



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

Centre for Cross Border Studies Statement on the draft Political Declaration Setting out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom

23 November 2018

The Centre for Cross Border Studies welcomes yesterday's publication of the draft "Political Declaration Setting out the Framework for the Future Relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom" (22 November 2018). While we appreciate that this short document is primarily a statement of intent about the 'direction of travel' for the future relationship between the EU and the UK, we think it is important to raise our concern about the specific reference (Paragraph 13) to the future PEACE PLUS programme and in particular the **failure to offer explicit support for cross-border cooperation**.

Paragraph 13 recalls the UK and EU's 'shared commitment to delivering a future PEACE PLUS programme to sustain work on *reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, maintaining the current funding *proportions* for the future programme'(emphasis added), and thereby replacing the current EU PEACE and INTERREG programmes.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies welcomes the express commitment to a future PEACE PLUS programme in principle. Likewise we appreciate the assurance that the current proportionate contributions by the EU, UK and Irish Governments will be maintained in the PEACE PLUS programme, and would urge that the current *levels* of funding are likewise maintained or increased.

The current PEACE and INTERREG programmes support peacebuilding and social and economic development in Northern Ireland and the Irish Border Counties. Both programmes are explicitly cross-border programmes: built upon the essential recognition that **only a joint cross-border and all-island approach can achieve effective resolution of problems** whose effects are not exclusive to one side of the border.

Of major concern however, is that – although the UK Government's *explainer* for the Withdrawal Agreement states that the *preamble* to the Protocol includes commitments to "current and future PEACE and INTERREG funding programmes" – neither the Withdrawal Agreement nor the Political

Declaration offer specific reference to a cross-border dimension for the proposed PEACE PLUS programme.

We also recognise that the European Commission's Fact Sheet on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland within the previously published draft Withdrawal Agreement notes the Commission's *proposal* for the "continuation of PEACE and INTERREG for Northern Ireland and the border regions of Ireland beyond 2020 under a single programme PEACE PLUS".

We are alarmed, however, that the Political Declaration refers to Northern Ireland only; omitting any mention of the Irish Border Counties.

Even at this late stage, we strongly recommend that the European Union and the United Kingdom amend paragraph 13 of UK-EU Political Declaration to include reference to PEACE PLUS *as supporting cross-border cooperation*. To do otherwise is to fail to protect and support Strand 2 of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

In addition, we urge that any future EU-UK Relationship Agreement not only includes a commitment that the future PEACE PLUS programme replaces (at minimum) the totality of current PEACE and INTERREG levels of expenditure, but that it include an additional allocation to address the specific impacts of Brexit in Northern Ireland *and* the border region.