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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN MAJOR,  
AND THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER, MR ALBERT REYNOLDS,  
IN LONDON

ON WEDNESDAY, 16 JUNE 1993

PRIME MINISTER:

Good Afternoon. I will invite the Taoiseach to say a word or two in a moment just by way of introduction, and then we will take a few questions from you.

I think, as you know, we agreed sometime ago to have twice annual summits. On this occasion we have met here in London, we agreed today that we would meet towards the back end of the year in Dublin and I very much look forward to that.

We have had the opportunity today of discussing firstly bilateral matters, those discussions will continue over dinner, we have not yet discussed detailed matters relating to Northern Ireland and security, those discussions will occur over dinner in a few moments. We have had the opportunity of an in-depth discussion on the European Community summit and a range of matters beyond that.

I think there are no substantive differences between the Taoiseach and I on the agenda for the European summit, we expect we are going to deal with employment prospects across Europe, we look forward to discussions about subsidiarity, about a number of foreign policy matters, Bosnia of course and possibly even Somalia and Sudan which may well be the subject of discussion at the European summit, we certainly expect to deal with enlargement and the agenda that I think is fairly well laid out before us and has been for some time.

I am not expecting any substantive surprises at the summit over the next few days and neither is the Taoiseach. The discussions that we will have on the future of employment prospects in the Community will not be discussions that we anticipate will lead to immediate decisions in the Community, I think there are to pick six people's minds on the importance of Europe becoming competitive not just within Europe but competitive as Europe with the United States, with the Pacific Basin and with Japan and we spent some time discussing those particular matters. Rather than go into the details of the whole range of matters we discussed, I leave it to you ask questions if you wish to later, after the Taoiseach has made a few remarks.

MR REYNOLDS:

Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I think you have adequately covered the extent of the discussions which have taken place already and of course we look forward to the resumption of talks over dinner tonight, especially in relation to Northern Ireland. In relation to the up-coming summit, I agree with the Prime Minister that we do not expect any areas to develop that will cause either of us any great problems, I think we see the major issues to be discussed and hopefully point to the future direction of policy and how to tackle the very serious unemployment situation throughout Europe. It is now a problem for every member state. As you know, we have very serious unemployment problems in Ireland but then indeed so has every other member state, so I think it is time that we came to grips and point in the future policy directions as to how to tackle that particular problem.

I think the decisions of Europe will be looking towards Copenhagen for that type of discussion, the type of discussion of issues that affect ordinary citizens' lives and of course now that we have the Maastricht Treaty almost completed I think what they will be looking forward to is for the Community to settle down and to implement what we have agreed in the Maastricht Treaty.

PRIME MINISTER:

Just let me add one thing. We have not discussed the substance of security and related matters in Northern Ireland but we did have a very preliminary discussion and I should perhaps make it clear that we would both like the talks process to continue and to deepen, we think that is the right way ahead in the future, we do continue to believe that its objectives are achievable. The next phase of course will involve further bilateral contacts to try and identify as much common ground as possible between the participants to the talks and I hope I need not say that the British and the Irish governments will work closely on the substance, in particular of Strand 3. I say that simply to set out the fact that those general parameters have been discussed prior to more detailed discussions over dinner.

QUESTION:

You talk about the objectives of the talks being achievable, what are the objectives of the talks?

PRIME MINISTER:

We want to make sure that we can actually reaffirm in Northern Ireland the sort of democratic structure that most people would wish to enjoy, those are the early objectives of the talks. There is a great deal of talent in Northern Ireland that is not actually exercising itself in terms of local government in any way at all, now we need to examine that, that is the first ground clearing exercise, we have to build from the ground upwards, that is the

purpose of the three-stranded approach and of course Strand 3 is a bilateral approach between the governments.

MR REYNOLDS:

I just want to add that both governments are committed to finding the ways and means of resumption of talks, we are fully committed to the three strand process, we believe that it is the way forward in relation to it and we want to resume the talks on the basis that we had them on 1 March 1991 where nothing is agreed until everything is agreed and of course in particular the third strand between the two governments, we will be looking at ways and means between ourselves as to how we can make our contribution towards a resumption of those talks, to which we are both fully committed.

PRIME MINISTER:

The most obvious point of course is the shared wish to see an end to the violence. Now that is a shared wish not just between the Taoiseach and with me, that is a shared wish I think amongst the overwhelming majority of people in both parts of the island of Ireland. So if one wanted to have an objective, that of course is the most immediate objective in everyone's mind.

