

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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SUMMARY OF NORTHERN IRELAND POLICY

PART 1 INTRODUCTION

The document opens with a statement that the people and political parties in the Republic have faced up to the reality of the Northern Ireland situation over the past ten years, led by Fine Gael. Nevertheless it states bluntly that many Irish nationalists are unhappy with the way stated British policy in respect of Northern Ireland is being carried out, although this has not diminished our people's commitment against violence nor has it blinded them to the fact that the main obstacle to a solution lies with the Northern unionists, and their fears of a united Ireland.

Fine Gael, given its background and history, has a particular duty, and is especially well placed, to undertake the task of clarifying what we mean by Irish unity, in a way that will alleviate some of the very real fears that exist amongst unionists in Northern Ireland. This policy document does not, however, claim to be a blue-print for a united Ireland; that would have to be negotiated between the parties in due course. It does, however, attempt to identify the practical problems that would be involved in a political association between North and South, and to outline some alternative solution to these problems.

PART 11 – BENEFITS FROM NORTH/SOUTH POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

In the past we have been content to attempt to offer reassurance concerning the fears of Northern unionists, but no attempt has ever hitherto been made to argue why a political association of North with South would be to the benefit of the North. The Republic would, of course gain from such an association, which would remove an element of continuing threat to the stability of the State, but the North would benefit also. It would benefit not only through the sharing of facilities now duplicated – some of which are more highly developed in the Republic; through the extension of cross-border co-operation; and through the possible mutually liberalising effects of the new relationship; as well as through possible progress in co-operation to secure and maintain human rights; but also in a number of other important respects.

Thus security co-operation could be of benefit to both – if a single internal security force could be established, under the control of an authority for the island as a whole.

Again there could be considerable economic benefits for the North. It is not generally realised that the Republic has caught up with the North economically, and that income per head is now higher in the Republic than in Northern Ireland in several important sectors – and is significantly lower only in the public administration and defence sectors. By comparison with Britain, the Irish economy over the period since the 1960's has been much more dynamic – a result of which has been that this State has been able to contemplate EMS membership at a time when Britain has felt unable to undertake the obligations, or seek the possible benefits, of membership of this system.

An important benefit to Northern Ireland would be freedom from the constraints imposed on its taxation policy by participation in the United Kingdom. Much of our success in industrial development has derived from the export tax incentives introduced by the Inter-Party Government of 1954–57, which Northern Ireland has not been free to follow.

In recent years Northern Ireland's sense of its own identity has developed significantly, and there is growing consciousness there of the deficiencies involved in having its interests represented abroad by the United Kingdom Government, which is naturally primarily concerned with the interests of Britain itself.

This problem is particularly acute in the EEC context. Northern Ireland has no role in the European Commission — and on the law of averages as part of the United Kingdom would have only one Commissioner between now and the 21st Century where as if North and South were politically associated the North could expect representation at Commission level during four of each twelve years. The same applies in the Court of Justice. In the crucial Council of Ministers it is not represented at all, and the policies pursued by Britain, e.g. cheap food, a big share of Regional Fund for Britain instead of concentration of the Fund on the really under-developed areas of Southern Italy and the island of Ireland, as well as Britain's lack of concern for adequate Northern Ireland representation in the European Parliament — achieved only through the efforts of the National Coalition Government — all show that in the Community Northern Ireland would be better placed if linked to the Republic rather than to Britain.

PART 111 — INDEPENDENCE ALTERNATIVE

Independence for Northern Ireland has been canvassed as an alternative. Such an independent Northern Irish State would be inherently unstable, vulnerable to a coup by extreme loyalists opposed to any power-sharing administration that might be established to run such an independent State. The disparity of the strengths of the two sections of the community in the security forces of the State, even if these were reformed and placed on a *pro rata* basis, as between these two sections would be an inherent threat to stability.

It is also questionable whether an independent Northern Ireland State could in fact secure most of the benefits mentioned earlier; for many reasons it would be unlikely to secure EEC membership. Its links with the EEC must realistically lie either through Britain, giving it a minimal or in some respects non-existent voice, or through an Irish Confederation, in whose policies it would exercise a major influence.

