



PRESS RELEASE

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EU 'BUILDING BRIDGES' SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

A seminar, highlighting the vital contribution that bridges have made in transforming the social, economic and cultural landscapes of communities across Europe, was held today in the City hotel, Derry-Londonderry.

The seminar was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of Londonderry, Alderman Maurice Devenney and organised by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), in partnership with the International Conflict and Research Institute (INCORE), within the University of Ulster.

Welcoming the event, Mayor Alderman Maurice Devenney said: **"The city is on the cusp of change and this weekend marks a transformational physical change for the city that I am confident will lead to greater connection within our communities. Exploring this further within the seminar is an important reflection for the city at this time"**.

Held on the eve of the official launch of the European Union funded 'Peace Bridge' the seminar examined the history and impact of some of the most famous bridges across the world.

Speaking at the event, Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the SEUPB, said: **"Bridges play an important role in any society. They support the economy but can also connect communities, both physically and symbolically. The Peace Bridge, which will be launched tomorrow, has been designed as a shared neutral space that will encourage greater levels of community cohesion and reconciliation for the people of Derry."**

The 'Stari Most' bridge in the city of Mostar, which was destroyed during the Croat-Bosniak war in 1993, was discussed during the seminar. Following cessation of the conflict, the bridges reconstruction in 2004 was seen as a crucial step in rebuilding economic and social cohesion within the region.



A number of other major bridge projects were discussed at the event including the 'Öresund' Bridge connecting Sweden and Denmark. The largest road and rail bridge in Europe, the impressive 7,845m long structure took five years to complete and acts as a catalyst for sustained social and economic growth for the cities of Copenhagen and Malmö.

Both the 'Samuel Becket' and 'James Joyce' Bridges, designed by world-renowned Spanish architect Dr Santiago Calatrava Valls, were also discussed during the event. Now a prominent part of Dublin's urban landscape these iconic bridges have helped to enhance the cultural capital of the city and also increase tourism.

The seminar also offered an opportunity to reflect upon the impact of the EU's PEACE Programme since its inception in 1995. Created as a result of the European Union's desire to make a positive response to the peace process the programme has, over the past sixteen years, supported thousands of different projects aimed at reinforcing peace and stability across the region.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Kenneth Bush from INCORE, a research institute within the University of Ulster, said: **"The EU PEACE Programme has important lessons that apply beyond the boundaries of Northern Ireland and the Border regions. It helps us to understand how structural funds can contribute to peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected societies and, in this case, how an infrastructural project like a bridge could have a positive peace building impact."**

-ENDS.

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Notes to Editor:

SEUPB - The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU structural funds Programmes PEACE III and INTERREG IVA designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society. The programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG IVA, Western Scotland.

The PEACE III Programme, funded through the European Regional Development Fund, is worth €333 million and is aimed primarily at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation. It focuses on helping Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland to reconcile communities and contribute towards a shared society.

For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu