Creating Border Space—
An EU Approach to Ethno-national Threat and Insecurity

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“All border towns bring out the worst in a country.” Orson Welles, Touch of Evil (1958).

Introduction
In the European Union (EU), contemporary global narratives of threat and insecurity are compounded by the inter-related fears of post-Enlargement mass migration and economic downturn, as well as ethno-national conflicts that percolate through the process of European integration. In dealing with ethno-national threat and insecurity the EU has employed a number of options. One option has been to wield ‘soft power’, such as establishing conditions for accession to the EU in the 1993 Copenhagen European Council including the protection of minorities. Another option has been to engage with ‘the idea of peacebuilding from below’ (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2005, pp. 217-21). The EU Peace programmes for Ireland—Peace 1 (1994-1999) and Peace II (2000-2006)—represented a sophisticated and sustained approach to ameliorating ethno-national conflict from below. As such, they serve as a precedent for a direct, committed, grassroots level engagement for the purpose of ameliorating other real and potential European ethno-national border conflicts. The promotion of cross-border co-operation and the creation of a transnational border space for addressing the threats and insecurity intrinsic to such conflict are important elements in this approach.

In this paper, it is argued that the transformation of a border from barrier to bridge via cross-border co-operation can help to create a useful transnational border space in which pivotal perceptions of threat emanating from ‘the other side’ may be addressed. In doing so, this transformation of a border provides an important element in the EU approach to ethno-national conflict regulation and resolution. Border towns and communities are considered as potential transnational spaces for addressing perceptions and narratives of threat and insecurity rather than primary sites for the perpetuation of conflict and for ‘bringing out the worst in a country’. However, if the border as barrier is perceived to be crucial for security in the face of multifarious threats, and the border as bridge perceived to be potentially dangerous, then the transformation of the border and the creation of a transnational border space may be resisted. Resistance to such a transformation is especially likely to come from an ethno-national group for whom the narratives of threat and insecurity are fundamental to its political culture and are intimately associated with the border. The chapter attempts to examine cross-border co-operation and the creation of a transnational border space in relation to such an ethno-national group—the Ulster Protestant unionist community in Northern Ireland.
**Borders and (in)security**

The post-2001 narratives of threat and insecurity have given rise to a political and media fix on the notion of borders as security barriers. Paradoxically, the 1960s heralded the process of contemporary globalisation with major implications for the protectionist quality of modern state territorial borders. Globalisation is the catchword typically used to encapsulate the breaking down of the inhibiting effects of time, space and borders in the contexts of the movement of goods, services, capital (including labour), and knowledge (Stiglitz 2002, p. 9). Globalisation also describes a concomitant deterritorialization of social relations and their re-structuring in developing political and economic spaces (Giddens 1990, p. 21). Consequently, the process of contemporary globalisation has important implications for secure state territorial borders and a monopoly of violence invested in the modern state (Tilly 1990). Global information flows, the global movement of capital, global media and culture, the global proliferation of terrorism under the spurious umbrella of Islamic jihad, as well as the military adventures of neo-imperial powers are the dominant global phenomena that appear to traverse the territorial borders of the modern state with relative ease.

One response of nation-state governments to globalisation has been to re-order international political and economic space in an effort to wrest back some control (Brunn 1999). The EU is perhaps the most advanced product of this re-ordering. The creation of the Single European Market and the adoption of the Single Currency by twelve of the then fifteen EU member states at the beginning of 2002 were important staging posts in the replacement of independent European trading nations with an EU corporate economic space (Rumford 2002, p. 19). Member states have also relinquished a substantial measure of legal sovereignty to the ‘supranational’ EU level but the extent to which political sovereignty has been transferred from member states to the EU is hotly disputed. However, what is not in dispute is that the EU represents an extension of economic and political space beyond the territorial borders of the member states (Rosamond 1999, pp. 666-7; Shaw 1999, pp. 583-7; Wallace 1999, pp. 503-6 and pp. 511-2). Interdependence, inclusion, accommodation and consent have been the political principles of the EU as it strives to develop an advanced transnational economic and political space designed to meet the contemporary challenges that are presented by global economics and the threat of political instability³. Member states have either embraced or acquiesced in the process of European integration in order to: prevent inter-state war in Europe; improve European competitiveness in the global economy; and, for some member state governments at least, build on EU social provisions.

