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Reiterating national identities:

The European Union conception of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland

Katy Hayward

University College Dublin

Abstract

The Haagerup Report commissioned by the European Parliament in 1984 was the first major initiative taken by the European Union on the situation of conflict in Northern Ireland. It embodied a conceptualisation of the conflict as between two national identities defined in relation to the Irish border. The EU's self-ascribed role towards a settlement in Northern Ireland since that time has followed this vein by supporting the peaceful expression of British and Irish identities rather than reconstructing them or creating alternatives. This nation-based approach is encapsulated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement between the governments of the UK and Ireland and political parties in Northern Ireland. Through detailed analysis of the Haagerup Report in the light of the peace process in Northern Ireland as a whole, this article assesses the implications of conceptualising Northern Ireland as a clash of national identities for resolution of the conflict and argues for a subsequent reconsideration of the EU's role in conflict resolution.

Keywords

Conflict resolution, European Parliament, Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, Northern Ireland

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Biographical note

Katy Hayward is a Government of Ireland Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin. She previously held fellowships at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Wales Aberystwyth. She has published in the fields of Irish politics, EU studies and nationalism, and her current research is on the role of multilevel partnership in conflict transformation.

Contact details

Dr. Katy Hayward

Institute for British-Irish Studies

School of Politics and International Relations

University College Dublin

Dublin 4, Ireland

Katy.Hayward@ucd.ie

Tel. +353 1 6587576

Introduction

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement represents the culmination of a peace process in Northern Ireland which has depended on distinguishing conflicting parties according to their ideological position regarding the Irish border.¹ The internal settlement is underpinned with cooperation between the Irish and British states and two ‘communities’ in Northern Ireland are thus identified with either Irish or British nationality.² Thus, the process of desecuritisation in Northern Ireland has been accompanied by an increased politicisation of national identification; as Cunningham (2001: 163) notes:

The Good Friday Agreement is geared more to *the recognition and accommodation of different national and cultural identities* than normatively promoting their supersession or transformation. [emphasis added]

Contrary to assumptions about the creation of European identities or postnational solutions, this explicitly nation-based premise has also informed the approach of the European Union (EU) to the province since the early 1980s.³ The EU has consistently supported a peace process in Northern Ireland based on British-Irish cooperation and the non-violent political articulation of unionist and nationalist identities. This article examines the dynamics of this process and reviews the role of the European Union therein through an examination of the role of partition in the conflict, the implications of the 1998 Agreement, and the significance of the Haagerup Report, which was the first major attempt of the EU to outline a position on the conflict situation in Northern Ireland.

Conceptualising the EU’s approach to conflict resolution

At the heart of this article is the intrinsic connection between the internationalisation of the conflict on the one hand and the nationalisation of the conflict parties on the other. Although using a constructivist framework, this argument queries core assumptions in recent literature from the same tradition on the subject of European integration and conflict resolution. Models

in this area tend to highlight the potential of the EU in this regard through practices of ‘Europeanisation’ that create a European public sphere in which incompatibilities can be peaceably communicated (Risse and van de Steeg 2003). As a political entity, the EU is viewed as creating a framework for a European identity that makes the costs of conflict across borders too high to continue and feed into the recognition of shared needs and the creation of common identities (Pace and Stetter 2003). Whereas earlier theories of European integration conceived peaceful interstate relations as a spill-over effect of membership of the European community (after Haas 1964),⁴ theorists such as those following the Copenhagen School link issues of (de)securitisation to processes of *identification* within the disciplinary and discursive effects of EU membership (Wæver *et al.* 1993; Wæver 1998; Diez 2001). This conception is closely related to constructivist acknowledgement of the historical contingency of state borders and the social construction of identities around them (Kaplan and Häkli 2002; Paasi 1996). This article seeks to test core assumptions in this literature regarding Europeanising effects towards conflict resolution by analysing the discourse used by the EU itself regarding a conflict within its borders.

To this end, this research utilises a discursive model of conflict (de-)escalation, and the EU’s involvement therein, devised by Diez, Stetter and Albert (2006) for research into the impact of European integration on border conflicts. Diez *et al.* (2006:7) define conflict as the product of an ‘incompatibility of subject positions’. A conflict can be said to be at a different ‘stage’ according to the dominant means of communicating difference between the subjects. As communication becomes more ‘securitised’, Diez *et al.* contend that a conflict can escalate across a spectrum of four ‘stages’: episode, issue, identity, and subordination. A *conflict episode* is an isolated instance in which the incompatibility of subject positions regarding a particular issue is articulated. A conflict becomes an *issue conflict* when each party attempts ‘to convince the other’ of the validity of its position through argumentation around a

particular issue. If ‘disaccord becomes explicitly personalised’ to the degree that one party rejects communication from the other merely on the grounds that it comes from the other, then the conflict is an *identity conflict*. The final stage of conflict involves the communication and reinforcement of difference through physical force, with parties seeking the *subordination* of the other. Violence thus becomes a means of ‘dealing with’ or ‘convincing’ the other of the legitimacy of one’s position, the rightness of one’s cause. Conflict resolution requires the de-securitisation of discourse, with subject positions being re-articulated to be increasingly compatible.

The EU could therefore be said to have successfully transformed a conflict only if it has helped to fundamentally change the subject positions involved (Diez *et al.* 2006:7). Because the EU can influence a conflict both indirectly and directly, through discursive as well as institutional means, its role is less that of a ‘third party’ than one of a ‘perturbator’, serving to ‘unsettle’ the reiterated communication of disaccord (Diez *et al.* 2006:18). Building on Barnett and Duvall’s (2005) categorisation of power types in international relations, Diez *et al.* (2006:22-26) contend that there are four ‘pathways’ through which the EU can impact on border conflicts, the delineation of which are determined by whether the target of influence is policy or society and whether the approach is actor-driven or an effect of the wider integration process. The pathways of most interest to this article are the *enabling impact*, in which the institutional and discursive context provided by the EU can indirectly alter the approach of political actors in the conflict situation, and the *constructive impact*, which affects the subject positions involved in a conflict through ‘changing the underlying identity-scripts of conflicts, thus supporting a (re-) construction of identities that permanently sustains peaceful relations between conflict parties’ (Diez *et al.* 2006:25).

