Abstract: Among the various community conflicts which affect Europe, the case of Northern Ireland appears as the most long-lasting and variable. Even if it had been studied by several scholars – by using different perspectives – the majority tends to deal with one single division (religion, nationality, etc.) or set of divisions (fusion of cultural, religious, political issues).

It is undeniably a community but not only a religious conflict: the Northern Irish identity is a more complex concept and it refers to a composite set of variables which helps to understand better the quarrel. Language and the use of words are the first one: it is common knowledge to refer to Catholics as Nationalists and to Protestants as Unionists, by merging together religious and political differences. However, not all Catholics are Nationalists, and not all Protestants are Unionists: the two sets of categories are not coincident and differences in theological beliefs - even if they are the more evident aspect - cannot be used as root cause of the conflict. In order to analyse the second variable, it is necessary to consider how religion turns to the concept of State and governance each community has developed by thinking to the country in which they live. In other words, it is necessary to measure how it takes not only to a social identity, but also to a political one. From this point of view, there are two opposite identities in Northern Ireland. The Catholic identity is, obviously, Irishness. It is fragmented into two separated approaches towards the problems, carried out by separated parties and/or movements: a moderate one, which aims to participate to the political competition and which identifies with Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); an extremist one, which doesn’t refuse a priori a more aggressive strategy through the ambiguous Sinn Fein’s “ballot box and armalite strategy” and IRA’s paramilitary attacks. In any case, both approaches refer to a common idea of the State which should be part of the Republic: they have a structured political identity.

By analysing the Protestant side, one can observe two general attitudes: a moderate one (represented by Ulster Unionist Party – UUP) and an extremist one (represented, at the same time, by political parties as Democratic Unionist Part, DUP, as well as paramilitary groups, as Ulster Defence Army, UDA). Nevertheless, they do not tend to converge on a common identity. Many Protestants refer to themselves as Loyalists and have a strong anti-English feeling. They think to themselves as British in a very general way and are not sure of their Britishness as a political identity. Some of them could accept to live in a Northern Ireland which is still a devolved government; some others would prefer to live in an independent (but British-style) country; some group could even aspire to be governed directly by the Westminster Parliament. For these reasons, religion is the safest part of their uncertain identity: their only possible political identity is anti-Catholicism.

The quality and structure of the two different political identities had, of course, several influences on the strategies both communities developed in the last three decades and showed during the Peace Process. It started in 1972 and involved the three main political actors: the British government, Northern-Irish parties (at first, only the moderate ones, then even the extremists) and the Republic of Ireland. The peace talks altered several times and went through some violent and upsetting events: nevertheless, some key elements remained as the irrevocable basis for peace building:

- Consent (acceptance of the majority’s will);
- Power-sharing (a new form of devolved government, based on cross-community representation);
- Irish dimension (cooperation with the Republic in some areas of common interest).

The final result, the Good Friday Agreement, signed on April 10th 1998 represents a formal acceptance of this mixture of standard measures (which are necessary in divided societies) and specific ones, created for the local situation. This second aspect had been particularly implemented through the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC), which aims to develop “consultation, cooperation and action within the island of Ireland, including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis—on matters of mutual interest within the competence of Administrations, North and South”. The cooperation started by economic initiatives and was significantly driven by European Union (EU) external aid. Together with US Administrations, EU had been significantly active during the Peace Process, by promoting and financing joint programmes and projects within the Structural Funds context. The main idea was that
economic cooperation could reinforce social dialogue among the two communities and constitute the basis for mutual trust and confidence. This pushed some scholars to build some neo-functionalist analysis, as well as spill-over effects. According to Tannam, in the Irish/Northern Irish case, possible indicators of co-operation can be identified along a *continuum* as ranging from informal contacts, to formal joint contacts, to joint programmes and finally joint authority (Tannam 1999, 4). By considering the role played by EU, he stated that two main factors potentially altered its significance in the Irish/ Northern Irish relationship. Firstly, the amount of money provided by the EU to foster cross-border co-operation and to underpin the peace process generally increased. Secondly, in response to Commission criteria for regional funding, the six Irish border counties were designated as Objective One. In order to receive maximum funding from the EU, administrative arrangements to ensure partnership and subsidiarity were demanded.

This paper aims to show how an “old-fashioned” case could offer an efficient and still valid example of conflict management and resolution, by focusing on three main aspects:

1. It is surely a typical example of community conflict based on religious/economic/political differences but, at the same time, it deals with the “new” civil wars which rise after the end of the Cold War;
2. Even if it refer to a specific territory and to specific issues, it contains some important elements which it is possible to find in other divided societies cases (standard measures and *ad hoc* measures included in the Good Friday Agreement are the best example);
3. It is a conflict which affects two important Member States and the role played by the EU during the peace process shows how integration could work on local conditions.

By analysing how EU tries to solve its internal conflicts could be a useful experiment to test, once again, the efficacy of its role within the global system.

**Keywords**: Conflict, Nationalism, Irishness, European Union, Dialogue, Integration

7th – 12th May, 2007

**Panel 8**
*Community Conflicts in the context of European Integration - Dimensions, Divergences and Convergences*
**Introduction**

Among the various community conflicts which affect Europe, the case of Northern Ireland appears as the most long-lasting and variable. On April 10th 1998, something important changed in the history of Ireland: the Good Friday Agreement represented not only the end to conflict and violence, but also the basis for a new political and social settlement, that will characterise Northern Ireland as well as the rest of the island. The official border between North and South divided the same geographical area into two different political systems: for many years, Irish people in the North and in the South lived just as foreigners, sometimes ignoring themselves, sometimes looking for some possible forms of cooperation.

Together with US Administrations, EU had been significantly active during the Peace Process, by promoting and financing joint programmes and projects within the Structural Funds context. The main idea was that economic cooperation could reinforce social dialogue among the two communities and constitute the basis for mutual trust and confidence.