Despite these transnational developments, territorial state borders remain synonymous with the exercise of social and political power. As such, they represent the physical parameters of possession, protection and exclusion that can provoke emotions of love, hate and violence (Berezin 2003, p. 4). The deterritorialisation and retrerritorialisation intrinsic to the processes of globalisation and Europeanisation inspire perceptions and narratives of threat and insecurity because they undermine state territorial borders as physical parameters of possession, protection and power. Communities where the promise of increasing opportunities in transnational spaces is broken by the reality of confinement in disempowered territorial places are particularly receptive to narratives of
threat and insecurity. Consequently, migrant workers, who avail of variable transnational opportunities and breach the physical parameter of the state, can find themselves subjected to racial hatred and violence (Bauman 1998, p. 2).

The EU has claimed much of the credit for maintaining the peace between hitherto volatile European states and has subsequently turned its attention to ways in which border conflicts involving ethno-national groups may be pre-empted, managed and ameliorated (Diez et al 2004). With the fear of post-Enlargement migration reinforcing narratives of threat and insecurity, the development of an EU approach to real and potential ethno-national conflict and its territorial and cultural borders takes on an added dimension. Cross-border co-operation is an intrinsic element in this approach. However, even in ‘post-conflict’ situations, where the use of politically motivated violence between ethno-national communities has largely ceased but political and cultural manifestations of conflict persist, the hard kernel of distrust and alienation cannot be dissolved easily, undermining the usefulness of cross-border co-operation for the purpose of conflict resolution. Retelling the conflict, further border incidents with even a hint of an ethno-national sub-plot, continuing ‘border banditry’ including diesel, cattle, alcohol, cigarette and people smuggling, as well as an influx of legitimate migrant labour in economically dynamic border regions help to maintain the climate of threat and insecurity. An economic dynamism, encouraged by European integration, EU Structural Funds and associated Community Initiatives like Interreg may provide some anaesthetic to that climate but it does not address directly the underlying issues of conflict. These underlying issues of nationality, assimilation, identity and fear of cultural hegemony continue to cause fundamental tensions. However, transnational ‘third party’ facilitators like the EU may have a pivotal role to play in diffusing such tensions.

Third party facilitation has been recognised as an important contingent in conflict regulation and conflict resolution (Cockell 2000). Financial support is an integral element of this facilitation. Yet, as the head of the EU mission in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Erwan Fouéré, has commented, ‘You can pour money into countries but if you don’t focus on reconciliation then it is not possible to create conditions for long-term stability’ (in Smyth 2005). Jean-Paul Lederach has highlighted the need for ‘the development of new ways of thinking about categories, responsibilities, strategic commitment to peace-building, and a new understanding of socio-cultural resources present in a conflict setting’ (1997, p. 151). The development of a strategic approach that mobilizes public, private and third sector organizations in the collective pursuit of conflict resolution is one that is favoured by the European Commission. Lederach has also prioritised the everyday understandings of local people as key resources in peace-building (1995, p. 26). Furthermore, he has emphasized the potential of ‘middle-range’ or intermediary actors to influence political élites and grassroots organisations in building the ‘infrastructure of peace’ (1997, p. 151). In the context of the EU Peace programmes for Ireland, the EU’s approach has involved the engagement of intermediary agents and local grassroots organisations on either side of the border, and their participation in cross-border partnerships (Pace 2005, p. 12). As a means to cross-border, cross-community engagement on issues of ethno-national conflict, assimilation, identity and cultural hegemony, this approach will be
considered subsequently. First, it is necessary to chart changes in the nature of the Irish border, driven at the political élite level, since the partition of the island in 1921.

**The border as a barrier**

The border between the two parts of Ireland has been of primary significance for the security and identity of the Ulster Protestant unionist community in Northern Ireland. This ethno-national community has prioritized differentiation and separation from its Irish nationalist ‘Significant Other’ over identification with its contemporary British ‘Self’ in Britain. The border has served as the primary marker of differentiation and separation, and as a symbolic security barrier from the threatening Irish nationalist ‘Other’. Therefore, the unionist position has been that the Irish border as a barrier is ‘good’ and that border as a bridge is insecure, perilous, potentially treacherous and, therefore, ‘bad’.

