

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2022/84/44
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

UIO GB
PO Box 11754
London WC2N 6DT
Tel: 0171-930 3650 Fax: 0171-930 3629

President: David Trimble MP
Director: David Burnside
Members: Patricia Carlisle

A personal message from the Rt. Hon. David Trimble, MP
Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party
First Minister of Northern Ireland

8 January, 1999

Dear fellow Unionist,

I trust you and your family enjoyed a happy Christmas and I wish you a good New Year. In the closing days of last year your Ulster Unionist negotiators reached agreement with the SDLP, our government and the Irish government on the areas to be designated for North-South co-operation under Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement. We also reached agreement with the SDLP to provide for ten government departments to administer Northern Ireland. Your Assembly Party and the Party Executive both voted overwhelmingly to endorse the agreement and it will be debated and voted upon in the Assembly on 18 January.

The SDLP and the Irish Government (with the prompting of Sinn Fein) were determined to secure powerful North-South bodies to control and undermine the international marketing of Northern Ireland be it for investment or tourism purposes. We successfully secured minimalist bodies, which remain completely accountable to the Assembly. To achieve this position, which is strategically most important, we did have to move from our position of seven Departments to agreeing ten Departments. In reality the only options were six or ten Departments. As with the Talks process the Ulster Unionist Party was left on its own without support from other Unionist Parties. We found ourselves isolated as the only Party not arguing for ten Departments. I felt that tactically our priority had to be the destruction of the nationalist North-South agenda and accordingly, I used the number of Departments as a negotiating tool. We did however win certain important provisos: The power of budgetary negotiation and financial control of Departments will rest with a new Economic Unit under my control and the Deputy First Minister, and our agreement to ten departments is conditional on it being cost neutral over the lifetime of the Assembly. This will be achieved by a thorough review of government and the elimination of undemocratic Boards and Quangos.

Critics have complained that the allocation of ten Departments will not reflect the community balance in the country. This is true but community balance is not reflected in the number of departments created but by the number of seats won by Parties in Assembly elections. If we had won 33 seats as opposed to our 28, we would have been entitled to 4 Departments instead of 3 and could have dominated the Executive

©TSCH/2022/84/44

The Unionist vote shredding and disunity that pervaded the elections ensured that our Party vote was split and allowed 3 independent Unionists, 5 UKUP, and 2 PUP members to be elected. These ten seats do not count for the purposes of distributing Departments under the d'hondt mechanism. They are wasted seats, wasted votes. Those who now criticise should reflect on the responsibility they shoulder for this waste!

Furthermore those independent Unionists and others presented themselves to the electorate as so-called 'United Unionists' yet as soon as they reached the Assembly the United Unionists disappeared and they returned to their old Parties. Indeed three of them formed a new Party and the UKUP have now split into two Parties. If they had all stayed as a bloc ministerial places would divide as 3 UUP, 3 United Unionists, 2 SDLP and 2 SF (if included). Criticism from the DUP, UKUP etc is thoroughly hypocritical and dishonest.

I know that most public discussion has focused on the number of Departments but we must not be blind to our central achievement. John Hume and Seamus Mallon had made it clear they would not agree areas for North-South co-operation and implementation prior to the formation of the Executive. We have achieved agreement without forming the Executive and we remain committed to our manifesto pledge not to sit in an Executive with unreconstructed terrorists. The judgement as to whether Sinn Fein/IRA have changed remains the credible commencement of a programme of decommissioning of weapons and explosives.

The SDLP had hoped to browbeat us into 7 or 8 North/South implementation bodies. This is why agreement was not possible during the Prime Minister's visit. Instead the SDLP has been forced to stick to the Agreement and agree just 6 topics. A summary of the areas agreed on 18 December is attached to this letter.

