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Title: Note on a meeting between Garret FitzGerald, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Reverend Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, in the Vatican City on 12 September 1973. Topics discussed at the meeting included recent developments in Northern Ireland and Catholic doctrinal matters which may be unacceptable to Protestants in the context of a United Ireland.

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The Minister called by appointment on Monsignor Casaroli at the Secretariat of State in the Vatican at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 12th September. The Minister was accompanied by the Secretary of the Department.

The Minister informed Monsignor Casaroli that the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Nine in Copenhagen went well. There was enough progress on the question of a common declaration to enable the visit of President Nixon to take place if the latter so wished. The French proved a little more flexible than at the previous meeting and there were indications that the British and the French were getting along better. The British went so far as to suggest that the French draft might serve as a basis for further consideration. There was acceptance that the European identity of the Nine should be in a separate declaration from anything the Fifteen might wish to draw up. There was one awkward moment for us when, unexpectedly, the Netherlands Foreign Minister sought to introduce a reference to their being faithful to their traditional friendships and alliances in the Declaration of the Nine. The Minister succeeded, however, in getting this dropped with the assistance of the Danish Chairman and the British Foreign Secretary and the German Foreign Minister.

There was broad agreement at the Copenhagen meeting on the future handling of Phase 2 of the CSCE. A problem had arisen in connection with the presence of the EEC Commission for those items on the agenda which came within the competence of the European Community under the Rome Treaty. The difficulty arose because the CSCE is a Conference between States. A compromise was eventually worked out putting the Community representative in the Presidential delegation but not under the control of the President - the Minister had helped to facilitate this compromise. As Monsignor Casaroli might appreciate one of the reasons for handling this matter delicately was the desire not to build up Comecon in a way which might tend to limit the freedom of the Eastern European countries to act on their own behalf in certain economic matters.

The Minister also mentioned that he was worried about the present attitude of the USSR insofar as there appeared to be new repression against Soviet writers etc. - this is in strange contrast to the hopes expressed in the CSCE context that there should be freer exchange of contacts and in cultural relations generally between East and West Europe.

The Minister then proceeded to give Monsignor Casaroli a resumé of recent development in relation to Northern Ireland. He referred to the fact that the new Irish Government had established good relations with the British Government and there had been increased cooperation with that Government on the Irish side. There had, however, been little real progress by the British Government on the main points which were of interest to us i.e. the Council of Ireland, the reform of the police in the North and of the Civil Service, internment and on lowering the profile of the British Army. The Littlejohn affair involving the use in Ireland by the British Government of known bank robbers for

the purpose of securing information had had a very adverse effect on public opinion in Ireland and, indeed, the revelations caused embarrassment to the British Government. This embarrassment, however, did enable us to exert increased pressure on the British Government to get some movement in the direction desired by us and Mr. Heath's agreement to come to Dublin for talks with the Taoiseach next Monday helped to a certain degree to allay the public criticism which had developed in Ireland.

The Minister emphasised that there must be progress on the formation of an Executive in the North with power sharing, a significant Council of Ireland on the EEC model with capacity to evolve (by agreement with a majority in the North) and on the reform of the police and the Civil Service in the North. If there should not be progress along these lines, there is a possibility of a civil war situation developing in the North with great danger to the Catholic community especially in Belfast. Public opinion in Britain might bring pressure to bear on the British Government to pull the British Army out prematurely and, in that event, there would be need for an international force in the North to protect the Catholic minority.

Monsignor Casaroli thanked the Minister for the foregoing information. He stressed the deep interest the Holy See had in the Northern Ireland situation - politically to see a just and peaceful solution but also from the religious point of view. He showed the Minister a copy of an interim reply to the Minister's letter of 14th August which had been sent to Dublin (but which the Minister had not yet received). This reply indicated that the Minister's letter and accompanying memorandum was being carefully studied. Certain points which touch upon doctrinal matters have to be considered by the competent office - the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith - the remaining matters were being carefully considered by Monsignor Casaroli himself i.e. those matters which concern the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church.

Monsignor Casaroli referred to the fact that the Minister had spoken to the Nuncio in Dublin about the matters covered by his memorandum and the views of the Nuncio thereon had been received. He added that the views of the Cardinal and the Irish Bishops would also be important. Apparently reflecting the views of the Nuncio (and this became clearer later on in the interview), Monsignor Casaroli expressed the opinion that unity in Ireland will not come soon. The various changes suggested by the Minister would not in themselves bring about unity. He wondered, therefore, whether we should be upsetting people in the Republic by making those changes now.

The Minister agreed that the unity of Ireland will not come soon. He stressed, however, that we must have an interim stage of appropriate reforms and a working Council of Ireland capable of evolution. If this is to develop we must be able to shift the opinion of 25% of the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland. There is little hope of influencing the remainder, at least in the near future.

The Minister emphasised the psychological block the Protestants in the North have of being swallowed up in the Catholic South. They fear that the provision in our Constitution on divorce which Constitution was ostensibly designed to cover a united Ireland might be used to take away their present rights in this field. The Minister made it clear that there is no significant pressure in the Republic at present to have a divorce law but the Constitution provision does cause concern to the Protestants in the North. Our laws on contraception make a criminal offence of what some of the Protestants would regard as their right. The Minister also referred to the fact that some 60% of the Catholic population in the North favour mixed education - a view which does not appear to be shared by the Hierarchy.

The Minister indicated that the question of mixed marriages was the one to which he attached the most importance in this context. The changes already made following Vatican II had resulted in considerable progress at the pastoral level. However, the demographic effect on the Protestant population in the South, as indicated in the Minister's memorandum, had a disproportionate effect on Protestant opinion in Northern Ireland, as they wrongly attributed the rapid decline in the Protestant population in the South to other and more sinister causes such as repression leading to emigration. The Minister thought that this was a unique problem in our circumstances which perhaps did not exist elsewhere. If real progress is to be made e.g. towards some sort of confederal solution in the future, we must allay the fears of Protestants and be as helpful as possible.

Monsignor Casaroli replied that the Holy See has already made considerable changes at the doctrinal level by respecting the conscience of others in this matter. Perhaps what is needed now is a further effort at the pastoral level. This is a matter which could be discussed by the Nuncio, the Cardinal and some of the Bishops in Ireland. Monsignor Casaroli considered that there were three psychological aspects, two in the North, namely the attitude of the Catholics and the Protestants there and one in the Republic. In this whole question Monsignor Casaroli considered that we should not seek to change the identity of those in the Republic. The Minister commented that we must emphasise the common Christian identity both North and South.

Monsignor Casaroli went on to say that while the Minister's letter and memorandum had set out the situation perfectly clearly, he was now of opinion from what the Minister had said to him, that the Nuncio in Dublin had given him (Monsignor Casaroli) the wrong slant. For this reason he thought that his discussion with the Minister was very valuable indeed as it changed his own comprehension of the complexities of the problem. He was very grateful indeed for the Minister's visit and he promised to continue to follow the situation very closely.

The Minister emphasised the importance that, at the meeting between Church leaders to be held towards the end of September, the Hierarchy should not take a negative or difficult line on the question of mixed marriages and he asked Monsignor Casaroli to do what he could to ensure that their attitude would be as constructive as possible. In view of the timing of the meeting against the background of other events it was important that failing a possibility of being constructive they should at least delay giving a negative response.

After a brief reference to the Holy Father the meeting then concluded - it lasted 55 minutes in all.



15 Meán Fómhair 1973