The Public Protection Advisory Group: A Model for Structured Co-operation

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Summary: On Friday, 10 April 1998 the Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland was signed, heralding a historic opportunity for a new political beginning. The Good Friday Agreement, as it became known, included plans for a Northern Ireland Assembly and cross-border institutions; under the section on policing and justice it made provision for a wide-ranging review of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. Arising from the recommendations contained in the review, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters was established, providing a framework for co-operation between the two jurisdictions. That work is continuing through the recently completed 2010 Agreement. Under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Agreement Working Group, the Public Protection Advisory Group (PPAG) was formed as a subgroup and is jointly chaired by the Director of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNi) and the Director of the Probation Service (PS) (Ireland). The PPAG has provided a formal structure for the engagement of the PBNi and the PS and strengthened connections with the other important stakeholders in the Criminal Justice System. It has been meeting since early 2006 and has addressed a range of topics related to increased cross-border co-operation, the sharing of best practice and cross-border offending. This paper sets the context, traces the history of formalised co-operation between the PS and the PBNi from 1998, and describes the structure, scope and activities of the PPAG as a model for bilateral co-ordination and co-operation.

Keywords: Public Protection Advisory Group, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Probation, criminal justice, Good Friday Agreement, cross-border co-operation.

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