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PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE TAOISEACH, MR. LIAM COSGRAVE, T.D.
TO THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. EDWARD HEATH, M.P.
DATED AUGUST 1973

Thank you for your message of 4 August about the Northern Ireland situation.

I share your view that the outcome of the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Assembly was reasonably satisfactory. The tactics adopted by the so-called Loyalist elements were indeed reprehensible but, as you say, they attracted a good deal of adverse comment.

I fully agree that we must be careful not to do anything that might strengthen the hands of those representatives in the Assembly who are determined to frustrate any attempt to set up a Council of Ireland. If their wrecking activities succeed, the hope of achieving a workable settlement will recede. It seems, therefore, that we should not under any circumstances make or appear to make concessions to their attitude of utter opposition to a Council of Ireland. Any such concessions would strengthen their hands very considerably and encourage them to intensify their efforts to turn the clock back in Northern Ireland.

As you know, my Government attach very great importance to the establishment of a Council of Ireland and envisage that it must be an effective body with clearly-defined and substantial functions. We recognise your Government's commitment to the setting up of such a Council on which your Ambassador laid emphasis in discussions with the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the White Paper.

You mention that feelings are running strongly both for and against the setting up of some form of Council. This, of course, is the case and I may say that my Government are generally in favour of the tactic of placating as far as possible the feelings and sensitivities of all parties involved. However, we are very

strongly of the opinion that we cannot accommodate ourselves in any way to the views of those who simply oppose the setting up of a Council.

There is too the question of the timing of the Tripartite Conference. We note the arguments that you adduce in favour of the formation of the new Executive before the Conference takes place. However, as you know from the Minister for Foreign Affairs' discussions with Mr. Whitelaw, we have very considerable doubts as to whether this is possible. As a matter of practical politics it is hardly realistic to hope that an Executive can be set up and can begin to function effectively in advance of agreement on the crucial question of a Council of Ireland. Indeed it is difficult to see any possible settlement which does not have the character of an over-all package designed to satisfy all reasonable aspirations and grievances. A piecemeal approach to the various problems involved is not likely to be successful.

Also the Executive's role in relation to a Council of Ireland will be a very important part of its powers and responsibilities and that role will not be known or identifiable until the Conference has been held. It is true, too, as you say, that the Conference would expose a new Executive to strains. These are additional arguments in favour of holding the Conference before the Executive is established.

I agree, of course, that the Strasbourg case has an influence on Northern affairs. For this reason the Government agreed to an adjournment of the July hearings in the very exceptional circumstances which then existed. I know that you will appreciate that this decision had been arrived at with great heart-searching on our part. Since the adjournment our motives in agreeing to it have been widely misconstrued and our decision has been the subject of a considerable amount of criticism. I understand

that the Commission has already fixed its procedures for the October hearings. I am afraid that it would not be consistent with our view of our responsibilities in the case and of our obligations under the Convention to depart in any way from those procedures or even to appear so to depart. Indeed I should say quite candidly that in the wake of recent revelations public opinion here would be gravely disturbed by any such departure on the part of my Government. I am sure that you will appreciate therefore that it would not be possible for me to agree to your suggestion that Sir Peter Rawlinson and Mr. Costello should be in touch before the October hearings to work out a solution on the friendly settlement lines. I can assure you however that in their approach to this my Government are not motivated by ill-will or by a desire just to rake over past recriminations. We are concerned to be as constructive in this and other matters in relation to the North as circumstances will permit.

With warm personal regards

Liam Cosgrave