The supranational EU has had, and will have, a considerable impact on the economic, social, and political life of people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The addition of the European context to Northern Ireland's political problems could make the difference. The extent to which Europe has, and will have, an impact on North/South relations will indicate whether or not the EU will be able to promote a positive political settlement of the conflict. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to examine, first developments of Peace Process until the Good Friday Agreement as well as the North/South relations and the European influence into Northern Ireland affairs; second the quantity and quality of EU intervention on the island; third, unionist and nationalist reactions to the EU involvement and its possible future developments. The thesis advanced in this article is that the peace process in Northern Ireland has been a product of significant changes in both the internal and external context of the conflict.

1. **The Northern Irish community conflict**

In 1922, Winston Churchill described the resistance of the Irish question by using these words:
“The whole map of Europe has changed. The modes of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world. But as the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm that has swept the world” (quoted by O’Malley, 1996: 5).

Since 1400s, the Irish people had been a problem for British government: the political regime they favoured on the island (at first, through the Plantation Policy, then through the Act of Union in 1801 and, since 1920, through the Partition) contributed to the social and religious fragmentation and to the rising of violence between Catholics and Protestants. This relationship, which was carried out by a majority vs. a minority in the whole island, reversed entirely in Northern Ireland, moving to a situation which is commonly considered as a “divided society”. Even if Northern Ireland benefited of a devolved government, Protestant majority advantaged of British support in order to play leading roles in the political life as well as in the economic one. Nationalist minority started to feel deprived and segregated in its own country and turned mostly to extremist positions and violent strategies (Cronin, 1980).

The Northern Irish conflict is surely a typical example of community conflict based on religious/economic/political differences. It is true that most interpretations of Northern Ireland problems dealt with one single division (religion, nationality, etc.) or set of divisions (fusion of cultural, religious, political issues) (Little, 2003: 372) and the majority tends to focus on religious matters. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that Northern Irish identity is a more complex concept and, especially if one considers the Catholic side, it refers to a composite set of variables which helps to understand better the conflict.

Language and the use of words are the first one: it seems to be common knowledge to refer to Catholics as Nationalists and to Protestants as Unionists, by merging together religious and political differences. One of the many fears Northern Ireland Protestants have:

“is the fear of being culturally and religiously absorbed in an all-Ireland State in which they would account for a small percentage of the population, a theocratic State” (O’Malley, 1995).
Belonging to some explanations, both communities should need a “second first language” (after English), a common idiom, which allows them to express shared values and aspirations. “Finding common ground is not subsequent to understanding, but a precondition of it” (O’Malley, 1995: 11). However, not all Catholics are Nationalists, and not all Protestants are Unionists: the two sets of categories are not coincident and differences in theological beliefs - even if they are the more evident aspect of the conflict - cannot be used as root cause of the conflict.

The second variable is a combination of religion and identity: it is necessary to consider how religion turns to the concept of State and governance each community has developed by thinking to the country in which they live. In only one of the great number of surveys carried out in Northern Ireland, Catholics resulted in favour of a united Ireland as their preferred option. Power-sharing dealing with a devolved government and an Irish dimension seem to be more acceptable: “a differentiation between the acceptable and the aspirational” (O’Malley, 1996: 21). In other words, it is necessary to measure how it takes not only to a social identity, but also to a political one. From this point of view, there are two different identities in Northern Ireland, which turn on two different political dimensions. Mitchell has described Northern Ireland’s party system as an ‘ethnic dual party system’, which sensibly marks a difference from other conventional Western European experiences: Northern Ireland has two party systems – one unionist and one nationalist – operating in tandem (Mitchell, 1995, quoted by Lutz-Farrington, 2006: 717). Even if this is basically true, we argue that the existence of extremists and moderates within the two parts makes the dual party system a more complicated and diversified one.

The Catholic identity is, without doubt, Irishness. It is, of course, fragmented into two separated approaches towards the problems, carried out by separated parties and/or

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1 This is what philosopher Donald Davidson stated. Dean Griffin explains that “The whole idea of society and government and the state is corporate from the traditional Roman Catholic point of view, whereas the Protestant angle is much more private, more individualistic. The common good will generally be thought of by Roman Catholics as a more of less philosophical or theological concept. The Protestant will think of the common good in a very practical kind of way – the maximization of tolerance and the minimization of suffering. Catholics have a different concept of it – it’s to help the fabric of the state in a more or less monolithic way”. (O’Malley, 1995: 11).

2 “War comes about not simply because humans are territorial, but because they deal with territorial issues in certain ways. The ways they select to resolve territorial issues determine whether there will be war or peace” (Vasquez, 1993: 152).
movements: a moderate one, which aims to participate to the political competition and which identifies with Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); an extremist one, which doesn’t refuse a priori a more aggressive strategy through the ambiguous Sinn Fein’s “ballot box and armalite strategy” and IRA’s paramilitary attacks (Dixon, 2001). In any case, both approaches refer to a common idea of the State which should be part of the Republic: they have a structured political identity.

It is not possible to make the same statement for Protestants. Even in this case, one can observe two general attitudes: a moderate one (represented by Ulster Unionist Party – UPP) and an extremist one (represented, at the same time, by political parties as Democratic Unionist Part, DUP, as well as paramilitary groups, as Ulster Defence Army, UDA). In this second group, literature tends to include evangelicals, who are commonly considered as the strongest contingent of Ulster loyalists, because of the well-established interrelations of Protestant theology with unionist politics (Mitchell – Tilley, 2004). Nevertheless, they do not tend to converge on a common identity. Many Protestants refer to themselves as Loyalists and have a strong anti-English feeling. They think to themselves as British in a very general way and are not sure of their Britishness as a political identity. Some of them could accept to live in a Northern Ireland which is still a devolved government; some others would prefer to live in an independent (but British-style) country; some group could even aspire to be governed directly by the Westminster Parliament (Farrington, 2006: 285-86). For these reasons, religion is the safest part of their uncertain identity: their only possible political identity is anti-Catholicism (O’Malley, 1996).

The quality and structure of the two different political identities had, of course, several repercussions on the strategies both communities developed in the last three decades, during all different phases of the Peace Process until today.