However, the creation and gradual embedding of the Irish border as a barrier between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State after partition in 1921 also sharpened the unionist perception of threat emanating from the Irish nationalist ‘Other’. The Boundary Commission (1925), which was proposed in the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921), presented Ulster unionists with the immediate threat of losing territory to the Irish Free State, a threat that failed to materialize (Kennedy 1988, p. 73). Other threats proved to be more durable. The Irish state’s constitutional claim to the six counties of Northern Ireland persisted until the 1998 Belfast Agreement was signed. The violent campaign of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) presented a recrudescence physical threat that was intimately associated with the border in ideological and practical terms. The approach of the British government to the Irish border compounded unionist insecurity. For example, in 1940, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill offered Irish Taoiseach Éamon de Valera Irish unity as an incentive for granting Allied troops permission to use Southern Irish ports. The combined effect of these constitutional, perfidious and physical threats emanating from Dublin, Westminster and the IRA respectively, reinforced an Ulster unionist political culture characterised by threat and insecurity, and focused on the border.

Despite the paralysis induced by this political culture, some covert North/South contact did take place, for example, in 1949 Sean MacBride (then the Republic’s Minister for External Affairs) met Northern Ireland’s Sir Basil Brooke twice (Arthur 2000, p. 8). More concrete practical, low-level co-operation was achieved during the 1950s with: North/South co-operation on the Erne Hydro-Electric Scheme (1950) (Kennedy 2005); the creation of the Foyle Fisheries Commission (1952); and the subsequent establishment of the Great Northern Railway Board (Kennedy 1999, p. 84).

In response to the dawn of contemporary globalisation in the 1960s and the corresponding need for economic modernisation, the then unionist Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O’Neill, in concert with the Irish Taoiseach Seán Lemass, attempted to transform the border from a barrier into a bridge. However, the Lemass/O’Neill rapprochement foundered because traditionalist unionist forces led by the fundamentalist preacher, the Reverend Ian Paisley, campaigned successfully to stop the initiative by appealing to the unionist political culture of threat and insecurity. Paisley lambasted O’Neill with his populist invective: ‘he is a bridge builder he tells us. A traitor and a bridge are very much alike for they both go over to the other side’ (quoted in Mulholland 2000, p. 84).
Another attempt to transform the Irish border was made in 1974 through the proposed resuscitation of
the Council of Ireland model that was first mooted in the Government of Ireland Act (1920) to serve as
an institutional bridge between the two devolved parliaments in Ireland. The 1974 Council of Ireland
was to comprise of a Council of Ministers with seven members each drawn from the Northern and
Southern governments. The Council was to be invested with an executive and harmonizing function,
as well as a consultative role (Hennessey 1997, p. 221). Fearing this Council to be a nascent Trojan
Horse to an All-Ireland state, Ulster unionists and loyalists mobilised on the streets and brought down
the fledging Northern Ireland power-sharing executive that involved unionists and nationalists.

In the 1970s and 1980s regular meetings between British and Irish governments in the 'neutral'
European economic and political space enabled them to transform their relationship, which had been
forged in imbalance, antagonism and mutual suspicion, into one characterized by co-operation,
especially in the context of Northern Ireland (McCall 2001, Hayward 2005). The 1985 Anglo-Irish
Agreement (AIA) may be regarded as a product of that transformed governmental relationship. The
AIA gave the Irish government a say in the public affairs of Northern Ireland. As it was an
international agreement between the British and Irish governments, unionist leaders were unable to
veto its implementation. Their political impotence induced a period of Ulster unionist and loyalist
street protest followed by one of political reflection. Consequently, during the 1990s, Ulster unionist
leaders became involved in a protracted series of ‘3-strand’ negotiations on power-sharing
governance for Northern Ireland, as well as the institutionalization of North/South and Britain/Ireland
relationships. Implicit in this involvement was an acknowledgement that cross-border co-operation
would be a necessary pillar of any future agreement.

**Building a bridge across the border**

In the 3-strand negotiations leading to the signing of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, the Ulster Unionist
Party (UUP) under the leadership of David Trimble challenged traditionalist unionist ideological
orthodoxy based on exclusion and the Irish border as a barrier. Though not without eventually
inducing a de facto split, the party accepted the principle of inclusion regarding the participation of
Irish nationalists and republicans in the governance of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, they
acquiesced to the establishment of cross-border institutions aimed at political, economic and cultural
co-operation and co-ordination between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These
developments in unionism were undertaken in an attempt to secure the constitutional position of
Northern Ireland in the UK, as well as the political position of the unionist community in Northern
Ireland in the face of a growing northern nationalist community7 and a perfidious British government
which had developed an intimate relationship with the Irish government regarding Northern Ireland
affairs. Crucially, reciprocity was required in the form of an end to the real and perceived
constitutional and violent threats posed by Irish nationalists and republicans.

