

The Far Side of Revenge

Reflections on the Northern Ireland Peace Process

Dr. Duncan Morrow

Glucksman Ireland House, New York University

22nd January 2016

First of all, some thanks. I am so honoured to have been asked to speak to you in a place of so much dedication to the transformation of Ireland, north and south, over the last decades. The role played by the Brennan Glucksmans will one day be properly recorded in history as a remarkable story of personal generosity, dedication and commitment. I am also grateful to Barbara Jones, the Irish Consul General in New York, both for speaking here today and for her personal contribution to reconciliation. We were lucky enough to have Barbara in Belfast for a few short years, and without breaking secrets, her role in cajoling and encouraging and interfering (in the best possible sense) were incredibly important. For much of that time she worked the Michael McAvoy in the NIO. Michael brought his experience of working with some of the most contentious and difficult issues directly to bear on his work in the NIO, and, though it pains me to admit it, he has made an incredibly important contribution to British Government thinking and knowledge about how to support efforts for peace and stability. I want also to acknowledge the role played by Norman Houston, where he has been the most effective ambassador for Ni that we have ever had in the US.

The responsibility for what I say today is all mine. I grew up in the Corrymeela Community and almost everything I do is influenced by that experience, but we have not spoken about content. By way of formal bona fides, I teach politics in Ulster University where I am also responsible for community engagement in relation to the new campus, I have worked on issues of peace and conflict in Northern Ireland for decades, and was for a period the Chief Executive of the Ni Community Relations Council. I am still a Sentence Review Commissioner, responsible for the early release of paramilitary prisoners, and am currently directly involved in issues like policing, interfaces and housing.

My theme today is the state of peace-building today, especially as it affects reconciliation both in Northern Ireland and in wider British Irish relations. I want to reflect on the long story and on how far forward the most recent Fresh Start agreement has taken us. For full disclosure and transparency, I am also a candidate for the Alliance Party in the coming Assembly elections. The party was directly engaged in the talks this autumn but outside the Fresh Start Agreement. They have not been asked or consulted on relation to the content of this talk, so all of its faults are personal and the considerations my own. But bias must be acknowledged to allow you to make your own judgments.

The far side of revenge? Reflections on the state of the NI peace process.

Reconciliation is a difficult word in politics. Its theological origins hint at its affinity with miracle more than realism: the promise of trust, security and love for people who have been estranged, bitter and violently hostile. For the true realist, violence and power are the basis of reality. In the New Testament, reconciliation is a radical 'turning around' where a bitter and violent economy of action and reaction is transfigured into an exchange of forgiving and being forgiven through the model of Jesus death and resurrection. Reconciliation between human beings is made possible by this unexpected revelation of truth, love and triumph over death: life is opened up for us if we make the same transformation. For the great power-struggle philosophers of the nineteenth century, Marx and Nietzsche, all of this was dangerous fantasy.

Because reconciliation in this sense is a radical disruption of the logic of action and reaction in rivalry for power. A break in the chain of revenge enables a new relationship. And because of that new relationship, in which revenge is no longer thinkable, the truth of what we did to one another can emerge.

Far from being romantic, reconciliation is always a shocking apocalypse of both mercy and truth. Generosity shines a more penetrating and unbearable light on our complicity with violence than conflict. But the requirement for mercy and the spotlight of unflinching truth mean that reconciliation hardly ever enters the world of the 'realistic' except when every other option is exhausted, as the last-chance saloon and salvation of the exhausted, the despairing and lost, not the romantic triumph of rational 'peace-building'. Reconciliation is much easier to support when it is others who are called to embrace their enemy.

This kind of peace is a far cry from the limited but manageable goal equating peace with the absence of violence. But in societies where peace requires both stopping killing and making a future together, negative peace is little more than a volatile truce. Reconciliation points to a new relationship where partners find ways both to make promises and to forgive failings, the actions that Hannah Arendt identified as the foundations of human freedom and political trust.

Precisely because it cannot be enforced, negotiated or legislated reconciliation remains both fragile and essential. To forgive and be forgiven is a leap of faith in the possibility of a fresh start with the antagonistic other that can only be hoped for, imagined and 'rumoured' until it is made real by concrete actions and gestures. To promise in a world where no promise except hostility has been kept is a moment of extreme vulnerability for any political leader. Leadership for reconciliation is potentially costly and self-sacrificial and always high risk.

