

Adrian
Guelke

Suggestions for confidence-building

While some progress has been made in the last year towards the Belfast Agreement's objective of democratic rule in conditions of peace, in a number of areas there is cause for concern. If the issues giving rise to concern are not addressed, the wide consensus of support for the Agreement which was achieved in the referendums in May 1998 might be threatened.

The areas of concern include:

- (1) lack of co-operation among the political parties;**
- (2) failure to form the Executive;**
- (3) the imperfect quality of the paramilitary cease-fires; and**
- (4) lack of progress on decommissioning.**

It may reasonably be argued that the failures in these areas stem in part from:

- (1) the continuation of sectarian polarisation; and**
- (2) differing views as to the legitimacy of Northern Ireland as a political entity and consequently of the institutions for its governance.**

However, while it is important that these two factors should be borne in mind, as a matter of practicality, it is the first four areas of concern that the review might reasonably be expected to address. Below are a few suggestions in each of the four areas.

(1)

- There is a need for regularly scheduled bilateral and multi-lateral meetings among the parties that negotiated the Agreement to address obstacles to its implementation and to reassure the public of their commitment to its implementation. The public should be kept informed of any progress made through these meetings.

- There is a need for the parties to reaffirm their support for the Agreement, including its principles of power-sharing, of an Irish dimension, of co-operation among the governments of Britain and Ireland, and of consent and its commitments to human rights and equality.
- The pro-Agreement parties should be invited to make public declarations that they will seek to resolve all outstanding differences over the implementation of the Agreement through a process of negotiation conducted in accordance with the principle of sufficient consensus.

(2)

- The pro-Agreement parties entitled to seats in the Executive should commit themselves to drawing up a programme for government as a demonstration of their determination to move forward together at the earliest possible moment.
- In the overall context of the widest possible agreement on confidence-building measures addressing the other major areas of public concern, there should be a commitment by all pro-Agreement parties to the formation of the Executive as soon as practically possible.

(3)

- All pro-Agreement parties should agree on the need for the existing paramilitary cease-fires to be enhanced and for their interpretation to be broadened so that it is agreed that unlawful killing for any purpose whatsoever is accepted as being incompatible with the maintenance of a cease-fire.
- A public commitment should be sought from all paramilitary organisations on cease-fire that they will not authorise or condone unlawful killing by any of their members.

- A public commitment should be sought from all paramilitary organisations on cease-fire that henceforward they will regard 'dummy runs' and targeting as incompatible with the maintenance of their cease-fires.

(4)

- Parties linked to paramilitary organisations should be invited to explore possibilities of conversion of weapons as part of the process of putting weapons beyond use, drawing on expert experience of the process from bodies such as the Institute for Conversion in Germany.
- A public pledge should be sought from paramilitary organisations that they will not seek to replenish their existing stocks of weapons.
- All paramilitary organisations on cease-fire should agree to appoint representatives to the International Commission on Decommissioning.
- All paramilitary organisations on cease-fire should agree to provide the International Commission on Decommissioning with an inventory of their weapons.
- There should be agreement that the parties linked to paramilitary organisations or, if preferred, representatives of paramilitary organisations on cease-fire themselves, will meet to discuss the drawing up of a schedule for the process of decommissioning on a mutually agreed basis.