

DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER'S SPEECH

Good Morning. I want to pay tribute to the work of the European Commission of the mid-nineties. To acknowledge their foresight in developing the PEACE Programme as we now implement the third programme. And our MEPs who did tremendous work in lobbying for the PEACE Programme.

Since the introduction of the PEACE Programme there have been significant milestones along the road to peace. Most notable was the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. There were of course some setbacks, but a lot of work behind the scenes eventually led to elections in March 2007 that saw the restoration of political institutions last May.

The EU underpins these political developments, investing in communities, promoting the integration of ex political prisoners, promoting reconciliation and meeting the needs of victims.

- The first EU PEACE Programme, PEACE I (1995-99), delivered 500 million Euros to peace-building projects on both sides of the border. It supported around 15,000 projects.

- The total value of PEACE II, was 994 million Euros. PEACE II has funded over 7,000 projects and delivered many social and economic benefits.
- The new PEACE III Programme has a more strategic focus than its predecessors with a renewed emphasis on reconciliation - focusing on projects aimed at reconciling communities and creating a shared society.
- And we have now greater integration in the European project through the Barosso Taskforce: Europe is very much a partner in our development.

We have learnt much from the PEACE Programme at various stages. We want to capture this knowledge for the benefit of others.

The Programme has had many evaluations that have looked at its successes and areas that needed strengthening. The most recent of these - a European Parliament evaluation drawn up by one of our MEPs – Bairbre de Brún. This highlights the need to learn lessons from implementing the Programme and the need for communities to work together to underpin their success.

Our Members on the European Economic and Social Committee, Jane Morrice and Mike Smyth – and their European colleagues – are working on a second Peace opinion. We wish them well with their session this afternoon.

We believe that it is now time to give something back. We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and expertise in conflict resolution with others. Many nations are keen to use our experience of political progress and moving to a new shared administration. These have included Iraq, the Middle East, the Basque region and Sri Lanka. We can develop this work.

We are drawing up a proposal to establish an International Centre for Conflict Transformation, which we hope will become the point of reference for conflict resolution within the European Union as well as internationally. The European Union has a shared interest in this work and will consider how it can be a supportive partner. Europe already has an important and developing role in conflict resolution around the world – our proposal will give further impetus to this critical work of peace building.

Indeed, Europe is the ideal model of a peace project. Years of division and conflict between nations has been consigned to history through the creation of the European Union. The concept of Europe is one where co-operation between nations and respect for diversity among its peoples serves as a touchstone for us all.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to the European Union for its support for more than a decade and for its continuing partnership as we strive towards a peaceful and just society for all.

I applaud the pioneering work and decision-making that Monika and Carlo (and Jacques Delors) undertook in helping a small region on the western periphery of Europe to become what it is today. A region prepared to play a bigger part in Europe - a region that is more outward and forward looking – a region that owes you a great debt of gratitude.