The third variable is, in fact, the frontier: the Northern Irish territory had been disputed by nationalist and unionists, as well as by extremists and moderates within the two parts and by UK and the Republic. It had been at the core of several contradictory strategies, projects and plans. In this sense, this community conflict is not only an issue regarding its own “frontier society” within the border, marked by segregation, discrimination and

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3 Nevertheless, as Mitchell and Tilley argue, it is not possible to oversimplify evangelical community and its political attitude.
the conflict of different identities (Wright, 1987). It refers also to other societies, placed outside the border: the nationalists are the minority community in Northern Ireland, while unionists are the majority. At the same time, Ulster unionists are the minority on the island of Ireland (and this is why they could not accept to leave the union with Britain in exchange for minority status within a united Ireland). Finally, if one considers the British Isles, the Irish are a minority and the English a majority. As Cunningham suggests, “every community feels threatened by minority (potential victimization) status and the loss of territory” (Cunningham, 2001: 8).

All these variables are essential to understand the long lasting peace process and the different and sometimes incoherent approaches taken by each political actor who had been involved in the talks.

2. The community conflict and the Peace Process

2.1 The First Peace Process (1972-1974)

The escalation of violence at the end of 1960s (which culminated in the Bloody Sunday) and the introduction of direct rule by Westminster (Bew – Gillespie, 1999; Irrera, 2000) created in Northern Ireland an undecided situation. Fear of new violence was very strong and, in the British plans, there was a “moderate silent majority” for peace (Dixon, 2001: 129). In other words, 1972 was paradoxically the best year to start talking about a possible new settlement for the country. Power-sharing with some kind of Irish dimension were the keywords: this meant a new form of devolved government, based on cross-community representation and involving the Republic in some areas of common interest. This was considered as the only possible solution, able to attract a significant cross-community support, as well as the base of concrete peace talks. It was necessary, however, to clarify which kind of power-sharing and which kind of Irish dimension could satisfy both communities.

The Green Paper was prepared by the British government on 31 October 1972, in order to start the discussion: some basic requirements and parameters for a political arrangement were identified and the concept of power-sharing introduced, suggesting that any Assembly should have cross-community support and exercise shared executive powers.

The first White Paper on Northern Ireland constitutional future appeared in March 1973, as a result of a joint discussion (British and Irish), and seemed very similar to the
previous Green Paper. Some “very significant areas of agreement” were recognised: a representative Assembly; a series of committees within the Assembly; the protection of human rights. Moreover, social security, education, industry, agriculture and planning were identified as matters of common interest, in which North and South interests could cross (Dixon, 2001). Among these proposals, the most attracting was an Assembly for Northern Ireland (composed of 78 members) elected by proportional representation and which constituted the basis for “power-sharing”. At the core of the plan, there was the principle of “consent”: only the wish of the majority of resident people could have changed the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The acceptance of this principle forced the two governments to make some important statements: the Irish one recognised the existence of Northern Ireland as the result of the will of the majority of its population (in that historical moment), while the British one declared the need to give institutional expression to the so-called “Irish dimension”.

These documents opened to talks among the three most important political actors within the Peace Process: the British government, the main Northern-Irish parties and the Republic. They met at Sunningdale, in Berkshire, on 6-9 December. The loyalists were excluded because of their disrupting attitude, as well as Sinn Fein leaders, because of its ambiguous relationship with IRA. It was an intergovernmental conference and, for the first time, Irish government had the feeling to work in parallel with the British one (Dixon, 2001: 142). In fact, nationalists started giving some concessions on Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, dealing with the essence and the identity of the Irish Nation.

The agreement was not accepted by every actor in the same way: the Ulster Unionist Party, for example, voted against by 454 votes to 374 and its leader, Brian Faulkner had to resign. Belonging to different readings, the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement was due the acceptance/refusal of power-sharing system and the consequent Irish dimension: in particular, the Unionists were scared of sharing power and responsibilities with Catholics and were convinced that the Agreement was “a bridge too far”, while the Catholics thought that the British Government had a too passive attitude and was not ready to act against the Unionist obstacles. The British general elections of February 1974, in fact, showed how Unionist position strongly opposed the settlement and, above all, how the Nationalist one was too isolated. In this period, it is possible to read the first European influence on the conflict. In 1963, Ireland withdrew its application to join the
European Economic Community (EEC), together with Britain. The economic system of the island, in fact, was strictly dependent on British ones. Nevertheless, the European context created some new possibilities: Ireland started benefiting from European funds and following new policies which were no more compliant with British ones. In 1979, Ireland decided to join the European Monetary System (EMS) (even though Britain did not), by expressing the confidence that the EMS would be strong enough for the Irish Pound to end its passive fiscal relation to the British pound.

As Ireland looked to Europe as a new possible actor, changes were not only economic but political and psychological as well: it seemed no more possible to treat a border conflict as a mere domestic issue in a general dimension of cooperation all over in Europe. The first important example was the decision taken by the Irish government, in May 1974, to act to take the British government to the European Commission of Human Rights with allegations of torture and brutal treatment of internees in Northern Ireland (Hayward, 2004: 6).

The EEC began to be seen as an “impostor” by some local actors and this perception was mixed with the general British euroscepticism. Unionists in Northern Ireland strongly objected any outside “interference” in the province, as well as the then-Northern Ireland Assembly and the British government. Prime Minister Thatcher, in her statement to the House of Commons in May 1980, said, in fact, that the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland was a matter, “for the people of Northern Ireland, this government, this parliament, and no one else”. It was a clear attack not only to the Republic of Ireland, but also to the possible external actors. The Peace process continued on this direction.

### 2.2 The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) – 1985

It was obvious that stronger efforts were necessary by both governments in order to push local actors (Unionists and Nationalists) to find a compromise. At the same time, they couldn’t but consider the principle of consent and power-sharing as key elements of the Peace Process. A new phase of the Anglo-Irish process initiated in May 1980 by bringing together British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey in order to put together an institutional framework by which both governments could accommodate their interests.
By the end of 1981, Northern Ireland had been blooded again by the Hunger Strike and by several violent murders (among them, the Unionist MP Robert Bradford by the IRA), which polarised more and more the Nationalist extremist position towards the moderate one. Nevertheless, the Conservative victory at the British General Election of 1983, as well as Fine Gael one at the Irish elections created the conditions for a new joint initiative. In May 1983, the four major Nationalist parties Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Labour Party from the South and the SDLP from the North, met in the New Ireland Forum, with the aim of studying a possible solution for Sinn Fein inclusion and, then, of formulating a common Nationalist agenda.

