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FROM EGMG FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER, MR DICK SPRING,
AND THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE, MRS MAIRE GEOGHEGAN-QUINN
IN LONDON
ON WEDNESDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 1993

MR SPRING:

As you are aware, we have had a wide ranging and useful meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference today. The Minister for Justice and I were glad to get down to business at a very early stage with the Secretary of State and his colleagues. The government are deeply committed to the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, there is an extensive programme of work which we wish to see undertaken by the conference in order to fulfil the Agreement's objectives.

Today's meeting covered a lot of important ground, we discussed the prospects for getting political talks under way again. The Secretary of State and I are at one in our determination to see the talks resume at the earliest possible opportunity. There is quite simply, we believe, no alternative to political dialogue.

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People on both sides of the Irish Sea desperately want to see progress made towards a lasting political settlement. The two governments and the parties have a responsibility to tackle this as a matter of urgency. I hope that all participants will be ready to assume their responsibility.

We considered the overall situation with regard to security in Northern Ireland at our meeting. We reviewed the continuing threat posed by paramilitaries on both sides, including the significant increase in sectarian attacks carried out by Loyalist paramilitaries. We were agreed in emphasising the importance of ensuring that all sections of the community should achieve equal protection under the law. Both sides also expressed their determination to maintain security cooperation at maximum effectiveness in their efforts to counter these activities.

We reviewed recent developments with regard to the improvement of safeguards for those held under emergency legislation, we also discussed questions arising with regard to the use of lethal force by the Security Forces and the importance of accompaniment of army patrols by the police. I stressed the importance of ensuring that the Security Forces act at all time within the law.

I also emphasised the importance of tackling the problems caused by closed cross-border roads. We agreed to return to this matter at a further meeting. We also reviewed the level of north-south economic and social cooperation and we planned our programme of work in this area over the next few months.

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I attach considerable importance to the benefits which increased cooperation in both the public and private sectors will mean for the two economies, north and south.

QUESTION:

In paragraph 2, the two governments underlined their belief that a settlement is attainable without requiring either of the two main traditions to sacrifice their interests or to prejudice their aspirations. How can you say that, surely there must be some compromise?

MR SPRING:

Obviously compromise is the political option at the end of the day, there is a recognition of both traditions on the island and it is important that the people charged with the political responsibility will sit down to discuss the preservation and indeed the development of those identities and the political culture and I think that can be done.

QUESTION:

Without sacrifice?

MR SPRING:

I believe it can be done without sacrifice. As I said, there has to be compromise and we have to work in a political direction to achieve that.

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QUESTION:

The Secretary of State has spent the last couple of weeks testing the mood of the political parties in the North which of course is an exercise you have not been able to indulge in, was he able to brief you on his meetings with the various party leaders and what was he able to tell you?

MR SPRING:

Yes, we discussed the meetings that the Secretary of State had with the various parties and I am hoping that we can now take this a step further and perhaps that I also can engage in a series of bilateral meetings with the leaders of parties. Obviously there have been some difficulties in the past but I am hopeful that I can have meetings and contact with the parties in Northern Ireland.

QUESTION:

This will be difficult given that the Unionist parties in particular have set their face against dialogue as long as there is no commitment to change the constitution in the Republic, realistically what is the prospect of you meeting face to face with the Unionist party in particular?

MR SPRING:

I would say that it is extremely important that we have the opportunity, as elected politicians, as constitutional politicians, to sit around the table to discuss our concerns. If

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there are matters which the Unionist leadership feel cause difficulty for them I would be only too willing to sit down and listen to their difficulties, I think it would be much better if we could do that together face to face around the table.

QUESTION:

With respect, we all know that you are willing, the problem is on the other side and where is the evidence to suggest that that kind of meeting is more possible now than in the past?

MR SPRING:

There is an opportunity between now and our next intergovernmental conference for me to issue the invitation to bring people to meetings and I am going to do that.

QUESTION:

The two Unionist parties have said they will not have talks with you unless you give a full undertaking that

MR SPRING:

I have said that all matters in relation to north-south relations are on the table for discussion. I think it is extremely important, as I have just said, that if there are serious concerns, serious worries by the Unionist leadership in relation to any aspects, Articles 2 and 3 or otherwise, then they should convey those to me in person.

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QUESTION:

It is reasonably clear what their concerns are.

MR SPRING:

The situation as I perceive it, we want to get back to talks, we want to start dialogue between the parties in Northern Ireland between the British and Irish governments and in that respect, as I have said, we are prepared to look at everything. I believe that constitutional change will be necessary but at this point in time we should get back to the talks and have exchange of views in relation to all matters which concern the future of politics on the island.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

MR SPRING:

The situation in relation to the talks, we are looking for a political solution to very difficult problems on the island and in that respect I believe we have to be prepared to look at all aspects of the problem and that can only be done I would say by negotiation and by sitting round the table.

QUESTION:

But you are not going to give the Unionists any indication that

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MR SPRING:

At this stage I am making it very clear that I want to talk to the Unionist leaders and I think it would be in both their interests and our interests and everybody's interests on the island, anybody who is concerned to bring some relief to the present situation, to look for a political solution out of this difficult impasse, it would be in our interest to get talking.

QUESTION:

You say constitutional change would be necessary, do you mean the Irish constitution?

MR SPRING:

It may be necessary, the Irish constitution, yes.

QUESTION:

You say may be necessary.

MR SPRING:

David, the point is that we have to be prepared to look at all matters concerning the future of the island, that is the point.

QUESTION:

So you would be prepared rather than could be prepared?

