



## **Meeting of the Centre for Cross Border Studies with the Oireachtas Committee on European Union Affairs to discuss the work of the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation**

6 October 2021

### Opening Statement

In my capacity as Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, I would like to thank the Chair, and the members of this Committee, for the invitation to meet with you to discuss the Centre's ongoing work in supporting and advocating cross-border cooperation, and in particular its role in convening the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation. Given that since its establishment in 1999 the Centre's core mission has been to empower citizens and build capacity for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield, we have been concerned to understand how the UK's withdrawal from the European Union may impact on cross-border mobility and on cross-jurisdictional cooperation, and how any of those impacts may be mitigated.

This has led to intensive work in analysing relevant policies and legislation, much of it set out in written and oral submissions to numerous parliamentary inquiries, as well as in many of our Briefing Papers.<sup>1</sup> In March of this year, and with the objective of improving our understanding of the context being shaped following the end of the Brexit transition phase and the entering into operation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, the Centre also initiated a quarterly survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation, aimed at civil society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland. The third quarterly survey has just recently ended, with the results to be presented later this month.<sup>2</sup>

As a means of gaining a more direct understanding and to secure engagement with the mechanisms of the Protocol under the joint oversight of the UK Government and the European Commission, and as many other organisations on the island of Ireland share our concerns, in May 2020 the Centre for Cross Border Studies came together with a range of organisations to establish the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation,

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<sup>1</sup> These can be consulted at <https://crossborder.ie/what-we-do/research-policy/>.

<sup>2</sup> The results of the previous surveys can be accessed at <https://crossborder.ie/what-we-do/projects/maintaining-the-necessary-conditions-for-cooperation-and-cross-border-lives/>.

which the Centre convenes. It aims to act as a prime contact point for purposes of meaningful consultation between cross-border civil society and regional, national and EU bodies on matters relevant to cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and between the island of Ireland and Great Britain.

In the first instance, in light of the Protocol, the Ad-Hoc Group and organisations involved in its work have been engaging with relevant decision-makers, including with the European Commission's Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee, representatives of the Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Specialised Committee on the Protocol.

The Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation is committed to working with others to safeguard cooperation and good relations within and between these islands, and looks forward to doing so with those who are currently making decisions that will affect the future landscape for cooperation and the maintenance of relations between our peoples. We do so conscious of the fact that the underlying context for such cooperation has changed, with its actors no longer operating from within a shared membership of the European Union, and therefore, for some, with their governments and other relevant institutions no longer in a position to directly shape EU policies, particularly those – such as Cohesion Policy – that support cross-border cooperation.

The Ad-Hoc Group believes that for all interested parties (which includes the Irish Government) to properly monitor the impact of the implementation of the Protocol on the conditions for North-South cooperation, there needs to be sustained and effective engagement with those who are intimately involved in such cooperation. The Centre for Cross Border Studies believes that the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation represents an invaluable asset in this regard, and calls on all parties to continue and deepen their engagement with the Ad-Hoc Group, including through the bodies established under the Protocol. Such engagement would ensure that organisations from the Republic of Ireland are able to offer their own perspectives on the extent to which they are able to engage in cooperation. It is our belief that no serious monitoring of the impact of the implementation of the Protocol on the conditions for North-South cooperation, or on their East-West relations, can take place without hearing directly from those involved in such cooperation who are based in the Republic of Ireland.

I am very grateful, therefore, that joining me today are representatives from three of the other organisations involved in the Ad-Hoc Group's work: Aoife Ní Lochlainn (Brexit Policy Officer with the Irish Environmental Network); Tara Farrell (CEO of Longford Women's Link); and Stephen Douds (President of the Irish Association).

We would be very pleased to answer any of your questions. Thank you, Chair.