

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

Quarterly Survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation:

Briefing on the findings from the 11th
Quarterly Survey (July – September 2023)

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About the Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns (for more details visit www.crossborder.ie).

1. Introduction

As we write this report at the end of October 2023, a delegation of potential US investors headed by the US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs is visiting Belfast. This visit follows on from a major investment conference that took place in Belfast in September, organised by the UK Government, and bringing together hundreds of business representatives and investors. On these occasions, Northern Ireland's unique position in terms of having access to the EU's Single Market and the UK internal market has been repeatedly stressed as a factor attractive to potential investors.

Meanwhile, during the period covered by this Quarterly Survey (July to September 2023), the UK Government and the European Commission were working intensely in preparation for the implementation of various elements of the trading arrangements initially established by the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and revised by the March 2023 Windsor Framework. Among them was the introduction of the red and green lanes for the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the use of "Not for EU" labelling of UK goods not for sale in the EU, both of which came into operation on the 1st of October. The introduction of these new arrangements, perhaps largely due to the preparatory work that preceded them, appeared to take place without any major difficulties.

However, as has been the case since our 5th Quarterly Survey (January to March 2022), Northern Ireland still lacks a functioning Executive and Assembly as a consequence of the Democratic Unionist Party's continued refusal to form a government. Whatever others' claims as to the benefits of Northern Ireland's trading position or the apparently largely smooth transition to the new arrangements being introduced by the Protocol/Windsor Framework, the DUP remains unsatisfied as to what these changes mean to Northern Ireland's position within the UK. It continues to seek legislative assurances from the UK Government that would allay its concerns and allow it to return to government in Northern Ireland.

For those engaged on the island of Ireland engaged in North-South and/or East-West cooperation, therefore, while the political context for their cooperation may have remained relatively stable in terms of UK-EU and UK-Ireland relations, the ongoing stalemate in Northern Ireland continues to be seen as a negative factor. This situation, with its consequences in terms of shrinking budgets that come on top of the cost of living pressures, is a major concern. The longer this goes on, the greater the risk that organisations in Northern Ireland currently involved in cross-border cooperation activities will decide to halt them as they focus on keeping their doors open and the lights on with drastically reduced funding.

Following the end of the transition period and the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland from the 1st of January 2021, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies' Quarterly Surveys have become a vital means to give us an understanding of the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation are being maintained, and how relations between civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland and Great Britain are being safeguarded. It is crucial that cross-border cooperation taking place at informal, local and community levels – which have for decades been the life-blood of cross-border cooperation and reconciliation – is made visible and taken into account when considering whether the conditions for North-South cooperation are indeed being maintained.**

This Research Briefing proceeds in 4 sections. The first provides information regarding the data collection and analysis. The second section provides an overview of the respondents. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey this is necessarily brief. The third examines in detail the respondents' experiences and perceptions of the North-South dimensions of cooperation and relations, and the fourth section analyses the respondents' insights into the East-West dimension.

1.1. [Understanding the data](#)

In this, the tenth round of this survey, 93% of the 28 respondents have completed at least one previous round of the survey. As the survey has been repeated every quarter since the beginning of 2021 and that there are a consistently high number of repeat respondents, we are in a position to infer the shape of some trends regarding views and experiences of the Protocol in a practical sense with a good degree of clarity. These insights are further developed through the inclusion of qualitative responses to the central contextual questions which allow for more nuanced insights into *how* respondents are experiencing the changing political, social, regulatory, and material conditions for North-South and East-West collaboration and their suggestions for improving conditions on the ground. This information has proved invaluable in painting a more detailed picture of the current contexts for cross-border collaboration. It also bears emphasising that the respondents to all rounds of the survey conducted thus far each have a wealth of insight, experience, and

expertise of cross-border cooperation and collaboration and the results presented should be considered with that in mind.

2. Respondents

The data has been collected via a survey of self-selected respondents between 22nd September and 6th October 2023, gathering 28 responses in total with 93% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter.

50% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 43% based in Northern Ireland, with 7% having a presence on both sides of the border, providing a broad representation of organisations from across the island of Ireland (figure 1).

Where is your organisation based?

28 responses

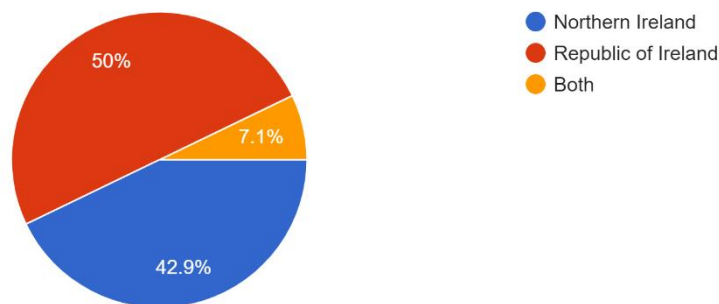


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Jul-Oct 2023) 82% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 50% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 46% of respondents.

In comparison with the previous quarter (April to June), has the number of meetings your organisation has had this quarter with organisations in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND
28 responses

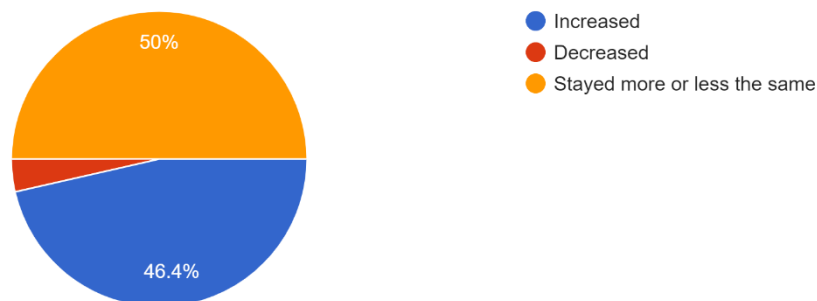


Figure 2

91% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (48%) or to a significant extent (44%). The nature of these challenges were varied but focussed particularly on concerns around a lack of funding and potential divergence in standards and regulations between the UK and Ireland and .

- “Ensuring mechanisms for civic society engagement with the mechanisms of the Protocol relating to maintaining the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation”
- “EU Horizon research funding”
- “The new Windsor Framework and how more inclusion of Civil Society Organisations on both sides of the border is needed in discussions”
- “Ongoing discussions on ETAs and divergence of rights on the island”
- “Policy and political context, differences and similarities between the two systems. Resourcing co-operation on an all island basis, particularly ensuring that local grass roots organizations can be included”
- “obstacles to joint working between Local Authorities in both Ireland/N Ireland”

At present 89% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 75% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. Over half (56%) of respondents presently engaged in cross border collaboration reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with the predominant funding source being the Irish government.

Is your organisation CURRENTLY involved in one or more collaborations with organisations/entities in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND?

28 responses

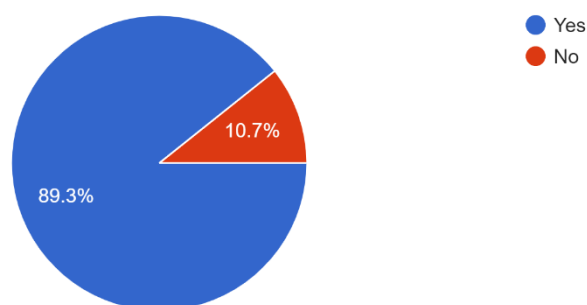


Figure 3

3.2. North-South context

When asked whether (and how) the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for cross-border collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=28), 71% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter (figure 4), while 11% say it has deteriorated and only 7% report an improvement.

