From border conflict to identity conflict:
The EU’s approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland

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Abstract
The European Union’s contribution to peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland has been predicated on a conceptualisation of the conflict as between two identities defined in relation to the Irish border. This approach was introduced and embodied in the Haagerup Report on the situation in Northern Ireland, issued by the Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament in 1984. The Report’s motion for a resolution proposes that the conflict be defused through action bringing together ‘British’ and ‘Irish’, beginning at the highest levels of government and filtered down through to regional and local level. Building on this, the EU’s self-ascribed role in conflict resolution has been primarily a supportive one, facilitating and building on vital agreement between the two states. The most notable product of revitalised British-Irish relations has been the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which applies the dual categorisation of actors as either Irish nationalist or British unionist. From this starting point, the Agreement puts into practice the intergovernmental agreement, multilevel governance and cross-border cooperation outlined in the Haagerup Report. Tracing the redefinition of the conflict in Northern Ireland from one of a clash of territorial claims to one of contrasting national identities, this paper evaluates the common ground between the peace process as nurtured by the two states and the EU’s approach to Northern Ireland. Ultimately, the 1998 Agreement reflects the EU’s assumption that conflict resolution is achieved not so much through the transcendence of national differences as by their peaceful, democratic expression.
1. Conceptualising the Northern Ireland conflict

1.1 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. Conceptualising Northern Ireland as a situation of border conflict has meant that its resolution must involve both states of Britain and Ireland and both ‘communities’ affiliated to these states, unionist and nationalist respectively. This premise has informed the approach of the European Union (EU) to the province since the early 1980s, leading it to support a peace process in Northern Ireland that has been based on British-Irish cooperation and the non-violent political articulation of unionist and nationalist identities. Thus, the process of desecuritisation has been accompanied by a politicisation of unionist and nationalist identities; as Cunningham (2001:163, emphasis added) 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."

Whilst institutional recognition of the integrity of both identities has facilitated the end of intercommunal violence in the province, evidence suggests that it has also further polarised the communities at all levels. This paper 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 1984 Haagerup Report. It thus uncovers the connection between the internationalisation of the conflict on the one hand (Haagerup Report representing the first major attempt of the EU to take a stance on the situation in Northern Ireland) and the nationalisation of the conflict parties on the other (with actors being defined in relation to a British-Irish binary).

1.2 Northern Ireland as a border conflict

A central basis of consensus for the parties to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) is that the resolution of the conflict requires redefinition of the Irish border’s significance for identities in the province. The GFA creates a new constitutional and institutional context in which the border is not a contested division between British and Irish sovereignty but rather a symbolic distinction between unionist and nationalist identities. The two ‘communities’ in Northern Ireland are thus identified with either Irish or British nationality and underpinning the settlement is underpinned with cooperation between the Irish and British states. Prior to this point, one of the obstacles to agreement had been fundamentally opposing perceptions of
the border which fed into different approaches to the resolution of the conflict. The British government had conceived the situation in Northern Ireland as a domestic problem of insurgency, which needed to be addressed through security measures and a restoration of law and order. In contrast, the rationale of Irish official nationalism was to approach the problems in Northern Ireland as an inevitable consequence of partition, only resolvable through reintegration of the Irish territory. As this paper elaborates, the European Union advocated an alternative approach (set out in the Haagerup Report), in which the conflict is dealt with as a conflict of identities defined by the border. As the border divides the territory of the Republic of Ireland from the United Kingdom, so differences of religion (Roman Catholic/Protestant), socio-economic status, educational and employment opportunity, cultural or linguistic community (e.g. Gaelic/Ulster Scots), etc. are explained in terms of their location on either side of the Irish nationalist/British unionist divide. According to the Haagerup Report, settlement of the conflict required cooperation between the neighbouring states, channels for the political expression of the two identities, and the creation of a developed, open and tolerant society. This paper assesses the implementation and implications of this approach to peace in Northern Ireland.

