

ULSTER DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Position Paper - Strand Three

Acknowledging the British and Irish aims to develop and extend their co-operation with the objective of seeing peace, stability and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Democratic Party wishes to reaffirm the following **principles and requirements**:

1. While any future agreement must involve the totality of relationships between **all** regions of the British Isles, the decision of the constitutional future of Northern Ireland is predicated upon the wishes and consent of the people of Northern Ireland. The unit of self determination, accordingly, is Northern Ireland and the people of Northern Ireland.
2. The conflict in Northern Ireland has been rooted in deep communal divisions existing in this society. Any future settlement, therefore, must be based on the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, **both** unionist and nationalist.
3. Twenty-eight years of conflict have made it unequivocally clear that any settlement, in order to be stable and lasting, can **only** be achieved through peaceful and democratic means.
4. Any settlement must be comprehensive, addressing the relationship between **all** regions of the British Isles. A comprehensive settlement, however, can only succeed if the relationship within Northern Ireland has been satisfactorily resolved. Thus, any settlement must reflect the two main traditions and must be able to command the support of both communities.

Nature, form and extent of new arrangements

The nature, form and extent of the new arrangements are crucial to negotiations and to the reaching of a settlement as they will determine the institutional framework for future relationships between **all** regions of the British Isles. The Ulster Democratic Party believes that any format for structures of co-operation must **genuinely** address the totality of relationships whilst also recognising the symmetry of relationships. This can best be dealt with by a Council of the British Isles which would be truly representative of **all** the regions of the British Isles.

A Council of the British Isles should not only address the two governments' shared interests in Northern Ireland, but should address all issues pertaining to co-operation in the spheres of tourism, agriculture, the economy, finance, security and employment etc., relevant to the British Isles as a whole. Such a body, while recognising national sovereignty and respecting it as a vital political force, would revitalise these islands, building new friendships, North, South, East and West.

Relationship with other arrangements

Reiterating the previously made points, a configuration drawing upon all regions of the British Isles would provide an acceptable and functional institutional framework for the development of areas of mutual benefit and the addressing of areas of concern. Moreover, a Council of the British Isles is not only fully compatible with, but also supportive of, the new arrangements for devolution in Great Britain. In fact, such a council is the only institutional arrangement which can provide equal participation for the people of all regions of the British Isles and ensure better economic and political co-operation, ultimately leading to the peace and stability sought, through a comprehensive settlement.

One further point, however, needs to be raised. The relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland will, beyond doubt, be influenced by both states' membership of the European Union. The European framework can have both a stabilising and a de-stabilising effect. The possibility of the Irish Republic joining the single European currency while the United Kingdom maintains a 'wait and see' policy is one potential disruption to smooth economic and political co-operation within the British Isles.

Rights and safeguards

Given the nature of Northern Ireland's society and the long-standing debate on specific civil, political, social and cultural rights which should be accorded to the respective communities, any settlement must include the following three elements: First, the immediate incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British Law; secondly, a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland addressing those aspects of civil liberties which have been particularly contentious within the context of inter-communal relations; and thirdly, a written constitution for Northern Ireland.

Civil rights and liberties, which specifically need to be addressed, include, *amongst others*:

- The freedom of expression
- The freedom of assembly
- The freedom of religious expression
- The right to democratically pursue national and political aspirations
- The right to seek constitutional change and legitimate means
- The right to live wherever one chooses without hindrance
- The right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, religion, gender or colour
- The right to full participation in democratic politics
- The right to be protected by law
- The right to liberty and security of person
- The right to a fair trial