Rather than assessing the effectiveness of these pathways as such (which the author has done elsewhere),⁵ the purpose of this article is to critique the supposition held by Diez *et al.* and the constructivist school that the EU's discursive influence is towards substantive or integral change in either identities or the 'scripts' by which they are articulated. It should be noted at this point that this is just one dimension of Diez *et al.*'s useful, nuanced and empirically-ratified model. Nonetheless, if there is no evidence of the EU offering a 'change of scripts' in one of the earliest and most explicit attempts by the EU to formalise a position on conflict resolution within its borders, questions must be asked of wider assumptions regarding the discursive sway of the European Union. In a conflict the EU defines as one of national identities – disregarding alternative analyses based on economic differentiation (Probert 1979; Smith and Chambers 1991) or religious segregation (Fulton 2002; Mitchell 2005) – the EU does not seek to replace or reconstruct them, but instead reiterates them through the formalisation of dual state involvement. This runs directly contrary to the claims of some advocates (most vocal of whom is the Nobel Peace Laureate and former MEP and nationalist MP, John Hume) of the potential of 'postnational' or European identities for peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland.⁶ In order to place this debate in context, the following section of this article sketches trends of national identification and differentiation on the island of Ireland since partition and the Troubles.

Northern Ireland as a conflict of national identities

Partition and identification

Partition was a compromise between two seemingly irreconcilable Irish outlooks and demands. (N. C. Mitchell quoted in Heslinga [1971:23])

The Irish border (and thereby Northern Ireland) came into being as a compromise between divided opinions within the island as to the role that Britain should play in the political affairs of Ireland (Boyce 1991:261). The line of inclusion and exclusion drawn in a territorial border

has symbolic, social and economic as well as political importance. As the border became the locus and the focus of Irish/British differentiation after 1920, so nationalist/unionist disagreement as to the border's legitimacy became fundamental to individuals' political, economic and social identification. Writing about the situation in Northern Ireland at the time of its accession to the European Union, Beckett (1973) detected widespread conviction that 'the line of division could not be removed from the map until it had first been removed from the minds of men'. What had been a stroke drawn first on a map in 1920 had become, two generations later, an entrenched contour in the definition of the Irish and United Kingdom (UK) states and the national identities of their citizens, most acutely affecting those proximate to the border. At a societal level, Harris' (1986:viii) study of a small border town traces the division of the surrounding district into two distinct geographical and social regions. Noting that 'ties of economic relationships and kinships had run freely' across the county boundary prior to it being raised to the status of a state border in 1920, Harris (1986:19-20) identifies a 'definite influence on the pattern of social relationships in the area' that the border had become since partition. This she attributes to the different view that Catholics and Protestants hold of the border, the former viewing it as 'invalid', the latter as 'vital to freedom' (Harris 1986:20). The general pattern of relations at all levels between north and south, unionist and nationalist after partition, therefore, was one of growing polarisation (Kennedy 1988).

Given the increasing rootedness of the divide between the six and twenty-six counties, it is unsurprising that two contrasting national narratives as to the distinction between 'north' and 'south' on the island of Ireland have become established. In direct contrast to the nationalist assertion that the border created an artificial division in what would otherwise be a 'naturally' homogenous island unit, unionist discourse has pointed to long-standing distinctiveness of Ulster.⁷ Certainly, the course of Irish history, particularly with regard to its relationship with Britain, prohibits vast generalisations about the similarity of experience and development

across the island of Ireland. Different types of production, paces of industrial development, patterns of migration, etc. all contributed to dissimilarities between east and west as well as north and south in Ireland. Yet, the delineation of the border in 1920 ensured that the historical differences between (as opposed to among) the twenty-six counties of the Irish state and the six counties of the Northern Ireland gained particular significance, in both retrospective and prospective analyses. Thus, whether considering the folkloric myths of Cúchulainn's defence of Ulster from southern invasion, the divergent responses of the high kings of Ireland to invasion in the middle ages, the sixteenth century failure of the Anglo-Norman conquest to impose central authority over the island, the seventeenth century 'plantation' of Ulster, or the impact of land reform in the nineteenth century... traditional unionist interpretations of Irish history emphasise the separation of north and south, whereas nationalists tend to view such differences as a consequence of external interference.⁸ The construction of Northern Ireland as a site of contestation between two such opposing national ideologies has occurred through the manifestation of four overlapping processes: politicisation of the north/south divide, association of unionism and nationalism with north and south respectively, institutionalisation of the divide, and polarisation between the unionist-dominated north and nationalist-dominated south.

The political entrenchment of partition

The British government had not envisaged partition to be anything other than a temporary solution to the problem they faced regarding unionist/nationalist tensions in the early twentieth century. Illustrating this, the 1920 Government of Ireland Act (which established Northern Ireland and its devolved parliament in Stormont) had allowed for the formation of a Council of Ireland to link the parliaments in Dublin and Belfast and facilitate the negotiation of an all-Ireland settlement. However, by the time of the Free State constitution in the southern twenty-six counties in 1922, the Council was suspended and with it went any formal

and official means of contact between the two administrations. Nevertheless, some form of cross-border relations between the two were maintained for the ensuing forty years (with the exception of the early 1930s), albeit on a largely secretive basis among senior civil servants (see Kennedy 2000). This enabled the unionist leaders of Northern Ireland and the nationalist leaders of the Irish state to conduct north/south affairs in such a way as to avoid outright conflict with their neighbours and with the implications of their rhetoric regarding the border. Whereas the Northern Ireland polity was founded and developed in accordance with unionist ideology that concentrated on its autonomy and distinctiveness, the Irish state was legitimised in nationalist discourse through acknowledgement of its incompleteness. This was epitomised in the inclusion of Articles 2 and 3 in de Valera's 1937 Constitution of Ireland. By defining the nation of Ireland on a 32 county basis, and asserting the Irish state's right to sovereignty over the island, these Articles embodied in Irish constitutional law what had previously been considered a nebulous threat to unionism. De Valera had chosen to legitimate independent Ireland in a way that effectively alienated northern unionists for the remainder of the century. Ideological polarisation between north and south was cemented after the Second World War and the 1948 Republic of Ireland Act that followed severed much of what remained of the formal political ties between the Irish state and the British Commonwealth. In response, the Ireland Act passed in Westminster the following year reaffirmed the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The increased fervour of the Anti-Partition League in the south and the campaign of the paramilitary Irish Republican Army (IRA) along the border in the ensuing years only served to exacerbate the polarisation of the two parts of Ireland.