1.3 The Irish border and identity conflict

Partition was a compromise between two seemingly irreconcilable Irish outlooks and demands. The classification of the border conflict as an identity conflict entails the association of the two states the border separates with two ‘communities’ in Northern Ireland. 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). O’Dowd (1994:5-6) describes the partition of Ireland as ultimately being a ‘product of the balance of power and coercion prevailing in Great Britain and Ireland’. The line of inclusion and exclusion drawn in a territorial border has symbolic, social and economic as well as political importance (Diez et al. 2004:11-12). 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 (then EEC) in 1973, Beckett 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, two generations later, become an indelible contour in the definition of the Irish and British states, the national
identities of their citizens, and the daily lives and worldviews of the 1.5 million inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

As a consequence of the increasing rootedness of the divide between the six and twenty-six counties, it is unsurprising that two contrasting 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 (the most northern 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). 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. Nevertheless, 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. 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 nationalist with north and south respectively, institutionalisation of the divide, and polarisation between the unionist-dominated north and nationalist-dominated south.

2. Partition, polarisation and peace

2.1 The entrenchment of partition

The association of two separate national outlooks with two separate territorial regions of Ireland arose when a combination of historical and social factors found political expression in the late nineteenth century. Partition of the island of Ireland was, in effect, a product of the
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The politicisation of differences between north and south. It is notable that 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 1920. Illustrating this, the Government of Ireland Act (which established Northern Ireland in 1920) 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, the notional purpose of the Council of Ireland rapidly diminished to that of merely allowing the Irish State some say in the affairs of Northern Ireland. By the time of the Free State constitution 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 in Ireland were maintained for the ensuing forty years (with the exception of the early 1930s), albeit on a secret basis between senior civil servants. 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. Nevertheless, the wider effects of partition on politics and society continued even in the absence of outright violence. At a societal level, Harris’ (1986:viii) study of a small border town traces a clear 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, is one of growing polarisation (Kennedy 1988).

2.2 North/south and British-Irish alienation

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. As O’Halloran (1987) incisively elaborates, the anti-partitionist rhetoric of the Irish political elite in the founding years of the state not only substituted for but actually served to prohibit closer unity between north and south. This was epitomised in the effects of 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. In pandering to nationalists on the edge of Irish democratic politics, de Valera had effectively marginalised northern unionists for the remainder of the century. Ideological polarisation between north and south was cemented after the Second World War, during which time de Valera’s prioritising of Irish sovereignty over Irish unity had been illustrated in his rejection of Churchill’s offer of an end to partition in return for the use of Irish ports by the British navy (Kennedy 2000:58). The 1948 Republic of Ireland Act severed all that remained of the 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 Republic and the campaign of the 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 EEC 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 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 which was to continue after Lemass’ replacement as Taoiseach and Fianna Fáil leader by Lynch. However, in a pattern that was to be repeated over the course of the ‘Troubles’, events within the province between the two conflicting parties were to throw north-south and British-Irish relations into confusion. As the civil rights movement highlighted the discriminatory policies at the heart of the Stormont regime, so it also revealed its weakness, as Northern Ireland security forces struggled to contain the resulting violence between loyalist and republican groups. From this point, the levels of securitisation and conflictual communication in the province raised the conflict to one of violent subordination (see Diez et al. 2004).