In November 1983, the new Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald met Margaret Thatcher at Chequers and launched informal talks. On November 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) was ready and what had been already stated in the White Paper was declared more officially:

1. Reaffirmation of the principle of consent and acceptance of the majority’s will;
2. Creation of an Intergovernmental Conference, jointly chaired by the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (at that time, Sir Patrick Mayhew) and an Irish Ministerial Representative (at that time, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring), to jointly manage political matters;
3. Preparation of a project of devolved government based in Belfast.

The AIA could benefit of a great acceptance, larger than the Sunningdale Agreement, but some new problems were rising: a lot of people – even in Ireland – was scared of the possibility that Sinn Fein could overtake SDLP and become the first nationalist party. At the same time, the Unionists interpreted the AIA as a step towards a united Ireland and were extremely hostile. However, Prime Minister Thatcher was really convinced of the importance of the new settlement to improve security and, above all, to defeat IRA and other nationalist paramilitaries. Moreover, the external pressure, coming from US, and mostly driven by Irish-American lobbies, was very strong and supportive towards the AIA (Dixon, 2001: 205). As Goodall stated:

“any system of government for Northern Ireland which is to command the level of acceptance from each community necessary for the system to be workable must have special features to take account of the ‘Irishness’ of the minority as well, of course, as of the unionism and legitimate rights of the majority. This is the balance which the 1985
In that period, the balance was obviously not sufficient to allow the birth of the Assembly or to start power-sharing. The AIA itself was, however, credited with some important results, through the Irish dimension. First, it promoted cross-border co-operation as either a means of reconciliation or as a means to achieving Irish unity: in this sense, it was welcomed by Nationalists (Tannam, 2006: 258). Second, it helped the “smoothness” of Sinn Fein’s strategy.

Even if it was strictly marked by the will of local political actors, the AIA could be read as a result of a general transformation, occurring in Europe and within the international system. The general climate of change, which affected the last period of the Cold war, contributed to implement cooperation and more joint efforts to solve security problems.

The EEC decided to play its own involvement in the Northern Irish Peace Process, by establishing, in 1986, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). Its aim was to favour the implementation of Article 10(a) of the AIA, which provides that "the two governments shall co-operate to promote the economic and social development of those areas of both parts of Ireland which have suffered most severely from the consequences of the instability of recent years, and shall consider the possibility of securing international support for this work".

Since the beginning, the objectives of the IFI were "to promote economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland".

It was clear that European integration was growing and diversifying: the introduction of the single European market, in 1992, have changed radically the trading relationships between European members. The implementation of free trade had more than economic consequences. The ending of economic custom controls between Northern Ireland and the Republic also had the effect of removing some physical characteristics of the border and forced people living in the north and in the south to change their viewed and thought of the official border.

This effect was evident in the last phase of the Peace Process.

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2.3 The Good Friday Agreement – 1998

In 1991 and 1992, the two governments and the major political parties started once again to re-launch formal talks, referring, this time, to three different levels:

- *Strand One* (Northern Ireland – British Government);
- *Strand Two* (North-South relations);
- *Strand Three* (Ireland – UK).

It was necessary to develop each of them separately, in order to create a balanced and multilevel system of governance in the country. This new phase of the Peace Process had been seen as an “Irish peace process”, a nationalist unilateral initiative, created by Gerry Adams and John Hume and supported by Northern Irish nationalist community and by the Republic. In this sense, the IRA ceasefire – declared in 1994 - was interpreted as a triumph for nationalist cause, even if it was considered by the British government as not sincere, and decommissioning was used to delay Sinn Fein participation to peace talks. Despite of this, the Nationalist view continued its domestic transformation: the Provisionals started to re-think the armed-struggle strategy and to re-define its relationship with Sinn Fein. The party was changing because of two main causes. First, the developing secularisation of the Republic, which culminated in the election of President Mary Robinson, who showed more sympathy for Northern Unionists; this pushed Gerry Adams to search new political (and electoral) alliances even in the South. Second, the international environment: the post-Cold War world ethnic conflicts and troubles over national territories were resulting in violent turmoil across Europe. Terrorism itself was changing, without the Cold War framework. Nationalists liked to see themselves as national liberation fighters, as the PLO in Middle East and the ANC in South Africa. This moved Sinn Fein to justify its shifting strategy from an armed to an unarmed battle (Guelke, 1998; Dixon, 2001). The new British approach showed by Prime Minister Tony Blair, as well as his Secretary for Northern Ireland, Ms. “Mo” Mowlam contributed to drive the Sinn Fein strategy to formal inclusion. For the first time, the extremist part was acting simultaneously with the moderate one in talking about the same issues and the same proposals (Evans, 2003). By considering the principle of consent as a basic condition of the settlement (and by accepting that only the will of the majority could have changed constitutional status of
Northern Ireland), it became extremely important for Nationalists to promote and implement the relations between the North and the South of Ireland.

During the last phase of the Peace Process, what had played a significant and decisive role was the awareness of the presence of different (and apparently incompatible) stakeholders and diverse levels of governance and dialogue. The conflict in Northern Ireland was not only a problem of relationship between Nationalists (Catholic) and Unionist (Protestants). These conditions had been present since the beginning of the talks – and even of the conflict: in other words, if the peace had been dependent only by local conditions, the Agreement could have been signed even many years before 10 April 1998. The acceptance of basic principles, like consent and power-sharing, by the majority of stakeholders, made the difference. Nevertheless, as we have tried to show, the international and European changes contributed as well.

This can explain the wide diversity of positions within the literature on deeply divided societies, on Northern Ireland. At the end of the Peace Process, these have contracted into two main camps: the consociationalists and the integrationists.