In comparison with the previous quarter (April to June), do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

28 responses

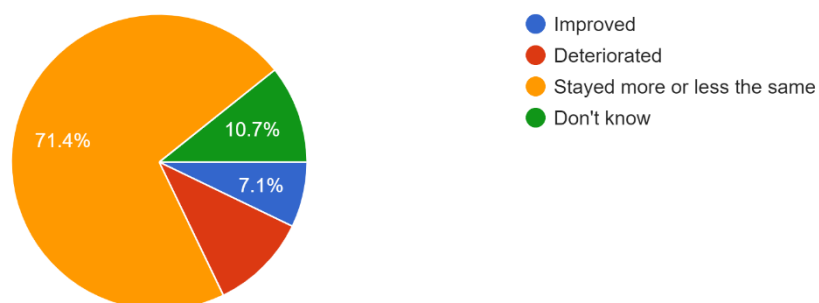


Figure 4

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **political** context for collaboration, respondents recognised progress in the UK-EU relationship but lamented the ongoing absence of an Executive at Stormont:

- “UK EU relations improving. This is a better context for collaborations”
- “Lack of government here and lack of leadership in the North and sometimes words and statements don't help with collaboration”
- “Increasing sense that reestablishing the Assembly in NI is being played in a cynical way by many involved”
- “Our research is ultimately aimed at influencing STEM Educational policy in NI and ROI. It is frustrating that despite our findings showing that policy change is required, particularly in NI, political stalemate means very little deeper policy change can occur”
- “Hopefully the political context will change before the end of the year. Civil Society organisations are fed up with the stagnation and the mounting problems for citizens and their access to public goods and services”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 79% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 11% saying it has improved and only 4% reporting a deterioration over the period.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the SOCIAL CONTEXT (i.e. attitudes within communities) for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

28 responses

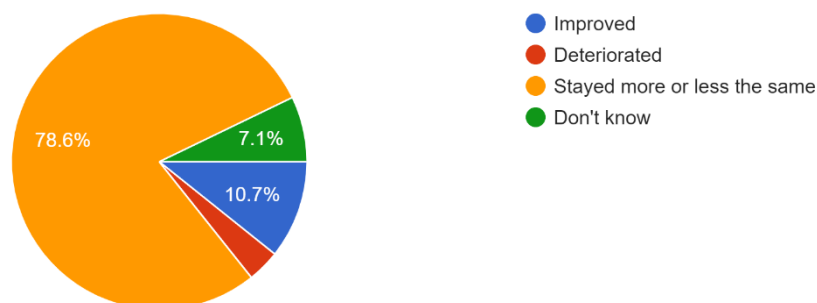


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate on the social context people are concerned by the ongoing political stasis though observe improvements at the local level.

- “The situation has Improved in terms of civil society organisations joint working on some common areas of interest, health, education, housing in terms of rights, good models of practice and access to services. It is hard to say how much this is being fed up or fed back to communities”
- “The agenda and space for conversing on a New Ireland is opening up and encouraging more outreach & direct engagement”
- “As a result of the diplomatic tension at governmental level”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 68% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 11% saying it has improved compared to 4% who report a decline. While this is only a modest recognition of improvement, this general sense of improvement in the regulatory environment has become a trend over the last nine months and this is the third consecutive quarter we have recorded an overall improvement in this aspect. However, there is still some confusion over the specifics of certain regulations with one respondent saying that “people don't know what's going on as information changes with the speaker”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the REGULATORY CONTEXT (i.e. legislation and regulations) for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

