

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/52/662
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

cc Section 1/13

Secure Fax: 1316SF

3 November 1998 **No of pages including this one: 13**

To: HQ
For: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Round-table meeting (2 Nov)

I attach a draft record of yesterday's round-table meeting at Parliament Buildings.

cc officials
Belfast w+l
YES 5/11

©DFA/2021/52/662

2/13

Confidential

Round-Table Meeting with the Parties

2 November 1998

1. The Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State, who were accompanied by senior officials, took part in a round-table session at Parliament Buildings yesterday with the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and representatives of the parties.

2. Sinn Féin were represented by Gerry Adams (whom Mitchel McLaughlin replaced shortly after the meeting began) and by Bairbre De Brun. The SDLP were represented by Sean Farren and Denis Haughey. The Alliance representatives were Seamus Close and David Ford while the NIWC were represented by Jane Morrice and the PUP by David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson. As predicted, the DUP, the UKUP and the UUAP stayed away.

3. The UUP representation reflected some internal turmoil. It had earlier been arranged that John Taylor would accompany David Trimble (both at the round-table meeting and at the informal supper with the Secretary of State last night). In the event, Taylor decided to travel to Strasbourg for a Council of Europe commitment. With Reg Empey at a Belfast City Council meeting, the UUP reportedly had great difficulty in finding a substitute for Taylor. Eventually, Esmond Birnie was fielded.

4. Trimble opened the meeting by warmly welcoming the Taoiseach and his party. He noted the presence also of Paul Murphy, in accordance with the Agreement's reference to "consultation with the British Government".

5. He went on to recall the thirteen options for implementation bodies which had been identified without prejudice at last Thursday's round-table meeting. The NIO had arranged technical assessments of these. Cavilling at the omission of Irish Lights from the list, he said that further advice was being sought in relation to these options.

6. Mallon also welcomed the Government delegation and noted the historic nature of the

©DFA/2021/52/662

3/13

occasion. It was the first time that a Taoiseach had been met on the steps of Parliament Buildings since Sean Lemass. The Taoiseach was also being met for the first time here by the First Minister and himself. The presence of the Taoiseach and his colleagues would assist in making progress towards agreement on areas for the implementation bodies and for cooperation. This meeting and later exchanges would hopefully serve to narrow down the options and to develop a timetable for future work. He noted the constructive approach taken by all parties to these negotiations.

7. Thanking the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for their welcoming remarks, the Taoiseach made an opening presentation which followed the lines of the attached text.

8. The parties were then invited to give their views individually.

Ervine said that the PUP had some difficulty with this meeting. (He made clear, however, that this had nothing to do with the presence of a Taoiseach in the building for the first time in many years). They believed that the creation of the Executive and the North-South Ministerial Council would have been the most rational approach. Instead, "the cart is being put before the horse". The failure to create the Executive meant that there was no proper accountability through a Ministerial process.

Welcoming the Government delegation, Morrice underlined the NIWC's attachment to North/South bodies and recalled the key proposals from their paper on this subject.

Close also welcomed the Taoiseach and his colleagues, emphasised the need to add impetus to the process and spoke of Strand Two as one of the three inseparable parts of the Agreement.

Farren registered the SDLP's concern to make as much progress as possible on the implementation bodies and agreed that this would restore credibility to the process. They would have liked, of course, to be addressing these matters within the shadow institutions. However, the route which was being taken, while circumventing to some extent what the Agreement laid down, would deliver added momentum.

Adams warmly welcomed the Taoiseach's introductory presentation. Agreeing with

©DFA/2021/52/662

4/13

Ervine's remarks about non-implementation of the Agreement, he suggested that today's meeting would help to complete work which should have been completed before now. The presence of the Taoiseach and his senior Ministers showed the Government's commitment and would hopefully be the catalyst for closure on this subject. On grounds of logic alone, there should be close North/South cooperation and harmonisation. He hoped that it would be possible to leave this meeting with agreement on what bodies should be established (though a formal agreement would, of course, have to await the establishment of the shadow North/South Council). If agreement was not achieved, it would be clear who was prevaricating.

Birnie said that the UUP took their obligations under Strand Two seriously. They had carried out detailed research into possible areas for interaction. A small informal group had met the SDLP on a number of occasions. The Agreement had, of course, said nothing about the width or depth of the implementation bodies. The UUP had taken account of public administration considerations, economic factors (such as economies of scale - or the lack of them) and legal considerations in approaching these issues.