The appearance of the language of reconciliation in Northern Irish politics in the mid 1980s must have reflected the truth that every other alternative to a war to the death appeared to have been exhausted. In the formulation of Denis Barrett - there was a problem to every (other) solution. Beyond formal deals and accommodations, peace would require existential decisions which broke with every previous pattern of political relationship and transformed bitter enemies into partners. Many using the term reconciliation in the 1980s and 1990s may only have been partially aware of its meaning and costs, although Seamus Heaney was not one of them. 'The Cure at Troy' may have become an Irish cliché, but reading it closely, it is hard to imagine any artist capturing both the implausibility and the necessity of what was at stake with greater accuracy:

Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.

Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.

If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky
That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term.

Reconciliation was and is 'learning to do what we don't know how to do'; a project of faith and hope in a different future against the backdrop of historically normalized hostility. It is both super-realism (it is the only possibility) and anti-realism (it is entirely implausible). Inevitably, therefore, it is a project subject to setbacks and the recurrence of old assumptions. In politics: 'Reconciliation is never an event'.

The Corrymeela Community

In contrast, reconciliation is the foundational word of the Corrymeela Community. Recently, I watched Philip Orr's play based on the experience of the founder of our community, Ray Davey, as a young pastor to the British army imprisoned in Dresden on the night of the bombing of the city by the allies in February 1945. It convinced me that this experience was crucial to Davey's -and then our Community's -conviction that the future of the world depends on reconciliation. After Dresden- for which we might now read Syria- Ray Davey concluded that reconciliation was an existential imperative for us all. The ultimate fantasy was the last realism.

A small group of both Protestants and Catholics groping around for a way to make this insight meaningful found itself thrust into the maelstrom of open hatred and killing that was Northern Ireland after 1969. In the midst of hopelessness, reconciliation was the platform for meeting unexpected people washed up from the disasters of Northern Ireland. There was no grand plan, only steps. There was no political blueprint only a different starting point and there was no realistic political hope, only a broader, deeper, more laughable hope for miracles.

We were lucky. We were in Northern Ireland where hatred was contained by the horror in both Britain and Ireland at the consequences of what was happening, and by the subsequent political, financial and military resources deployed in containing and managing the catastrophe. Containment did not prevent the crisis, and in some places it exacerbated it, but it allowed some to survive the tsunami. We were certainly not better people than those in Bosnia or South Sudan, but we may have been more fortunate.

Northern Ireland and reconciliation

Northern Ireland has never really known reconciliation. From its conception and birth it was disputed and divided. The fundamental of liberal democracy - commitment to the peaceful alternation of power depending on free electoral outcomes and changing political preferences - never emerged. Instead politics reflected the suspicious antagonism, where Unionists (and Protestants) monopolized power with the primary purpose of preventing any Catholic Irish influence by all means necessary, while the Catholic minority continued to nurture the hope that power would eventually be wrested from British-Unionist control, by violence if required.

If Northern Ireland was always a 'failed-statelet', it also allowed an Irish Republic to emerge without having to consider a significant pro-British remnant in its post-independence politics and the rest of the UK to walk away from its Irish legacy by declaring it resolved and avoiding operational responsibility for any consequences by means of devolution. The benefits of containing the hatreds of a post-colonial interface into six counties had considerable value - elsewhere.

But while violence reduced, resentment lingered. When demands for full Civil Rights on the model of Martin Luther King met open radical Unionist hostility, the political system was overwhelmed by volcanic violence. Although the United Kingdom government resumed direct rule after 1972, it did so reluctantly and struggled to avoid the re-emergence of a full-scale confrontation with Irish nationalism. At the same time, the Irish political establishment was extremely anxious to avoid destabilizing the existing political system for unattainable objectives in the North.