28 responses

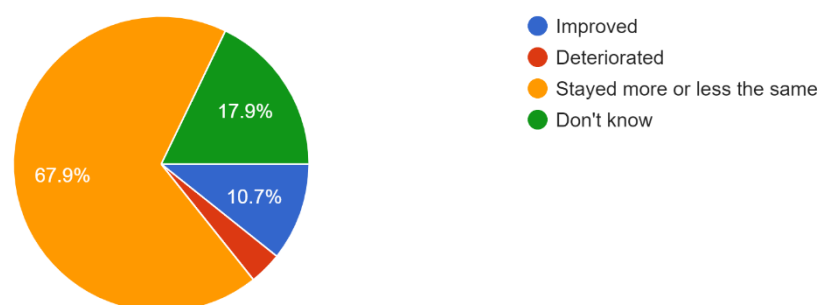


Figure 5

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 82% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with no respondent reporting a deterioration in the material context, observing that the “Shared Island Civic Fund has created some opportunities for improved collaboration”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the MATERIAL CONTEXT (i.e. access to goods or services necessary for organisations to operate in other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

28 responses

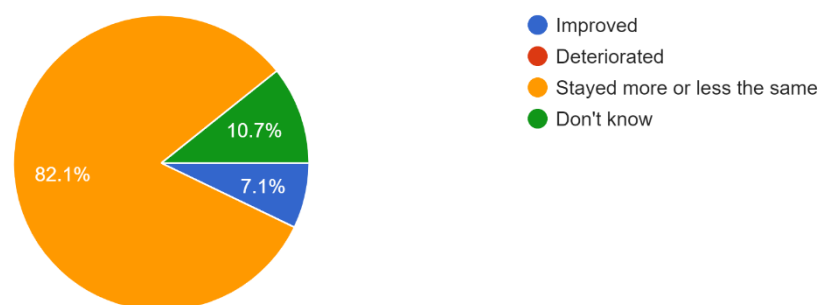


Figure 7

3.3. North-South suggestions for improvement

We have also asked respondents for any suggestions they have for improving the conditions for cooperation and collaboration. In the North-South dimension there were suggestions for improving access to education, funding, and increased engagement with politicians.

- “Context of our collaboration is Sligo-based response to draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review where we worked with ICBAN on the issue. This cross-border infrastructure issue can be built on, for the greater NW and especially the "southern" NW of Sligo-Leitrim-Fermanagh”
- “We'd like a regular listening ear with public authorities with policy responsibility for VCSE and an opportunity to present on the development model community ownership & wealth building”
- “Our concern is that organisations in the Republic are moving away from North-South collaboration as they don't see any change in conditions for all-island civic engagement”
- “I would like to see further development of the All-Island partnership funding that has been helpful over the past two years”
- “Educational and student collaborations”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 46% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 75% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 14% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

Has your organisation had meetings THIS QUARTER (July to September) with organisations/entities IN GREAT BRITAIN?

28 responses

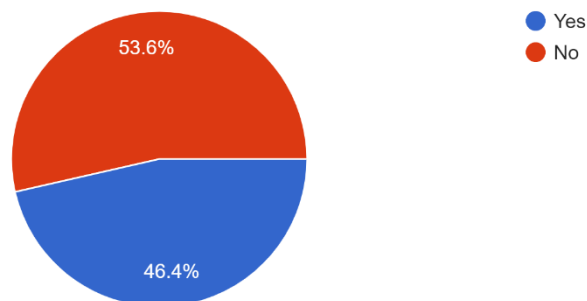


Figure 8

69% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (54%) or to a significant extent (15%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues with regard to access to funding and potential implications of regulatory divergence:

- “Lack of UK government funding for East-West cooperation”
- “Obstacles to cross border funding opportunities for organisations based in Britain”
- “Different legislative frameworks within UK mean representations to international fora must distinguish”
- “EU Horizon issues”

This quarter 46% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), but only 32% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain. 46% of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects, with the funding being drawn mainly from the organisations own core funding.

Is your organisation currently involved in one or more collaborations with organisations/entities IN GREAT BRITAIN?