The connection between domestic and foreign policy is exemplified in the fact that moves by the Irish Republic towards integration in the international community (admittance to the United Nations in 1955 and application to the EU in 1961), liberalism in economic policy (1958 Programme for Economic Expansion), and positive relations with Britain (Anglo-Irish

Free Trade Agreement of 1965) created a new context for north-south cooperation. In 1965, Taoiseach [Prime Minister] Seán Lemass travelled to Belfast for a meeting with Terence O'Neill, the Stormont Prime Minister – a move which was soon reciprocated with a visit by the Northern Ireland premier to Dublin and continued after Lemass' replacement as Taoiseach by Jack Lynch. The accession of Britain and Ireland to the European Economic Community in 1973 coincided with a period of significant upheaval within Northern Ireland and in British-Irish relations. The rise of internal civil conflict (rapidly involving paramilitary groups on both sides), the posting of British security forces, and the reinstatement of direct rule from Westminster in 1972 set the stage for what was to be thirty years of conflict and unrest.⁹ Just as the border became more firmly entrenched as a physical and ideological barrier between north and south during the Troubles, so the division it represented became replicated within Northern Ireland. Analysis of the census results of 1971, 1981 and 1991 from Northern Ireland suggests that the violent conflict of subordination at this time was accompanied by a deepening physical segregation of society (see Smyth 1996).

British-Irish approaches to peace

The search for peace in Northern Ireland was hindered from the start by the fundamentally opposing perceptions of the border held at the highest levels and which fed into different approaches to the resolution of the conflict. Two things that the two governments did agree upon from quite early on, however, was that (a) a return to a Stormont-style government (i.e. dominated by a unionist majority) in Northern Ireland was not acceptable and that, (b) there had to be some sort of 'Irish' dimension to any future agreement (not least to weaken support for the IRA). Thus, the Sunningdale Agreement of December 1973 – the first major attempt at a settlement in Northern Ireland involving both governments – established a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland and included provisions for an all-island Council of Ireland. But Sunningdale relied heavily on the moderates within the nationalist Social Democratic Labour

Party (SDLP) and the Unionist Party and, when it came to it, they were ultimately too weak to sustain such a major change in a context of growing unionist opposition, nationalist suspicion and insufficient movement from the two governments. The reinstatement of direct rule after the collapse of Sunningdale in May 1974 signalled the British government's belief (similar to that in 1920) that the nationalist and unionist parties were too polarised and the situation too securitised to find an internal solution. The Irish government, however, placed a large portion of the blame for the failure of Sunningdale on the British government, believing it showed a lack of commitment to the settlement and caved to unionist pressure too soon. This marked the resumption of a decade of instability in British-Irish relations, the effects of which were even felt at the European level (as when Ireland refused to endorse EU trade sanctions against Argentina during the Falklands War) (Arthur 1983:172). Yet for the most part, the EU – specifically the Council – was a forum around which a positive and cooperative intergovernmental relationship was built (Arthur 1999; Meehan 2000). Regular meetings on the fringes of EU Council summits created a context for a bilateral approach to the conflict, leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985. This Agreement reinforced formal structures for a role for the Irish government (through the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference) that this time did not depend on the success of the regional government in Northern Ireland but rather acted as a substitute for devolution until internal agreement could be found (O'Leary and McGarry 1993). This facilitated a strategy of dual state involvement whilst strengthening the moderate political ground for the largest political parties in Northern Ireland in the hope of seeing power-sharing established. Aided by an array of external and internal forces (most particularly the paramilitary ceasefires), this peace process was carried through joint declarations and multiparty talks to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.¹⁰ This Agreement differed from previous British-Irish initiatives in two fundamental ways. First, it sought to 'incorporate extremism' rather than bolster the middle ground and, secondly, it institutionalised multi-level structures supported by constitutional alterations for both the

British and Irish states (Cunningham 2001:160). This Agreement bore closest resemblance to the EU's conception of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland as set out nearly fifteen years previously in the Haagerup Report.

The EU's approach: The Haagerup Report

The Haagerup Report was commissioned by the Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in February 1983 in response to a number of motions for resolution tabled by Members of the European Parliament (MEP) (mainly but not exclusively from Ireland).¹¹ In seeking to address 'one of the gravest political and social problems existing in the Community', the stated purpose of the Haagerup Report was twofold: (a) to explain the situation of conflict in Northern Ireland 'to non-British and non-Irish' MEPs, and (b) to see how the EU could be of assistance in addition to the economic support 'already rendered' within its regional policy and social fund (Haagerup 1984:5, 13). Building on the European Parliament's Resolution of May 1981, which recognised that the European Community had 'no competence to make proposals for changes in the Constitution of Northern Ireland', the Haagerup Report outlines a limited role for the EU in creating an integrated economic plan for the region. It recommends power-sharing as the ultimate solution within Northern Ireland. For the most part, however, the Report concentrates on the importance of cooperation between the two players with direct interest and influence in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, namely the British and Irish governments.

Was the Haagerup Report biased?