The consociationalists refer to Arend Lijphart’s model of a democratic system based on consensual rather than adversarial élites (Lijphart, 1969; 1977). The model was developed with empirical cases in Europe and has been criticised on several methodological grounds. The criticisms relate primarily to the model’s consequences. The integrationists argue that consociationalism is unable to overcome the divided society’s basic problem: its divisions. They show that conflict resolution only happens when the divisions are overcome and when political élites have incentives to be moderate and to compromise with other ethnic élites (Horowitz, 1985, quoted by Lutz-Farrington, 2006: 717-718).

We argue that Northern Irish political parties have received strong incentives – especially from abroad – which became decisive in the last years of talks. The establishment of three Strands, as a means to order and regulate the different levels of government, has revealed a good result, applying general management of divided societies to the specific Northern Irish context. The provisions taken within the Strand Two of the Agreement were crucial.

2.4 The North/South Ministerial Council
The North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was established on 2 December 1999 on the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement, to develop “consultation,
cooperation and action within the island of Ireland, including through implementation on an all-island and cross-border basis—on matters of mutual interest within the competence of Administrations, North and South” 5.

The NSMC is composed by those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland on matters of mutual interest and in order to provide mutual benefits to both parts of the island 6. The recognition of the existence of areas in which (Northern and Southern) Irish people have common interests 7 – beyond the political borders – is one of the most important standing points within the Agreement. The methodology which should be used is, of course, discussion and dialogue. In order to better categorize its work, the NSMC is composed of six North/South Bodies, which operate on an all-island basis (Fig. 1). Even if they have an independent operational status, they stay under the overall policy direction of the NSMC, with clear accountability to the Council and to the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

6 Belonging to the Agreement: “All Council decisions to be by agreement between the two sides. Northern Ireland to be represented by the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and any relevant Ministers, the Irish Government by the Taoiseach and relevant Ministers, all operating in accordance with the rules for democratic authority and accountability in force in the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas respectively. Participation in the Council to be one of the essential responsibilities attaching to relevant posts in the two Administrations. If a holder of a relevant post will not participate normally in the Council, the Taoiseach in the case of the Irish Government and the First and Deputy First Minister in the case of the Northern Ireland Administration to be able to make alternative arrangements”. Good Friday Agreement (1998), Strand Two – North/South Ministerial Council, art. 2.
7 “Areas for North-South co-operation and implementation may include the following:
1. Agriculture - animal and plant health.
2. Education - teacher qualifications and exchanges.
3. Transport - strategic transport planning.
4. Environment - environmental protection, pollution, water quality, and waste management.
5. Waterways - inland waterways.
7. Tourism - promotion, marketing, research, and product development.
8. Relevant EU Programmes such as SPPR, INTERREG, Leader II and their successors.
9. Inland Fisheries.
10. Aquaculture and marine matters.
11. Health: accident and emergency services and other related cross-border issues.
12. Urban and rural development.”
**Fig. 1 - North/South Bodies**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waterways Ireland</td>
<td>(Responsibility for specified navigable inland waterways on the island, chiefly recreational);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Safety promotion Board</td>
<td>The promotion of food safety awareness on an all-island basis;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradeIreland)</td>
<td>The promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special European Union Programmes Body</td>
<td>The SEUPB has significant managerial and oversight functions in relation to various EU programmes and the Common Chapter in the National Development Plan for Ireland and the Northern Ireland Structural Funds Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Language Body (consisting of two agencies i.e. Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch):</td>
<td>Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for the promotion of the Irish language and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch for promoting a greater awareness and use of Ullans and of Ulster-Scots culture;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (consisting of two Agencies i.e. The Loughs Agency and Lights Agency):</td>
<td>The Loughs Agency is responsible for the management and development of the Folye estuary and Carlingford Lough. It was intended that the Lights Agency, when established, would replace the Commissioners of Irish Lights as the General Lighthouse Authority for Ireland. However, given the complexities that have arisen in terms of pursuing such a transfer of functions, the matter is under review at present.</td>
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The operation of the NSMC has been affected since October 2002 by the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is clear that what occurs at the Strand One, among both communities continues to settle on the other Strands and has even the power to

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8 “Following the introduction of suspension, the British and Irish Governments, by an exchange of notes on 19 November 2002, agreed that, "Decisions of the North/South Ministerial Council on policies and actions relating to the Implementation Bodies, Tourism Ireland or their respective functions shall be taken by our two Governments. No new functions shall be conferred on the Implementation Bodies". These arrangements were designed to ensure that the Bodies would continue to fulfil their important public functions on a "care and maintenance" basis, pending the restoration of devolved government to Northern Ireland. This agreement provides a mechanism for decisions to be taken on policies and actions relating to the Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland during suspension. These "Interim Procedures" were put in place and are administered by the NSMC Joint Secretariat". North/South Ministerial Council (2005), *North/South Ministerial Council Annual Report*, Armagh, June 2005.
stop activities and initiatives. Nevertheless, the implementation of cooperation and dialogue among the two parts of the island is a success which cannot be denied. It was significantly driven by European aid. As shown in previous paragraphs, Europe started to be active in the region as EEC and through some important economic initiatives. The so-called *Two Track Diplomacy*, then, became the mirror of the European Union (EU) action. The aim of this new actor to go beyond economic integration among Member States, by developing a real and effective political integration reflected also on Northern Ireland issues. Economic incentives continued and were reinforced not only for implementing and strengthening economic and financial conditions but also for pushing the two communities to work together and act jointly on the same projects. In other words, the funding policy in Northern Ireland should have promoted, in the long period, dialogue and confidence. This could have worked, for example, through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), whose Mission Statement sets out the objective to “develop co-operation, understanding and action between people and organisations in Ireland and Northern Ireland through consultation and the implementation of social, economic and reconciliation and cultural programmes” ⁹.

This was, probably, the initial aim of European aid: nevertheless, only in 1998, it seemed to be effectively possible, because something has changed in local communities as well as in Europe.

### 3. The impact of European Integration

As shown, a European dimension to the resolution of the Northern Irish crisis has emerged mainly for two reasons: EU programmes and activities are considered as the answer for deepening political and economic ties between the South and the North, as well as between the two communities; Northern Irish political groups have seriously raised the question of EU involvement. Our analysis, thus, will continue on this direction, by drawing, at first, the quantity and quality of EU intervention and then the answer given by local stakeholders. A preliminary theoretical reflection is, therefore, required.