2.3 The search for peace
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 (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 twenty-five years of conflict and unrest. The peace
process that developed in the 1990s built on foundations first tentatively marked by the
Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, signed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Irish
Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald. From this point onwards, the role of the Irish state in the future
of Northern Ireland was clarified and formalised. This had much to do with the Irish
governmental elite redefining the its constitutional claim over Northern Ireland in such a way
as to assure the British and unionist elite that it absolutely rejected violent irredentism
(Hayward 2004). This facilitated a strategy of dual state involvement whilst strengthening the
moderate political ground for the largest political parties in Northern Ireland (then the Ulster
Unionist Party and Social Democratic Labour Party). Aided by an array of external and
internal forces, this peace process was carried through to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.
This Agreement differed from previous agreements in three fundamental ways: (a) it involved
all significant political parties in Northern Ireland (except the Democratic Unionist Party,
which opted out of the talks), (b) it initiated constitutional alterations for both the British and
Irish states, and (c) it institutionalised a form of multilevel intra- and inter-state governance. It
is the contention of this paper that the tenets of this Agreement reflect a conception of the
conflict and peace process long supported by the European Union, and anticipated in the EU’s
first major resolution on Northern Ireland outlined in the Haagerup Report.

3. The EU’s approach to the conflict in Northern Ireland: the Haagerup Report

3.1 Cause of the conflict: British-Irish antagonism

Commissioned by the Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, the Haagerup
Report represents the first and most direct attempt by the EU to outline its responsibilities
with regards to resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict. 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 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. 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:
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). 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).

3.2 Defusing the conflict: 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. (1984:6K)

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’ (1984:913). 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, however, 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’ (1984:7L).

Ideally, these arrangements 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 (1984:8S). 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’ (1984:1014). 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, 72, 87, 99). 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 as a political instrument and eventually to accept a formula of tolerance thus resolving their conflict.

3.3 Conflict resolution: 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 (2004) theoretical model, 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 becomes even more important for nationalism in the context of Europeanisation. This is at least in part due to the fact that nationalism springs from ‘the same source that informed the concept of the nation-state and, ultimately, that of a united Europe’ (Kockel 1991:41).

Nevertheless, what the EU can normatively contribute is to defuse the conflictual potential of national difference because, as common economic needs and political interests are met through cooperation, greater understanding and toleration emerges between the member-states. Thus, contrary to the claims of some advocates of ‘postnationalism’, the EU does not
presume so much to create a European identity as to remove the divisiveness of national identities.\textsuperscript{21}

4. The Good Friday Agreement as a move to identity conflict

4.1 The tenets of the Good Friday Agreement

The peace process moved the situation in Northern Ireland from a violent conflict of subordination to an identity conflict through defining the conflicting parties in terms of the dual divide over the border. The fundamental tenets of the Good Friday Agreement serve to reinforce this divide at all levels – participation in supranational, state, regional and local institutions is defined by affiliation with one ‘side’ or the other. Strand 1 of the Agreement categorises the conflict in terms of a divide between unionist and nationalist identities. 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). This has been described by former Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald (2003), as founding the devolved assembly in Northern Ireland on sectarianism. The effects of this condition were most evident in November 2001, when the lack of required cross-community support in the Assembly led to failure to elect a First and Deputy First Minister (thus preventing the establishment of the Executive), until three Alliance Party and two Women’s Coalition MLAs redesignated themselves as ‘unionist’ rather than ‘other’. The institutions established in the Agreement were intended to prevent such a zero-sum situation between unionist and nationalist within Northern Ireland from occurring, by placing this divide in a wider context. However, the success of the institutions in Strand 2 (north-south) has been restricted by problems encountered between the two ‘sides’ in Strand 1. This was most clearly illustrated in October 2000 when First Minister David Trimble, supported by his Ulster Unionist Party and Council, prevented Sinn Féin representatives from taking part in meetings of the cross-border bodies until they fully cooperated with the International Body on Decommissioning. Strand 3 has been perhaps the most successful element of the Agreement, not so much in terms of the inter-regional British-Irish Council but in the strong intergovernmental relations on which the peace process is built. The positive influence of progress at this level on developments in Strand 1, however, depends on close connections between the British government and unionist parties on the one hand and the Irish government and nationalist parties on the other. In the conceptual framework of the Agreement, the British state is ideologically, constitutionally and politically associated with unionism in Northern Ireland, and loyalist (including paramilitary) groups claimed to act in defence of British
sovereignty over the province, i.e. to ensure the maintenance of the border. Similarly, the Irish state is associated ideologically, constitutionally and politically with nationalism in Northern Ireland, and republican (including paramilitary) groups were motivated by Irish irredentism and the perceived illegitimacy of the border.

