

## Strands Two & Three

### Introduction

The process of European integration, begun by the Council of Europe and continued by the European Community - later Union - has brought with it a rise in the phenomenon of regionalism. Among the factors contributing to this rise were, on the one hand, rejection of the cultural uniformity of states and belief in the continent's regional diversity, and on the other, the demand for more local participation in decision-making and rejection of decisions being made in distant capitals by "faceless" bureaucrats. Since the 1970's regionalism has developed in two ways. At national level many member states of the European Union, particularly Belgium, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, have been decentralising, giving or proposing to give, various degrees of legislative, administrative and financial powers to their regions. They have joined the only two states in the European Union with a formal federal constitution, Austria and Germany. At sub-national level those regions of Europe with legislative, executive and financial powers themselves became active in promoting cross-border co-operation, and this development came to involve regions in states not members of the European Community such as Switzerland and the former Yugoslavia, most notably in seven Arbeitsgemeinschaften, involving a total today of some 40 regions, provinces and cantons in Europe, east and west, some, indeed, involved in more than one organisation. To this must be added the vast array of cross-border arrangements promoted by the European Community's INTERREG scheme to help particularly the poorer regions, provinces, departments on the internal borders of the Union.

For its part the Council of Europe adopted in May 1980 the Madrid Outline Convention on Transfrontier co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities in which the participating states agreed to promote cross-border co-operation, including the right of local and regional authorities to make agreements with their neighbouring foreign opposite numbers in the fields of their competences as laid down by domestic laws.

In very few of these cross-border arrangements mentioned above are there agreements between states, on the one hand and regions in neighbouring states on the other. For example, in Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia were members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Adria before independence, but remained in the organisation afterwards, and the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium) signed a Language Union in 1980.



The Ulster Unionist Party is not opposed to the idea of cross-border co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. Indeed in the earlier years of Northern Ireland's existence the government proposed on many occasions that formal links be established with its southern neighbour, only to be rebuffed.

The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes the principles underlying the aims and methods by which cross-border co-operation has developed in Europe, namely:

- in response to the practical and specific demonstrable economic, social and cultural needs of the parties involved;
- under rules of the democratic accountability of those institutions involved in cross-border co-operation to the people most directly concerned;
- the diminution of nationalism rather than its exacerbation,
- that such cross-border co-operation by one region be not limited to only one partner;
- that there exists in Northern Ireland an Assembly with powers sufficient to enable it to play a responsible role in cross-border co-operation, not only with the Irish Republic and other British regions but with regions on the continental mainland of Europe,
- to avoid any unnecessary layers of bureaucracy.

In view of the already massive co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic covering many fields, and stemming from their geographical proximity and shared history, the Ulster Unionist Party makes the following proposals:

- There shall be a body established, called the Council of the British Isles (hereinafter called 'The Council') to deal with the Totality of Relationships within these islands.
- The Council shall enable and facilitate discussion, consultation, and co-operation on matters of mutual interest between the constituent elements of the British Isles
- The Council shall be composed of representatives of the British and Irish Governments, and of the Regional Elected Administrations of Scotland, Wales



and Northern Ireland. Representatives from the Administrations of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands may be invited to participate, as will representatives of any English Regional Administration established.

- Summit Level Meetings of the Council, involving all Administrations shall be convened at least twice a year. However, meetings of the Council may also be convened between two or more Administrations (i.e. between the British and Irish Governments, between Elected Regional Administrations, and between the Irish Government and Regional Administrations of the United Kingdom). All meetings between Ministers/Heads of Committee of the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Assembly will take place in such meetings of the Council.

Where any such a meeting is convened, discussions will be restricted to matters within the jurisdiction of the Administrations represented in the meeting

- Council Meetings may be held at a General or Sectoral Level with Representatives of the appropriate Departments/Committees present. The Council will thus operate on the basis of variable geometry and subject matter.
- Governments Elected Regional Administrations will be represented at Council Meetings by their Ministers/Heads of Committee, each of which shall be a delegate to the Council. All decisions are to be taken by unanimous votes of Delegates present.
- Council Meetings may take decisions on Agreed Policies/Actions to be taken by the Respective Administrations. Such decisions are however, only recommendatory and have no Legal Basis, until ratified by the respective Assemblies/Parliaments.
- Agreed Policies/Actions shall be implemented by appropriate agreed mechanisms Such mechanisms must also be subsequently ratified by the respective Assemblies/Parliaments.
- The Council shall be serviced by a single small Administrative Unit.
- A Council Meeting will only be properly constituted if any participating administration is represented by at least two Ministers/Heads of Committee. The Northern Ireland Assembly's representation at a Council Meeting must



25/11/98 10:55 NO. 10 C.F. + TO W.HALL COMON

NO. 037 010

23/11 '01 16:03

-->901718399044

Pg. 09

contain at least one Head of Committee drawn from each of the two main traditions.

- Where meetings between the British and Irish Government are held which discuss Non Devolved Issues for Northern Ireland, representatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly from each of the main traditions shall be invited to participate.

These Proposals are prepared on the basis of Acceptable Constitutional Change and on the understanding that they form part of a wider agreement which replaces the Anglo-Irish Agreement.