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29 JUL 1991
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From: J W Thorp
British Embassy, Dublin

Date: 10 July 1991

cc: PS/PUS, NIO(L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell, NIO(B) - B
Mr Ledlie, NIO(B) - B
Mr Pilling, NIO (L&B) - B
Mr Hamilton, NIO(B) - B
Mr Thomas NIO (L&B) - B
Mr D J R Hill, NIO (L&B) - B
Mr D A L Cooke, NIO(L) - B
Mr Dodds, NIO(B) - B
Mr Hughes, NIO - B
Mr Archer, RID, FCO - B

ASST. / MM 492/7
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R Alston Esq, CMG - B
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ANGLO-IRISH VISITS AND EXCHANGES

1. I am sorry that we did not respond earlier to John Chilcot's letter of 4 February to the Ambassador about visits and exchanges between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Since then the Anglo-Irish Planning Group has asked you to conduct a review of policy in this area. We have seen David Cooke's useful contribution of 19 June. Until this week we have all been so heavily involved in the talks that it has not seemed opportune to address this question. Now that the talks are on hold you might even have time to read this letter which is intended as the Embassy's contribution to your review. It draws upon and updates the views in the Ambassador's letter of 31 August last to Nigel Broomfield.

2. It also seems sensible to look at both North/South and East/West visits together, since they may sometimes involve the same people, and should be planned as, part of a single overall strategy. Responsibility for East/West visits falls mainly to RID, and this note seeks their views also.

3. We welcome your Secretary of State's interest in encouraging more visits from the Republic to Northern Ireland. For our part, we would also welcome an increased flow of visits between the Republic and Great Britain. On North/South visits we had, prior to the intensification of the talks process, a steady stream of Northern Ireland Ministers visiting the Republic; the IGCs had a rhythm all of their own; and Economic and Social Ministers had been attending part of IGC meetings. But, with one or two significant exceptions, the visiting was almost all one way. It is in our interest to encourage visits by Ministers and elected representatives from the Republic to both Northern Ireland and Great Britain:-

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- (a) Every time a Fianna Fail Minister pays a visit to colleagues in Northern Ireland, he implicitly acknowledges the status of his interlocutor. He enhances the sense of normality about the relationship. Most of all, any visitor from the Republic sees the realities of Northern Ireland for himself or herself; visits should therefore should include opposition spokespersons and TDs as well as well as Ministers from the Republic. Visits should not be conducted without a substantive agenda, but they are useful in themselves.
- (b) On East/West visits the situation is rather different. In general, Irish Parliamentarians know more about Great Britain than Northern Ireland. They watch the British media carefully from Dublin. They visit Great Britain for a host of private and professional reasons and are generally well informed about current developments. Some Ministers have plenty of opportunities to meet British counterparts in the margins of EC meetings. We had plenty of visitors during the EC Presidency. Inevitably the rate of visits has slowed. But there should be a regular stream of Ministerial exchanges on issues of bilateral interest; as these help thicken our relationship by placing our ancestral quarrel over Northern Ireland into a broader context of a more normal relationship between close neighbours. The main vehicle for East/West Parliamentary contacts will continue to be the British/Irish Parliamentary Body. But this could be supplemented to include the opposition, younger TDs, and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on EC legislation for a return visit following the Commons Committee on EC Legislation last year.
- (c) There is less value in East/West visits by press and media people, given existing close contacts and saturation coverage of Britain in the Republic. (Whether visits for some journalists to see aspects of Northern Ireland would be useful is difficult for us in Dublin to judge, since we do not know what arrangements are made by the NIO Press Office). Visits to Great Britain on the other hand by economic, financial, and perhaps industrial relations journalists from the Republic could be useful, provided they can see some fairly senior people who are responsible for EC policy in these fields.)

The rest of this letter looks at constraints and opportunities, offers some suggestions and asks some questions. We incline to agree with John Chilcot's letter of 4 February that a meeting would be useful to identify priorities and make decisions. We should be glad to attend such a meeting.

Constraints

4. Resources:

- (a) In general, Ministerial visits do not run up against budgetary constraints.