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⁹ Ibid.
3.1 Theories on integration

The impact of EU membership on state borders has been central to the transformation of governance in contemporary Europe. New relationships across the internal and external territorial borders have been surely driven by economic considerations, but with the facilitation of political adjustments and legitimating of conceptual change. This shift had been particularly deepened by neo-functionalist theory, which tends to explain why political actors (acting in specific and separate national sceneries) decided to move their traditional loyalties, expectations and activities from their original political system towards a new constitutional order. This is due to the fact that “once different national political and economic elites decide to deepen co-operation between themselves, even in fairly prescribed policy areas, they will find that the scope of the boundaries of the integration agenda are expanding quickly” (Teague, 1996, 560).

According to Tannam’s neo-functionalist interpretation, in the Irish/Northern Irish case, some possible indicators of co-operation can be identified along a continuum as ranging from informal contacts, to formal joint contacts, to joint programmes and finally joint authority (Tannam 1999, 4). By considering the role played by EU, he stated that two main factors potentially altered its significance in the Irish/ Northern Irish relationship. Firstly, the amount of money provided by the EU to foster cross-border co-operation and to underpin the peace process generally increased. Secondly, in response to Commission criteria for regional funding, the six Irish border counties were designated as Objective One. In order to receive maximum funding from the EU, administrative arrangements to ensure partnership and subsidiarity were demanded (Tannam, 2006: 260).

The gradual inclusion of subnational (regional, local and municipal) forms of government into the structure of the EU poses important questions for EU theorists. Marks’s study of EU multilevel governance in the context of the Regional Policy has led him to conclude that the developing role of the subnational level in the processes of policy-making contribute to create a system of multilevel government where policy networks are beyond modern territorial boundaries and, subsequently, are no more confined to the national and supranational levels (Marks 1993: 401–2).
Northern Ireland political representatives are beginning to perceive more and more these changes within the European state system. Consequently, the EU is becoming a vehicle of mobilization of the local territorial, economic and cultural resources.

Some other authors tried to read European influence in a more enlarged context, by analysing it as an exogenous action that has facilitated power-sharing settlements in Northern Ireland, as well as towards other community conflicts. Outside interventions (which were neglected by traditional consociationalists) should be accorded with local conditions but are able to play a pivotal role in promoting power-sharing institutions 10. As Stetter, Diez and Albert argue, while external involvement certainly changes the patterns of communication within the conflict system, new ‘arguments’ might themselves become absorbed by the conflict system. (Stetter S. – Diez T. – Albert M., 2003: 19). We suggest that, in the case of Northern Ireland, the conflict and its political actors pushed EU to reflect on its policies in social and security fields; at the same time, the European external involvement had been extremely important, not in changing the patterns of communication within the conflict (which remained basically driven by local actors), but in giving new alternative arguments in favour of peace and agreement.

3.2.1 The Structural Funds

The most obvious manifestation of the EU centre/periphery relationship in the Northern Ireland context is EU subvention for Northern Ireland made through the four inter-related funds known collectively as the Structural Funds 11, aiming to be active in the priority areas of employment, urban and rural regeneration, social inclusion, and productive investment and industrial development. The Structural Funds action should

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10 It would be possible to refer, in a more general way, to the United States, the United Nations, NATO and to their civilian and military powers, to promote and establish power-sharing institutions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Timor East or Afghanistan (McGarry – O’Leary, 2006: 52-53).

11 The Structural Funds are:
(i) The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) provides financial support to regional development programmes in order to reduce socio-economic imbalances.
(ii) The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main instrument of Community social policy and provides financial assistance for vocational training, retraining and job creation schemes.
(iii) The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) is the financial instrument for agricultural and rural development policy and finances development in rural areas throughout the European Union.
(iv) The Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) enhances the competitiveness of the fisheries sector and strives to maintain the balance between fishing capacity and available resources.
be read within the EU’s Regional Policy, with the purpose of covering the existing differences and gaps the Member States,

Northern Ireland is defined as an Objective One region, “despite being ranked as number 45 of the poorest regions in Europe” (regions whose development is lagging behind)\(^{12}\). The communities are, thus, encouraged to take proper initiatives to develop the economic potential of their peripheral location.

Due to their location, Northern Ireland, as well as the Republic of Ireland, started to receive amounts of money, to be destined to different priority areas (Fig. 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Ireland</td>
<td>£2,128,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>£600,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Commission

In the first period, the benefit accruing from Northern Ireland’s objective one-status was strictly linked to the funding received from Britain. From 1989 to 1993, the EU contributed £600 million "to Northern Ireland from the Structural Funds through a series of programmes directed particularly towards economic revitalisation and development ". Of this amount, £106 million went towards improving transportation infrastructure, £87 million "towards strengthening and diversifying the region's industrial base," and £70 million were "allocated towards development in tourism and agricultural sectors". Despite the fact Northern Ireland has been an EU economic priority, the £600 million Northern Ireland has received over four years seems small in comparison to the £2.4 billion "grant-in-aid" money they receive each year from the UK.

The real change occurred with previsio for the 2000-2006 periods: the UK has been allocated 16.596 billion euro (£10.7 billion) in EU Structural Funds support. On an annual basis, this represented a good increase, if compared to the previous planning period 1994-1999.

\(^{12}\) Objective 1 aims to promote development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind. Regions with a GDP per capita of less than 75% of the Community average are eligible for Objective 1 funding.
It should be remembered that, in the specific case of Northern Ireland, the amounts of money destined by the Structural Funds were an adjunct to the several Special Funds, established by the EU for the conflict.

### 3.2.2 Special funds for Northern Ireland

In 2000, the EU started a comprehensive reform of some of its policies, in order to make them more coherent and competitive. The regional policy was radically changed, in its goals and means: this was requested not only by the changes occurred in the international system, but also by the forthcoming enlargement process. EU needed to be more developed and sustainable.

