

PROGRESS OF THE BARROSO ACTION PLAN

BACKGROUND

The European Commission adopted a report from its Northern Ireland Task Force (NITF) in April 2008 that identified key EU policy initiatives and programmes which could be used across government in support of the region's economy. The Committee for Enterprise Trade and Investment requested a briefing note on current progress with the Barroso Action Plan against the targets set, along with details of who the Committee should engage with in Europe in relation to it.

SUMMARY

The Barroso Task Force Report came to Northern Ireland (NI) with a unique, one-off offer that has been made nowhere else and which will never be duplicated.¹ The report covered every area of co-operation between the EU and NI; setting out 'in detail the extent to which current public policy maps out on to European Public policy'² and how NI can benefit more fully from European policy and financial additionality. It also placed EC officials at the disposal of the NI authorities to help guide the process in its immediate aftermath.

The Report was completed in 2008 and the NI Executive published a response in March 2009 which integrated the task force's recommendations into the pre-existing strategy.

In terms of progress, Maurice Maxwell recently reported to the Committee for OFMdfM that the initiative has not been as effective and successful as it could have been.' Mr Maxwell points out that the NI response has been predominantly bureaucratic in nature when the Commission's intention had been to clearly open its doors to the region and emphasis the business opportunities available within and through Europe.

'I do not think that Barroso came here to talk about bureaucracy. He came here to speak to the Northern Irish society, small and large businesses, trade unions, civil society groups and NGOs. He said that

¹ Maurice Maxwell – European Commission Office Belfast, The Official Report (Hansard) of Evidence on European Issues to the COFMdfM – 24th February 2010 , p.4

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2009/OFMDFM/100224_EuropeanIssues.pdf

² European Economic and Social Committee – M Smyth, Written Submission to the COFMdfM 'Report on its Inquiry into Consideration of European Issues.' Session 2009/2010, p.390.

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/2007mandate/reports/2009/Report_33_09_10R.htm

*Europe is open for business and that there are opportunities everywhere to identify the initiatives and go for them.*³

With respect to whom the Committee should engage on Barroso, there has been a new Commission appointed in 2010, therefore members of the original Task Force may have been allocated new duties. Identifying these particular individuals is not imperative however as the core of the task force's work is completed. What remains is for officials to be identified who now occupy positions of influence in the new Commission. Some suggestions to that end are in the final section of this briefing note.

INTRODUCTION

The Barroso Task Force, which was led by Commissioner Danuta Hübner, was put in place following President José Manuel Barroso's visit to Belfast on 1st May 2007. Its mandate was to look at how to improve Northern Ireland's access to, and participation in, EU policies and programmes and 'to help finalise programming of EU funds so that Northern Ireland can benefit from experience across the European Union in creating growth, innovation and opportunity.'⁴ The core members of the NITF represented the services of the European Commission with a role to play in Northern Ireland's economic modernisation (agriculture, education and culture, employment, regional policy, enterprise and industry, environment, maritime affairs and fisheries, research and development, transport and energy), together with the European Investment Bank.

On 7th April 2008, the European Commission adopted a report from the Task Force that identified key EU policy initiatives and programmes which could be mobilised in support of the region's economy. The report took stock of Northern Ireland's economic development and identified routes for NI to take further advantage of its EU membership and boost its modernisation. The work of the Task Force was to facilitate a change in relationship between NI and the European Union. This change sought to facilitate NI's engagement with the EU, and assist the region in diversifying the range of programmes and initiatives it was involved in, thus allowing it to compete for additional resources and added value of membership.

Identifying alternative funding streams within which NI can potentially compete is a particularly significant area for continued economic development. As NI has progressed from being a designated EU Convergence region to having Competitiveness and Employment region status, the region's allocation of mainstream EU Structural Funds has declined. Use of alternative sources of funding through proactive bidding processes, in competition with other regions, will lessen the negative impact of lowered Structural Funds.