28 responses

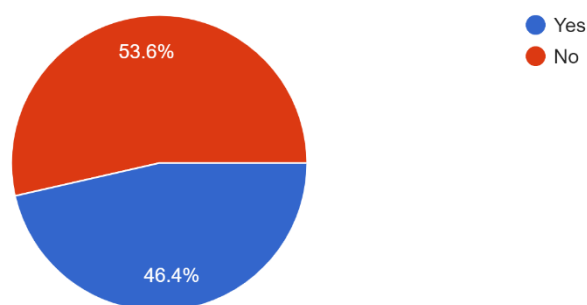


Figure 9

4.2. The East-West context

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for East-West collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=28), 61% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 18% saying it has improved (figure 10).

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

28 responses

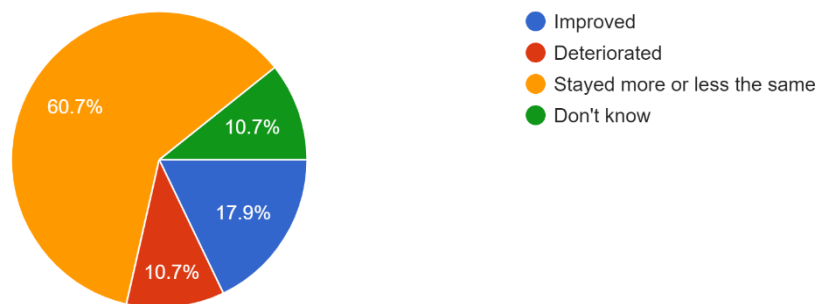


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated that the UK Government is not focussing on the correct priorities, and a sense that Northern Ireland is being punished for the DUP's refusal to enter an Executive:

- “The politics of Westminster Government are increasingly difficult to understand and accept as reflective of moves towards a better life for people on these islands; sustainability, environmental damage, increasingly positioned within a populist and new right agenda”
- “Funding cuts imposed on NI government departments by Secretary of State”
- “Brexit ended Interreg participation by Scotland in particular”
- “There is a collective sense that society is being punitively under resourced in order to pressurise the DUP back into the Assembly. The chill factor around this is a distancing from anything that involves N. Ireland”
- “UK administration is less confrontational than previous administrations”

64% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 14% saying it has deteriorated and 11% reporting that it has improved.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the SOCIAL CONTEXT (i.e. attitudes within communities) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

28 responses

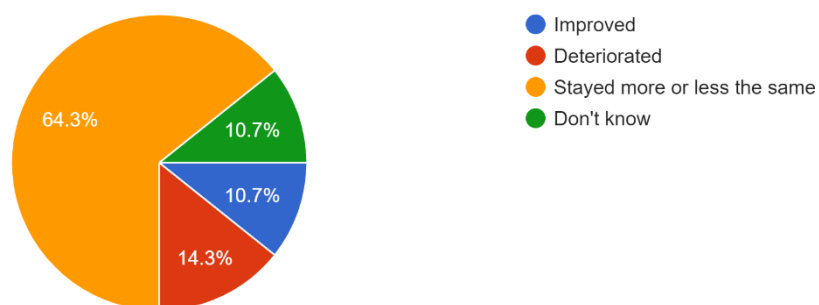


Figure 11

When asked to develop on their experiences of the **social** dimension this quarter respondents signal hope for the future but concern around the recently announced funding cuts.

- “Hopeful that there will be some opportunities on the horizon for research and perhaps some constructive discussion and action on equality and diversity and the involvement of minority ethnic groups”
- “Programme investment opportunities for VCSEs creates the conditions for more and better social collaboration”
- “Walking back on human rights frameworks”
- “Funding cuts imposed on NI government departments by Secretary of State”

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 57% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter with 11% saying that it has improved, 7% stating that it has deteriorated, and 25% that do not know. Respondents have said that “If correct and honest information was being given it would help”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the REGULATORY CONTEXT (i.e. legislation and regulations) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

