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PRESS RELEASE

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EUROPE DAY MARKS OVER £1.75BN INVESTMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE BORDER REGION OF IRELAND

This year's Europe Day celebrates over €2.5bn (£1.75bn) worth of European investment in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland, as well as the half-way point in the EU's current PEACE III and INTERREG IVA funding programmes (2007-2013), managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Occurring annually on the 9th May Europe Day is a celebration of peace and unity across all 27 member states and commemorates the beginning of official European co-operation following the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community on the 9th May 1950.

This event commonly known as the Schuman Declaration, after its main proponent French foreign minister Robert Schuman, is widely considered to be a landmark moment in the creation of the modern European Union as we recognise it today.

Commenting on the significance of Europe Day Howard Keery, Director of the Joint Technical Secretariat with the SEUPB said:

“Over the past 15 years a substantial level of investment has been provided to Northern Ireland and the border counties from the European Union. This support has been allocated to thousands of different projects which collectively have helped reinforce peace and stability across the region as well as enhance economic cross-border co-operation and development.

“At present we have reached the half-way point in the current EU funding programmes, PEACE III and INTERREG IVA, and are allocating considerable levels of funding to a wide-range of new innovative projects. The strategic nature of these projects will ensure that they will provide a lasting legacy to the region and make a real and tangible impact to its future success and prosperity,” he continued.

Europe has traditionally played an intrinsic role in supporting Northern Ireland's peace process as shown by the high level of support €667m (£444.6m) provided under PEACE I during the initial ceasefires in the mid-90's and following the Belfast Agreement of 1998.

The EU funded INTERREG programmes (1994-2013), running in parallel to the PEACE Programme, have also made a significant contribution in promoting greater levels of cross-border co-operation. Focussing on a number of different priority areas including enterprise, tourism and infrastructure the programme has, and is, supporting pioneering projects on a cross-border basis.

Under INTERREG IVA the eligible area has also been expanded to include western Scotland, creating a new stream of projects that are delivering meaningful benefits using a tri-partite approach.

Highlighting the importance of continued support from the European Union, Maurice Maxwell, European Commission representative in Northern Ireland, said:

“The Peace programme was the first of its kind ever to be developed by the EU and it really was an experiment. And what a successful experiment it has turned out to be. The experience in Northern Ireland and the border regions has set best standards and examples for the rest of Europe. It has been one of the most significant initiatives in the history of the European Union. This concept of cohesion across economic regions and clusters of influence is very much at the heart of the European debate on cohesion policy post 2013. More and more we are looking at how we can see beyond territorial boundaries to harness economic energies.

“Cohesion policy is at the core of our cross border programmes and I believe the rest of Europe has much to learn from what has happened here. The success of our efforts in achieving the objectives set for both PEACE and INTERREG are being held up to the rest of Europe as examples of good work, carried out by dedicated people that has created a lasting legacy. Despite growing economic concerns I think we can have confidence in ourselves and our own talents and we can be sure that we can rely on the continued support of Europe in building a better society for all our people,” he continued.

For further information on the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes as well as the work of the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu

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Notes to Editor:

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 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.

The INTERREG IVA 2007-2013 Programme is worth €256 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. It has two distinct priority measures to create co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable cross-border region.