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OIFIG AN AIRE GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

24 January 1975

An Taoiseach
Liam Cosgrave, Esq., T.D.

Dear Taoiseach,

With regard to the suggested contacts with the British Government concerning re-negotiation and Northern Ireland the following seemed to me to be considerations that should be borne in mind.

1. Because the British Government are very sensitive on the re-negotiation issue, and because we have had or will have had direct bilateral contacts with a number of the other EEC countries, it could be argued that it would be desirable for us to have similar direct contacts with them. This matter came up in discussion to-day between Eamonn Gallagher and Galsworthy and Galsworthy seemed inclined to think that such a meeting would be useful.

On the other hand it has to be said that at this point such a discussion would be one which we might find rather difficult. The British would be pressing us on the question of the financial contribution to the budget, where our position is clearly different from theirs, and on agricultural policy where our interests notably diverge and where we would have the disadvantage of not having available to us until the end of February the Commission's review of the policy. It seems to me that the balance of argument on this point is not very strong in either direction and if it were felt desirable for other reasons to have a meeting with the British Government at this time we could probably overcome the possible disadvantages just listed. On the other hand if it is not desirable for other reasons to have such a meeting then it might be better if the meeting on re-negotiation were kept to Foreign Minister level.

A further reason for keeping it to Foreign Minister level is the fact that our partners may be somewhat suspicious of a meeting at your level on a matter of such importance to Britain in view of their exaggerated view of British influence on us. It would be a different matter if you had had bilateral contacts with the other Prime Ministers.

2. A second aspect is that of the desirability of discussions with the British Government on Northern Ireland at this time. In general the evolution of events in Northern Ireland at the moment does not seem to require any particular intervention by us - save for one issue, and that a comparatively minor issue over which we may have little influence. This is the question of the possible postponement of the convention elections. There seem to be strong reasons for wishing these elections to be

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postponed and if it is the case that Britain is at present inclined to hold the elections in March, as originally proposed, and if there is a possibility that an intervention on our part might shift the balance towards postponement of the elections, then a meeting that would achieve this result would be worthwhile. As agreed on Friday we are at present taking soundings from the Loyalists to find out their attitude on a postponement.

This raises several questions.

- (1) Should we try to make soundings as to what in fact is the British attitude at this point? During the last couple of weeks their previous determination to hold the elections does not appear to have been reaffirmed, although there is no particular indication that they have changed their minds, other, perhaps, than the postponement of the power-sharing White Paper, arising from the cease-fire situation. There is however the danger that an attempt by us at the political level to establish what their position is might produce a very unyielding answer. We might, however, consider soundings at an official level.
- (2) Another difficulty that arises is as to how we could have such discussions at political level without being in danger of being "put on the spot" afterwards by questions from the Press or in the Dáil about whether we had raised the question of the postponement of the elections. Even a "no comment" answer here, or an evasive one, could be dangerous vis-a-vis the Loyalists in Northern Ireland. While it might be possible to avoid this danger if the meeting were confined to Foreign Minister level and so far as the public is concerned to discussions on the British re-negotiation, it would be much more difficult to do so if the meetings took place at Prime Minister level whether in London or in Dublin. We would need to be clear as to how we would handle this difficulty before we embarked on the operation.
- (3) If a meeting is to be held at Prime Minister level there would seem to be a case for it being in Dublin rather than in London. It is the British who are seeking assistance from us on the British re-negotiation. Moreover it is Britain's turn to visit here as there have been several Ministerial and Prime Ministerial visits to London since the last visit by the British Prime Minister here - discounting his attendance at the funeral of President Childers.

The balance of these arguments as far as a political meeting is concerned is not very clear either way. I think I would be more than marginally inclined against a meeting at this time as the possibility of our securing a gain in terms of a shift of the British position on the Convention elections, to the extent that this position remains as previously stated, would seem to be small, and certain risks would certainly be run by having a meeting which could raise questions as to whether this matter was discussed or not. On the other hand, on further consideration, other reasons in favour of such a visit, including broad political considerations, might weigh in the balance in favour of it. It is a matter which

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might usefully be discussed in Government where other angles of the problem might emerge.

If it is decided to have such a meeting and if I were to accompany you, as would be essential if the "cover" of the British re-negotiation were to be maintained, the dates that would be possible for me in the next couple of weeks would be Wednesdays 5th and 12th February. It should be noted incidentally that Stanley Orme is coming here on Friday, 7th February.

Yours sincerely,

Garret FitzGerald

(Dictated by the Minister and signed in his absence)