Institutions provided by the 1998 Agreement reflected the 3 strands of the negotiations that preceded
it. They included a Northern Ireland Executive, Assembly and Civic Forum (strand 1), a North/South
Ministerial Council and its Implementation Bodies (strand 2), and a British-Irish Council and British-
Irish Intergovernmental Conference (strand 3). The importance of the North/South arrangements was highlighted by the mandatory nature of the Implementation Bodies. They concentrated on the specifics of cross-border co-operation in the areas of food safety, minority languages, trade and business development, aquaculture, waterways, and EU Programmes. The provision of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) was of particular significance, not least because it was given responsibility for managing the EU Peace II and Interreg III programmes. Meanwhile, the North/South Ministerial Council met regularly to discuss wide-ranging cross-border co-operation. These meetings involved ministers with sectoral responsibility for education, health, transport, agriculture, the environment and tourism.

Henry Patterson's verdict on the outcome of the negotiations embodied in the 1998 Belfast Agreement was that it represented a 'constitutional triumph for unionism, combined with a certain political and ideological retreat' (Patterson 2001, p. 182). However, the implementation of the 1998 Agreement strengthened unionist opposition to it because the narrative of unionist political retreat appealed to a political culture underscored by threat and insecurity. Political retreat became embodied in: the early release of paramilitary prisoners; the actuality of Irish republican Sinn Féin leaders occupying ministerial positions; police reform; the slowness and secrecy of IRA ‘decommissioning’; and the perceived challenge to the British symbolic representation of Northern Ireland (McCall 2005). The unionist perception of retreat and loss was not alleviated by four secret acts of IRA arms decommissioning. Indeed, these acts combined with subsequent charges of IRA intelligence-gathering activity in Northern Ireland, IRA guerrilla training activity in Columbia, and IRA involvement in the stg£26.5m Northern Bank robbery, to maintain and even intensify the unionist perception of continuing IRA threat. Consequently, the Belfast Agreement's main institutions faced prolonged suspension and the UUP suffered electoral annihilation in the 2005 UK General Election at the hands of Ian Paisley’s rhetorically anti-Agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).

Despite these setbacks there is some evidence of declining Ulster Protestant unionist antipathy to what is termed ‘non-political’ cross-border activity (MacCarthaigh and Totten 2001, pp. 287-352; Anderson 2005). The North/South aspect of the 1998 Belfast Agreement continued under the auspices of the North/South Implementation Bodies, even though the two key institutions provided by the Agreement - the Northern Ireland Assembly and the North/South Ministerial Council—entered into a prolonged period of suspension after 15 October 2002 and 19 November 2002 respectively. Although Peter Robinson (DUP, Deputy Leader) claimed that the North/South Implementation Bodies posed the ‘greatest long-term threat’ to the Union, DUP leaders began to engage with politicians and community and business leaders in consultation on North/South co-operation and appeared to be amenable to some form of institutionalised cross-border co-operation during negotiations on the implementation of the Belfast Agreement at Leeds Castle in Kent, England, during September 2004.

In 1974 unionist leaders appeared to be willing to acquiesce to power-sharing in Northern Ireland but baulked at North/South co-operation. Thirty years later, cross-border co-operation appeared to be relatively unproblematic for them but power-sharing, especially after the experience of Irish republican
Sinn Féin ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive between 1999 and 2002, appeared increasingly to be an anathema.

Dissolving Ulster unionist hostility to cross-border co-operation is closely linked to that community’s perception of political and cultural threat emanating from the Republic of Ireland. Articles 2 and 3 of the 1937 Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution) were presented as primary evidence of the political threat emanating from the South because they claimed *de jure* jurisdiction over the whole island territory, though qualified by *de facto* jurisdiction over the 26 counties of the Republic ‘pending the re-integration of the national territory’ (Lee 1989, p. 202). The 1998 amendment of Articles 2 and 3 had the effect of neutralising the territorial threat for the unionist community through the introduction of a consent clause: ‘It is the firm will of the Irish Nation … to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, [but] a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island’\(^{11}\). Moreover, the revised article did not necessarily imply a unitary state should consent for a ‘united Ireland’ be forthcoming in the North and in the South (O’Leary 2001, p. 67). As far as the cultural threat from Catholicism is concerned, the diminishing grip of the Catholic Church on the Irish state and society has been a well-publicised development over the past two decades.

