

# **VoV 3: The Good Friday Agreement (1996 - 1998)**



[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflitto\\_nordirlandese](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conflitto_nordirlandese)

### Context

The Good Friday Agreement was so called because the deal was reached on Good Friday, 10 April 1998. It was a tripartite peace agreement between the British and Irish governments, and the majority of the political parties in Northern Ireland. It paved the way for a new, devolved government for Northern Ireland in which unionists and nationalists would share power.

Among its Terms of Reference were a commitment to:

- Ireland shall not be one united country without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland (i.e. a border poll).
- The people of Northern Ireland have the right to call themselves either Irish or British.
- A multi-party assembly (Stormont) will be elected to govern Northern Ireland.
- A north/south council be set up to consider areas of mutual interest.
- Linguistic diversity to be recognised and Irish was now to be taught in all schools.
- Paramilitary groups were to be decommissioned within two years.
- A gradual reduction in the number of security forces deployed in Northern Ireland.
- Political prisoners to be released providing the ceasefire\* was maintained

**\* Note:**  
“Ceasefire” refers to the end of the violence of the Troubles. On 31 August 1994, the IRA called a ceasefire. They were followed by loyalist paramilitaries who called a ceasefire in October of that year.



Image of the open border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Source: <https://www.geograph.ie/photo/5251578>

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1998 a referendum held in Northern Ireland showed (71.1%) in favour. A simultaneous referendum held in the Republic of Ireland showed 94.4% in favour. It brought an end to the contentious border checks on the island of Ireland. The Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, warmly welcomed the agreement.

The peace process, although it has been slowed down at times, has been enormously successful because it has the momentum of the people behind it. Yesterday the President in Office of the European Council, Prime Minister Lipponen of Finland, conveyed his congratulations in person. All Europe wants peace in Northern Ireland to succeed. President Clinton, whom I met at the OSCE conference in Istanbul two weeks ago, has expressed his delight with the progress that has now been made. Irish people around the world, knowing how difficult it has been to resolve the conflict and seeing the problems that other peace processes have had to confront, will share in our pride and satisfaction.

### **Speech by Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern following the acceptance of the Good Friday agreement**

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1999-12-01/7/>



<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DrlanPaisley.jpg>

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which later became the largest unionist party, did not support the Good Friday Agreement. It walked out of talks when Sinn Féin and other loyalist parties joined, because republican and loyalist paramilitary weapons had not been decommissioned. The leader of the DUP, Dr Ian Paisley was particularly vocal in his criticism of the agreement.

I would just like to make the last call to the people of Northern Ireland that they make sure to register their vote no. No to gunmen being let out of prison. No to breaking up any hope for peace. How can you have peace when you release the gunmen and bombers on the street? No to allow terrorists to keep their arms. No to the reorganisation and demoralisation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary ....

*Speech by Dr Ian Paisley, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1998*

**Note:**

The DUP were particularly against the idea of governing with the leading nationalist party, Sinn Fein whose leadership at the time included people accused or convicted of terrorist offences. They saw the Good Friday Agreement as a move towards a united Ireland.

The also opposed the reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who were the police force in Northern Ireland at the time. Nationalists saw them as anti-nationalist. The DUP saw the reform of the RUC as giving way to the nationalists.