Without any clear way forward, inter-governmental partnership gradually emerged as the only viable alternative to chaos and confrontation. After the IRA hunger strikes further deepened polarization in Northern Ireland in 1981, the British and Irish governments eventually broke through profound historic suspicions to reach the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, over-riding violent Unionist and Republican objections in Northern Ireland. More profoundly than ever, two governments accepted that "diminishing the divisions [in Northern Ireland] and achieving lasting peace and stability" and "the need for continuing efforts to reconcile and to acknowledge the rights of the two major traditions" took precedence over territorial sovereignty or assumed support for sides.

In effect, the British and Irish Governments governments conceded that peace in Northern Ireland could not be achieved without radical change. The case for reconciliation was made by twenty years of carnage on the streets. International support and the establishment of the International Fund for Ireland as part of the 1985 Agreement created an international instrument to invest directly in social, cultural and economic initiatives prioritising economic renewal and social co-operation. Previously, inter-community initiatives had largely relied on private initiatives like the Ireland Funds. Among others, the

work of groups like Corrymeela took on a new symbolic public significance.

Throughout the ups and downs of diplomacy that eventually produced the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, reconciliation provided the intellectual consistency shaping British-Irish and international diplomacy. The Downing Street Declaration explicitly aimed at “fostering agreement and reconciliation” while the Framework Documents specifically committed the governments to “remove the causes of conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions which have resulted.” The Irish Government established a Fund for Peace and Reconciliation while the British Government promoted community relations, integrated education and increased participation in communities, including by those with connections to paramilitary organisations. The EU established an enormous ‘Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation’ known by the Acronym PEACE. Speaking on his remarkable first visit to Belfast in 1995, President Clinton remarked that ““No one can say his heart is altogether clean, his hands altogether pure. Thus, as we wish to be forgiven, let us forgive those who have sinned against us and ours: That was the beginning of American reconciliation, and it must be the beginning of Northern Ireland’s reconciliation.”

Reconciliation since 1998

On some issues, the Good Friday Agreement is unequivocal: it is “a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning” based on “partnership, equality and mutual respect” where everyone gives their “total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues.” Above all, the signatories agreed to acknowledge the tragedies of the past and to honour “those who have died or been injured, and their families... through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.”

The Agreement was undoubtedly a watershed in British-Irish affairs. Since then, the level of inter-community violence and the nature of everyday security have been transformed beyond imagining in the 1980s. Incredibly, the police are now a beacon of international best practice in human rights, community engagement and public order. The murders of

Constables Ronan Kerr and Stephen Carroll tragically provided the moments of greatest symbolic evidence of change in atmosphere and attitude on all sides. The Agreement was a new *anno domini* for British-Irish inter-state relationships, symbolized most vividly by visits by presidents and royalty. The border no longer prevents cultural, economic, social or even political relationships nor does it feature in the protestant imagination as a real and present danger. Sporting bodies, notably the GAA, IFA and IRFU, have worked to diffuse the most provocative elements of their sectarian heritage.

But, heard from inside Northern Ireland the language of 'new beginning' and 'fresh start' has a discomfiting resonance 17 years after the Agreement was 'a fresh start' and 16 since the Patten Report was 'a new beginning'. Revisiting the text of 1998 from the perspective of Northern Ireland has the strange effect of highlighting the gap between vision and reality, ambition and delivery.

After 1998, the absence of clarity on the process of decommissioning and devolving government almost destroyed all progress. Devolution was finally restored in 2007 but by reducing and limiting the level of inter-community co-operation required to elect a First and Deputy First Minister and tightening up arrangements to lock in community designation.

Since 2007, the problem has not been institutional continuity, but the inability or unwillingness of the Executive to move beyond sectarian polarization or tackle the recurrent capacity of events to reproduce antagonism along traditional lines. Specific issues identified for change in the Good Friday Agreement such as integrated education and shared housing have made little progress. The attempt to agree a Bill of Rights resulted in deeper polarisation, there has been no progress on a Single Equality Act, Language remains a poisonous and sectarian issue.

Most worryingly of all, the failure to pick up the inherited Shared Future strategy in any plausible form has been injurious to the continuity of non-partisan and inter-community infrastructure established with external support between 1995 and 2007. Instead, in a Northern Irish economy dominated by the state, there is the significant risk that the voluntary and community sector has ceased to be the seedbed of creativity for demonstrating reconciliation in practice that it must be and become instead a tame client

of the permanent powers that be, dependent on speaking the right message for continuity of public funding. Even the TBUC strategy, hastily brought together by the DUP and Sinn Fein in advance of the G8 summit in 2013 is long on rhetoric and very poor on delivery.

