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Reference Code:	2022/47/404
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3/6/11

Secretary General Gallagher

To see please beneath instructions I issued to Ambassador Barrington on 3 July and his report, following an article which appeared in the Sunday Times re. a possible visit by Queen Elizabeth. In a informal chat late last week, the British Ambassador mentioned to the Chief of Protocol that he might raise with him in the Autumn the possibility of a visit by the Queen next spring. I mentioned this in passing to Ambassador Barrington who said that if we continue to hold the view that next spring would be inopportune for a visit it might be best for him to convey this information to the Foreign Office (Cresswell) before the August break in order to avoid a formal approach by the British Ambassador next Autumn.

I have discussed this matter with the Minister whose view is next spring would be too soon for a visit by the Queen. It is unlikely that the institutions in Northern Ireland, including the Executive, the Assembly, police service, normalisation etc. would be sufficiently bedded in by that time. The principles of parity of esteem and equality of treatment would need to be sufficiently accepted within Northern Ireland before we could be certain that a visit would proceed smoothly and to the best advantage of all concerned.

The Minister asked if I would ask you to discuss the matter with the Taoiseach before issuing instructions to the Ambassador.

If we do instruct the Ambassador on the lines above to approach the British at the level of Head of Division in the Foreign Office (Cresswell) we can be certain that our views will receive wide circulation within Whitehall and may attract adverse attention. Care would need to be taken with the instructions given to him which would stress our

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wish to ensure that a visit by the Queen would be as successful and as well received as possible and that it is for that reason that we wish to delay the visit beyond next spring.

Dáithí O'Ceallaigh
25 July, 2000

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3 July 2000

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

Dear Secretary,

London Times Article on Visit by the Queen to Ireland

Following our discussion I spoke to Jeremy Cresswell who is the Head of European Department at the FCO with responsibility for bilateral relations with Ireland. I drew Creswell's attention to the article in today's London Times and said that its tone and content had given rise to concern in Dublin at Ministerial and official level. I said that I was sure that both countries shared the same objective in relation to a possible visit - that the question should not give rise to controversy and that its consideration and eventual preparation should take place in a calm and friendly atmosphere. In general we on the Irish side felt that up to now the joint handling of this issue, which was important and sensitive for both countries, had been good, and reflected these considerations. The key points from our point of view were:

- first, that the Irish Government would welcome such a visit in due course;
- second, that the question of a visit, including the timing, was a matter for discussion between the two Governments.

For this reason we felt that speculation of the kind in today's Times was

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unhelpful, particularly against the background of the considerations required for such a visit. In this connection it was the strong view of the Government that the institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement needed to be bedded in so that a visit could take place in the best possible atmosphere.

Creswell had seen the report, and clearly the FCO had given some thought to how they might respond to any complaint from our side. He said that the story was not the result of a leak or of any strategy on their part to change the situation. The line taken by the Palace in response to the Times ("no invitation, formal or informal, has been received") was their normal response to queries of this kind. He did concede however that the line could appear somewhat wooden and he intended talking to the press people about it. Not wishing to get drawn into criticism of the Palace I said that the Palace response was a statement of fact, but that the speculation in the article was of a wider kind, involving the FCO and the British Embassy in Dublin.

Creswell said off the record that consideration was being given within the FCO to a possible visit by the Queen and he admitted that some internal thinking had centred on the late Spring or early Summer of next year. They were however conscious of the considerations involved, including the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and, he added, the electoral cycles in both countries. An added factor in their own planning is that 2002 would be the fiftieth anniversary of the Queen's coronation and it was unlikely that she would travel abroad during her jubilee year. This tended to focus internal thinking in the British system on next year.

I emphasised that we had no problem over the substance of a visit by the Queen at the appropriate time. Our difficulty was with the presentation of the issue in the Times report and arose out of our desire to ensure that a visit took place away from controversy and in a friendly atmosphere.

Comment

As I mentioned to you earlier it does seem to me, notwithstanding what Creswell said, that the Times article was designed to highlight the question of a visit, to give it a higher profile and to test us somewhat on the public line we have taken up to now viz, a visit would be welcome in due course, the timing is a matter for the two Governments, we would like to see the Good Friday Agreement well on the way to implementation and the institutions bedded in. I

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have felt for some time that both the Palace and the British Government think that a visit should take place sooner rather than later, and I suspect that the British Embassy in Dublin has been under some pressure on the matter. Ivor Roberts raised it informally with me during the President's visit to Scotland and London last December (when of course the President had lunch with the Queen) in terms which suggested that he is under pressure to advance matters and to obtain an invitation. What is interesting about the Times article is that its effect is to focus attention on the question of an invitation and away from the question of discussions between the two Governments. My guess is that some within the British system have become a little impatient and are using the Times to try to hurry things along. Interestingly, we have had no follow up queries to the Press Office here. My advice would be, unless we are in a position to take forward the question of a visit, to keep to the line we have taken and not to get drawn into a press dispute with the Palace or the British Government.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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