

RETHINKING THE IMPACTS OF EXTERNAL ECONOMIC FUNDING  
IN TRANSFORMING PARAMILITARISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
AND THE IRISH BORDER COUNTIES

*Benjamin Maiangwa, Alexandra Kutznestova, Brett M. Mallon,  
and Sean Byrne*

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This article is based on extensive interviews conducted by one of the paper's authors in the summer of 2010. We aim to address the question of what to do with lingering paramilitarism following a peace agreement. To this end, we explored the role of economic funding of the International Fund for Ireland and the European Union Peace and Reconciliation funding (Peace III) in engaging with and transforming the influence of paramilitary leaders/members towards sustainable peace. Our analysis was focused on three major themes that emerged from the data, including decline in local support for paramilitaries and fears of renewed violence, commitment to community peace leadership, and transition from single identity to cross-community activities. We found that despite the socioeconomic development and cross-community contact projects initiated by the IFI and EU Peace III Fund, some communities remain deeply segregated in post-peace accord Northern Ireland. However, there are promising prospects for cultivating a culture of peace due to the agency of local peacebuilding actors and senior paramilitary leaders, as well as the goodwill of some former combatants to break through their own political and cultural barriers.

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