On 26th March, the Executive agreed its response to the NITF Report and on 31st March, in Brussels, President Barroso was presented with a copy of the Executive's '*Priorities for European Engagement:*' ('the Response') which included the 2008/09

³ Maurice Maxwell –The Official Report (Hansard) of Evidence on European Issues to the COFMdFM – 24th February 2010, p.16

⁴ Jose Manuel Barroso, 'Remarks to Parliament Buildings', Belfast – May 1 2007.
http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/about_us/office_in_northern_ireland/press_releases/nirelandfinal1may2007.pdf

Action Plan.⁵ On 21st April 2009, the deputy First Minister made a Ministerial Statement⁶ to the Assembly on the Executive's Action Plan response to the NITF report. An End of Year Report on progress against key targets and activities was released by Ministers on 21st September 2009.⁷

The Response is structured under the following five key themes:

- Promoting Northern Ireland's interests within the European Union;
- Raising Northern Ireland's positive profile throughout Europe;
- Raising awareness and encouraging participation in European;
- Accessing EU funding; and
- Sharing our experience of building peace and conflict resolution in a divided society with Europe and beyond.

SUMMARY OF THE NI TASK FORCE CONCLUSIONS

NI has performed relatively well within the EU, but there are obstacles, such as high public sector dependency, levels of economic inactivity and the need to develop infrastructure networks, which need to be addressed in order to support a strong economy.

Under the current programme period NI has a credible track record in participating within EU policies which are central to the Lisbon Strategy, governing the overall strategic direction of the EU.

NI has strengths to offer the EU itself. NI is unique within the EU in this type of experience and this asset should be fully exploited. Its expertise in conflict resolution constitutes an asset for both the EU and beyond.

The Task Force further offered to assist the NI Executive to:

- Decide the best allocation of the available financial envelope for (EUR 1.1 billion) for 2007-13. This amounts to assistance in choosing the areas to increase and sustain growth, promote employment and social inclusion and preserve the environment;
- Participate more thoroughly in EU policy affairs, so that NI will be able to present and defend its interests in the EU context;
- Encourage openness and networking opportunities with other regions, mainly in the fields of technology and innovation;
- Share its experience of conflict resolution and reconciliation programmes with European and international counterparts;
- Design and elaborate a new image of a young and dynamic knowledge-based economy, based upon technological excellence and innovation – an image which dispels the previous negative myth of NI being a risky place to invest.

⁵ Northern Ireland Executive (2008) Priorities for European Engagement: Action Plan 2008/09
http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/priorities_for_european_engagement- action_plan_2008-2009_3mb_2.pdf

⁶ Ministerial Statement - Executive's Action Plan in response to the Barroso Task Force Report.
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2008/090421.htm#2>

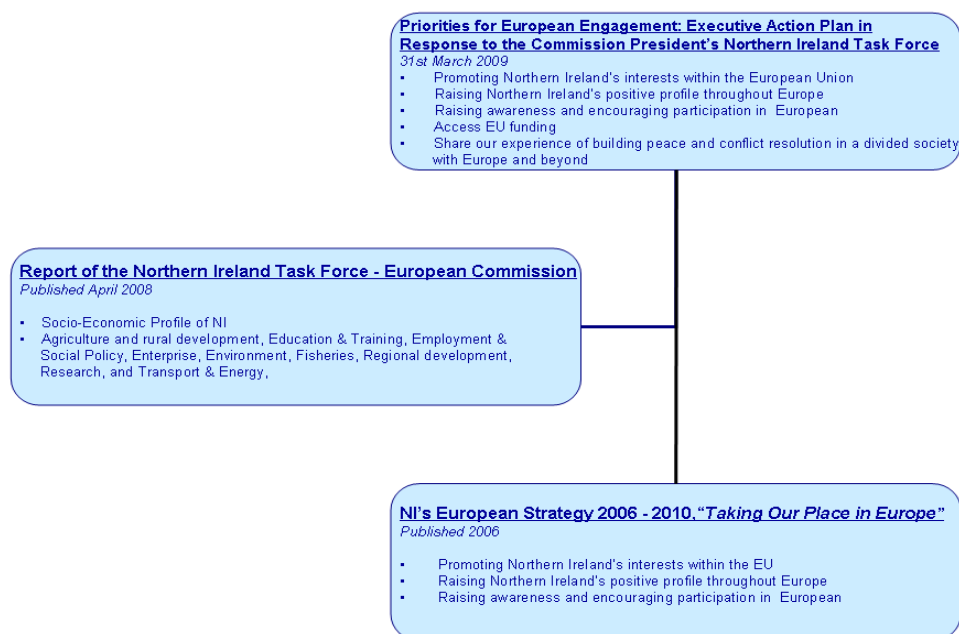
⁷ Northern Ireland Executive (2009) Priorities for European Engagement: End of Year Report 2008/09
http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/barroso_task_force_-_end_of_year_report_2008_09_-_final_publication-3.pdf

This is recognition of the potential for peace and prosperity to be mutually supportive.