Consequently, some unionist politicians have expressed a willingness to entertain the possibility of institutionalised cross-border co-operation. For example, Jeffery Donaldson (DUP) has said:

> You will find today, more so than in 1974 with Sunningdale and the Council of Ireland, that there is less resistance to North/South institutionalized co-operation. That is heavily influenced by changes that have taken place in the Irish Republic. It is seen today as being much less dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, with changes to the constitution that reflect this. It has become a more open society; a more modern society; economically, it is doing very well: all of those things have had an impact here in Northern Ireland and amongst unionists. [We], therefore, feel that perhaps we can do business with the Irish Republic in a manner that will be mutually beneficial. If the North/South Ministerial Council and the Implementation Bodies are about co-operation between both parts of this island then I think unionists rest easy\(^{12}\).

The long-term success of changing unionist attitudes to the border depends on a number of factors, not least the absence of political, cultural and violent threat from Irish nationalism and republicanism, and unionist recognition of a rapidly changing Irish state and society. In the broader context of the EU, the 1986 Single European Act signalled the transformation of its borders with the removal of non-tariff barriers\(^{13}\). With EU regional funds benefiting the Irish border region and some unionist councillors supporting dual currency towns along the border and improved cross-border transportation links (Morrison 2004), these broader ‘European’ economic factors have also impacted upon some unionist attitudes to the border. However, other factors in Northern Ireland, not least the strength of ‘internal’ inter-communal borders, have the potential to compromise the role of cross-border co-operation and the development of a transnational Irish border space in helping to ameliorate the conflict.
Despite the territorial compromise at state level which is embodied in the 1998 Belfast Agreement, as well as the subsequent amendments of the Irish constitution, territorial polarization within Northern Ireland has remained steadfast. The 1991 census revealed a sharp East-West demographic divide in Northern Ireland between Ulster Protestant unionists and Irish Catholic nationalists, a divide shown by the 2001 census to have maintained in the intervening years. The 2001 UK General Election resulted in Irish republican Sinn Féin candidates claiming the two remaining unionist seats west of the river Bann\textsuperscript{14}, heightening the river’s significance as a symbolic border. The 2005 local election revealed a quite startling decimation of the unionist vote west of the Bann with nine out of twelve councils returning a decisive nationalist majority\textsuperscript{15}. The upturn in the territorial significance of the ‘Bann border’ may also have helped to intensify the symbolic significance of borders between the Catholic nationalist dominated west and Protestant unionist dominated east territories that exist in towns and cities across Northern Ireland including Armagh, Portadown, Omagh, Enniskillen, Dungannon, Magherafelt, Derry and Belfast.

Borders within Northern Ireland are particularly explicit in the working-class and under-class areas of Belfast. The 2001 Holy Cross Primary School protest was undertaken by Protestant loyalists because they objected to the route taken by pupils and parents to a Catholic primary school in a ‘loyalist area’. A widely cited reason for the action of the loyalist protesters was that the Catholic population of the surrounding area was on the increase while Protestant numbers were dwindling, leaving them insecure territorially. Territorial insecurity may also help to explain the upsurge in racially-motivated attacks in Belfast and elsewhere across Northern Ireland. For example, racist attacks in the loyalist ‘Village’ area of Belfast have been explained in the media in terms of a working-class community that once felt under threat from the IRA, now feels itself squeezed by Southern Irish property speculators, Filipino nurses and the local Chinese community. However, in this specific context, as in the wider Northern Ireland context, there has also been evidence of the infiltration of some loyalist paramilitary groups by British far right elements, which suggests that many of these racist attacks have had an organised dimension (Chrisafis 2004).