They were looking at seven options, which overlapped substantially with the list of thirteen drawn up last Thursday. These were:

(i) Aspects of the environment (probably environmental research).
(ii) Inland waterways.
(iii) Aspects of animal and plant health (possibly veterinary research).
(iv) Food safety standards.
(v) Aspects of strategic transport planning (with specific reference to roads).
(vi)- Re-establishment of Commissions for Carlingford Lough and Lough
(vii) Foyle respectively.

These implementation bodies would not usurp decision-making functions, which would properly remain with the North/South Ministerial Council.

9. Asked by Trimble to comment, Murphy said that this was an important and historic day. Echoing the importance of generating momentum in the process, he hoped that real progress would be made at the bilaterals later and that a timetable for finalisation of this work might be identified. He was "lurking in the corner" at this meeting,

©DFA/2021/52/662

5/13

given that the role of the British Government under this part of the Agreement was simply to be "consulted with".

10. Trimble launched a general discussion by noting some commonality in relation to options such as strategic transport planning or inland fisheries and waterways.

The Taoiseach noted that CBI/IBEC had last week drawn attention to the inadequacy of transport infrastructure and services on the island. This was an area which we had to get right and that was why we were proposing a strategic transport agency for the whole island. Turning to training and employment, he proposed a body with selected functions which would build on the existing cooperation between FÁS and the TEA and would create opportunities for economy of scale. As regards tourism, he favoured a state agency to develop and promote international tourism marketing strategies. The tourist industry had enormous potential for growth and all the industry experts agreed that the promotion and marketing of Ireland on an integrated basis was essential to the full realisation of this potential. There could, of course, be no question of closer cooperation in this area threatening the identity or culture of either tradition in Northern Ireland.

11. Suggesting closer discussion of these ideas, Trimble noted in relation to the training proposal that the Irish side were proposing a body which would deal with community organisations, develop programmes based on the IFI's Wider Horizons etc. According to the assessment he had received, the DED were suggesting that an implementation body could be set up which would aim initially at the harmonisation of qualifications between North and South but that the other matters might be more suited to the category of cooperation with separate implementation. Responding to an invitation from Trimble, McCusker confirmed this DED advice.

The Taoiseach said that the Irish Government had been in receipt of substantial funding for training purposes from the EU's Social Fund over the past twenty-five years and that we had developed a wide range of models for the unemployed, the disadvantaged and other groups. There were many areas in which we had developed expertise which could profitably be shared. He honestly did not see this as a threatening area for full cooperation.

Farren agreed that there was much to be said for drawing in a very focussed way on

©DFA/2021/52/662

6/13

the experiences of FÁS in the training field. A CBI/IBEC submission had mentioned the question of mutual recognition of qualifications but had gone on to list five more key points and to emphasise the importance of labour mobility on the island of Ireland . These matters could be reflected in the remit of the implementation body in this area. The FÁS experience and the EU programmes could be built on immediately.

Mallon pointed in detail to the relevance of the EU programme ADAPT to this work and suggested that the areas covered by ADAPT were more important than the qualifications issue. More generally, he recalled that Sean Lemass had identified five key areas for cooperation as far back as 1965 - tourism, educational exchanges, health, trade matters and joint agricultural research. How could anyone seriously suggest that matters such as trade promotion, business development or inward investment should be overlooked in 1998?

De Brun agreed that business investment was a vital area. In the training field, the pooling of expertise was important but assistance to people living in economically disadvantaged communities was even more important. An implementation body in this area would have to focus on the latter and go well beyond the question of mere qualifications. Had the NI civil service carried out an assessment and, if so, had they concluded that a wider role of the kind indicated would be feasible?

The Minister of State suggested that the harmonisation of qualifications would inevitably need to happen before integration of the two training systems. An implementation body could, however, have responsibility for planning and developing this harmonisation. Something more meaningful than mere qualifications would be required. The labour market in Ireland was increasingly becoming a single market

Birnie observed that harmonisation was not being proposed in relation to the two social security systems. He also noted that training and employment did not feature among the twelve areas listed in the Agreement. It might be premature, he commented, to reach decisions in the absence of technical assessments from either of the civil services.