MR REYNOLDS:

It is the first objective indeed that I set myself out when I took over the job of Taoiseach, that there were two objectives I had and one was to find a formula for peace in Northern Ireland which will create the environment for talks to take place on the future



and how people can learn to live together and work together for the betterment of all.

QUESTION:

Mr Smith has said that Mr Paisley should not be allowed to hold a veto on the resumption of the talks, if all the other parties agreed to go ahead, he said, they should go ahead without Mr Paisley, do you agree with this?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am in the business of getting all the parties together for talks, I do not think it is of help in bringing the parties together to get those talks started for me to indulge in public exchanges about what one participant of the talks should do. The substantive matter is that I want the talks to continue, I want everybody to take part in the talks and I am not going to engage in public badinage that might make that more difficult.

QUESTION: *mp-*

Was the ... Commission discussed?

PRIME MINISTER:

We have not discussed it yet, it may turn up later.

QUESTION:

What is the current assessment of when it may be possible to resume the talks on Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER:

I could not give you a date at the moment, I would like the Taoiseach and I think the Taoiseach would share this view, though he will speak for himself in a minute, I would like the talks to resume speedily as possible. I think perhaps more important than the fact that I would like the talks to resume as speedily as possible, I think all the people who live in Northern Ireland, whichever community they come from, would like to see the politicians talking again so that they can begin to seek to resolve these problems. I hope that will prove to be possible, will certainly do all we can to ensure it is.

MR REYNOLDS:

I believe the political leaders on all sides are looking to the politicians to make whatever contribution is necessary to re-start the talks process and I look forward to hearing from Sir Patrick tonight on the results of his meetings with political leaders so far and to then make an assessment, an evaluation of how both governments can contribute to the resumption of the talks process.



QUESTION:

There seems to be a certain impatience in Northern Ireland among people who think that devolution should be re-established first and should be built from the bottom up and that tying it to strands 2 and 3 is delaying a return to democracy of which the Prime Minister spoke.

PRIME MINISTER:

If you had lived through the last 20 years in Northern Ireland - forgive me, you may have done, I do not know - but anyone who has lived through the last 20 years in Northern Ireland has a right to be impatient. But I think what we have to build is a structure that is going to last. We are approaching that in the way we think is most likely to achieve that end, that is why we believe we need to go through the stranded approach to talks so that we can carry consent. Above all, what we need in Northern Ireland is an end to the violence and consent for the developments that have been made, and it is upon that basis that we have approached the talks in this particular way. But as to people feeling impatient, I fully understand and sympathise with that.

QUESTION:

But is there a blueprint being prepared by Sir Patrick?

PRIME MINISTER:

It depends what you mean by a blueprint. Of course the Secretary of State is examining how we take the matter forward and how we encourage the talks to go forward, but I do not know quite whether one would call that a blueprint.

QUESTION:

... for the British and Irish government to lean on the local politicians to get them to accept not only to come to the talks but to accept a settlement?

PRIME MINISTER:

One man's leaning is another man's persuasion. We are seeking to persuade all the participants to return to the talks, that is the way to reach a lasting settlement in our view.

QUESTION:

Are you taking Mr ... advice in asking the Taoiseach to do something about removing Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am not going into my private discussions with the Taoiseach, I am keen to make sure that we look at all the elements of getting a proper settlement and that is the Taoiseach's view too, but I am not discussing that in public.

MR REYNOLDS:

I think there should be an appreciation, there are many hundreds of thousands of people out there who live normal lives, who want to continue to live normal lives, there is quite extensive bridge-building between the two communities, we want to encourage economic cooperation between the north and south and this is a way to demonstrate to people how they can live better together, how they can work together to improve the lot of both communities in the North of Ireland and I think that has its own contribution to make. In relation to the overall talks process, we are quite clear that we do not want to condemn the future generation in the North of Ireland to another 23 - 25 years of violence which they have suffered up to now, we think there is marvellous resilience in the community up there to continue to live ordinary lives and we want to use the opportunity, and any opportunity we can get, to try and first of all find a formula for peace up there and then hopefully to get people to talk together.

QUESTION:

Do you see a difference in principle of the union between England and Scotland and England and Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is the principle of consent. We have always made it clear in terms of Northern Ireland that no changes in the position of Northern Ireland could be obtained without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. And as I have said in speeches in

Scotland up to and during the general election, you need to retain the consent of people in Scotland for the union, so that is I think a similar position.

QUESTION:

Do you think your meeting today would raise hopes in Northern Ireland of an improvement in the security situation because surely that is uppermost in the minds of most people?