WHAT HAS THE ACTION PLAN ADDED?

1. The Response directly relates to, and retains the format of, the Executive's earlier European Strategy 2006 - 2010, "*Taking Our Place in Europe*" ("the first Strategy"), published in 2006. The first Strategy was published under Direct Rule and amounted to a high level overview, establishing broad and overarching strategic aims. The strategy was 'designed to encourage regional engagement in Europe at regional and local government levels and in civil society.'⁸ As it was undertaken under Direct Rule, there was neither accompanying Action Plan nor assessments of baselines.
2. Conversely, the Task Force Report is more detailed, wide-ranging and articulates a more precise set of recommendations. It scrutinises the specific sectors in which NI's public policy interacts with the policy areas of the EU. In so doing, it identifies means through which NI Departments could maximise the advantages of the EU as an inherent part of their policy area rather than merely an add-on.
3. The first Strategy had 3 high level key objectives which increased to 5 "themes" in the Response. The two new areas are heavily based upon the findings of the Task Force; that is Accessing Funding and Sharing Northern Ireland's experience of Peace Building.

Figure1: The Various strategies and action plans re. Europe



⁸ Hansard Official Report, Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Executive's Response to Barroso Task Force Report. 11th February 2009.

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/centre/2007mandate/moe/090211_barroso.htm

The audit of NI involvement in Europe undertaken in the Task Force Report now represents the baseline upon which future engagement will be judged. The Executive's Response therefore is, in effect, 'an implementation plan'⁹ for the First Strategy. It factors in the Commission's stock take and provides momentum for integration of European opportunities across different policy areas. The timelines for the achievement of some objectives are indicative of the extent to which the Response is a continuation of some pre-existing policies.¹⁰ However, the Task Force Report may be considered primarily as providing fresh impetus for individual Departments to consider the European dimensions to their policy area and presenting benchmarks against which the success of future mobilisation within Europe can be measured.

PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS SET WITHIN THE 'PRIORITIES FOR EUROPEAN ENGAGEMENT'

DETI has seven action points for which it has the responsibility of Lead Department within the Priorities for European Engagement. These actions primarily concern the interaction of NI in EU Funding Programmes and seek to create benchmarks for the establishment of collaborative networks within Europe alongside deeper connections within, and understanding of, European institutions and the informal networks therein. The action point regarding INNOVA (a European level innovation platform) is a good example of how cross-sectoral and inter-regional collaboration can be increased through a combination of practical information services and 'matchmaking services in support of entrepreneurial innovation.'¹¹ While the Task Force report identified that there are clusters well established in NI, it also argued that only a few have set up a formal structure which would permit them to connect across borders and with existing networks in Europe.

Appendix 1 identifies all 10 of DETI's action points within the action plan and the most updated progress as published in End of Year Report 08-09, published September 2009.

WHO TO CONTACT TO ENGAGE WITH THE ACTION PLAN AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The Barroso Action Plan was the first time there had been a specific taskforce for a single region in the EU. It is an extensive appraisal of NI's approaches to accessing European markets and funding. The NITF who compiled the report was a special taskforce in the sense that experienced officials were identified from various departments and encouraged to participate in the creation of the document by Danuta Hübner, then Commissioner for Regional Policy.

However, the NITF was not intended as a permanent group. Since the report has been completed the staff originally involved have moved departments or changed remits. Therefore, it is questionable as to whether the individuals who formed the original Task Force will be available for the Committee to engage with; rather the onus should now be on establishing those in the Commission who hold influence

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Such as the Objective regarding the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme for the Department of Agriculture and Regional Development. The scheme ended on the 31st December 2008, which was prior to the publication of the Response.

¹¹ INNOVA Europe <http://www.europe-innova.org/web/guest/about>

over the areas highlighted in the report on a formal level, and also the informal routes of influence.

The first contact could be Ms Hübner's successor, Mr Johannes Hahn of Austria. Mr Hahn took up his position as Commissioner for Regional Policy on the 9th February 2010 and recently expressed an intention to divert more regional funds into innovation, research and education at this recent European Parliament hearing.¹²

Another useful contact might be the Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Antonio Tajani. He is charged with ensuring that all the EU's business sectors will come out of the current economic crisis stronger and more competitive than before, and will be able subsequently, to support sustainable growth in a strong social market economy.¹³

Further, more institutional engagement could be done with the Director Generals of both Enterprise and Regional Directorates. The DG for Enterprise, for example, has been involved in the DETI actions in hosting exchanges, and an eventual secondment, for Invest NI staff in Brussels. It might be useful to organise a meeting to support the realisation of this aim.

