COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1968/2006

of 21 December 2006

concerning Community financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007 to 2010)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 308 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament,

Whereas:

(1) The International Fund for Ireland (hereinafter "the Fund") was established in 1986 by the Agreement of 18 September 1986 between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning the International Fund for Ireland (hereinafter "the Agreement") in order to promote economic and social advance, and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland, in implementation of one of the objectives specified by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 15 November 1985.

(2) The Community, recognising that the objectives of the Fund are a reflection of those pursued by itself, has provided financial contributions to the Fund from 1989. For the period 2005 to 2006 EUR 15 million was committed from the Community budget for each of the years 2005 and 2006 in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 177/2005 of 24 January 2005 on Community financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland[1]. That Regulation will expire on 31 December 2006.

[1] OJ L 30, 3.2.2005, p. 1.

(3) The assessments carried out in accordance with Article 5 of Regulation (EC) No 177/2005 have confirmed the need for further support for activities of the Fund, while continuing reinforcing synergy of objectives and coordination with Structural Funds interventions, in particular with the Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (hereinafter "the PEACE programme") set up in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds[1].

(4) The peace process in Northern Ireland requires a continuation of Community support to the Fund beyond 31 December 2006. In recognition of the special effort for the peace process, the PEACE programme has been allocated additional support from the Structural Funds for the period 2007 to 2013 pursuant to paragraph 22 of Annex II to Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999[2].

(5) At its meeting in Brussels on 15 and 16 December 2005, the European Council called on the Commission to take the necessary steps with a view to continued Community support for the Fund as it enters the crucial final phase of its work up to 2010.

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1 OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 1. Regulation as last amended by Regulation (EC) No 173/2005 (OJ L 29, 2.2.2005, p. 3) and repealed and replaced by Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 (OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 210) as of 1 January 2007.

2 OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25.

(6) The main purpose of this Regulation is to support peace and reconciliation through a wider range of activities than those covered by the Structural Funds, and which extend beyond the scope of the Community's policy on economic and social cohesion.

(7) The Community contribution to the Fund should take the form of financial contributions for the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, thus terminating at the same time as the life of the Fund.

(8) In allocating the Community contribution, the Fund should give priority to projects of a cross-border or cross-community nature, in such a way as to complement the activities funded by the PEACE programme for the period 2007 to 2010.

(9) In accordance with the Agreement, all financial contributors to the Fund participate as observers at the meetings of the Board of the International Fund for Ireland.

(10) It is vital to ensure proper coordination between the activities of the Fund and those financed under the Community Structural Funds provided for by Article 159 of the Treaty, in particular the PEACE programme.

(11) Assistance from the Fund should be regarded as effective only in so far as it brings about sustainable economic and social improvement and is not used as a substitute for other public or private expenditure.

(12) An assessment reviewing the closure provisions of the Fund should be carried out before 1 July 2008.

(13) A financial reference amount, within the meaning of Point 38 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and sound financial management[1] is inserted in this Regulation for the entire duration of the programme, without the powers of the budgetary authority as defined by the Treaty being affected thereby.

(14) The amount of the Community contribution to the Fund should be EUR 15 million for each of the years 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010, expressed in current values.

(15) The Fund strategy launched for the final phase of its activities (2006 – 2010) and entitled "Sharing this Space" focuses on four key areas: building foundations for reconciliation in the most marginalised communities, building bridges for contact between divided communities, moving towards a more integrated society and leaving a legacy. Consequently, the ultimate aim of the Fund and of this Regulation is, therefore, to encourage inter-community reconciliation.

(16) The Community support will contribute to reinforcing solidarity between the Member States and between their peoples.

(17) The adoption of this Regulation is considered necessary to attain the objectives of the Community in the course of operation of the common market. Since the Treaty does not specifically provide the necessary powers, this Regulation should be adopted on the basis of Article 308 of the Treaty,

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[1] OJ C 139, 14.6.2006, p. 1.