monitoring Committee (Northern Ireland) and the CSF Monitoring Committee (Ireland).

17. Both Governments will have to demonstrate the truly additional nature of this aid package (including the requisite matching funds), over and above the additionality situation as already set out for Northern Ireland and Ireland in the SPD and CSF respectively.

The Commission and the Member States concerned will agree, in establishing this Community Initiative, the exact arrangements (including the frequency of additionality assessments) for verifying additionality.

18. In order to promote the full involvement of all relevant actors and to implement effectively the bottom-up approach that is essential to the success of this initiative, Technical Assistance should be made available during the preparation and implementation of the programme. In the preparation stage, the Commission will offer the necessary technical assistance for the definition of measures in relation to the priorities and mechanisms of implementation.

The programme jointly submitted by both Member States should include a provision to cover Technical Assistance during the implementation of the programme. Technical assistance may include :

- dissemination of information and other awareness actions;
- provision of consultancy and expert services interim assessment of the programme, including the initial review of its operation which is foreseen during the third year of its implementation;
- funding for seminars, conferences etc.; which will facilitate the promotion of the aims of this initiative, namely peace and reconciliation;
- the establishment of a coordination mechanism to develop existing potential in the community and voluntary sector, especially amongst women's groups, and to assist local groups to develop proposals and evaluation processes and to act as an animator and general project development resource.

Information and publicity on access to the funding will also be made widely available: