

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Consultation Response from Traditional Unionist Voice

TUV welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We will go through the document and highlight areas of particular interest or concern to our party and supporters.

TUV finds it ironic in the extreme that this document should have a forward written jointly by the co-First Ministers. Had it not been for the brutal campaign of violence in which the deputy First Minister played a key role we would not have to “build a peaceful, ... future” (page 2).

Similarly, TUV finds objectionable the idea that responsibility for implementing the CSI programme will could lie with a Ministerial Panel chaired by OFMDFM Ministers (10.6). We believe that Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly’s notorious involvement in violence makes them supremely unfitted for such a role.

We find it ironic that the CSI should state that “Now, as in the past, some young people have made flawed judgments about their futures and have taken, or been led down, paths that they might not have taken had they grown up in a society free from conflict. Often, these flawed judgments can result in engagement in civil disturbances, antisocial behavior or interface violence. We want to help prevent our young people at risk from becoming disaffected and empower them to engage in positive activities and programmes that will have beneficial impacts and outcomes for them” (4.2) when one of the authors to the forward led many young people down the road of terrorism and continues to argue that he was justified in so doing.

TUV objects strongly to the commitment within the CSI programme to publish a sexual orientation strategy (1.9).

TUV is astonished that there is not one word of recognition of the contribution which nurturing the traditional family unit can make to a cohesive society within the CSI programme while at the same time there is a commitment to publish a sexual orientation strategy (1.9).

It is patently obvious that there is already a more than enough legislation to protect and promote this interest group. There is no statutory justification or requirement for the proposed strategy. It is an obvious sop to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) lobby demanded by Sinn Fein/IRA and meekly accepted by the DUP – in spite of the latter’s past stance on such issues.

TUV sees potential dangers in the loose and fluffy language which characterises much of this document. While on the face of it no one could take issue with the statements like “it is recognised that a cohesive society is one in which everyone

can live, work and socialise together free from intimidation and prejudice in the context of the fairness, equality, rights, respect and responsibility” (1.7) TUV believes there could be dangers in how these words are twisted by interest groups. For example, the Belfast Agreement stated that everyone has “the right to live free from sectarian harassment” - a phrase which is almost repeated word for word in this consultation document (5.2). TUV wholeheartedly agrees with this laudable objective. However, the phrase has been twisted by sectarian “residents’ groups” and Republicans in order to justify their efforts to ethically cleanse areas of any form of cultural expression which is not Irish and Republican.

It is obvious that parading – a key feature of the public expression of Unionist and Protestant culture in Northern Ireland – featured in the minds of those who drew up this document because the creation of a “new and improved framework for the management and regulation of public assemblies including parades and protests” is listed as a “key goal” of the CIS (2.3).

TUV strongly believes that respect for the Unionist/Protestant marching tradition is a key indicator of whether or not this country is genuinely moving forward. Time and again Unionists hear grand words from Republicans about how we need to see toleration and accommodation while at the same time they openly oppose expressions of Protestant and Unionist culture.

TUV believes that one of the signs of “a greater sharing and understanding of the diversity within our community and respect for cultural manifestations where they are compatible with human rights norms” (5.3) would be an acceptance of the right to demonstrate ones culture on the Queen’s Highway without having to be escorted by the police and running the gauntlet of stone throwers and petrol bombers.

It is meaningless to quote Life and Times Survey figures saying that 95% of both Protestants and Roman Catholics respect the other’s culture and that “we want to build on these positive findings to ensure that this is translated on the ground” (5.5). Very few people will admit to not having respect for others in a survey. The reality on the ground, however, reveals the true state of affairs where Protestant and Unionist culture is opposed in many places every year, often with violence.

We note with interest that the CIS refers to the need to “create a new and improved framework for the management and regulation of public assemblies” (2.3), that 5.13 refers specifically to the consultation paper outlining proposals on Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests and that 5.15 states:

“We fully recognise that support from all sections of the community has the potential to create a new and improved framework for the regulation of public assemblies and our approach will be based on the principles laid out in the Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, which are:

- Respect for the rights of those who parade and respect for the rights of those

who live in areas through which parades will pass;

- The right of everyone to be free from sectarian harassment;
- The right of citizens to be free from all forms of harassment; and
- Recognition that at times there are competing rights.”

TUV welcomes the fact that

- (a) Following a public outcry the Draft Public Assemblies Bill’s outrageous attacks on freedom of peaceful protest and religious freedom were scraped and
- (b) The Orange Order has refused to bow to intense political pressure to accept a system which would have in effect resulted in mandatory dialogue between self-styled residents groups and marchers before any parade could take place.

TUV comprehensively outlines its own vision of the way forward in relation to parades in our response to the consultation on the Draft Public Assemblies Bill which is online here <http://www.tuv.org.uk/tuv/documents/>.

TUV welcomes the fact that the CIS recognizes the continuation of arson attacks on Orange Halls (5.9). Events in Orange Halls form the backbone of the social calendar for many in Northern Ireland.

TUV notes with interest the comments on flags, emblems and memorials within the report.

3.43 states that “Displays of flags and emblems, graffiti or murals, parades or public assemblies or festivals should be held in an environment which respects individual and community rights.”

TUV believes that the democratically expressed will of the people of Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK should be respected and that flags and emblems reflecting this, including those displayed in District Councils (3.43) should be retained.

TUV strongly objects to the symbols of Britishness being stripped from our public buildings as has been the case in some areas of late.

TUV welcomes the desired goal to “adopt a zero tolerance approach to all incidences of, and reasons for, attacks motivated by sectarian, religious, racist or hate prejudice, including those on symbolic premises, cultural premises and monuments” (2.3). We would, however, also like to see a firm commitment to remove the proliferation of illegal and divisive monuments to terrorists in Northern Ireland.

TUV believes that far from helping to “contribute to the Executive's goal of a shared and better future for all citizens living here” the proposed Regional or

Minority Languages Strategy (5.16 and 5.17) has the potential to foster division in Northern Ireland.

This is part of the outworking of the atrocious Hillsborough Agreement. TUV opposes this suggestion because it will see the rampant promotion of Irish in our Province with, no doubt, a few crumbs for the Ulster-Scots sector in order to spare the blushes of those Unionists involved in the process.

The promotion of the Irish language has always been a feature of Nationalism going right back to the 19th century not because of any genuine interest in linguistics or the literature of the language but rather to simply stress Irishness in opposition to links with Great Britain. As one Republican memorably put it, every word spoken in Irish is “an other bullet in the freedom struggle”.

TUV is unashamedly pro-British and wants to see our links with the rest of the UK strengthened so we make no apology for opposing the introduction of a Regional or Minority Languages Strategy. Irish is, sadly for those genuinely interested in it, as much more a cultural weapon – frequently used to mark territory - than a language in Northern Ireland.

TUV welcomes the recognition that “cultural tourism can have a positive impact on the wider community and specifically can make an important contribution to the economy“ (5.27). We look to the Executive promoting one of the largest cultural festivals in Europe – 12th July Orange parades – more aggressively and marketing Ulster’s historic links with the United States and Scotland to promote tourism.

TUV notes the references in the document to the encouragement of north/south and east/west links throughout the CSI. We look forward to a redressing of the imbalance which has seen north/south links fostered with no regard to cost while east/west links have been neglected in recent years.