4.2 Connections between the GFA and the models of the Haagerup Report
Previous studies have acknowledged the link between the European Union and the peace process in Northern Ireland with regard to two dimensions. First, joint membership of the European Union was without doubt a positive influence on relations between the two governments (Gallagher 1985; Gillespie 2000; O’Dowd et al. 1995; Teague 1996). Secondly, the Agreement’s three ‘strands’ model, with its associated multilevel political institutions – within the province, within the island of Ireland, and between Ireland and the constituent parts of the United Kingdom – is to a significant degree both inspired and facilitated by the context of European integration (Arthur 1999; Bell 1993; Goodman 2000; Laffan 1999; Meehan 2000). Both of these elements are supported by evidence from the Haagerup Report as to the EU’s approach to the conflict. First, it is important to note that the emphasis placed upon British-Irish relations in the Haagerup Report as a foundation for settlement in Northern Ireland was somewhat radical at the time. For Northern Ireland was not a priority for either government in its approach to the EU and, as a leading official in the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs acknowledged, neither government understood nor paid much attention to events in Northern Ireland prior to the 1970s (Dorr 2001). Secondly, with regard to the institutional recognition of the dimension of cross-border cooperation and the Republic’s significance, the Strand 2 and 3 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’. The origins of such bodies lie undoubtedly with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which established foundations of intergovernmental cooperation, and some channels of the Republic’s involvement in Northern affairs (e.g. through the Maryfield Secretariat). However, a fatal flaw in the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that it was purely an intergovernmental agreement – the lack of consultation with the main political parties, most particularly the unionist parties, meant that it was seen as imposed upon rather than agreed by the political actors in Northern Ireland. This had also been a problem for the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974, the tenets of which bear closer resemblance to the Good Friday Agreement (with its power-sharing executive and Council of Ireland) but the negotiations of which involved representatives from only three moderate political parties (SDLP, UUP, Alliance). As noted above, the Haagerup Report (1984:74) explicitly recognises
the limitations of a purely intergovernmental agreement and the need to include elected representatives from across the political realm in Northern Ireland in devolved institutions that involve ‘participation in government by both communities’. In addition to these institutions, the EU has also supported the constitutional changes that the GFA has introduced. The Haagerup Report (1984:73-74) foresaw the nature of wider adjustments to accompany such a major development, including Irish political parties no longer competing to ‘appear the most ardent advocates of a unitary Irish state’, consensus among British political parties on the status of Northern Ireland, joint British-Irish responsibilities towards the province, explicit condemnation of all terrorist activities by both governments, a ‘speedy withdrawal of [...] British military forces’ following paramilitary ceasefires, substantial reduction of policy forces, and the reintroduction of normal judicial procedures. However, the connection of these controversial issues to a British unionist/Irish nationalist binary in the 1998 Agreement, as recommended by Haagerup, has proven to be problematic.

4.3 Problematic implications of the GFA

As Diez et al.’s (2004) model outlines, the expression of difference in an identity conflict is still accusatory albeit non-violent. Disaccord is personalised, and statements are rejected because they come from the other side. Moreover, the notion that convergence occurs through change in the Other’s position leads quickly 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 players (such as Patten on Policing or de Chastelain on decommissioning). Thus, by bringing the identities of the two conflicting parties to the centre of politics in Northern Ireland, the middle ground has been eroded – both within and between the parties. This is most clearly illustrated by the results of the recent elections to the (still suspended) devolved Assembly in November 2003, when Sinn Féin and the DUP replaced the SDLP and the UUP as the largest parties in the province.

