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26 July 2000

Mr. Dáithí O'Ceallaigh
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Secretary,

Conversation with the Queen

I met the Queen at Buckingham Palace yesterday. Our conversation touched on a number of topics but of most interest were her comments on Northern Ireland. She said that she was optimistic about the peace process and the future of the Agreement. She felt that the marching season, "that silly marching business" as she put it, had gone off better than expected and hoped that things would now quieten down and allow politics to continue. She was well aware of the prisoner releases this week and referred to Michael Stone's release the previous day. She noted that although Stone had "done dreadful things" he and others had moved away from violence and had endorsed the process. She acknowledged the role that the prisoners generally had played in underpinning the peace process and seemed to accept that the releases, difficult as they were, were necessary to ensure the success of the Agreement.

Comment

The Queen did not, and I would not expect her to, mention anything about a visit to Ireland. Nonetheless the fact that I and my wife were brought over to speak to her during the garden party does, I feel, represent a signal of interest on her

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part and was intended to be seen as such. We had been told beforehand that she wished to speak to us. I would expect her to be aware of the Government's position that a visit should only take place when the Agreement is bedded in, and her views and enquiries about developments in the process should be seen in this light. In this connection (and pending further instructions from you as discussed) I have mentioned informally to Ivor Roberts that FCO thinking about a possible visit in the Spring of next year is premature.

I have reported before that the Queen follows events in Northern Ireland and developments in the peace process in some detail. She appears comfortable with the process and her comments yesterday were similar to those she has made to me on previous occasions. However, I have not before reported her dismissive views of the Orange marches for fear that they would gain a wider currency, and I would therefore ask that this report be given limited circulation.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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