28 responses

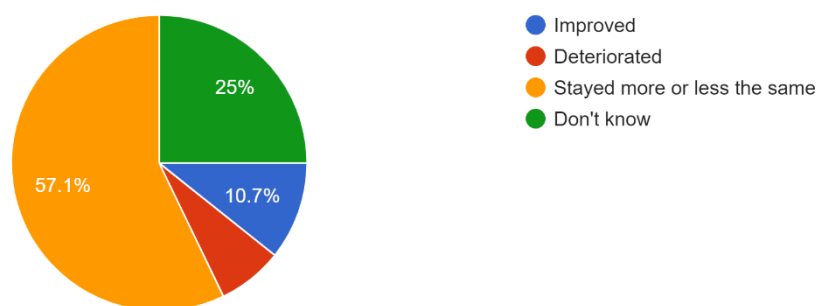


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 61% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 21% of respondents say they do not know how it has changed with respondents concerned by the lack of GB-NI trade and lack of investment saying, “[we] still have companies not sending to NI”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the MATERIAL CONTEXT (i.e. access to goods or services necessary for organisations to operate...ctively) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has
28 responses

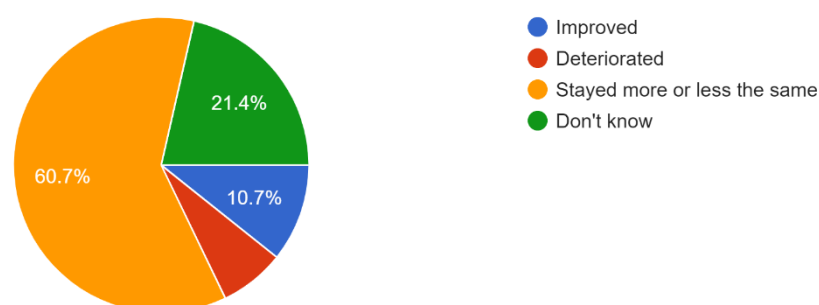


Figure 13

4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

In the East-West dimension respondents suggest that a citizens' assembly initiative could move to resolve some issues but that lack of funding is a major pressing concern

- "A citizens-assembly type event to address the values and possibilities of E-W collaborations"
- "The concern is that organisations are now so focused on income generation and basic survival due to costs of operations that cooperation or activities on this scale are not seen as a priority"

5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Windsor Framework

71% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for cooperation across the UK and Ireland, compared to 21% who say it has had no impact, and only 7% who believe it has had a negative impact on cooperation and collaboration. These sentiments are echoed when asked about the impact of the Windsor Framework.

6. Respondents in their own words

In addition to the open text questions asked specifically around political, social, regulatory, and material conditions, the survey also asked respondents to provide, in their own words, any additional comments and insights they feel would be beneficial to understanding the impact of Brexit and the protocol on cross-border contact and collaboration, both North-South and East-West.

- *"Continuing efforts to build relationships on the island are necessary to ensure connectivity between people cultures and organizations. Rail freight is an untried*

possibility. There is no rail freight in NI yet for decades this was in place and a means of connection between north and south”

- *“I have noticed even our own organisation not as focused on cooperation and N-S/E-W activities due to immediate funding pressures. Unfortunately it makes it difficult to prioritise and this is not good for future relations and indeed the future of cooperation on these islands”*

Conclusion

The responses to this quarter’s survey suggest a plateau from the signs of improvement we have seen for much of the year with respondents predominantly reporting that all conditions for cooperation, both North-South and East-West have remained the same on the previous quarter. In some respects this is to be welcomed as it represents a broad improvement in the context we have seen for much of the previous 2 years, but on the other there are clearly still many improvements people feel are needed in order to fully realise the potential for cooperation and collaboration across these Islands.

Specifically, while the level of North-South cooperation remains both high and robust, East-West cooperation consistently falls behind. This survey, and indeed several previous rounds of the survey make clear that increased funding is needed from all quarters, but particularly the UK Government in order to build capacity and incentive for East-West cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, the absence of a functioning Assembly at Stormont is having ongoing negative impacts for cooperation and collaboration both North-South and East-West where people feel like they are increasingly being punished for the inaction of their politicians.

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