The list of unresolved issues that became obstacles to change in the last three years has, by now built up into a sad list of traditional routes. Reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust has been scarce: flags protests in 2012, collapse of the Long Kesh/Maze Peace Centre project in 2013, parading disputes in Belfast, the failure of the Haass talks in 2014 and the chronic crisis over the budget throughout 2015, and consistent evidence that paramilitary culture, and in some cases structures, remained intact. The consistent political preference seemed to be for rehearsing and acting out grievances rather than finding accommodations, trades or honourable compromises.

None of this speaks convincingly of partnership, equality and mutual respect. The Institutions were in place, Northern Ireland was contained and self-managed but any insistence on reconciliation was quietly abandoned, except when it suited the rhetoric of investment visits.

A fresh 'Fresh Start'?

The most recent attempt to sort some of this out was the talks held this autumn, culminating on 17 November in the 'Fresh Start' document agreed by the two governments with the two largest parties in the Executive. This year's emergency talks were triggered when the chronic impasse over how the Executive should respond to UK government austerity and social security reform, which had already led to apparent paralysis in government, met an acute crisis after the PSNI attributed the assassination of Kevin McGuigan to members of the Provisional IRA.

The list of issues to be resolved appeared to be growing rather than reducing. The need to end paramilitary organisation and culture was added to the requirement to find agreement on budgets first attempted in 2014 and resolving the impasse to the issues first approached in the Haass-O'Sullivan talks in 2013. For the British government the priority was a resolution of the budgetary crisis and avoiding any need for direct rule in Northern Ireland. For the Irish government the priority was to save devolution and finding a way to

address issues emerging from violence in the past. The goals of the Northern Ireland parties were an uncertain mix of all of the issues complicated on the Unionist side when the Ulster Unionist Party announced that it was withdrawing from the Executive while the DUP tried to keep it alive through a series of rather awkward tactical manoeuvres and on the Nationalist side by competing approaches to paramilitarism, austerity and the past.

In practice, negotiations were conducted among a narrow group of negotiators. Increasingly the key group was restricted to the governments plus two, emphasising that the Executive is in practice a 'duopoly plus others' rather than a full coalition.

Fresh Start focussed overwhelmingly on the two issues that had triggered collapse. On budgets, the signatories agreed that the Executive could allocate £585m over four years to 'top-up' UK welfare arrangements in NI and would establish a group to identify ways to mitigate against the harshest consequences of reform. From April 2018, Corporation Tax in Northern Ireland will be lowered to 12.5% with a consequent reduction in the block grant. The UK government found means to creative flexibility around budgets and offered limited additional resources where a special case could be made for unique Northern Ireland circumstances, including support for TBUC. On this basis Sinn Fein and DUP accepted that the welfare changes already introduced elsewhere in the UK would now be applied in Northern Ireland. On paramilitarism, a 3-person panel would be appointed by the Executive and reporting before the end of May 2016 on recommendations for a strategy to disband paramilitary groups and a cross-border 'Joint Task Force on Organised Crime including Paramilitarism' was established.

There were other elements: moves to strengthen the pledge of office, a nod towards enabling formal opposition, a promise to revisit petitions of concern. The Irish government promised to support North-South transport infrastructure and to consider a cross-border dimension to flood relief and health. The number of NI Executive Departments was reduced. Instead of a civic forum, A Fresh Start foresees a possible "Compact Civic Advisory Panel" with uncertain reach or mandate. An 18 month, politically-managed, Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition and a further paper on managing Parades as originally foreseen in the previous Stormont House Agreement will be implemented.

By far the biggest omission was agreement on how to address the violence in the past. Following Stormont House in 2014, the police service had made clear that it had a strong preference to be relieved of responsibility for investigating legacy issues for fear that this would undermine confidence in present-day policing. Preparations were already well-advanced for the establishment of a separate Historical Investigations Unit (HIU). But this time it was strongly rumoured that the talks came close to collapse over disagreements on the extent to which considerations of national security should impact on the disclosure of information.

