

Plenary JC 28 June 2002

North/South Ministerial Council

Plenary Meeting

Armagh, 28 June 2002

1. The fourth plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held at the Armagh City Hotel, Armagh on Friday 28 June 2002.
2. The Northern Ireland delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt. Hon. David Trimble, MP, MLA, and Deputy First Minister, Mr. Mark Durkan, MLA who jointly chaired the meeting. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. The Plenary meeting reviewed the programme of work which it had put in train at its first meeting in Armagh in December 1999.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A NORTH/SOUTH CONSULTATIVE FORUM

4. The Council considered proposals brought forward by the consultative forum working group, following consultation with the Northern Ireland Civic Forum and the social partners in the South participating in the Central Review Mechanism of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness.
5. An outline structure for a North/South Consultative Forum was agreed by the Council. A twice yearly conference will take place, alternating between north and south, comprising representatives of civil society, north and south. The planning and organization of the first conference would be undertaken by a steering committee drawn from the Northern Ireland Civic Forum and the social partners in the South participating in the Central Review Mechanism of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, in liaison with the two administrations. The steering committee will also invite representatives from a range of relevant organizations, north and south to participate in the conferences.

AREAS OF CO-OPERATION

6. The Council noted the analysis put forward by the working group and agreed that the appropriate Ministers in the respective NSMC sectors should consider whether there were items falling within existing areas of co-operation which might be included in their future programme of work. In regard to North/South co-operation currently taking place outside the NSMC, it was agreed that Ministers would examine the working group's proposals. The Council also agreed the group's view that there is a potential case for mutual benefit to be gained from co-operation in areas such as strategic investment /infrastructure

(including strategic transport issues). The Council acknowledged that any expansion of the current work programme of the NSMC would require the specific endorsement of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas.

IRISH LIGHTS

7. The Council considered the provisions in the Agreement establishing the North/South Bodies for the transfer of the functions currently carried out by the Commissioners of Irish Lights to the , Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission. The Council recognises that complex issues surround such a transfer and asked the relevant Ministers and Departments, North and South, to examine the alternative possibilities as a matter of urgency and bring back proposals to Council.

CO-OPERATION ON EU MATTERS

8. The Council had a discussion on EU matters and considered a report from the EU Working Group. Recognising the importance to both jurisdictions of the European Union, the Council decided that at the next meeting of the NSMC in each sector, Ministers may consider the EU dimension of North/South co-operation in that sector and that the working group should bring forward an overall assessment of EU issues likely to arise. Further consideration will be given as to how the views of the Council can be appropriately reflected at EU meetings.

OBSTACLES TO MOBILITY

9. The Council considered proposals on Obstacles to Cross-Border Mobility on the Island of Ireland. A Study on the matter, undertaken by consultants, had been published earlier this year followed by an extensive public consultation.

10. The Council was pleased to note that since the commissioning of the Study and the consultation process, a number of recommendations have in fact already been implemented. In response to recommendations on the difficulty of accessing information on issues related to North/South mobility, the Council agreed to establish a Website, providing comprehensive and easily accessible information.

11. The Council also decided that recommendations in the areas of Education and Working, Health, and Pensions should be considered by relevant Government Departments who would bring forward detailed implementation proposals, including costs.

12. The Council also agreed that other recommendations required further examination by officials from the two administrations.

2001 ANNUAL REPORT OF NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL TO BE PUBLISHED

13. The Council noted the Annual Report on the activities of the North/South Ministerial Council from 1 January to 31 December 2001. This Report will be published shortly.

WORK OF THE NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

14. The Council received a progress report on the work of the NSMC at meetings in sectoral format since January 2002. In this format, Ministers from North and South meet to oversee work in the 12 Sectors agreed at the first Plenary in Armagh in December 1999. The Council heard reports on the valuable work being done in these Sectors. Both sides looked forward to the delivery of further tangible benefits to both jurisdictions. The Council noted that a useful first meeting had taken place in Institutional Format in December 2001 and looked forward to the continuation of its work in this format.

DISCUSSION OF INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

15. The Council welcomed the proposals being prepared by both Administrations for infrastructure development.

NORTH SOUTH PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

16. The Council considered and agreed that, recognising that any development of a joint parliamentary forum is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas, officials from the two administrations should make contact with officials in the elected institutions and report to the next Plenary meeting.

ACCOMMODATION FOR NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT

17. The Council noted a recently completed economic appraisal of the options for accommodation for the Joint Secretariat of the NSMC in Armagh and agreed that these options should be considered by the two administrations in liaison with the joint project team and brought forward to a future Council meeting.

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF NSMC MEETINGS

18. The Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings to take place over the coming months.

LAUNCH OF NSMC WEBSITE

19. Before the meeting commenced the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Taoiseach launched the website for the North/South Ministerial Council. The website is to act as an initial point of contact for those interested in discovering more about the North/South Ministerial Council and its work. The website can be found at www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org.

NEXT MEETING

20. The Council agreed that its next meeting in Plenary format will be in Northern Ireland in November 2002.

Joint Secretariat
28 June 2002

**MEETING OF THE NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ARMAGH -
28 JUNE 2002**

Annex A

Northern Delegation	Southern Delegation
Rt Hon David Trimble MP MLA (First Minister)	Bertie Ahern TD (Taoiseach)
Mark Durkan MLA (Deputy First Minister)	Joe Walsh TD (Minister for Agriculture & Food)
Bairbre de Brún MLA (Minister of Health, Social Services & Public Safety)	Charlie McCreevy TD (Minister for Finance)
Seán Farren MLA (Minister of Finance & Personnel)	Brian Cowen TD (Minister for Foreign Affairs)
Carmel Hanna MLA (Minister of Employment & Learning)	Noel Dempsey TD (Minister for Education & Science)
Martin McGuinness MP MLA (Minister of Education)	Dermot Ahern TD (Minister for Communications, Marine & Natural Resources)
Dermot Nesbitt MLA (Minister of the Environment)	John O'Donoghue TD (Minister for Arts, Sport & Tourism)
Bríd Rodgers MLA (Minister of Agriculture & Rural Development)	Micheál Martin TD (Minister for Health & Children)
	Seamus Brennan TD (Minister for Transport)
	Michael McDowell TD (Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform)
	Martin Cullen TD (Minister for the Environment & Local Government)
	Éamon Ó Cuív TD (Minister for Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs)
	Mary Coughlan TD

(Minister for Social & Family Affairs)

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