PART IV — POSSIBLE FORMS OF NORTH/SOUTH POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

Hitherto we have been inhibited from spelling out possible forms of North-South political association, for fear of disturbing actual or impending negotiations. No such negotiations are currently pending — and it is desirable to seize this moment to spell out what might be involved, in terms that will reassure Northern unionists who fear that the Republic seeks a 'take-over' of the North, which is of course not the case.

Any North-South political association must meet four criteria:

1. Guarantee the legitimate interests and identity of the unionist section of the community in Northern Ireland, and free them from any fear for their future on the island of Ireland.
2. Guarantee the legitimate interests of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland.
3. Secure for Northern Ireland the potential benefits mentioned earlier.

4. Make provision for international aid to help the reconstruction of the North's economy, and for the safeguarding of its people's living standards, and the maintenance of peace and security.

Alternatives:

1. A unitary Irish State with a blocking mechanism or weighted majorities voting to protect legitimate unionist interest. This would not be likely to be acceptable to Northern Unionists, but we would be open to it.

2. A Four Province Federation is ruled out as contrived, cumbersome and designed to place the Ulster representatives in an artificially small minority. However, a North-South Federation or Confederation deserves serious consideration. The example of other Federations or Confederations is examined at some length. In the Irish instance an arrangement under which the two States would permanently delegate functions to Confederal institutions would seem the most attractive.

Within this system there could be a Federal system akin to those that exist in countries like the United States, Canada, Germany etc., or alternatively one with a more limited delegation of functions to the Confederal Government – viz the key areas of security functions, foreign affairs including relations with the EEC, and economic and monetary policy.

PART V ECONOMIC, MONETARY AND FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

The economic realities of modern world require central economic control. We note that after sixty years of separation and even after the EMS decision, Irish banking is controlled, North and South, by the Irish Banks' Standing Committee. Two separate monetary systems within this island would have dangers and would create difficulties. There could be more problems about borrowing abroad – especially for Northern Ireland. Some co-ordination of expenditure taxes could be needed to prevent distortion of trade.

Harmonisation of social welfare would not be essential – reciprocal arrangements could be made as between different systems.

The problem of British subsidies to Northern Ireland is not as great as is sometimes alleged, although there is a gap which the Republic at this stage of mere equality with the North in economic terms, could not undertake to fill. Other possible sources of transitional aid, however, would be Great Britain, which might be willing to phase out its present assistance gradually; the United States, in the light of the 1977 Carter initiative; and the EEC.

PART VI POSSIBLE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

We should be willing to be innovatory – as the EEC has been so successfully in respect of its institutions.

The Confederal Administration could be either chosen directly by the people, or by the two State Governments. Key Ministers would be those for Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs and Security, while others would cover aspects of EEC policy, e.g. agriculture, but the administration of policies could be left to State governments. The key posts could rotate, as could

the Chairmanship of the Confederal Administration. Ambassadors could be accredited to and by the heads of the two States, or to and by the head of the Confederal Administration.

Given that citizens of the Republic already enjoy de facto the rights of citizens of the UK and that almost all Northerners are legally Irish citizens, common citizenship within these islands might be considered.

Within Northern Ireland itself power-sharing would clearly be necessary until such a time as a normal political alignment emerges. This would be essential both in its own right and so as to ensure participation by the Northern minority at the Confederal level. Thus power-sharing in Northern Ireland might be achieved by having the Northern Ireland Parliament or Convention choose a Prime Minister and allowing him to choose his government – but requiring that this government should secure, and should be able to retain, the confidence of a majority of the parliament big enough to ensure that it would be representative of the minority as well as the majority.

The policy statement winds up by expressing the hope that these proposals, many of the details of which are deliberately left open at this stage, as being for negotiation eventually, be considered on their merits in Northern Ireland, and that in any event this document will offer reassurance to those in Northern Ireland who fear Irish unity as a take-over ploy by the South, and that it may thus facilitate negotiations between the representatives of the two sections of the community there on devolved participatory government within Northern Ireland.