It is highly significant that the very fact that the EU was making this attempt to outline its responsibilities with regards to the situation in Northern Ireland was something encouraged by the Irish government and moderate nationalist politicians and strongly opposed by the British government and unionist politicians. John Hume, as an MEP for Northern Ireland from the

nationalist and pro-European SDLP party, has long been credited as a major instigator of the Haagerup Inquiry (Hermant 1992).¹² Hume's efforts to encourage EU action were supported by the Irish government, not least because both shared a determination for the situation in Northern Ireland not to be treated as a domestic problem by the UK. Garret FitzGerald, then-Taoiseach of Ireland, recalls that the Haagerup inquiry 'was initiated with some encouragement by us at top level, but not officially'.¹³ The close relationship between moderate Irish nationalists and Haagerup's inquiry is seen in his elaboration of the background of the conflict as one of historic British-Irish antagonism and his emphasis on the Irish border as an aggravating factor. Nonetheless, Haagerup's conclusions are noticeably different to those of the New Ireland Forum (an initiative by moderate nationalists north and south) whose lifespan was similar to that of the Haagerup inquiry, lasting from 1983-1984.¹⁴ The main point of closeness between moderate Irish nationalists (particularly John Hume) and the EU has been the fact that nationalists have consistently sought to internationalise the conflict in Northern Ireland. The EU's commissioning of a report on the situation was therefore automatically welcomed by nationalists; FitzGerald states that the Irish government was 'grateful' for the Report primarily because 'it alerted people to become aware [of the situation in Northern Ireland] in Europe'.

Yet, FitzGerald asserts, 'we weren't in any way seeking European intervention... we didn't want to be seen as pushing it [the Haagerup inquiry] in a way which would damage the relationship, a good relationship, that was developing with Britain at the time'. The Irish government were not the only ones not wanting to publicise their input into the preparation of the report; if they were cautious, the British government was somewhat duplicitous. Haagerup states he 'had conversations with government members, political leaders and other elected representatives from the United Kingdom and the Republic and with representatives of all major constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland' in preparation for the report

(1984:11).¹⁵ Yet, In March 1983, James Prior, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced the British government would not co-operate with the Haagerup inquiry. Unionists in Northern Ireland also objected in the strongest terms to any outside ‘interference’ in the province, and the then-Northern Ireland Assembly (from which nationalist politicians abstained) passed a motion urging the British government to do all in its power to prevent the Haagerup Report from seeing the light of day. As it was, the Report was published in December 1983 and passed by the European Parliament by 124 votes to three in March 1984.

Tenet 1: Cause of the conflict is British-Irish antagonism

Haagerup (1984: 7, 13) defined the situation in terms of two ‘conflicting national identities’: ‘It is like two nations deeply distrustful of each other living in each others’ midst’. At the heart of the EU’s approach to the conflict is the belief that it is caused by historical antagonism between British and Irish nationalisms and identities. Thus, the motion for a resolution for the European Parliament outlined at the start of the Haagerup Report asserts that it is:

aware that the conflict, deeply rooted in British-Irish history, is less one of religious strife than of conflicting national identities in Northern Ireland. (1984:^M)¹⁶

This interpretation is supported by a substantial section of the Report (1984:17-31) which outlines the history of the conflict. This offers an interesting insight into the reasoning behind Haagerup’s conclusions. The first historical ‘event’ noted is ‘rise of the Irish nation’ dating back ‘to the invasion of the Celts’, forming the roots of a ‘clearly discernible’ Irish identity. As Catholicism became a ‘distinct feature of the Irish entity’, so the merging of ‘political and religious struggles’ throughout Western Europe was replicated in Ireland’s relationship with its neighbour (1984:17). Yet, Haagerup (1984:29) asserts, ‘the conflict is one of culture and of loyalties, of memories of historic struggles rather than disputes of doctrine’.

The clash of these two national cultures and identities means that ‘Irish-English history is dominated by Irish rebellion and British suppression’ (1984:18).¹⁷ Even in more recent times, historical events served to further polarise the two national identities, with the Famine causing ‘an increased hatred of the surviving Irish towards the British’ (1984:20) and the 1916 Easter Rising highlighting Irish people’s:

apparent willingness to collude with the enemies of Britain in times of crisis and war, a suspicion which was stimulated as late as during the Falklands war by the way in which the Republic pursued its policy of neutrality, which was perceived in the United Kingdom as anti-British. (1984:21)

Haagerup defines the establishment of the Irish state in 1921 as the end of one dimension of the conflict, i.e. the fight for Irish national independence (‘This time the Irish finally won’). Yet, he points out, the ultimate cause of the antagonism, i.e. the clash of British-Irish national identities, continued unabated, with ‘relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom [being] difficult and often strained’ (1984:22, 30). This must be acknowledged in order to address the current economic and political climate of Northern Ireland, which reflects ‘a bitter, if distant, past’ that serves to reinforce ‘the prejudices of the present day’ in Northern Ireland (1984:50).

Tenet 2: Means of defusing the conflict is British-Irish cooperation

Recognising that Protestants ‘feel as British as [Catholics] feel they are Irish’, Haagerup (1984:16) draws a fundamental connection between the conflict between the two ‘communities’ in the province and the tension between the two governments. The motion for a resolution therefore states that:

improvement in the situation requires the closest possible co-operation between the United Kingdom and Irish Governments, taking inspiration from the resolution of conflicts already achieved in other parts of the Community. (1984:^K)

The British and Irish governments are urged ‘to use their influence with the two communities in Northern Ireland to bring about a political system with an equitable sharing of government responsibilities, which would accommodate the identities of the two traditions, so upholding the ideals and the concept of tolerance vis-à-vis minorities practiced in the two countries and in other EC Member States’ (1984:¹³). Intergovernmental cooperation ‘cannot dictate the terms [of] progress in the political field’ yet, Haagerup (1984:73) contends, the ‘acknowledgement and encouragement’ of the two governments ‘could improve the prospects for progress to take place with the active participation of all law-abiding parties in Northern Ireland’. He is confident that such progress can be achieved given that, as evidenced in the work already performed by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council:

it would be quite wrong to suppose that the peoples of the two islands, or of the two parts of Ireland are at arms length. On the contrary, they are mixed up together in a way that is unique in relations between independent sovereign states. (1984:60)

Haagerup urges this type of cooperation to be built through intergovernmental agreement. This can mean, at one level, that reforms by the UK authorities to the political situation in Northern Ireland are made ‘with the consent of the peoples of Northern Ireland and with the fullest possible co-operation with the Republic’ (1984:72). Ultimately, the European Parliament (in its motion for a resolution) would like to see the creation of ‘new arrangements’ that have the agreement of both sections of the population and the two governments’ (1984:^L).