Murphy agreed with a point made by the Taoiseach about the artificiality of distinguishing between training and education and noted recent changes to ACE and

©DFA/2021/52/662

7/13

other training programmes which gave greater recognition to the educational dimension.

Morrice was surprised at the attention being paid to the harmonisation of qualifications. The EU had been trying to achieve this since 1987 and no implementation bodies have been required in any member State; if harmonisation did not take place, redress to Brussels was possible.

Farren remarked that a single labour market involving considerable North/South mobility was developing in Ireland "under our noses" and that it would be important in this context to build on the experience acquired through Wider Horizons, ADAPT etc.

Observing that there was also East/West labour mobility, Trimble looked forward to getting more detail on the DED assessment and the ADAPT programme.

12. On the question of trade, business and inward investment, Trimble asked what matters could be handled via an implementation body or otherwise.

Agreeing with Mallon's emphasis on this area, the Taoiseach said that we envisaged a State agency with two wings - one wing would be concerned with the development of indigenous businesses North and South, supporting the internal strengthening of individual companies and their overseas marketing activities. The other wing would coordinate inward investment promotion by IDA Ireland and the IDB through shared offices abroad and the pooling of market intelligence. We recognised, of course, that the respective incentive packages would, at least initially, remain distinct.

Trimble agreed that the respective packages would have to remain separate. The Taoiseach noted that each State in the US offered different incentives in their search for investment, yet all were working for the United States. A coordination of effort would be very valuable. Trimble said that he and Mallon had just returned from the United States where the opportunities were very obvious. Both North and South offered the same selling-points: a "gateway to Europe" and the English language. Did the Taoiseach envisage some degree of coordination between the IDB and the IDA? The Taoiseach replied that he did. Even if the packages were different, this should not be a problem.

©DFA/2021/52/662

8/13

Murphy suggested that there was probably a difference between trade promotion, on the one hand, and inward investment on the other. Reading from a Departmental assessment in front of him, he referred to technical difficulties about the inward investment option. Trade promotion would be the easiest option. He saw scope for joint activity in the form of e.g. joint trade missions, joint stands at international trade exhibitions, the joint use of Enterprise Ireland and UK trade offices abroad and joint research. There would, of course, be complications arising from the fact that the Republic was an independent State while Northern Ireland was part of the wider UK framework.

Trimble suggested that there could be complications because of the DTI's role in promoting UK trade as a whole. De Brun agreed that trade promotion might be the easiest option at the present time but that this should not preclude consideration of inward investment. She went on to support the Taoiseach's point about the diverse packages on offer from individual US states.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs suggested that it would be sensible to share market intelligence, trade promotion offices and marketing activity abroad in relation to an island the size of Ireland. As regards inward investment, the two regimes were basically similar and the technical difficulties identified could be overcome in due course.

Birnie suggested that a "tit-for-tat" competition between North and South in relation to State aids would not be desirable and that some "policing" in this area would be necessary. Trimble supported him, warning of the dangers of prospective investors seeking to play off one region against another. The Taoiseach endorsed Trimble's earlier emphasis on the island of Ireland as a gateway to Europe and drew attention to the enormous potential for attracting investment from people of Irish background and sympathy in US and Canada.

Ford said that Alliance favoured cooperation in relation to some aspect of inward investment. Farren observed that inward investment and trade promotion "feed off each other in the real world anyway". Haughey pointed out that each part of Ireland has to work extremely hard to attract investment and suggested that the resources of the IDA and the IDB were individually inadequate to this task.

©DFA/2021/52/662

9/13

13. At this point, Trimble brought the meeting to a close to facilitate media briefings and bilateral contacts with the Taoiseach and his colleagues. A sequence for the latter was suggested - the NIWC, Alliance, Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the UUP. Trimble said that the DUP and the UUAP had declined the invitation. The UKUP had been willing to meet, but the meeting would have to take place away from Parliament Buildings (and, Trimble added jokingly, Maryfield would not be an acceptable alternative) and it could only discuss decommissioning.

14. In conclusion, the Taoiseach hoped that basic understandings about the implementation bodies could be reached very shortly and emphasised the enormous amount of work which would be required to put these into effect. Trimble agreed strongly with the latter point.

David Donoghue.