Nonetheless, given that stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose ‘a structuring of interaction’, the new arrangements in Northern Ireland are at least conducive to structured interaction between the two groups, albeit on a polarised basis (Barth 1969:16). Moreover, one effect of the hardline parties on both sides being propelled to the position of dominance in Northern Ireland politics is that these parties now face a greater degree of responsibility than ever
before. The success of these hardline parties in recent times is undoubtedly connected to their use of the politics of opposition; to date this opposition has been directed towards their direct competitors within their own ideological grouping. The fact that neither Sinn Féin nor the DUP has a substantial alternative to the 1998 Agreement means that pressure on them to act within the framework of the GFA arrangements will increase. Whether this pressure will be sufficient for the two conflicting parties to engage with each other across the binary divide of identities defined by a contested border remains to be seen.

5. Conclusion
The EU did not conceive the solution to the problem in Northern Ireland as being the forging of a European identity nor in the forging of a Northern Irish identity as such, but rather in the forging of new arrangements in which the different national identities that exist in Northern Ireland can be peacefully expressed. The reduction of the situation in Northern Ireland from a conflict of subordination to that of an identity conflict has been successful in terms of desecuritisation/demilitarisation of the province and the non-violent communication of disaccord. The politicisation of the conflict in Northern Ireland has depended on an institutionalisation of 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. The rationale of this approach was to respond to the type of challenge posed by Longley (1990:24), namely for the two governments to ‘cease to talk about accommodating diversity and face up to duality’, helping to release Northern Ireland to function ‘as a shared region of these islands’. It was implicitly understood by the parties to the Agreement that this process was to be accompanied by change within the two ideologies themselves, making them more accommodating towards the Other. Advocates of the Agreement claimed that it had created ‘a unionism compatible with nationalism’ (Porter 2000) and represents for nationalism ‘an historic reconciliation with unionism’ (Maginniss 2001). However, as forms of identity, unionism and nationalism still rely on ‘absolutist and essentialist forms of self-definition’, whose territorial claims are advanced only through denial of ‘more varied, mixed, fluid and relational kinds of identity’ (Longley 1990:23). Progress from the Agreement, therefore, depended on the growth of moderation within unionism and nationalism, rather than the establishment of a middle ground between them. Unfortunately, the necessary sense of group insecurity that arises from actors moving closer to the boundaries of their ideological position has not been met by substantive progress on a cross-community basis.
Nonetheless, Northern Ireland is in a process of change at all levels, and one that is based on the recognition and politicisation of unionist/nationalist difference. The three-stranded approach allows for the British dimension of unionist identities (Strand 3) and the Irish dimension of nationalist identities (Strand 2) to be addressed in addition to the direct competition of these two parties in Strand 1. Central to these constitutional and institutional adjustments is the changing conceptualisation of the Irish border itself, from an obstacle in British-Irish relations to a bridge for north-south relations on the island. The European Union has provided a context for these adjustments, yet is itself in the midst of a major process of change. As it faces new pressures, particularly in relation to the next rounds for structural funding, the EU will need to decide whether it can move beyond the primary stage of conflict resolution set out by Haagerup twenty years ago. Its solemn declaration of a ‘readiness to assume a greater responsibility for the economic and social development of Northern Ireland’ in that Report (1984:7) now comes to the fore as the most vibrant opportunity for the EU to assist the many individuals at a local level in Northern Ireland seeking to counteract further alienation of their communities from mainstream politics and from each other.

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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: N. J. Haagerup

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 → 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 ROI governments’
   • Taking inspiration from other conflicts resolved elsewhere in EC already achieved
L. New arrangements:
   • Agreement of both sections of population + Irish and UK governments
   • Possible for EC to intervene productively through social & 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 ROI-GB cooperation in combating terrorism
   • Urges all other MS (member-state) governments to underwrite this cooperation → joint European efforts
12. Condemns individuals/organisations anywhere providing financial and material support to terrorist organisations + urges all governments to take action to prevent it
13. GB & ROI 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 MSs
14. Urges GB and ROI parliaments to set up joint Anglo-Irish parliamentary body (with MEPs?)
15. EP President to forward resolution to Commission, Council, Governments and Parliaments of ROI & UK

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.’