In Northern Ireland, the Track Two Diplomacy had been reinforced with the provision of some programmes which established new activities and reinforced the old one. The Northern Ireland Community Support Framework’s 2000-2006 aimed to achieve a transition to a more peaceful, stable, prosperous, fair society, sustained by a better physical environment. It was divided into two Operational Programmes:

(i) Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity 2000-2006 – 890 million euro (£575m)

(ii) EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland 2000-2004 - 425 million euro (£274m)

The first one was considered as the largest component of the strategy, accounting for 68% of the Structural Funds allocated. The following Priorities were adopted:

- **Priority 1:** Economic Growth and Competitiveness
- **Priority 2:** Employment
- **Priority 3:** Urban and Social Revitalisation
Priority 4: Agriculture, Rural Development, Forestry and Fisheries

Priority 5: The Environment

Priority 1 Economic Growth and Competitiveness

The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland (P & R) was agreed in September 1994, after the declaration of ceasefire in Northern Ireland. It is agreed between the Commission and the Member States. Its aim was to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border cooperation and extending social inclusion.

The first package was established for the period 1994-1999 (PEACE I) and, in the following years, provided £234 million (the UK and Irish governments added £78 million) and had a strong cross-border element. It is not only one of the five action priorities (together with employment; urban and regional regeneration; social inclusion and investment and industrial development), but it was also one of the most important: at least 15% of the total package, in fact, should have been destined to cross-border projects.

The PEACE II Programme was established to reinforce the cross-community approach and to promote reconciliation. It also address specifically to the Peace Process, implementing the opportunities arising from dialogue and talks.

PEACE II accounts for 38% of the Structural Funds allocated and complement the Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity.

Its two specific objectives can be identified in relation to the overall aim of the Programme:

Objective 1: Addressing the Legacy of the Conflict;

i.e. the Programme will address specific problems generated by the conflict in order to assist the return to a normal peaceful and stable society.

Objective 2: Taking Opportunities Arising from Peace

i.e. to encourage actions which have a stake in peace and which actively help promote a stable and normal society where opportunities for development can be grasped.
Priority 1 has an indicative allocation of 153.67 million euro in Northern Ireland and 17.07 million euro in the Border Region, while Priority 2 has an indicative allocation of 107.04 million euro in Northern Ireland and 24.46 million euro in the Border Region.

3.3.3 The Community Initiatives

The Community Initiatives are special forms of assistance which the Commission has proposed to the Member States; they are financed by the Structural Funds with the aim of solving specific problems.

The Community Initiatives have three particular features which give them added value, compared to other measures financed by the Structural Funds:

- Encouraging transnational, cross-border and interregional co-operation
- Increased involvement of people on the ground (*bottom up approach*)
- Support through a real partnership of those involved in the Community initiatives

As shown in Fig. 4, in the period 2000-2006, Northern Ireland has received several amounts of money, in favour of cross-community development.

| Amount of Funding allocated within the Community Initiatives (in million euro) |
|---------------------------------|--------|------|------|
| Northern Ireland                | 15     | 12   | 10   |

3.2.3 International Fund for Ireland

As we have said in a previous paragraph, the first European involvement in the conflict took place in 1986, with the creation, by the then EEC, of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI). Since its foundation and until now, the European Community had been very active within the IFI: the Commission has been represented by an observer at all Board meetings, and, together with the United States and other countries, it had been one of the most munificent investor. EC funding currently represents 44 % of annual contributions to the Fund and 39,5 % of cumulative contributions to date.

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13 All information about this program had been taken from the official website [www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbover/overmap/pdf_region/fp2mc_en.pdf](http://www.inforegio.cec.eu.int/wbover/overmap/pdf_region/fp2mc_en.pdf)
Approximately 75% of the IFI’s resources shall be distributed in Northern Ireland. The original principal objectives are:

- to promote economic and social advance,
- to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland.

In the period 2005-2006, the Fund had 30 million euro, mainly allocated projects of a cross-border or cross-community nature, in such a way as to complement the activities financed by the Structural Funds, and especially those of the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland \(^{14}\).

In 2003, the IFI launched a strategic review of its programmes, with a clear aim to “reposition” itself on more “community-based” activities. Following this review, a five year strategy entitled “Sharing the Space” was launched in early 2006 which will promote reconciliation in Ireland in a final phase of the IFI’s activity. The objectives of the IFI over the final five years will include:

- building and realising the vision of a shared future for Northern Ireland and both parts of the island;
- promoting understanding between the different communities in Ireland;
- facilitating integration between the communities;
- building alliances with other agencies, ensuring the long term work of the IFI beyond 2010 and sharing the expertise with peace builders in other regions.

For the period 2007-2010, the IFI will have 60 million euro \(^{15}\).

The IFI’s existing community programmes have been extended, including a sustainable infrastructure for reconciliation operating beyond the IFI’s lifetime. Consequently, much of the IFI’s traditional economic-based activities have ceased, in favour of grassroots community development.

The programmes supported by the IFI will in the future be clustered around four themes: building foundations, building bridges, integrating and leaving a legacy. These programme themes will support the objectives set out above \(^{16}\).


As clarified by Table 5, the EU has invested several amounts of money in Northern Ireland, through its Structural Funds as well as its Special funds, in favour of peace and reconciliation.

**Fig. 5**

**Commitments and payments of the EU to the International Fund for Ireland and to the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland**

(million ECU)\(^{17}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HI</th>
<th>P &amp; R ((^{1}))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitments made during the financial year</td>
<td>Payments made during the financial year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>12,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>14,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>146,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{1}\) The Special Support Programme commenced in 1995.

It is clear that, by analysing the quality and quantity of EU investments in Northern Ireland, some important and significant incentives had been given to local stakeholders. This does not mean that they became an alternative to traditional ideologies or political attitudes towards the Unity/Partition and the border; nevertheless, they pushed nationalists and unionists (extremists and moderates) to re-thinking their approach to Europe.

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3.3 Impact on local communities

It is argued that European integration is proceeding “like an erratic marriage where love, loathing and lethargy” are the hallmarks (Teague 1994: 33). EU is constantly claimed in every official discourse and during electoral campaigns by the most influential political parties in Northern Ireland. They obviously use different words and meaning: nevertheless, nobody can forget EU.