Tenet 3: Conflict resolution equals peaceful, democratic expression of national identities

The EU views the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland as dependent upon the peaceful, democratic expression of the national identities at its core. The EU’s responsibilities

towards the citizens of Northern Ireland, to be exercised ‘by concrete undertakings and projects’,

must be carried out in conformity with and in the context of the comprehensive Irish-British understanding, which remains the core of and the clue to, any lasting improvement of the situation in Northern Ireland. (1984:75)

Toleration, rather than transformation, of the identities in the conflict is the goal that the EU sets in relation to Northern Ireland. To apply Diez, Stetter and Albert’s (2006) model of the EU approach to conflict resolution, the EU was not seeking to transform the situation in Northern Ireland from that of a conflict of subordination to that of an issue conflict. Instead, the violence in the province and the Irish border itself were seen as products of a fundamental *identity conflict*, which could not be erased so much as transformed. Rather than suggest that these differences be overcome in the European context, the Haagerup Report acknowledges the integrity of the contrasting national identities involved in the conflict and aims to create a situation in which they can be peacefully expressed. The EU acknowledges that economic integration, political cooperation and legal harmonisation do not eradicate borders, not least because their symbolic power can become even more important for nationalism in the context of Europeanisation. Nevertheless, according to Haagerup, what the EU can normatively contribute is to *defuse the conflictual potential of national difference*.

Tenet 4: Strict limitations on any role for EU

Ideally, according to Haagerup, arrangements in Northern Ireland should facilitate further cooperation between the European Commission and the relevant authorities and elected representatives in Northern Ireland ‘in matters related to the economic development’ of the province (1984:⁵). It is clear from the Haagerup Report that the EU is acutely aware of the limitations on its capacity to effect change in Northern Ireland. In areas relating to political change, the EU is confined to a supportive role for the peaceful measures taken by the British

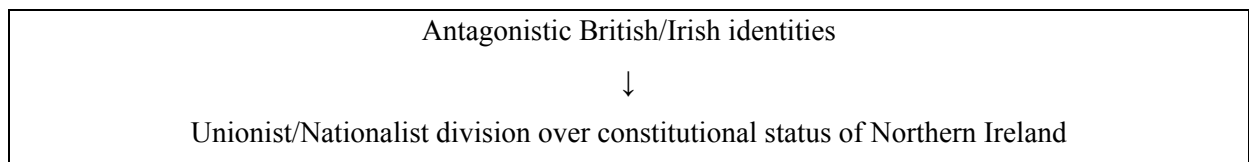
government and (it urges) by the British and Irish governments together. Thus, the European Parliament's motion encourages the setting up of a joint Anglo-Irish parliamentary body, and offers to have MEPs take part in this body but only 'in so far as that meets with the support of the British and Irish members' (1984:¹⁴). Even in the area of economic and social development (the primary operative role of the EU according to Haagerup), outside of conducting projects in order to recommend plans for development of the province (such as the studies by the Economic and Social Committee on the border), it recognises that improved cross-border trade depends on British-Irish relations and the states' own approach to the EU rather than EU innovation (1984:74, ², ⁷, ⁹). In fact, the only unique and independent contribution the EU can make according to Haagerup (1984:74) is to, 'provide the inspiration for the people of Northern Ireland to oppose and reject violence'.

Strategy for progress: avoid the constitutional question

In his concluding comments, Haagerup (1984:69) states that his recommendations are not so much 'concrete policy recommendations' as the rapporteur's own 'ideas and concepts', albeit ones which the European Parliament would be asked to vote on. It is worth outlining what his recommendations are, therefore, although they are imprecise and difficult to deconstruct as a consequence of Haagerup's awareness of the complexity and sensitivity of the situation. Whilst acknowledging that Northern Ireland's constitutional status is perceived to be 'uncertain and unstable', he argues that constitutional instability is caused in the main by 'the conflict of identity of most members of the two communities' (1984:69). He notes the 'sense of insecurity among unionists as to the medium and long-term intentions of the United Kingdom government', and yet also argues that 'nobody should question the right of nationalists to demand and to hope for Irish unity'. This is further complicated by the fact that 'at least two of the four major British political parties are seen to favour Irish unity' (as do 'many votes in the United Kingdom') and that 'no Irish party can escape its commitment to

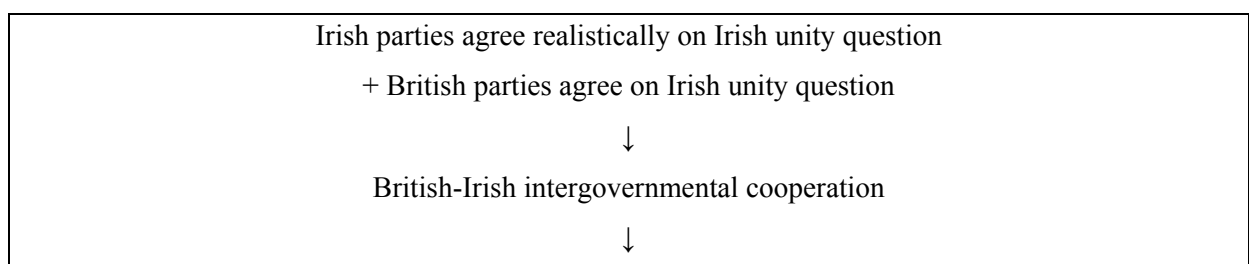
Irish unity' (1984:70). Nonetheless, he contends, British withdrawal would increase the violence in Northern Ireland 'to civil war proportions'. This, when taken with the unfeasible financial input needed to realise Irish unity, makes it an unviable ideal (1984:71). Although recognising that 'shelving the Irish unity question' will not be possible, Haagerup argues that progress depends on consensus among Irish and British political parties respectively to agree on the issue. This would allow progress 'within the present constitutional framework without prejudice to possible future changes under different conditions than those prevailing today' (1984:73). It would also enable means of finding 'more legitimate and visible expressions' of the Irish dimension. Haagerup (1984:73) also states that the British and Irish governments should explicitly agree that further terrorist activity would only have the effect of stiffening their resolve to maintain a strong police and military presence. Similarly, they should concur that a cessation of terrorist activities would 'lead to a speedy withdrawal' of British military forces, bringing back 'normal judicial procedures to Northern Ireland' and thus easing 'the pressures for constitutional changes'. The aim is the substitution of one-party rule or direct rule with 'a system of participation in government by both communities', in turn leading to 'some form of devolution (Haagerup 1984:73-74). For the purposes of clear comparison, Haagerup's concluding comments are summarised in diagrammatic form below:

Cause of conflict



Process to conflict resolution

British-Irish dimension



Formalise Irish dimension; Joint British-Irish responsibilities
+ agreement to progress if terrorism ends + possibility of future constitutional change
+ cooperation against terrorism

Military dimension

↓
Cessation of terrorist activities
↓
Withdrawal of British military
+ introduction of normal judicial procedures in Northern Ireland

Internal to Northern Ireland

↓
Participation of all law-abiding parties in Northern Ireland (in talks?)
+ internal reform within parties
↓
Political reform in Northern Ireland
+ Cooperation of unionist and nationalist parties
↓
Devolution

European dimension

Weaknesses
No relevant 'political reality'
No 'military reality'
Must conform with 'Irish-British understanding'

Strengths
Inspiration to reject violence
Commitment to economic development of Northern Ireland

The next section of this article assesses these tenets and recommendations of the Haagerup Report in relation to initiatives in the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Assessing the EU's approach in the light of the peace process

Comparing Haagerup with Agreements reached to date

The Sunningdale Agreement, which preceded the Haagerup Report by a decade, bears close resemblance to the Report in three major ways: intergovernmental agreement, north-south dimension, power-sharing within Northern Ireland. The main difference was that everything else centred on the success of the power-sharing Executive (peace being anticipated as a ‘spillover effect’ of its workings), whereas Haagerup placed power-sharing institutions more or less at the end of long-term processes of change in British-Irish and unionist-nationalist relations and perceptions. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, which came the year after the Haagerup Report, did prioritise intergovernmental agreement and put devolved government as a reward for agreement between moderate unionists and nationalists. The 1985 Agreement also further formalised the ‘Irish dimension’, with the development of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the establishment of its secretariat (including Irish civil servants) in Maryfield, outside Belfast. However, this intergovernmental agreement was merely a stop-gap until an internal settlement could be made. It also digressed from Haagerup’s approach on the constitutional question in that it set out official agreement on the principle of majority consent for change in the status of Northern Ireland without long-term discussion among political parties as to their position on the matter.

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is by far the closest agreement to the model suggested by Haagerup. First, it clearly defines the conflicting parties in terms of the dual divide over the border (Irish nationalist/British unionist) and served to reinforce this binary at all levels.¹⁸ As a consequence, there is a lack of space for formal manifestation of the principles that it purportedly recognises, such as ‘human rights’ and ‘equality of opportunity’ (which are not expounded in the Haagerup Report either).¹⁹ Secondly, with regard to the institutional recognition of the dimension of cross-border cooperation, the new north/south and British-Irish bodies reflect the application of Haagerup’s (1984:73) support for the ‘establishment of

joint British-Irish responsibilities in a number of specified fields, politically, legally and otherwise'. Thirdly, and most crucially, the agreement between the two governments underpinning the multi-party Agreement contains a commitment to constitutional and institutional change to (in the case of Ireland) modify (if not remove) the direct claim over the territory of Northern Ireland in Articles 2 and 3 and (in the case of the UK) allow for future change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

Where the Good Friday Agreement differs most substantially from its precursors and Haagerup is its inclusive nature. The multi-party talks that preceded it included all parties in Northern Ireland including Sinn Féin and excepting the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (which opted out of the talks). Haagerup did not clarify what he meant by 'law-abiding parties', but it is presumable he did not envisage Sinn Féin being seated around the negotiating table.²⁰ Another key point of divergence between Haagerup's recommendations and the peace process is that, although there has been some reform at the constitutional and even discursive level in British and Irish governments and parties, there has not been an explicit consensus reached among parties in Britain or Ireland let alone Northern Ireland not to use the constitution question as point of political competition. Although all parties (including Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party) have made some significant modifications to their discourse and practice in light of the Agreement, the position of Northern Ireland remains not only a political cleavage but the most prominent issue of contention in political activity at all levels.²¹ The question remains as to whether this is surprising given that the Agreement itself stands on institutionalising an identity conflict intrinsically connected to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

The EU's approach to Northern Ireland since Haagerup

If the Haagerup Report was the first effort of an EU institution to conceptualise an approach to the situation in Northern Ireland, it would not be for another decade or so that any major moves were made by the EU to act on it. Without getting into the detail of the 'pathways of influence' that have been most successfully used by the EU in the conflict, it is worth briefly noting the effectiveness of the EU's strategy as Haagerup had envisaged it. Haagerup's Report may be said to have been highly insightful regarding the likely nature of EU involvement in building peace in Northern Ireland. First, he emphasised the role of the EU in supporting an 'Irish-British understanding'. The potential of this was highlighted soon after in the Anglo-Irish Agreement's expression of the 'determination of both governments to develop close cooperation as partners in the European Community'. The repetition of this phrase in the 1993 Downing Street Declaration and the 1995 Framework Documents and the intergovernmental agreement incorporated in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 – 'wishing to develop still further... the close cooperation between their countries... as partners in the European Union' – embodies the position of the EU as a framework for British-Irish cooperation at the heart of the peace process. The value of joint EU membership in forging relations between the two governments upon which agreement on Northern Ireland could be built is examined and acknowledged in numerous studies (Arthur 1999; Gillespie 2000; O'Dowd *et al.* 1995; Meehan 2000).²² This relationship may be said to epitomise elements of the 'enabling impact' that the EU can have at the highest levels (Diez *et al.* 2006).