Groups and public institutions representing victims were scathing in their anger and the deal was rejected by the SDLP, Alliance and the Ulster Unionists. And while the First and Deputy First Minister did their best to assert that Fresh Start was “a far-reaching and comprehensive framework for addressing some of the most challenging and intractable issues” even they conceded that the deal could do little more than “nudge history forward.”

The brute reality was that without a deal, the devolved settlement itself was vulnerable. Fresh Start got sufficient political support to proceed. Agreement on budgets removed the technical obstacles to day-to-day devolved government- for now. But it did so while leaving the question of how to face the past as unresolved as ever.

Reconciliation: An apocalypse of mercy and truth

The conviction of Ray Davey and of Corrymeela was that reconciliation is essential because of the alternative, and possible despite, not because of, violence. The process that led to the Good Friday Agreement was driven by much of the same insight: reconciliation is necessary in the same sense that Churchill spoke about democracy as a bloody awful system except for all the others that have been tried, and an alternative to violence not its reward.

Reconciliation is its own judgement on the past, but it judges the past from a new place. Our experience is that reconciliation opens a new future, and also brings remorse, mourning and shame. It builds from here, it binds wounds, it brings unexpected people into community - and tries to learn from the mistakes of the past. The Agreement intimated the same in its preamble. We have failed, so far to fully realise its implications.

In Northern Ireland, truth-telling has become a euphemism for war by other means. Losing the battle for truth' means losing the battle for the future. The dispute in Northern Ireland has not been *whether* we should deal with the past but *which* past we mean and *how* it will be told. Everyone exists in the looking glass: Sentence first, trial second. Defeat implies that truth-telling will become another exercise in pinning blame on us and refusal of responsibility by them.

The Fresh Start failure tells us that we have come to a standstill in that war. For as long as it remains war by other means, we will at best stoke resentment and, at worst, rekindle violence. Facing the past can only be resolved with a framework of reconciliation where the purpose is to build a future together. The political truth is that we have to agree what we want truth for.

The battle over the past suggests that our political leadership, and maybe we all, have not yet concluded that reconciliation is our only way to justice. All but the most recalcitrant accept that violence brings no resolution to Northern Ireland, understand that there is no political appetite outside Northern Ireland to reframe Northern Irish resentments as part of any ongoing British-Irish struggle and recognise that the acts of reconciliation between the British and Irish states have been genuine and heartfelt. But for as long as the suspicion remains that every move toward the other means loss and injustice, peace is presented as loss: a prison chosen as a least worst option not the miraculous opportunity of escape. Reconciliation is a trap not victory. So we continue to test all other options - without success.

The issue, of course, is not to curse the darkness, but to light candles. And it seems in fact that there is much that we could and should do. Reconciliation does not, in the end proceed as an idea but as experience. The critical factor therefore is who can take leadership and what does it mean within community and political life? Five steps seem vital:

First, the importance of creating public opportunities for telling and hearing of experiences, for engaging with complexity and for discovering that suffering and human dilemmas reach far over political boundaries. The Chief Constable at a recent meeting talked about the

importance of 'face-to face accountability'. The culture of policing has been transformed by the new partnerships made possible since 2000. It is Corrymeela's experience that there is nothing like it for stripping us of our comfortable illusions about the simplicities of goodies and baddies. Places and spaces which are unthreatening and welcoming need to be fostered and encouraged. The absolute commitment is to the integrity of each person not the shape of any prior picture. Lost Lives did this in print. Legacy did it on radio. We have seen some of it community relations work, work, the arts, in museums, in broadcasting but it has never been part of a systematic attempt to humanise a political story.

Having worked many years with both former prisoners and victims and survivors of the troubles, having sat with the police during their transformation, having served as a Sentence Review Commissioner on the early release scheme and having worked on every interface in Belfast my experience is that suffering was unevenly distributed, violence was brutal not romantic and that truth telling inevitably exposes truths about us and ours as well as him and them.

