Impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland

2017/2225(INI) - 27/06/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Regional Development adopted the own-initiative report by Derek VAUGHAN (S&D, UK) on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland.

Underlining the positive contribution of EU cohesion policy to Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of assisting the recovery of deprived areas and of building cross-community contacts in the context of the peace process, Members welcomed the **commitment to future funding in the Commission's draft multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027.**

They pointed out that in addition to the more general cohesion policy funds, Northern Ireland has benefited in particular from special cross-border and inter- and cross-community programmes, particularly the **PEACE Programme** (more than EUR 1.5 billion since 1995), which has decisively contributed to the peace process in Northern Ireland, supports the Good Friday Agreement and continues to support the reconciliation of communities. More than EUR 1 billion in EU financial assistance will be spent on economic and social development in Northern Ireland and the neighbouring regions in the **current financing period**, of which:

- EUR 230 million will be invested in the Northern Ireland PEACE Programme (with a total budget of almost EUR 270 million) and
- EUR 240 million in the Interreg V-A programme for Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland (with a total budget of EUR 280 million).

The committee believed that the special EU programmes for Northern Ireland are of key importance for **sustaining the peace process**, as they foster cross-community trust-building measures, and measures for a peaceful coexistence. The funding is seen as 'neutral money' in Northern Ireland and the committee feared that an end to these programmes would endanger cross-border and inter- and cross-community trust-building activities and, as a consequence, the peace process;

In addition to the Commission's intention to propose the continuation of the PEACE and Interreg programmes in its proposal for the MFF 2021-2027, Members noted the **UK position paper** on the future of Cohesion Policy of April 2018, in which the UK states its willingness to explore a potential successor to PEACE IV, as well as Interreg V-A, for the post-2020 period with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the EU, in addition to its engagement to honour commitments to PEACE and Interreg under the current MFF.

Members went on to stress that the Northern Irish reconciliation process is a positive example for other areas in the EU which have experienced conflict, and good practices with cohesion funding and the **PEACE Programme should be taken as the EU model** and promoted in order to overcome mistrust among communities in conflict and to achieve lasting peace in other parts of Europe and even worldwide.

Lastly, Members felt that more must be done to **inform the general public** about the impact of EU-funded projects for the peace process and the economic development of the region.