



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Background Note: Recent Developments relating to
Political Talks

1. On numerous occasions since the beginning of the year the Irish and British Governments have expressed their wish to see further talks take place as soon as possible.
2. In a speech to the Irish Association on 5 March, the Tánaiste urged a new accommodation between the two traditions in Ireland and, inter alia, stated that "an accommodation on the constitutional issue, which allayed the deepest fears of both communities, would open the way for decisions on new structures which could be designed to match our complicated inter-relationships and therefore acceptable to all".
3. In an interview in the Irish Times on 6 April, the Secretary of State indicated a willingness to produce a paper to which the parties could respond. In a visit to Northern Ireland on 7 April, Prime Minister Major endorsed the idea of putting to the parties a Government "blueprint" outlining possible ways forward.
4. The Tánaiste made clear at an Oxford Conference on 16 April that any "purely internal approach" would not solve the problems of Northern Ireland. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, speaking to the same Conference on 17 April, agreed that all three relationships had to be addressed. He said that Dublin had a "crucial role" to play in new talks "not as a rival for sovereignty but as a partner in relationships between the two Governments and within the island of Ireland".
5. On 20 April the Taoiseach appealed to Unionist leaders to drop "pre-conditions" on Articles 2 and 3 in relation to resumption of talks. He said that he would not support any plan aimed only at an "internal settlement".

6. In a wide ranging speech in Liverpool on 23 April, Sir Patrick Mayhew outlined what he saw as parameters for a new agreement. In his public response, the Tánaiste noted that the Secretary of State had "rightly reaffirmed the need for any talks to address comprehensively all of the relationships involved" and had emphasised that both traditions must be accorded parity of esteem in any settlement and that the validity of each tradition must receive unqualified recognition. He described the latter as "essential ingredients which must be translated into reality for a successful outcome to renewed talks".
7. In the local elections on 19 May, the UUP first preference vote declined by 2.3% compared to 1989; the DUP vote declined by 0.5%; the Alliance vote increased by 0.8%; the SDLP vote increased by 0.9% and Sinn Fein by 1.3%
8. At their meeting in London on 16 June, the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major considered the prospects for a resumption of political dialogue in Northern Ireland. At a joint Press Conference, the Prime Minister said that, while he could not give a date for the resumption of talks, the two Governments would work closely "on the substance in particular of Strand 3". The Taoiseach said that the British Government would be "thinking through" a position paper for presentation when the talks resumed and that the Irish Government expected to be consulted about it.
9. In a Belfast Telegraph interview on 30 June, UUP leader James Molyneaux said that a so-called UUP "Blueprint" outlining possible new structures of government should be ready in September. Molyneaux added that "we need a layer of government near to that agreed in Strand One, excluding Dublin If you had a body with real power the SDLP would find it difficult to justify a

boycott".

10. In a speech to the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body on 30 June, the Tánaiste stated, *inter alia*, that it remains the joint wish of both Governments to relaunch the process of political dialogue. The Tánaiste continued that in the event of failure to persuade all parties to return to the negotiating table, both Governments will face a choice: to acknowledge that no new arrangements can be agreed at this point and examine how the Agreement can best be developed and adopted to meet this reality. Alternatively, both Governments can examine ways in which, acting in close consultation with each other, they can best bring their resources to bear in a renewed search for a settlement.
11. In exchanges in the Commons, in early July following the disclosure of an internal Labour Party document which envisaged joint sovereignty, the Prime Minister declared that the Conservative and Unionist Party was "four square behind the Union".
12. In an interview with the Guardian on 8 July, the Tánaiste stated *inter alia*, that "there is now a very real menace of a destabilising political vacuum . . . if it is not possible to restart the Talks, then the British and Irish Governments themselves must act". The Tánaiste was quoted in a report summarising the interview as indicating that without clear evidence that the talks would restart by the late Summer, the two Governments should try to agree a framework settlement and that "ultimately an agreement might have to be put directly to the people". The Tánaiste was quoted as indicating that concepts such a shared sovereignty in Northern Ireland "are very interesting ideas and deserve to be studied very closely". Discussion of the Tánaiste's interview and its implications dominated a meeting of the Inter-

Governmental Conference also held on 8 July.

13. Both Governments reviewed the political situation at the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Conference on 8 July. In the Communique issued following the Conference, both sides confirmed that they believe the objectives of the Talks process remain valid and achievable and that the two Governments will make every effort to achieve these objectives through direct discussions and negotiations between all the parties concerned.

14. The UUP supported the Government in two House of Commons votes on 22 July on the Social Chapter of the Maastricht treaty and in a confidence vote on the following day. In the Conference debate, Prime Minister Major denied any "deal" with the UUP and said that "nothing was asked for, nothing was offered and nothing was given". In an RTE interview on 27 July, the Taoiseach stated that he accepted indications by the British Government that there had been no agreement on the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland but "if it were to come into being . . . it would cut across and run contrary to the agreement of 26 March 1991" and would "tend to go a long way to undermine the Anglo-Irish Agreement".

15. In an interview with the London Independent on 28 July, James Molyneaux said he was not holding the British Government to ransom with a shopping list of demands but that he expected the Anglo-Irish Agreement to wither and the Conservative Party presence in Northern Ireland to collapse. In a Belfast Telegraph interview on 3 August, Molyneaux said that he had held a number of meetings over the previous four months with Prime Minister Major to discuss UUP plans for a Northern Ireland Assembly. Molyneaux added that he was confident an Assembly would be in place by 1995.

16. In a speech in Downpatrick on 6 August, the Secretary of State confirmed the British Government's commitment to the 26 March objective of a "comprehensive political settlement". It was continuing to pursue that objective in private discussions with the Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government. Nothing it had heard in those discussions made that objective impossible to achieve. It was ready to offer, "at the right time" proposals to give "focus and direction to these exchanges".
17. At a recent meeting of the Liaison Group, British officials renewed a suggestion that the two Governments begin work on a "joint framework statement".
18. In a Radio Ulster Interview on 4 September, Dr. Ian Paisley indicated, inter alia, that "until we have a clear statement from Dublin and action that Articles 2 and 3 are going to be dealt with and that this claim is going to be given up, then there can be no success to any talks".

Anglo-Irish Division
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