In these last decades, especially during the Peace Process, it had been clarified that political parties and Northern Irish people have different perception of EU. This significant divergence is not monolithic, but it presents several dissimilarities which should be analysed. The traditional fear of European integration as a sort of perturbation of internal affairs had changed both within Nationalists and Unionists.

A general perplexity over EU had been explained among Unionist with the apprehension that the EU’s incremental integrationist dynamic will help the promotion of a North-South integration process, gradually integrating the two parts of the island of Ireland. On one hand, some extremists developed an incoherent and sometimes ambiguous relationship with EU: the DUP’s leader, Rev. Ian Paisley continues to portray integration as a danger in itself, being a Member of European Parliament. On the other, the moderates (UUP) tried to follow British commitment, showing at first hostility, then compliance.

The same divisions and changes had been cultivated by Nationalists. The SDLP preference for a “Europe of the Regions” is based on the conviction that integration has the power to diminish nation-state loyalties and deliver a highly decentralized, regionally autonomous regime that will facilitate reconciliation within the North, between North and South, and between Britain and Ireland.

On the contrary, Sinn Féin has been very straightforward in its opposition to European integration in the past: it was particularly opposed to the Maastricht Treaty because the transfer of power to EU institutions could weaken the role of national parliaments. Now, the EU is presented as a means to end the partition of the island: the political and economic transformation of Europe provides a golden opportunity for Ireland to resolve its British problem and embark on a process of economic and political reunification.

The centrist and non-religious parties had always been very enthusiastic. The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) is pro-European integrationist because, in its views, the EU will increase secularisation.
These considerations are a clear sign that EU integration is not dissolving and that, among difficulties and misconstructions, it is an irreversible path.

If political parties and their leaders seem to be more familiar with integration dynamics, people living within the two communities perceive EU as a remote entity, very far from their daily struggles and division. The latest surveys carried out in Northern Ireland on identity and citizenship issues confirm this perception. We chose to analyse data, collected by *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2005* 18. We have selected questions on EU perception and chose to consider only the religious variable.

**Fig. 6 - How much, if anything, do you feel you know about the European Union?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>No religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fair amount</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing at all</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 7**

Please tell me if you think that the following statements are true or false.
The European Union consists of 12 member states

(This statement is FALSE - there are currently 25 member states (June 2006))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>No religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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18 Fieldwork for the 2005 survey was carried out between October 2005 and mid January 2006. 1200 adults were interviewed. The modules included were *Gender and Family Roles; Complementary Medicine and Health Issues; Democratic Participation; Political Attitudes; Attitudes to Minority Ethnic People; Community Relations; Background information on the respondents*. See the website http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2005/index.html
There is a strong lack of information about EU and its main facts (like the enlargement process). This is not a surprising result, if one considers that the same deficiency could have been found even among people living in other Member countries. This could be read within the general lack of a European *demos* and of attachment which affects the whole EU.

There are at least two more interesting findings. First, Northern Irish people do not perceive EU in its daily life; this means that money coming from Structural Funds and other Special Programmes are not immediately correlated to European action. Second, there are no significant differences between Catholics and Protestants: the percentages seem to be quite similar and this probably reveals that, referring to EU, political parties has no more a strong influence, like in the past, on their electorate. As we argued in this paper, Europe has already joined an important role in Northern Ireland, by helping to create the conditions to accept a compromise. This happened on a political level but not yet on a social one. And it could be expected. As Kearney suggests, in a changing Europe, borders will cease to be important, and even indirectly or unexpectedly "*such a focus could help modernise nationalist politics on the island in the process, away from the traditional emphasis on border change and territorial unity towards a stress on the unity of peoples, of 'hearts and minds'*" (Kearney, 1997; 87).

4. Northern Ireland: a lesson for EU?

In his speech *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, of 12 December 2003, the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, pointed out the main elements which are required to build a strong and solid *European Security Strategy*. It was, undoubtedly, a message to the world, explaining how EU would be able to face global challenges and threats.

Nevertheless, there is an implicit awareness, in the document, that before working on its external relations and on its neighbours, EU should be a space of stability and security within its geographic and political borders. As Solana stated, wars and conflicts are still
a threat for Europe: “The outbreak of conflict in the Balkans was a reminder that war has not disappeared from our continent” (Solana, 2003: 1).

At the same time, according to the document, EU citizens continue to be scared of ethnic conflicts and the 60% of them consider the persistence of ethnic conflicts in Europe at the fourth place of the more dangerous threats, together with international terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction.

An “old-fashioned” case, like the Northern Irish one could be still considered as a threat for Europe and could offer, at the same time, an efficient and still valid example of conflict management and resolution. It is surely a typical example of community conflict based on identity differences, characterised by terrorism and the use of violence. It is not, however, a product of Cold War, but deals with the “new” civil wars which increased the lack of security. The role played by the EU during the peace process showed how integration could work and interact with local conditions. This is what characterised EU as a civilian power, and what continues to be considered as the only possible way to achieve security: “Contributing to better governance through assistance programmes, conditionality and targeted trade measures should be an important element in a European Union security strategy (Solana, 2003: 10)”.

And thus we need “Greater capacity to bring civilian resources to bear in crisis and post crisis situations” (Solana, 2003: 12).

If one considers the current situation in Northern Ireland, it will be clear that nothing has changed among the main political stakeholders: in 1998, the Assembly in Stormont depended on Trimble-Hume mutual agreement; today on Paisley-Adams one. This confirms that, according to the opinions expressed in this paper, if the peace had been dependent only by local conditions, the Agreement could have been signed even many years before 10 April 1998. The EU peace package acted – and continues to act – in a positive way within the conflict. Its functions should, however, be accorded with a serious commitment by local stakeholders, who have the main responsibilities in securing the peace.

EU is a good interlocutor for Northern Ireland (even if it is not yet a common acknowledge), while Northern Ireland is a good lesson for EU: to be attentively learnt before acting elsewhere.
Bibliography


