



Northern Ireland Peace Process: A Future After the EU?

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The Nationalists The Unionists

Consociationalism

"A form of government which accommodates the diverse interests of divided and plural societies through powersharing in a coalition, made up of parties representing the dominant groups in that society".

Factors favourable towards the establishing of a consociationalist system:

- External threat to the country, such as an international crisis or war
- Multiple balance of power among the subcultures
- Relatively low total load on the decision-making apparatus, i.e. economic and social stability, not too large pressures on the system

Consociationalism was suggested as fit for Northern Ireland as a form of democracy and conflict regulation because it is seen by consociational advocates as typical of divided societies, where there are long-standing divisions and a history of violence.

In the Belfast Agreement of 1998, the Republic of Ireland dropped its claim over Northern Ireland in exchange for cross-border institutions. The agreement was largely achieved due to the fact that both Ireland and the UK were EU member states.

"For all meetings of the Executive Committee the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be co-chairmen".

Ministerial Code, Section 28A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

The Northern Ireland Assembly

- The Assembly is made up of 108 members who are elected from 18 constituencies
- The parties with the largest number of seats in the Assembly claim the positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister
- Seats on the Executive are allocated on the basis of a party's share of the vote

Powers of the Assembly

The Assembly is directly involved in government by nominating Ministers to the government. It also has a legislative function which it fulfils in two ways:

- it meets in full session to debate a motion, vote on legislation or present questions to a minister
- it forms committees for different purposes

The Heads of Government

The Belfast Agreement of 1998 provides that the First Minister and the deputy First Minister are to be the chairmen of the Executive Committee. Their responsibilities include:

- standards of public life
- machinery of government
- EU issues
- human rights

The heads of government are always chosen from the two parties with the greatest majority to ensure equal representation.

The Electoral System -History

- The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 established that the MPs to the Northern Irish parliament were to be elected by proportional representation.
- By 1929 this had been replaced by the first-past-the-post system, allowing for the dominance of only one party.
- Because of this, until 1972 the Unionist Party was effectively the party of government

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Northern Ireland uses STV:

- Multi-member constituencies - people elect more than one representative
- Voters rank candidates in order of preference on the ballot paper.
- Each candidate needs a minimum number of votes to be elected.
- If a candidate has more votes than are needed, that candidate's surplus votes are transferred to the remaining candidates

The European Union

The peace process in Northern Ireland has been receiving financial support from the EU since 1989. The total funds which have been invested in the PEACE programme since 1995 comprise EUR 1.3 billion.

The PEACE programme was a cross-border cooperation programme between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, conducted in the context of European territorial cohesion. In 2016, the next phase of the program PEACE IV (2014-2020) was launched which was going to target:

- shared education
- helping children and young people
- creating shared spaces and services
- building positive relations at a local level.

Achievements of the programme cover "a wide range of projects, including projects to support victims and survivors, young people, SMEs, infrastructure and urban regeneration projects, as well as projects in support of immigrants and of celebrating the ethnic diversity of society as a whole".

"Ministers must at all times follow the seven principles of public life [...]"

- selflessness
- integrity
- objectivity
- accountability
- openness
- honesty
- leadership"

Ministerial Code, Section 28A of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

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Do you think that the Northern Ireland peace process can continue outside of the EU?

Let us know!