The second dimension of EU involvement that Haagerup highlights is its capacity to support the economic and social development of Northern Ireland. At one level, the economic dimension of European integration has had a motivating and largely positive effect on cross-border cooperation on the island of Ireland (Hayward 2004; McAlinden 1995). More specifically, the Commission has been generally seen as an external and beneficent player in relation to Northern Ireland as a region of the EU (Teague 1996). In addition to structural and

development funds given as a result of its Objective One status, the funding power of the Commission has been used as what Diez *et al.* (2006) would term ‘an instrumental carrot’ in Northern Ireland. The most important example of this was the creation of the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (PEACE) and the increased EU contribution to the International Fund for Ireland after the announcement of the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994 (Anderson and O’Dowd 1999). Such funding has proven to be vital for community development (including in previously marginalised groups and areas) because it is relatively long-term and can address core needs (such as staff salaries or buildings). However, a criticism of the administration of PEACE funding that relates back to the EU’s identity-based conception of the conflict is the use of crude categories (such as the number of Catholics and Protestants attending events) to measure the outcome of its projects, which some contend serves to reinforce rather than transcend divisions (Hayward 2005).

Assessing the implications of a nation-based approach to conflict resolution

The Good Friday Agreement followed Haagerup in institutionalising a British unionist/Irish nationalist binary to facilitate the expression of identities and the direct negotiation of interests that arise in relation to the border and its political, economic, social and ideological impact. Progress from the Agreement depended on the growth of moderation within unionism and nationalism, rather than the establishment of a middle ground between them. The Agreement is thus an attempt at consociationalism, setting up non-majoritarian power sharing between what are defined as two ethno-national groups. An inherent problem with this, however, is that the Agreement also constitutionalises the condition of majority consent – by which the status of Northern Ireland will change should an absolute majority within it wish so. Thus, it is integral to the logic of the Agreement that citizens vote for parties that most strongly represent and defend what they see as their identity and interests (defined along British unionist or Irish nationalist lines). Thus, the institutionalisation of this difference can

lead to an impasse on issues that are of significance to the identity of both groups. The recurrent problems in Northern Ireland since the Agreement are just such issues: decommissioning of weapons, parades, policing. The nature of these issues (i.e. their fundamental connection to the identities of unionism and nationalism) means that they have led to stalemate in (and ultimately suspension of) the devolved institutions and have had to be addressed by the intervention of international arbiters (such as Chris Patten on Policing or John de Chastelain on decommissioning). As the power-sharing institutions within Northern Ireland have sat suspended, support for hardline political parties has grown to a degree that far outstrips the moderate ones that drove the Agreement talks forward in the first place. It is important to recognise at this point that the way in which the Agreement was interpreted and implemented has been more crucial than the text itself. The progress that could have been made by mainstream politicians and the institutions they set in place was impeded (through repeated suspension of the devolved institutions) as a means of punishing the obstreperousness of hardline parties and paramilitary organisations on the margins. As it stands, whatever the debate about the fit of consociationalism to Northern Ireland, the Agreement cannot be said to have failed without ever having been fully tried (McGarry and O'Leary 2004).

Conclusion

We noted at the start that Northern Ireland's construction as a site of contestation between two national identities has occurred through four processes: politicisation of the north/south divide, association of unionism and nationalism with north and south, institutionalisation of the divide, and polarisation between the unionist-dominated north and nationalist-dominated south. It is evident that the 1998 Agreement (and the initiatives that preceded it) and the overall influence of the EU have served to problematise each of these processes to some degree, for example with the mechanisms and institutions for cross-border cooperation on the

island. However, this is far from the ‘transformative’ assumptions evident in constructivist literature on the EU’s approach to conflict resolution. To return to Diez, Stetter and Albert’s model: the EU chose to conceptualise the conflict in Northern Ireland as an ‘identity conflict’, yet its discursive or constructive influence on the construction of these identities has been minimal. Although Diez *et al.* (2006:19) acknowledge that ‘the effectiveness of any sort of [EU] influence on the conflict will also depend on the way in which the perturbation is reacted to’, they perhaps overestimate the alternative nature of the EU’s role in the first place. Even the Haagerup Report itself has a highly limited conception of the potential of the EU towards conflict resolution; it does not presume so much to create a European identity as to remove the divisiveness of national identities. Nor is this to be achieved through their ‘reconstruction’ (to use Diez *et al.*’s term) as such, but rather through providing,

the inspiration for the people of Northern Ireland to oppose and reject violence as a political instrument and eventually to accept a formula of tolerance thus resolving their conflict. (Haagerup 1984:74)

The nature of this inspiration and the ingredients of this formula are left undefined. Regardless, by the EU’s own confession, the resolution of conflict ultimately depends on the willingness of national governments to reform and political parties to change. In affirming a process of bringing national identities centre stage to the peace process in Northern Ireland, the EU effectively made its own role all the more elusive.

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Appendix 1. Summary of Haagerup Report

Report drawn up on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee on the Situation in Northern Ireland:

Motion for a Resolution

Rapporteur: Nils J. Haagerup

European Parliament Working Documents, March 1984, Doc. 1-1526/83

Conditions

A. Conflict in Northern Ireland (NI) ‘one of the gravest political and social problems existing in the Community’

B. European Parliament (EP) Resolution 7 May 1981:

- Strongly opposing all forms of violence
- European Communities (EC) no competence to make proposals for changes in NI Constitution

F. ‘Bearing in mind’ that UK government responsible for maintaining law and order in NI

G. Huge costs of maintaining border security to British and Irish governments

I. Estrangement between the two communities in NI prevented normal democratic process of changes of government thus alienating minority from political system

J. Recognising ‘the legitimate Irish interest in the achievement of lasting peace and stability in NI’

K. Improvement requires ‘closest possible cooperation between UK and Irish governments’

- Taking inspiration from other conflicts resolved elsewhere in EC already achieved

L. New arrangements:

- Agreement of both sections of population plus Irish and UK governments
- Possible for EC to intervene productively through social and economic development policies

M. Conflict-deeply rooted in British-Irish history: Less a conflict of religious strife than conflicting national identities