Perhaps the most potent markers of internal urban bordering are the ‘peace walls’ in Belfast which were erected to separate Catholic and Protestant working-class communities at the cutting edge of the conflict in the city. The number of peace walls in Belfast multiplied in the decade following the 1994 Irish republican and Ulster loyalist ceasefires\textsuperscript{16}. Some academic commentators have held the 1998 Belfast Agreement directly responsible for this upsurge in urban bordering, regardless of the fact that the Northern Ireland conflict itself has been, first and foremost, a zero-sum territorial one\textsuperscript{17}. In that zero-sum paradigm, attempts at territorial compromise invite a territorial response from those who believe that they are losing. Parades Commission\textsuperscript{18} rulings against some contentious Protestant Orange Order parades through predominantly Catholic areas have precipitated violent reaction on the streets. Another response has been to attempt to work the transnational thrust of the Belfast Agreement and supporting EU Peace programmes in order to help address the dominant narratives of threat and insecurity, as well as the associated narratives of alienation, victimhood, betrayal, loss and defeat.
Creating a transnational border space

In his stimulating and provocative book, *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement* (2005), Arthur Aughey suggested that the 1998 Belfast Agreement was the latest in a line of ‘errors of intelligence’ that ‘repeat themselves by abstracting idealism from earthy circumstance’ (p. 13). However, the EU, through its Peace programmes for Northern Ireland, has endeavoured to address ‘earthy circumstance’ by supporting local grassroots projects engaged in, among other things, North/South community dialogue and understanding. These programmes represented a sustained, sophisticated and significant attempt at inculcating communal reflexivity at the local grassroots level and have provided an important precedent for the development of a strategic approach to ethno-national conflict regulation and amelioration in the widening EU.

Peace I (1994–9) was conceived as a conflict resolution support programme for Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland in response to the 1994 Irish republican and Ulster loyalist paramilitary ceasefires. The strategic objectives of the programme were: to promote the social inclusion of those who are at the margins of social and economic life; and to exploit the opportunities and address the needs arising from the peace process in order to boost economic growth and advance social and economic regeneration. The objectives of Peace II (2000–6), namely, to address the legacy of conflict and take opportunities arising from peace, followed on from the initial programme’s objectives. In essence, Peace II was intended to underpin, at the ‘earthy’ local community level, functioning institutions delivered by the 1998 Belfast Agreement at the political élite level. However, the key institutions have endured a protracted crisis from their inception, and since 2002 have been subjected to a prolonged period of suspension. Stalemate at this élite level has undermined the sustainability of local and regional cross-border partnerships and the building of a holistic strategy for peace and reconciliation because political élites and their institutions are intrinsic to such a strategy. Nevertheless, the cross-border partnerships created and developed by the EU Peace programmes have continued to provide a necessary element in this strategy.

In the context of the Peace programmes, the EU has acted as a transnational ‘third party’ facilitator for the amelioration of ethno-national border conflict. Third party facilitators need to engage local agents, who have grassroots knowledge of ethno-national division, and help develop their expertise in addressing those divisions (Byrne and Keashly 2000, p.111). The social partnership structure for the implementation of the Peace programmes, involving the public, private and voluntary sectors, embodied this approach. These partnerships provided for the application of local knowledge, skill and effort at the level of Intermediary Funding Bodies and local community project organisers. With 15 per cent of both programmes specifically designated for cross-border co-operation, such co-operation was judged to play a significant role in helping to ameliorate this ethno-national conflict at the local grassroots level.

The fundamental focus of cultural and educational projects funded in the cross-border priority of the Peace programmes was on the acceptance of difference and the promotion of diversity rather than on attempting to narrow political and cultural differences. According to Anton Blok (1998), where the cultural differences between groups are relatively small then the potential exists for a more intense
conflagration in the event of an attempt being made to further narrow those cultural differences. In 1993, Ignatieff found cultural difference between Serb and Croat explained to him in terms of the nationality of the cigarettes smoked (1994, pp 1-2). In comparative terms, cultural conflict in Northern Ireland rests on relatively small cultural differences that have been reinforced by decades of violent conflict. ‘Telling the difference’ (Burton 1977) and defending social (including territorial) boundaries have been integral to this conflict. For example, in April 2001, the placing a vase of Easter lilies in great hall of Parliament Buildings at Stormont, Belfast had the seemingly disproportionate effect of forcing an emergency debate and the recall of the Northern Ireland Assembly from the holiday recess. Easter lilies had become a symbol of Irish republican political culture after the Easter Rising of 1916 and the subsequent execution of fifteen republican revolutionaries by the British state. Sinn Féin leaders had wanted to commemorate the Rising with this floral display, keenly aware that it challenged symbolically the territorial and cultural boundaries of Britishness in Northern Ireland (McCall 2005). Jim Wells, the DUP Assembly member who forced the emergency debate proclaimed: ‘For the first time in the history of the United Kingdom a government building will be used to display symbols which honour IRA terrorists’ (quoted in Sharrock 2001).

