



## **Meeting of the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation with the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement**

28 September 2021

### Opening Statement

On behalf of the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation, I would like to thank the Chair, Vice-Chair, and the members of this Committee for the invitation to meet with you to discuss the ongoing work of the Ad-Hoc Group, its overarching purposes, and to set out some key issues in regard to engagement with organisations on the island of Ireland involved in North-South and/or East-West cooperation with regards to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

I am the Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies and Convenor of the Ad-Hoc Group, and joining me are representatives from three of the other organisations involved in its work: Aoife Ní Lochlainn (Brexit Policy Officer with the Irish Environmental Network); Tara Farrell (CEO of Longford Women's Link); and Chris Quinn (Director of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum).

Drawing together a range of organisations from Northern Ireland and Ireland, the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation was established in May 2020 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.

Organisations participating in the Ad-Hoc Group are on the front-line of the study, promotion, support and delivery of North-South and/or East-West cooperation initiatives across a broad spectrum of areas of interest, and with decades of accumulated experience.

They are organisations who see North-South and East-West cooperation, as well as wider international cooperation, as essential to the ongoing peace and reconciliation process on the island of Ireland, and to equitable and sustainable socio-economic development.

The primary objective of the Ad-Hoc Group is to secure the continued means to cooperate within and between these islands, ensuring that agreements, policies or legislation developed or enacted by relevant regional/devolved and national governments and/or the European

Union are conducive of the maintenance of the conditions necessary for cooperation within and between the island of Ireland and with Great Britain.

In the first instance, in light of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, 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 on Ireland/Northern Ireland.

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.

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 Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation, which brings together a range of organisations with decades of accumulated experience in North-South and East-West cooperation and relations, 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 with the Ad-Hoc Group 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.

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