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N.I./E.U.

(32)

Sec. Gen. Taoiseach

Subject to agreement with the UK side (their draft with D/For. Affairs obs in bold), I intend to submit to the Taoiseach for signature

Mr. McGarry
S.Sh. 3.2.99.

Mr Hayde
2.2.99.

Ryk 1/2/99

cc. Mr. Kinsella.

Note

I told Mr Kelly that the attached draft letter to President Sampa is fine from our standpoint. He told me that the agreement of the UK for the draft is still awaited.

2.2.1999.

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DRAFT LETTER FROM BLAIR & AHERN TO JACQUES SANTER:

M. Jacques Santer
President of the European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
B1049 Brussels

Pl cc P Kelly
D Nolan

EU SUPPORT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Both of our Governments and the people of Northern Ireland are very grateful for the significant assistance that the EU has given Northern Ireland in support of its search for peace **as well as to the border counties of the South which continue to be affected by the troubled situtation in Northern Ireland.** We owe much to the personal commitment given to this effort by you and by Commissioner Wulf-Mathies. Your own message, that the EU can contribute to securing peace in Northern Ireland as it has done for four decades in Europe as a whole, has been widely heard and appreciated.

Foreign Secretary Cook and Minister for Foreign Affairs Andrews had the opportunity, at their recent meeting with you, to underline the crucial political importance EU support has in Northern Ireland, and the very real economic and reconciliatory benefits it brings. **Both of our Governments** want to see continued significant assistance from the EU in the Agenda 2000 settlement. **The Cardiff European Council invited the Commission to make proposals's on continued EU support and the Vienna European Council reaffirmed those conclusions.** We hope the Commission will play its part in meeting the remits from Cardiff and Vienna and proposing imaginative and significant contributions to the integrated economic strategy that David Trimble and Seamus Mallon are pulling together. We and they are keen that this strategy be pursued in partnership with EU.

David Trimble and Seamus Mallon wrote to Commissioner Wulf-Mathies on 22 December with some further thoughts as to future priorities for EU support in Northern Ireland, partly based on the useful discussions they held in Brussels during their visit in November. These priorities focus on the investment in economic development through infrastructure and training necessary to continue the rebuilding of Northern Ireland after thirty years of the Troubles. But they are also aimed at **building on current cross-community and cross-border initiatives in ways which are complementary to the new democratic institutions, so as to help to consolidate** the inclusive democratic process in Northern Ireland, through improved community relations and social inclusion, where elements of the Commission's innovative PEACE programme should be retained in a new special programme with an economic focus. The economy of Northern Ireland requires radical transformation, away from reliance on public sector subsidy and employment towards vital, diverse, and self-sustaining economic activity (public expenditure accounts for 55.5% of Northern Irish GDP, and 32.2% of employee jobs are in the public sector **[deletion of final phrase in brackets]**).

Our two Governments are working closely with the Northern Ireland First Minister and Deputy First Minister on agreeing the cross-border mechanism we would use to deliver some

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of these objectives. **Both Governments assume that EU support would continue to have an appropriate cross-border dimension which reflects also the particular problems of the border counties of the South.**

We should add that it has been agreed that one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies to be set up under the Good Friday Agreement is to be given the task of managing programmes under the Community Initiatives, in partnership with the national authorities. This is a tangible recognition of the vital role of the EU and its programmes in fostering closer relationships between North and South. For both administrations, it will involve a substantial change in existing arrangements and we look forward to working closely with the Commission in ensuring that this innovative new approach works effectively on the ground.

Continued support from the EU is very important to all parties in Northern Ireland, both in practical terms and as a potent symbol of the benefits of cooperation and solidarity. But the Northern Ireland Executive's priority will be to secure the resources over an agreed period needed to achieve their aims rather than the detail of which instruments are used to deliver them. The current proposal that Northern Ireland would have to make do with standard Objective 1 transition funding and an INTERREG programme is financially inadequate and insufficiently flexible for the carefully targeted measures that David and Seamus plan. Initial work, which our officials would be happy to discuss with yours, has indicated that support for 2000-2006 of the order of 2bn euro would enable Northern Ireland to make significant and lasting progress in meeting the objectives it has set itself.

We would be very interested in hearing your thoughts on how you might be able to help Northern Ireland continue on its path to peace and cohesion as envisaged at Vienna and Cardiff. I know that this is something that David Trimble and Seamus Mallon will want to discuss with you when they visit Brussels on 8 February.

Another key element in EU support for the peace process is the importance of a continued EU contribution to the International Fund for Ireland. Both our Governments strongly share the hope expressed by David and Seamus in their letter to Commissioner Wulf-Mathies that the EU will continue its highly valued support to the IFI, which will be essential to maintain the viability of the fund over the next crucial years.

We are copying this letter to David Trimble and Seamus Mallon, and to Gerhard Schröder.

Tony Blair **Bertie Ahern**

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