Second, we must become more honest about the possibilities and limits of criminal justice as a way of doing justice to violence as all-encompassing as ours. Not only is the standard of proof high, and the evidence ever more distant, but it is my experience that it can only identify small parts of a huge jigsaw, at the constant risk that it creates a more not less random picture of justice. My experience reviewing files as a Sentence Review Commission is that those leaving marks or evidence were usually junior while those directing events went free. Murder was seldom an individual act, but always a team game. Individual actions were nested in structures of command, support and tolerance which make the assignment of responsibility and guilt complex. Furthermore, conflict created whole constituencies who reject any definition of their violence as crime, representing it instead as heroism. The motor for vengeance and response is not eliminated with the individual because it lives in the hinterland, with the implicit and tacit support of a wider community and structure. Getting people across the community to take responsibility is not resorting to collective guilt but being honest about where the engine of violence and hatred lay.

Third, we need to accept collective responsibility for honouring those who suffered and meeting their physical and psychological needs where possible. This has begun, but it needs to become something of a social contract akin to that owed to veterans, and not a question of begging and games-playing. For me qualification should be needs-based, not because this is easy but because the purpose is to repudiate violence and recognise costs. This includes support for mental health services, but it must also include some public vehicle and ritual for the political community to express remorse and acknowledge suffering. All our commemorations in Ireland take place in the shadow of the violent costs for some of us of our failure to resolve their consequences. Failing to mark not only events 100 years ago, but the consequences that required the Good Friday Agreement 80 years later, is to wilfully fail to acknowledge consequences. There is a risk that we will get through our decade of centenaries without even acknowledging this.

Fourth, can promote reconciliation, sharing and opportunities to work beyond the confines of sectarian suspicion in everything we do. This too has suffered since the agreement, in part because it was declared over, and in part because the local political leadership have not found it important. If necessary, it should be funded from outside Northern Ireland, because it is only if reconciliation is shown and experienced and not talked about that it is real. But it will remain incomplete until we get serious about translating this into how we target all public resources.

Finally, the notion of a historians inquiry, might be useful both to test political narratives against evidence, and to test historians against their use of evidence. Historians never agree on anything, but an evidence-based inquiry might put a shape on what is and is not contentious, allow us to build an evidence path through ideology and limit some of the wilder simplicities.

Learning to do...

Peace beyond containment is an existential decision for a new relationship. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, so far, Northern Ireland has embraced management but refused reconciliation. Put another way: our enthusiasm for peace stretches to the absence of violence but not to the presence of sustainable relationships. The Good Friday Agreement as modified and limited by the St Andrews Agreement and battered by experience has

been a ceiling rather than the floor of our ambition. Unwilling to find a way to each other, unable to use violence to resolve it, the risk now is of a frozen political landscape poisoned by its festering resentments. There has undoubtedly been a sea-change, but it has not yet taken us to the far side of revenge. Much better certainly than 1972, better indeed than 1993, but not great if measured by 1998, and still at risk.

Unless the Northern Ireland peace process is again focussed on reconciliation, it will inevitably limp from crisis to crisis in the battle of the past to control the future, and in the festering of resentment. Change requires that all parties to the Agreement, above all the governments refocus themselves on securing reconciliation not containment. Containment failed in 1969 and it will fail again. The design of the Agreement foresaw devolution as the answer, but clearly failed to secure a mechanism to ensure that devolution was accountable to building reconciliation. There is a risk that we have built up institutions while neglecting their purpose. The absence of an implementation plan and forum for accountability and the absence of any mechanism to ensure continuous progress has been very marked. Governments may be happy with containment, but there is an inevitable price to neglecting something that festers.

If reconciliation is to be meaningful in politics it must have consequences. Outside NI, only governments can establish connections between investment, funding and outcomes. In my view, Northern Ireland should not receive additional resources because it is a 'special case' but only because it is making unusual efforts to escape the antagonism of the past and its legacy. That includes finding ways to encourage creative initiatives at grassroots level that are independent of party-political control. It means focussing on the ending of paramilitary culture, without which no interface can be removed and no real community democracy free of violence can grow. It means encouraging and steering not avoiding discussion on how to resolve cultural issues which become mired in debates about domination, like flags and parades. It means taking the lead in truth-telling processes not hiding behind the defensive protection of the state. For me personally, it means not leaving the European Union and losing the opportunities it affords for cross-border and inter-state co-operation. Ideally, it means investing in the future- the human future of young people and the physical future through planning and housing.