David Donoghue
3 November 1998

©DFA/2021/52/662

10/13

Meeting between Government and Round Table of Northern Ireland Parties

2 November 1998

Speaking Points

Introductory

I am delighted to have this chance to meet all of you today, both in this round-table format and later in bilaterals. The issues we are addressing are of the highest importance and it is vital that we make substantive progress as rapidly as possible.

The need to turn the promise of the Good Friday Agreement into a reality, through implementing all of its provisions in their totality, was starkly underlined by the murder on Saturday of Brian Service. This was a chilling reminder of just how appalling - how unthinkable - it would be to step off the path of peace and co-operation.

It would of course have been preferable if the work which is now getting underway - of identifying and agreeing areas for North/South co-operation and implementation - could from the beginning have been done in the Shadow North/South Ministerial Council itself. But we all know that this has, so far, not been possible.

It is the Government's strong view, however, that we cannot afford to sit on our hands and allow difficulties in one area to block all progress. Public and political confidence in the Agreement need to be sustained through visible momentum - including in the North/South area. Today, therefore, should be an occasion for focussing on the task in hand.

General Approach to North/South Institutions

For the Irish Government, as we made clear throughout the Talks, and in our referendum campaign, the North/South dimension of the Agreement is an absolutely crucial aspect of what is a carefully balanced overall package.

©DFA/2021/52/662

11/12

- It has a dual significance. We recognise the importance of the Strand Two provisions as a means of recognising and giving tangible institutional expression to the nationalist aspiration and tradition.

- But, equally, there is a powerful practical logic. We share a small island. We have many common interests and concerns. Together, we face the challenges of rapid social and economic change; of the continuing evolution of the European Union; and of ever-greater global competition. In recent years, there has in recognition of these realities been growing and exciting co-operation - not just between public bodies but also within the private and the voluntary sectors. The private sectors, North and South, have in fact been urging us to press on actively with our co-operation.

- It's time for us to bring co-operation on to a new plane, in our shared interests. But such co-operation must, as the Agreement recognises, be based on core principles, including mutual advantage, genuine partnership, agreement and democratic accountability.

- The Irish Government therefore believes that the areas now to be agreed for co-operation and common action, whether through new Implementation Bodies or through existing agencies North and South, need to be substantial and meaningful. In a moment I will run through our thinking on the leading candidates for selection for Implementation Bodies, the identification of which should be our immediate priority. But there are a few other general points I would make first.

Key Considerations

- In focussing on the Implementation Bodies, we shouldn't lose sight of the importance of the North/South Ministerial Council itself. There are some key areas of public policy which should be priorities for the Council which don't necessarily

©DFA/2021/52/662

12/13

lend themselves, at least in the first instance, to the establishment of Bodies - I'm thinking of such sectors as agriculture, health and education. For this reason the selection of the "second six" areas, for co-operation and separate implementation, is also very important.

Before the Council itself is formally established we will need to flesh out the detail of what the Agreement calls its modus operandi - key issues mentioned in the Agreement include the format of meetings and the structure of the Secretariat. This work can be carried forward side-by-side with other preparations for the entry into force of the Agreement.

Areas for Implementation Bodies

As regards the Implementation Bodies themselves, the priority at the moment should be to identify the areas we can agree on. I would like to see six bodies drawn from the areas of

Tourism
Trade promotion, business development and inward investment
EU programmes
Training and Employment
Strategic Transport
The Irish language and the Arts
Inland waterways, and Inland Fisheries

I believe our focus should be to reach a basic political understanding of the remits we have in mind. I think it's possible to agree the areas before every I is dotted and t crossed. Detailed agreements setting up the bodies can then follow.

I should underline that I am clear that the Bodies will be implementing policies agreed

©DFA/2021/52/662

13/13

in the Council. The Bodies will be operating on a day to day basis but must ultimately be under political control and must, through the Council, be accountable to the Assembly and the Oireachtas.

- I very much look forward to developing today my own understanding of your approaches.

- When we agree on the areas, there is a substantial requirement for detailed legislative and other preparations necessary to establish the bodies. It is in all our interests to create the basis for that work.

- I propose therefore that at the end of today's discussions we aim to agree a mechanism to bring forward, by the beginning of next week, firm proposals or at the very least clear options, for our consideration and agreement in a further meeting in today's format.

©DFA/2021/52/662