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MR SPRING:

At this stage I do not think we want to get bogged down in would be or could be quite frankly, I think that would be particularly unhelpful.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

MR SPRING:

I have absolutely no preconditions in relation to location for talks, I think what is important is that dialogue is resumed at the earliest possible date.

QUESTION:

When will you be writing to the leaders?

MR SPRING:

We will set in train the contacts.

QUESTION:

But you know Ian Paisley has already turned down such an offer which I think was floated in the press recently, he has said he will not meet you until Articles 2 and 3 are changed?

MR SPRING:

I have seen and read and heard Mr Paisley's statements in recent times, yes.

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QUESTION:

So is there any point in renewing your invitation to him in particular?

MR SPRING:

Personally speaking I think I would want to keep all the options open, I think I am entitled to do that.

QUESTION:

Do you really believe you will get all the parties to the talks, there are local elections also?

MR SPRING:

There are difficulties, there are political difficulties for everybody concerned and I am very conscious of the fact that there are local elections in Northern Ireland but on the one hand the British and Irish governments are determined to proceed with Anglo-Irish governmental conferences to get our work agenda back in place and to make sure the work continues on. Also we feel that dialogue should be resumed at the earliest possible date and that is our responsibility, that is our challenge, and I want to do anything I can to bring that dialogue about.

QUESTION:

Do you think it can be done?

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MR SPRING:

I believe it can be done, yes.

QUESTION:

Do you think that the talks when they resume should carry on on the same basis as before or whether they should address more significant questions?

MR SPRING:

I believe that substantial progress was made in the talks when they were in progress and I believe that what is important is we set the agenda for the talks to resume.

QUESTION:

You seem to set great store on the work of the conference, you said this morning that you wanted to establish a framework for the meetings of the Anglo-Irish conference, meetings were suspended last year, would it be fair to say you would be unhappy to see that pattern repeated?

MR SPRING:

For the present time and arising from our meeting today we have set out an agenda of work for the foreseeable future and I think it is important that under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that the conference meeting would resume and take place on a regular basis. I am happy that will happen.

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QUESTION:

And deferrals of meetings only take place in extreme circumstances?

MR SPRING:

Deferrals of meetings would have to be considered in the relation to the prospects of political dialogue.

QUESTION:

Can you say what ground you will be covering with Mr Hurd this afternoon?

MR SPRING:

Obviously there are a number of matters we will be discussing and I do not want to go into the detail but we will be discussing European matters, we will be discussing Maastricht and obviously mainly matters of European affairs.

QUESTION:

What about the intention or suggestion by the American President that he would send a peace envoy to Northern Ireland, do you have a view on that?

MR SPRING:

I am aware of the suggestion, I read about it in the context of the American election and obviously there has been an interest in the United States both in their assistance to Ireland in terms of

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the American/Ireland Fund and we are basically waiting to see what developments take place in relation to that suggestion.

QUESTION:

Would you welcome it?

MR SPRING:

We have always welcomed the interest shown by the United States in terms of the development of Ireland and helping the situation in Northern Ireland. I think at this stage it is one of waiting to see how the proposal is fleshed out.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

MR SPRING:

I do not think it is on the agenda as yet, I think we have to wait for further developments on the American side.

QUESTION:

Is the question of the Exchange Rate Mechanism on the agenda with Mr Hurd?

MR SPRING:

All matters relating to European affairs are on the agenda, yes.

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QUESTION:

Did your colleague get any satisfaction today on the question of lethal force?

MRS GEOGHEGAN-QUINN:

Yes I think that the communique states very clearly that there is a recognition by both sides that there is a very high level of security cooperation between both sides and we intend to maintain that and to continue it and to improve it if that is necessary.

QUESTION:

But with regard to the recent Eniskillen Inquest jury's verdict, did you get any satisfaction there?

MRS GEOGHEGAN-QUINN:

We discussed that at some length at the conference, I do not think it would be appropriate to talk about the exact detail of what we discussed in relation to it.

QUESTION:

Can you say the extent of your concern about the rise in Loyalist Paramilitary violence?

MRS GEOGHEGAN-QUINN:

Yes we have a tremendous concern which both ... and I brought to the attention of the Secretary of State and Mr Mates today. We were obviously anxious to know how they evaluated it and we heard

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a report from the Chief Constable and from the Garda Commissioner in relation to how they viewed the situation.

QUESTION:

Were you reassured?

MRS GEOGHEGAN-QUINN:

Yes.

QUESTION:

Mr Spring, could you give us a few more details on this proposal to maximise structural funding for parts of Ireland?

MR SPRING:

Yes we discussed in detail the opportunities for both north and south in the context of the European Community, in the context of structural funds, and there are obviously projects which we can look at which would be mutually beneficial. It is an obvious area in the economic and social areas where we can make a lot of progress by working together.

QUESTION:

But it is not a joint application?

MR SPRING:

No, not at this stage, we are working on a joint paper.

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QUESTION:

Can you tell us anything about the proposals that you have put in relation to appointments to public bodies in Northern Ireland?

MR SPRING:

Not at this stage, Frank, it was a matter which we discussed and a matter which we will be discussing on an on-going basis.

QUESTION:

You mentioned ... of extradition and of amending legislation which is receiving priority attention, where exactly are you with these amendments to Ireland's extradition laws?

MR GREGGHEGAN-QUINN:

As you know, Leo, that is a commitment by two previous governments in Ireland and it is a commitment that is there by this government as well. Obviously there is a lot of work that has been done by the officials in the background, I am coming to it afresh, I will have to take a fresh look at it and bring my proposals in relation to it in good time to the government and it will be a matter for the government to make a decision at the end of the day.

QUESTION:

It is not imminent?

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MR GEOGHEGAN-QUINN:

It is a priority.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)