Recommendations

1. Ready to assume greater responsibility for the economic and social development of NI

2. EC Commission should produce an integrated plan for development of NI conforming with overall EC objectives

3. Additionality: current and future EC projects additional to existing UK schemes
4. Advertise EC funding for EC projects in NI so both traditions aware of benefits of EC membership
5. Cooperation between relevant authorities in NI, elected representatives in NI, EC Commission
6. Support for and appreciation of work carried out by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council
7. Support more British-Irish cooperation in 'exploiting resources on both sides of the Border' to create employment
8. Significance of studies by Economic and Social Committee on Border cooperation projects
9. Need to promote 'more and better balanced trade between the two parts of Ireland'
10. Strongly condemns 'all acts of violence and terrorism in NI and elsewhere' and supports 'all individuals, organisations and parties who unreservedly work for the welfare of the people of NI' by solely peaceful means
11. Encourages and supports existing British-Irish cooperation in combating terrorism
 - Urges all other member-state governments to underwrite this cooperation → joint European efforts
12. Condemns individuals/organisations anywhere providing financial and material support to terrorist organisations and urges all governments to take action to prevent it
13. UK and Irish governments to re-examine their responsibility for expanding their mutual cooperation, to bring about an equitable power-sharing political system, so upholding the concept of tolerance practised in EC member-states
14. Urges British and Irish parliaments to set up joint Anglo-Irish parliamentary body (inc. MEPs?)
15. EP President to forward resolution to Commission, Council, Governments and Parliaments of UK and Ireland

Conclusion.

'[EC responsibilities] must be carried out in conformity with and in the context of the comprehensive Irish-British understanding, which remains the core of and the clue to, any lasting improvement of the situation in Northern Ireland.'

¹ The 1998 agreement is generally known as the Good Friday Agreement, yet it is also referred to elsewhere as the Belfast Agreement, the British-Irish Agreement, or simply as the Agreement.

² Hence, the constitutional provision in the Agreement obliging both governments to give effect to the wish of the majority in Northern Ireland, whether it be for remaining in the United Kingdom or for unification with the Republic of Ireland.

³ For reasons of clarity, this article refers to the European Union (EU) throughout, rather than to the EEC or EC.

⁴ For a detailed critique of the application of the neofunctionalist model to the case of Ireland, see Tannam (1999).

⁵ For analyses of the Northern Ireland conflict in relation to all four pathways – and thus a wider critique of the EU's influence on conflict transformation in this case – see Hayward (2004, 2005).

⁶ For arguments regarding the impact of European integration on the conflict in Northern Ireland through the creation of new postnational identities see Delanty (1996), Kearney (1997) and McCall (1998).

⁷ Ulster is the most northern of the island of Ireland's four historical provinces, traditionally consisting of what now constitute the six counties of Northern Ireland and three border counties in the Republic.

⁸ For analyses of the complex history of north and south difference in Ireland, see Gillespie and O'Sullivan (1989) and Goodman (2000:8-52).

⁹ From what is generally taken to be the start of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland in July 1969 to the first IRA and loyalist paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, 3375 people were killed as a result of the conflict. Between the ceasefires and the Good Friday Agreement, 66 were killed. Since the Agreement to the end of 2005, 118 have been killed or disappeared, mainly as a result of internal paramilitary feuds. (These figures are approximate, and are calculated from the database of conflict-related deaths compiled by Malcolm Sutton on the CAIN website (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/>). See also Sutton (1994).

¹⁰ The most significant joint declarations by the two governments were the 1993 Downing Street Declaration (which upheld the principle of majority consent and the right of all parties to participate in talks if they rejected violence) and the 1995 Joint Declaration on the Framework Documents (which outlined plans for cross-border cooperation and an assembly based on proportional representation in Northern Ireland).

¹¹ The Report notably includes a motion for a resolution (Doc.1-833/82) tabled by the unionist MEPs from Northern Ireland, Ian Paisley and John Taylor, which reaffirmed 'that the European Community has no competence to make proposals on the constitutional and political affairs of Northern Ireland' and 'deplores and repudiates the contrary assertion' of other motions on the subject.

¹² For example, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (in a speech at The Mater Foundation Dinner in honour of John Hume, Dublin, February 2001) credits Hume with bringing about the 'involvement of the European Parliament [in Northern Ireland], leading from the Haagerup Report', and a colleague in the SDLP Sean Farren (in a speech at the 22nd Patrick MacGill Summer School, Donegal, July 2002) acknowledges that Hume has been 'closely associated with such initiatives as the Haagerup Report'.

¹³ All quotations from Dr. Garret FitzGerald taken from interview with the author, Dublin, 7 October 2004.

¹⁴ Whereas the *New Ireland Forum Report* viewed the political transformation of the border as conditional to peace and proposed solutions on the basis of a new all-island constitutional arrangement, the Haagerup Report quite clearly stated that Irish unity was not conceivable in the foreseeable future because it would cause too much instability and was not economically viable (1984:70-73).

¹⁵ FitzGerald, for example, admits to 'various contacts at the time' with Nils Haagerup (interview with author).

¹⁶ References to the Haagerup Report that are written in superscript relate to the points summarised in the annex to this article, rather than page numbers.

¹⁷ Haagerup's failure to distinguish between 'English' and 'British' here, as in other parts of this Report, is a notable error.

¹⁸ This is most explicitly evident in the condition ('for the purpose of measuring cross-community support in Assembly votes') that all members of the Northern Ireland Assembly state their affiliation as either unionist or nationalist in order to have full voting privileges (GFA 1998: Strand 1.6).

¹⁹ For a critique of the consequences of this in the working of the Agreement see Wilson and Wilford (2003).

²⁰ In contrast to the Council of Europe, whose explicit focus on human rights led it to act in relation to controversial issues in the Troubles such as the use of internment, the EU was unwilling or unable to engage with those on the margins of the political sphere until the late 1990s (as when three MEPs visited Roisin McAliskey, held in prison in relation to the IRA bombing of Osnabruck, in January 1997). This gradual change in approach may be seen as a response to Sinn Féin's decision to embrace electoral politics and John Hume's encouragement of this process.

²¹ For example, the campaigns for elections to the European Parliament in June 2004 that won the most votes in Northern Ireland centred on the promise to 'Keep unionism first in Europe' and 'Face down IRA/Sinn Féin' (DUP manifesto) and to provide 'an all-Ireland voice in the EU' (Sinn Féin manifesto).

²² It is important to note, however, that there is substantial disagreement among scholars as to the influence of the European Union on the peace process in Northern Ireland, with some claiming that its role has been greatly exaggerated (Dixon 2000).