K. Hayward
The EU and identity conflict in N.I.

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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.

This is epitomized in the results of the recent elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 26 November 2003. The pro-Agreement moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), as well as the smaller ‘middle ground’ parties (such as the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition), lost out to the more hardline, uncompromising Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin (SF). This pattern of polarisation is also played out at a societal level, where increasing numbers of individuals are being intimidated out of living in areas dominated by the other community and where the number of ‘peace walls’ separating residential communities is nearly three times that of ten years ago (Wilson 2003).

Hence, the constitutional provision in the Agreement (1998) 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. The intergovernmental agreement within the GFA (1998:Art.1.vi) also recognises ‘the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland’.

As a case study for the EUBorderConf programme, the theoretical framework for this paper is derived from Diez, Stetter and Albert (2004). Adapting Messmer (2003 in Diez et al.), Diez et al. (2004:6-10) identify four stages of conflict (episode, issue, identity, subordination), in which conflict worsens through securitisation and communication of disaccord. The thesis presented in this paper is that the EU assisted in the transformation of the conflict in Northern Ireland from one of violent subordination to an identity conflict, in which disaccord is personalised and one party rejects an utterance from the other party simply because it is uttered by that party (Diez et al. 2004:8).

Analyses of the conflict in Northern Ireland in terms of a religious or theological divide include Akenson (1982), Bruce (1986), Fulton (2002), Mitchell (2004), and Rose (1971).


For analyses of the link between the conflict and segregated education and employment, see Cormack and Osborne (1983) and Murray (1985).

Nic Craith’s (2003) work emphasises the importance of cultural signifiers in Northern Ireland politics and society.

Although based on a very different case study, Gluckman’s (1958:33) observation that, in a society with a single dominant cleavage, this division ‘tends to run down through all social relationships and influences their subjective interpretation of the system’.

For reasons of clarity, this paper refers to the European Union (EU) throughout, regardless of whether it would have been termed the EU, the European Community or the European Economic Community at the time.

Gottmann’s (1951:164) observation regarding state borders supports this claim: ‘The most stubborn facts are those of the spirit, not those of the physical world’.

Longley (1990:24) defines Northern Ireland as ‘a frontier region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and Britain permeate one another’. Similarly, it is Heslinga’s (1971:11) contention that ‘it was not Ireland but the British Isles that suffered partition’, given the closeness of the relationship between Ireland and Britain and the great contrasts between north and south in Ireland.

In an illustration of the complexity of the Irish situation, a tract written on the European continent in the early seventeenth century noted that Ireland was divided into two parts, the south being far more under English influence than the more Gaelic north (Gillespie and O’Sullivan 1989:2).

For a detailed history of the differences between north and south in Ireland, see Gillespie and O’Sullivan (1989) and Goodman (2000:8-52).
For more information on developments at this period relating to north/south difference see Bardon (1995) and Coakley (1999).

For a definitive, detailed account of these meetings and their significance, see Kennedy (2000).

Reflecting on de Valera’s comment in 1917 that, ‘If Ulster stands in the way of Irish freedom, Ulster will have to be coerced’, Sheehy (1955:36) notes: ‘The Southern demand for self-determination involved an explicit refusal to grant it to the North’.

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

For analysis of the impact of European integration on the conflict in Northern Ireland through the creation of new postnational identities see Delany (1996), Geoghegan (1994), Kearney (1997) and McCall (1998).

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).

The growing willingness of the EU to recognise the importance of inclusion of the extremist elements into the peace process is reflected in the actions of the European Parliament in particular, for example the visit in January 1997 of three MEPs to the IRA prisoner Roisin McAliskey held in relation to the bombing of Osnabruck in Germany in June 1996.