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- (b) The Embassy has a limited sponsored visits budget, currently for 6 fares paid visits to the UK in the current financial year. This would cover one or at most two rounds of TD visits to Great Britain, but would leave us with little else. For visits to Northern Ireland, we would hope that at least some of the costs could be borne by the NIO. These should not be large.
- (c) Visits by opposition leaders, or TDs, to Northern Ireland or Great Britain would probably require funding in full, certainly in the case of Fine Gael because the party is broke.

Political

5. There are potential political constraints on visits to Northern Ireland, both in the Republic and in the Province. There are no comparable constraints on visits from the Republic to Great Britain:

- (a) In the Republic, some TDs might regard an official visit to Northern Ireland as a recognition of British jurisdiction there. This might cause some Fianna Fail TDs to hesitate before undertaking a visit. Some Irish Ministers might privately share this concern, and they might have an additional reason for reluctance to visit their Northern Ireland colleagues, because they would prefer to meet their UK Departmental counterparts. Both these attitudes are however, inconsistent with the current Irish Government emphasis on cross-border cooperation and contacts. Irish Ministers can always be invited to meet their UK as well as their Northern Ireland counterparts. Nevertheless, some backbench TDs might face questions from their greener constituents about official visits to Northern Ireland.
- (b) Discreet enquiries have not produced evidence that the Irish Government would object to visits by TDs, but we could not rule this out. They may initially be suspicious but we doubt that they would wish to veto visits by Fianna Fail TDs.
- (c) Some visitors, particularly from Fianna Fail, might be reluctant to be given a security briefing, at least by members of the security forces. If we offer such briefings, we must expect some refusals of the offer. But we are aware of some successful visits to Northern Ireland prisons on an individual basis by TDs and Senators, including from Fianna Fail.
- (d) Some border TDs who have a wide range of contacts with Northern Ireland may be unwilling to undertake a visit because they feel they already "know the territory". However, this is not a reason for not asking them.

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- (e) In Northern Ireland, although Ministers have welcomed in principle the idea of an increased flow of visits from the Republic, a careful judgement is needed on whether, in the present state of play on political development, there might be a Unionist reaction to sponsored visits by political figures, which might affect the prospects for the talks. The NIO is better placed than we to make this judgement.

Organisational Constraints

6. There are two points to note:-

- (a) Consideration needs to be given to whether North/South visits in areas covered by the Agreement would be organised primarily through the Secretariat, or by the Embassy and the Government organisations most directly concerned.
- (b) In practice it is often difficult to fit Irish visitors to Britain into the diaries of busy Ministers and senior officials. But if they do not see senior people, the value of the visit may be reduced.

Opportunities

7. Seen from here, a coherent visits programme would be valuable and could comprise the following elements:

North/South

(a) Ministerial Visits.

NIO Departmental Ministers might look for opportunities to invite their Southern counterparts to Northern Ireland, for public occasions, private consultations, or as part of the IGC. Visits should have a specific purpose so as to avoid political sensitivities. Wherever possible, Irish visits to Northern Ireland should include an educational element. Seen from Dublin, current priority areas might be:

- (i) Energy. Mr Molloy met Mr Needham during the October 1990 IGC. An invitation to Northern Ireland would enable him to discuss the gas extension to Northern Ireland and possibly the North/South electricity interconnector.
- (ii) Environment. Mr Flynn went incognito to the Du Pont plant last autumn and met Mr Needham during the January 1991 IGC in Dublin. This is an area where there should be common interests. An educational visit to see housing and environmental projects in Northern Ireland should not be too controversial politically. Ms Harney might welcome an invitation to an "environmental protection" visit, though we should avoid a succession of PD Ministerial visits.