The National Assembly for Wales European and External Affairs Committee identifies The Conference of European Regional Legislatures (CALRE), the Committee of the Regions (COR) and Conference of European Regions with Legislative Power (REGLEG) as EU networks which are a key channel for presenting agreed positions. These committees could be useful for the Committee to engage with, particularly as each is interested in lobbying for regional interests in their own right, and potentially as separate from those of Member States.

Further potential contacts referenced and/or related to the '*Priorities for European Engagement*' include:

- **The European Region Research & Innovation Network (ERRIN)** has invited expressions of interest from regions wishing to join or lead working groups on sectoral themes of relevance to NI.
- **The European Regional Knowledge Based Innovation Network (ERIK).** 52 regions participate through this grouping with the aim of:

Benchmarking and disseminating good practices of innovation and knowledge-based policies.;

Supporting inter-regional networking on technological innovation related topics;

Co-operating with European regional networks with similar objectives to create synergies and make networking activities more efficient and better targeted.

¹² 'Hahn strikes right note in EU regional policy hearing' 15/01/2010.

<http://www.euractiv.com/de/node/223280>

¹³ Tajani, A., Mandate. http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/tajani/about/mandate/index_en.htm

- INVEST NI Officer within the NI Executive Office in Brussels
- International links with Finland, Upper Austria and Romania are mentioned within the '*Priorities for European Engagement*' in terms of building and enhancing collaborative links. It could be useful to develop these links further whilst in Brussels through Member States or Regional Offices.

Appendix A: DETI Action points from Priorities for European Engagement: End of Year Report 2008/09 – Published September 2009

Theme 1:	Access European Funding		
Objective 2.1	To maximise benefits from mainstream EU Funding Programmes through innovative approaches and participation in best practices initiatives		
Policy Area	Action	Key Stages/Milestones	Update Positions as of 31 December 2008
Framework Programme 7	Enhance the support for the development of high quality proposals for NI projects to be funded under Framework Programme 7 (FP7).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest NI have decided to appoint a Representative in Brussels in the Office of the NI Executive to liaise with the Commission on this issue. Job description and selection process under preparation. • Invest NI to work with Enterprise Ireland to jointly promote uptake and examine the potential for feasibility grants to develop proposals. • Invest NI to develop a strategic roadmap of where Northern Ireland is able to take a leadership position in its interface with FP7 based on the 	<p>A job description has been prepared and the selection process is ready to be launched. The representative will take up position in Brussels in April 2009.</p> <p>More than 60 researchers and policymakers from both sides of the border took part in a joint Invest NI/Enterprise Ireland workshop in Belfast on 20 November 2008 to focus on increasing the number of North-South collaborative FP projects. Invest NI clients can now apply for feasibility grants for planning collaborative R&D projects under FP7 from the new Grant for R&D Programme. Invest NI has commissioned an economic appraisal of future FP delivery options and the chosen option will address all FP opportunities for NI Research and Development (R&D) activity.</p> <p>DETI and Invest NI agreed a framework in December 2008 for taking forward NI's interface with</p>

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		<p>findings of MATRIX, the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DETI and Invest NI to identify a limited number of EU networks of particular relevance to NI (if MATRIX recommendations) and develop contacts. • DETI and Invest NI to invite Commission Task Force counterparts to meet regional business and research partners in Belfast. 	<p>FP7 on a sectoral basis and in coherence with the MATRIX findings. The Framework will be developed by Invest NI.</p> <p>Related to the MATRIX findings, DETI and Invest NI have identified ERIK (European Regional Knowledge-based Innovation Network) and ERRIN (European Region Research and Innovation Network) as two of the most relevant networks for NI to join.</p> <p>The ERRIN network has invited expressions of interest from regions wishing to lead or join working groups on sectoral themes of relevance to NI and this will be explored with the network</p> <p>DETI and Invest NI met with Commission Task Force counterparts in Brussels in October 2008 and issued an invitation to come to NI. The Commission has accepted and a visit will be arranged in Spring 2009.</p>
<p>Regions of Knowledge</p>	<p>Promote the development of regional research-driven clusters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DETI and Invest NI to review the thematic focus of existing clusters and their levels of participation. 	<p>Invest NI is working with DETI to identify potential clusters in line with the strategic roadmap for engagement with FP7 and the findings of the MATRIX panel.</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify suitable existing clusters for possible NI interaction. • Identify potential participants for future calls to the programme as they may occur. Further discussion between DETI and Invest NI will be required. 	<p>DETI and Invest NI are assessing the most recent calls for participation published in January/February 2009.</p> <p>Once relevant calls for participation have been identified, potential participants will be informed.</p>
Objective 2.2	To maximise benefits from mainstream EU Funding Programmes through innovative approaches and participation in best practices initiatives		
Structural Funds Programmes 2007-13	Explore the possible benefits to NI of utilising the Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises (JEREMIE) Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality projects selected and implemented in line with the legislation, the programmes, the budgets and expenditure targets. 	<p>Implementation of the programmes is progressing with all regulatory deadlines met and first round of projects approved for all programmes.</p> <p>Formal terms of reference for review of 2007-13 Competitiveness Programmes in light of economic downturn agreed to ensure that 2009 and 2010 expenditure targets are met and that Programmes best meet current needs. Any proposed changes to be agreed by Executive by end March 2009, presented to Monitoring Committee April 2009, agreed by Commission and reflected in June Monitoring proposals.</p>

