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Short Title Interview With An Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds

Eamonn Lawlor:

In the snail's pace politics of Northern Ireland statements are analysed and compared in search of the slightest sign of change from established positions so when the Taoiseach said on Sunday a Referendum on changes to Articles 2 & 3 of the Constitution would rather than could be a part of an overall settlement for the North, John Bruton for one saw that as a significant advance to which Unionists should respond. The SDLP and the DUP have each, meeting Prime Minister John Major this week, the Democratic Unionists have prepared their own document on resuming political progress and the Northern Secretary is believed to have a paper ready to put to the Northern parties if and when talks are resumed. In Boston, Una Claffey asked the Taoiseach if any developments of the past week offered real hope for a resumption of talks?

Albert Reynolds: (An Taoiseach)

We have to look at every possibility and I think first of all I think what people want is peace and that's what I believe is the best way forward. I believe that if we had a peace formula, if we did get a cessation of violence that we would have talks in a different environment altogether and I believe it would make a lot more progress. So we can't just discard it, I think we have to wait and see if there's anything behind it. Then we had the statement that, Ian Paisley has sent a paper direct to John Major for consideration the official Unionists are supposed to be certainly thinking seriously about the talks again, that's what we're given to understand, so I think all in all there are signs there that the talks process should get back on the rails.

Una Claffey:

But, you're worried about the Northern Ireland office and the paper that it's supposed to have submitted on the fact that the Irish Government hasn't been consulted?

Albert Reynolds:

Well I think it would be very foolish to do that because I mean we're party to the Anglo/Irish Agreement, we're party to the three stranded formula for talks which the British Government again have reiterated and which Sir Patrick Mayhew says he's quite happy with and even the Unionists said they, they would go along with that type of talk so, in those circumstances I don't think, excuse me that it'd be, that it'd be very wise to go ahead with the paper, to resume talks without even having consulted us and we haven't been consulted as yet.

Una Claffey:

Taoiseach, John Bruton has said that he's glad to see the change in your position in terms of what you said about Articles 2 & 3 here in the United States, has your position changed?

Albert Reynolds:

No and now that his position has changed that, he was and many others indeed had taken up a position that they were calling for unilateral action in relation to the Constitutional position down here in advance of getting talks resumed. What I have said in Bodenstown last October what I have said in the Dail and indeed what I repeat here is that in the event of an overall agreement that took account of the Constitutional position of both traditions and that both traditions could have their identity in one way or another recognised to, to their satisfaction that in those circumstances that type of agreement would be put to the Irish people both North and South for approval.

Una Claffey:

So Articles 2 & 3 may not be for sale but they're certainly for negotiation, is that your position?

Albert Reynolds:

I've always said everything will be on the table, that both Constitutional positions must be on the table otherwise I can't see how we could come to a resolution, a long-term resolution of the problem if we don't recognise what is the real problem, where it started and I have always said from the first day I was made Taoiseach and that is that the Government of Ireland Act is a Constitutional position in the North of Ireland and Articles 2 & 3 is the Constitutional position down here. What we're looking for is a balanced Constitutional agreement that takes account of both traditions and both identities.

Una Claffey:

And if the Unionists and the British Government continue to refuse to negotiate on the Government of Ireland Act does that mean that Articles 2 & 3 will not be on the table for consideration, do they both have to be on the table simultaneously?

Albert Reynolds:

Well the arrangement as I understand it is that there are no preconditions to these talks and consequently I would expect that all sides can put whatever they want on the table, in other words if we ask for a discussion on the Government of Ireland Act or that the Unionists ask for discussion on Articles 2 & 3 I think both sides are free to put their respected views on the table.

Una Claffey:

But from your point of view does the quid pro quo of the Government of Ireland Act have to be there before Articles 2 & 3 can be there?

Albert Reynolds:

The position is this, is that both Constitutional positions are on the table, if somebody says we're going to exclude something or somebody says there's going to be a pre-condition in that then we are not conforming with the parameters of the talks as laid down on the 1st of March or in March of 1991 and which people have gone along with and which the British Government have recently said should be the parameters again for the resumption of talks, no conditions, nothing is agreed till everything's agreed.

Eamonn Lawlor:

The Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, speaking to Una Claffey in Boston last night.