PRIME MINISTER:

The Taoiseach and I have known one another over many years, both as Ministers before he became Taoiseach and I became Prime Minister, we are used to doing business together, we have done business together in more than one capacity over a number of years. These meetings are regular meetings, they are not emergency meetings, they are not crisis meetings, it is one of a whole series of regular meetings that have gone on for a while, I instituted them a couple of years or so ago, they are going to go on continuing. I think the community of interest that exists both in the European Community, beyond the European Community and in terms of Irish matters make it absolutely right that we should have these twice yearly summits.

I do not want people under any of these summits to suddenly develop unrealistic expectations, if we have learned anything about the history of Ireland as a whole it is that patience is a virtue and patience is a necessity. So nobody should reach

unrealistic expectations. Of course we will discuss security matters, we always discuss security matters and we rarely talk about security matters beyond our private discussions, I am sure that we will discuss them later tonight.

QUESTION:

Can I ask you both how you expect the European Community to respond to the renewed impatience from President Clinton and his avowed support for arming the ... and indeed air strikes?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think there is nothing fresh to say, you know the British government's position about that, it is as it was. I am sure the European Community summit will spend some time discussing Bosnia in all its aspects.

MR REYNOLDS:

I think we are all horrified by what we see on our screens every day of the week in relation to Bosnia and I think everybody knows that the view of the Irish government, the view of the British government, in relation to it and undoubtedly it will be discussed at the summit and hopefully we will be able to contribute to some way forward in the whole sad tragic situation of Bosnia.

QUESTION:

Was the question of a visit by The Queen raised or discussed?



MR REYNOLDS:

No.

QUESTION:

Have you had a chance to read Sir Edward Heath's comments on the security situation where he said that you needed to lift the issue of terrorism higher on the political agenda, appoint a senior Cabinet Minister as a terrorism supremo and introduce a centralised counter-terrorist agency?

PRIME MINISTER:

I share with Ted Heath the importance of the issue, I do not share with him the way in which we should deal with the issue. It is very high on the agenda, it could scarcely be higher on the agenda and it will remain there.

QUESTION:

You talk about the need to get the parties around the table again, Sir Patrick Mayhew is talking to them to try and do that, how do you yourself think that they can be persuaded to get back into negotiations?

PRIME MINISTER:

You might have asked me that question before they began negotiations and you would be right to, you would say how are you ever going to get these people to sit round the table together, they never have done in the past? But we have crossed that



Rubicon, they have sat round the table, they have made progress, they have made far more progress sitting around the table in discussion, parties that had never previously done that, than anybody realistically expected. The advent of the local elections in Northern Ireland and other matters have broken that continuous discussion for a while. I think it is a matter of persuasion and patience and I think we will get them back round the table. You ask me precisely how, if I knew precisely how, I would have done it last week, but that can be done I have no doubt.

QUESTION:

Is it conceivable that new devolutionary arrangements for Northern Ireland will provide a role for Dublin or Brussels?

PRIME MINISTER:

For Brussels, no I do not think so. We have got to continue, we have a process, I do not think it is at all helpful to start inventing fresh processes when we have a process in being, it undercuts the work that is being done and there is work being done, we have got a process, the Taoiseach and I would like to see that process reactivated. Both of us are entirely clear that that is the right way for us to proceed. So no I do not think an intermediary from any external source is likely to be helpful.

QUESTION:

Inaudible.

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, the people in Northern Ireland, go and talk to the people in Northern Ireland, not just the politicians, go and actually talk to the people in Northern Ireland, it does not matter whether you talk to the Protestants or whether you talk to the Catholics, go and ask them whether they want another 20 years like the last 20 years and they will tell you 'No'. Go and ask them whether they would like the politicians to be talking and they will tell you 'Yes'. Ask them whether they want to actually see the end of violence from whatever source it comes and they will say 'Yes'. We all have to try and deal with that cry from the heart and I think that is a good reason for optimism.

MR REYNOLDS:

That is exactly the message that I get from my own contacts on both sides in both communities in the North of Ireland, they want to see all the political leaders, both north and south and the British government and the Irish government all involved in the talks process. They recognise that the road to violence is a cruel one, it is the road to nowhere and that there are so many families up there, they have been hooked by this, they do not want to inflict that on their children. Remember now at this stage that we have young people in the North of Ireland, 21 years of age, they were born into violence, they have not known anything else.

We certainly have a responsibility and both of us recognise that to try in every way we can not to inflict that type of lifestyle on the next generation and for the next 25 years we do not want to see that type of violence extend into the families of people in Northern Ireland and we are going to use every initiative that we can think of to try and change that situation and get people talking which is what people in Northern Ireland want them to do.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)