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Theme 3:	Raise our positive profile throughout Europe.		
Objective 3.1	To project a dynamic forward-looking approach as a peaceful region ‘Open for Business’, participating actively in strategic alliances with other regions, sub-regions and cities.		
Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)	Explore Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KIC) and their networking potential to boost jobs and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI to seek clarification on the thematic focus of the KICs and the different levels of participation within them. Promote the initiative and secure at least one participant 	<p>Preliminary discussions have been held with relevant stakeholders to identify which Knowledge and Innovation Centres are most relevant to NI.</p> <p>The first KIC’s are due to be selected in Spring 2009 and it is likely that they will focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable Energy; Climate Change; and Future information Society
Objective 3.2	To equip our people to operate effectively in Europe and demonstrate engagement through the relationships we build.		
Helsinki Innovation	Build on the linkages with Finland, and Tekes in particular, developed through European Research Area – Networks (ERA-NETS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest NI officials to visit Helsinki in September 2008 to further investigate potential linkages. 	<p>Visit completed – September 2008.</p> <p>Invest NI and DETI reviewed Finish innovation policies. Invest NI plan to roll out Young Innovative Enterprise (YIE) programme within new R&D guidelines, in line with Finland. Programme guidelines are currently being drafted.</p> <p>There are no specific outcomes as yet, but contact will continue with the Finns.</p>
Staff Exchanges	Discuss with DG Enterprise an exchange process for Invest NI staff for short term and long term secondments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provisional list of Invest NI candidates to participate in short term exchange has been drawn up. 	Visits were carried out to DG Enterprise & Industry and DG Research in Brussels during

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			<p>October to discuss short term secondments. Formal requests will be made to each DG for consideration.</p> <p>“Enterprise Experience” is a unique programme to give civil servants working in the European Commission’s Directorate General for Enterprise & Industry practical and hands-on experience of life in a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME).</p> <p>An intern from DG Enterprise will come to Invest NI for 1 week in early 2009 (date yet to be agreed). Invest NI is continuing contact with DG Enterprise to arrange future placements of DG Enterprise Staff with businesses in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Invest NI hosted a visit of 17 Romanian delegates from various ministries on 13 October to disseminate Invest NI’s experiences of EU funding mechanisms and opportunities. Invest NI have arranged for 2 Romanians to visit Invest NI on a one week internship starting 2 February 2009. Another two will visit on 16 February 2009.</p>
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<p>INNOVA (EU Innovation)</p>	<p>Establish a Collaborative Networks Programme to support collaboration between private sector, academia, research bodies & public sector by use of network facilitator and relevant workshops.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest NI support under this programme offered to 20 projects. • Run 20 workshops for networks participating in the CNP projects once facilitators are appointed. • Operate 6 training support events for collaborative networks to explain to participants how to work together is required. • Building connections within Europe to give groups of NI companies access to leading clusters in Europe. Target of 3 regional linkages. • 8 Cluster study tours. 	<p>11 projects supported to 31 December 2008.</p> <p>15 workshops supported to 31 December 2008.</p> <p>1 event supported – Digital Media network.</p> <p>1 linkage being developed in the Plastics sector with Upper Austria.</p> <p>1 Study visit in planning phase – Plastics sector to Upper Austria</p>
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APRIL 2010