By way of contrast, after the 1998 Agreement and the diminished political and violent threats from Irish nationalism and republicanism, the Irish border appeared to offer a less contentious transnational space in which unionist and nationalist culture differences could be explored. Research on the cross-border priority of the Peace II programme found that Ulster Protestant unionist groups involved tended to embrace the cross-border dimension with many seeing it as providing a useful ‘detour’ on the way to better cross-community relations in the North because it entailed engagement with Southern Irish groups perceived to be nationalist but at one step removed from the post-1969 conflict (McCall and O'Dowd 2005). It is possible to interpret cross-border co-operation as a ‘scenic route’ for such unionist groups since it may have provided a convenient means of avoiding or postponing cross-community interaction with the northern nationalist ‘Other’ experienced at the coalface of the conflict. More damningly, cross-border co-operation may actively promote the intensification of malign social practices across the border, especially those of racism and sectarianism. Hann found that the Carpathian Euroregion across the Polish-Ukrainian border actually exacerbated anti-Ukrainian prejudices (cited in O'Dowd 2001). Similarly, Hayward (2005) encountered perceptions of an increase in sectarianism in Donegal that was attributed to Derry youths crossing a more open Irish border. However, there is also evidence to suggest that cross-border co-operation can develop a non-contentious transnational border space for small group encounters and interaction which helps to address the political culture of threat and insecurity, downgrade communal antagonism towards ‘the Significant Other’ and lead to the articulation of cultural difference in a more constructive way (see Hayward 2004, p. 22; McCall and O'Dowd 2005; Pollack 2005). Such an articulation is embedded in an approach which challenges the reified and homogeneous conceptions of culture associated with nationalist and unionist communities, conceptions forged in a long history of political and violent conflict. It embraces Avruch’s maxim that ‘culture is to some extent always situational, flexible and responsive to the exigencies of the worlds that individuals confront’ (1998, p. 20).
Conclusion

If state borders remain synonymous with the exercise of social and political power, and consequently continue to represent the physical parameters of possession, protection and exclusion, then the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation intrinsic to the processes of contemporary globalisation and Europeanisation feed narratives and perceptions of threat and insecurity because they undermine territorial borders as physical parameters. If political bargains brokered by élites in remote centres like Brussels, Dublin and London have the capacity to reinforce feelings of threat, insecurity and alienation in local communities and even ‘bring out the worst in a country’, then border towns and regions offer connective sites for the EU to facilitate practical grassroots cross-border co-operation that can help address these issues. While this case may be made in the general context of the widening system of EU governance, it has even more resonance in the particular context of European ethno-national border conflict.

The EU has paid increasing attention to developing strategies for tackling real and potential ethno-national conflict. As well as engaging in political élite level diplomatic initiatives in order to off-set or ameliorate such conflict, the EU has also developed a sustained and sophisticated strategy aimed at local communities through its Peace programmes for Ireland. Cross-border co-operation and the inclusion of intermediary agents and local grassroots groups in cross-border partnerships have been integral elements in the strategy. Such co-operation enables these groups to address perceptions of threat emanating from ‘the other side’ and help transform the border from being a primary site of conflict to an important transnational space for its amelioration.

The Irish border as a barrier was the major ideological and practical focus for ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland. However, the transformation of the border has the potential to help further diffuse that conflict through the creation of a transnational border space in which ethno-national groups can address narratives of threat, insecurity, victimhood, loss, betrayal and defeat, and begin to explore and accommodate their differences in the absence of threat. While there is the possibility of some cross-border activity actually fuelling the malign social practices of racism and sectarianism, there is also evidence to suggest that a transnational border space can help to diffuse ethno-national tensions and engender a climate of respect for diversity and the accommodation of difference. Such a pursuit is one that Adenauer, Schuman and Monnet would recognize as being embedded in the EU’s founding principle of peace-building.

In the widening EU of the twenty-first century, the onus for sustaining the development of such transnational border spaces falls increasingly on member state and regional governments as EU structural funds and community initiatives become increasingly stretched. Consequently, pressure is being applied on member state governments to ‘mainstream’ the cross-border work of social partners and support the transnational endeavors of meso-level transnational bodies like the SEUPB, as well as the voluntary and community groups that are helping to develop transnational border space. Whether they succumb to such transnational pressure will doubtless be the subject of future research.
Notes

1. Consequently, the Estonian government came under particular pressure by the EU to provide equal citizenship for Estonia’s ethnic Russian-speaking minority (Kronenberger and Wouters 2004, p. xix). This experience has been maturing into strategies for ameliorating ethno-national conflict and inter-communal divisions in the widening EU. One such strategy came in the form of the Conference/Pact on stability in Europe, which was an exercise in ‘preventative diplomacy’ undertaken by the EU aimed at Central and Eastern European accession states. The conference in May 1994 and subsequent regional roundtables focused on borders, minorities and economic co-operation. A final conference in May 1995 delivered a Stability Pact detailing over one hundred agreements (Wouters and Naert 2004, pp. 40-41).