The Ulster Unionist Party has now fulfilled all of its obligations under the Belfast Agreement. There remains only one Party still to honour its commitments and it is Sinn Fein/IRA on whom maximum pressure must now be exerted. As your Leader I wish to assure you that Sinn Fein will not be included in the Agreement that I have referred to above if Sinn Fein/IRA do not honour their commitments to decommissioning made under the Belfast Agreement. **If they do not the Ulster Unionist Party will not form an Executive that includes Sinn Fein.**

©TSCH/2022/84/44

Claims that Sinn Fein are entitled to places without decommissioning are completely dishonest. The opening pages of the Agreement repeat the need for a commitment to peaceful means and an absence of the use of the threat of violence four times. The Agreement provides for the exclusion of those who do not abide by this requirement and this exclusion is cross-referenced to decommissioning.

I cannot speak any plainer and I expect the total support of my Party and the country at large for my position. I expect an end to the bickering and factionalism that has haunted us since the Belfast Agreement was endorsed by our Party. Disunity, as I have explained, benefits our enemies.

You have had to contend with much you do not like over the past year. The road ahead will not become any easier- the disastrous policies adopted by the Parades Commission continue, and the Patten report on policing is a continuing concern but the prize is in sight – security of the Union, stable, democratic government, and peace for all our people. Thank you for your support and encouragement and have a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Yours,

David Trimble

PS Since my election as First Minister (Designate) my workload has increased tenfold and contact with the Party at large has suffered as a result. I am determined to redress this and have instituted regular liaison meetings between our Assembly, Parliamentary and European spokesmen. I have appointed Mr David Campbell as my Chief of Staff and if you have concerns or enquiries that require my personal attention please communicate directly with him and he will ensure that I receive your comments.

Office of The First Minister (Designate)
Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3SW
Telephone: 01232 521013 Facsimile: 01232 521963

©TSCH/2022/84/44

APPENDIX

The six North-South implementation bodies will cover the following areas with their main functions in brackets:

Inland Waterways (canal development)
Food Safety (research and promotion)
Trade and Business Development (encouragement of trade and exchange of Information between NI and ROI)
Special EU programmes (cross-border aspects of European programmes)
Language (promotion where appropriate and research into Irish Gaelic and Ulster-Scots)
Aquaculture and Marine (Lough Foyle, Carlingford Lough, and lighthouses)

The bodies on inland waterways, food safety, and aquaculture were proposed by the UUP and are uncontentious. The EU body deals only with matters specific to cross-border activity; Northern Ireland will continue to be represented at EU level by HMG. The Trade body deals only with cross-border trade, not the promotion of Ireland as an investment base as the SDLP had hoped. The IDB and LEDU are untouched. The language body will give Unionists an influence over matters previously manipulated by nationalists. In addition, the North-South Council will discuss how to co-operate separately in NI and ROI using existing structures, on aspects of transport (road and rail), agriculture (animal health etc), education (special needs, teacher qualifications), health (accident and emergency services, cancer treatment), and environment (protection and waste). There will also be co-operation on tourism promotion to develop existing initiatives. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board will remain however and will continue to work through the British Tourist Authority.

All areas of North-South co-operation and implementation are fully accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and under its control.

The ten Government Departments are, with their principal functions in brackets:

Agriculture and Rural Development (farming, forestry, fishing, rural development)
Environment (planning, heritage, pollution, local govt., env. protection)
Regional Development (transport, roads, rail, Airports, ports, energy, water, strategic Planning)
Social Development (housing and social security)
Education (primary and secondary schools, nursery education and youth)
Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Enterprise, Training and Investment (economic development, IDB, LEDU, tourism Health and safety)
Culture, Arts and Leisure (arts, museums, libraries, inland waterways and fisheries, Language)
Health, Social Services, and Public Safety (Health, social services, Fire Authority)
Finance and Personnel (Finance, personnel, rates collection)

Other matters are left under the control of the First and Deputy First Ministers such as economic policy, equality and community relations, liaison with British-Irish Council, North-South Council, Civic Forum, Europe and International Fund for Ireland.

©TSCH/2022/84/44