2. An EU official in DG Regio with responsibility for the EU Peace II programme has commented that the EU is well placed to engage in such an approach because it does not place a higher priority on ‘quick results’ (during the Ireland/Northern Ireland Roundtable organised by the EUBorderConf project in Brussels on the 24th of November 2005).

3. The European economic and political space also extends beyond the EU, not least because its economic and political principles are adhered to by other West European states and have been adopted by Central and Eastern European states that aspire to EU membership (Axtmann 2003, p. 123).

4. Moreover, some evidence suggests that territorial and cultural borders between indigenous ethnic-national communities and migrants are being reconstituted within European states (O’Dowd 2003).

5. In the United Kingdom (UK), much of this fear is stoked by alarmist headlines in the tabloid media.

6. In an ICM opinion poll published in the Guardian newspaper on 21 August 2001, the question posed to a sample of British people in Britain was: ‘Do you think Northern Ireland should be part of the UK?’ 26 per cent responded that it should remain part of the UK, 41 per cent that it should be joined with the Republic of Ireland, and 33 per cent responded ‘don’t know’. In an article in the same newspaper the following day the leading unionist politician Jeffery Donaldson argued that such findings were not cause for unionist concern because, ‘the constitutional and political reality [is that] under the principle of consent [unionists’] future will be determined by the people of Northern Ireland themselves’ (Guardian, 22 August 2001).

7. In 2005, the Irish nationalist community represented approximately 42 per cent of the electorate of Northern Ireland and the Ulster unionist community accounted for approximately 50 per cent.


10. In remarks to the 2002 annual conference of the Young Democrats, the DUP’s youth wing (*Irish Times*, 18 February, 2002).

11. From the new Article 3.1, Constitution of Ireland, 1998.


13. Including the different standards or regulations regarding goods and services between states, and the national preferences of state-related purchasing agencies (Pinder 2001, p. 65).

14. The Bann follows a course that runs down through the middle of Northern Ireland from north to south.

15. In 2005, councils west of the Bann with a nationalist majority included Limivaday, Derry, Strabane, Fermanagh, Omagh, Cookstown, Dungannon, Newry and Mourne, and Down. Councils with a unionist majority included Banbridge and Craigavon. Armagh City and District Council had 11 unionist and 11 nationalist councillors.

16. There were 15 ‘peace walls’ in Belfast prior to the 1994 paramilitary ceasefires; by 2003 their number had increased to 37 (Wilson 2003).

17. Wilson & Wilford maintained that ‘despite and even because of the Belfast agreement, sectarian divisions in the region are as wide as ever’ (emphasis in original) ([www.devolution.ac.uk/Wilson&_Wilford_Paper](http://www.devolution.ac.uk/Wilson&_Wilford_Paper)).

18. Established by the 1998 Agreement to adjudicate on contentious political and sectarian parades.

19. Peace I (1994-9) had funds of €503m. Peace II (2000-6) was worth approximately €707m ([www.seupb.org](http://www.seupb.org)).

20. Peace II had five priority areas including:

   - Economic Renewal;
   - Social Integration, Inclusion and Reconciliation;
   - Locally Based Regeneration and Development Strategies;
   - Outward and Forward Looking Region;
   - Cross-border Co-operation

The measures of the Cross-border Co-operation priority include:

   - Increasing Cross-border Economic Development Opportunities (ERDF);
   - Improving Cross-border Public Sector Co-operation (ERDF);
   - Developing Cross-border Reconciliation and Cultural Understanding (ERDF);
Promoting Joint Approaches to Social, Education, Training and Human Resource Development (ESF);

- Cross-border School and Youth Co-operation (ERDF);
- Rural Development Co-operation (EAGGF);
- Cross-border Fishing and Aquacultural Co-operation (FIFG) (http://www.seupbsuccessfulprojects.org/).

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