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- (iii) Agriculture. We understand that, as a result of the very good rapport established between Mr Hanley and Mr O'Kennedy, the latter has been invited to the annual DANI v DAF golf tournament later this year. This could be expanded into a visit to discuss inter alia CAP reform.
- (iv) Industry and Commerce. If Mr Molloy were to visit Northern Ireland one would not want another PD Minister to follow immediately afterwards. A visit by Mr O'Malley to discuss cross-border trade, 1992 and the possibilities for a common approach to attract foreign investment to Ireland could be useful, but it would probably need to be built around an IGC.
- (v) Social Welfare. Dr Woods has met his Northern Ireland counterparts in the Republic. A return visit, perhaps to discuss fraud, would be useful.
- (vi) Health. Mr Hanley visited Cork in July as the guest of the Irish Minister of Health, as a follow-up to Mr O'Hanlon's visit to Belfast earlier this year.
- (vii) Education. Irish Ministers are unlikely to want to get into political hot water by visiting an integrated school in Northern Ireland. But Mrs O'Rourke could have a substantive visit built around eg the scope for youth exchanges, cooperation on tertiary education and curriculum development.

(b) North/South Visits by Other Southern Politicians

- (i) Mr Bruton has expressed interest in a visit to Northern Ireland to meet Mr Brooke. Now that the talks are in recess I hope that we can activate this idea.
- (ii) Michael Martin, a young Fianna Fail TD from Cork who is head of its Youth Branch has told us that he would like to visit Northern Ireland. He is a bright individual with Ministerial potential. A visit by him should have some priority.
- (iii) Senator Maurice Manning, Fine Gael spokesman on Northern Ireland matters in the Senate visits the province regularly. We should offer an official visit to him, perhaps in conjuncture with a visit by Mr Bruton.
- (iv) Senator Helen Keogh, the PDs spokesperson on Northern Ireland, also visits the North regularly and it should be possible to arrange a visit for her.

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- (v) We should also target some younger TDs. Those who represent border constituencies already have close contacts with the North; some of them may be reluctant to accept an official visit, and some of those that do will be critical of what they see. But we think that some of them would be willing to participate in visits which are tailored to their particular interests. TDs from the rest of the country who do not have frequent contacts with the North should also be included. Many of those listed in paragraph 7(d)(ii) below as possible candidates for East/West visits would also be candidates for visits to Northern Ireland (the two visits could, of course, be combined). Depending on numbers, we would probably try to send a group from a single party.

East/West

(c) Ministerial visits

- (i) Mr Jacks, PUSS at the Department of Social Security will be visiting Dublin in late July.
- (ii) Mr Tim Sainsbury, Minister for Trade at the DTI will be visiting Dublin and Cork in late September.
- (iii) The most important Ministerial visit in prospect is that of the Prime Minister to Dublin in the autumn. That should not preclude other visits the following months; indeed the positive atmosphere in Anglo-Irish relations which such a visit should engender should encourage further ministerial and senior official exchanges:
- (iv) A call by the Minister of Justice on the Home Secretary to discuss frontier and emigration issues would be useful and timely. This might most conveniently take place in London, perhaps in the margins of an IGC.
- (v) In addition to a meeting in London a Home Office Minister of State might, as we have suggested, come to Dublin to discuss other issues than frontiers, eg urban problems, drugs, AIDS.
- (vi) Mr Seamus Brennan might talk to his transport counterparts about eg privatisation, and liberalisation of urban bus services. There may be other 1992 issues which it would be useful to pursue with him.

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(d) Other East/West Visits

Candidates would be:

- (i) A visit by the Opposition Spokesman on Foreign Affairs, Jim O'Keefe would be useful. To be successful his programme should include a call on an FCO Junior Minister. If successful, we might arrange a visit by the Deputy leader of the Labour Party, Ruairi Quinn, who already has extensive contacts with his counterparts in the British Labour Party.
- (ii) It would also be useful to have a visit to Britain as well as Northern Ireland (see b (v) above) by a small group of younger TDs, particularly from Fianna Fail. A group might be formed from some of the following: Dermot Ahern, Mary Coughlan, Brian Cowen, Tom Kitt, John Stafford, John O'Donoghue (all Fianna Fail) Richard Bruton, Dinny McGinley, Gay Mitchell, Nora Owen, Enda Kenny (Fine Gael). We would plan a visit by a group on a single party basis.

8. Visits to Scotland and Wales could also be considered at Ministerial and other levels. Regional development, agriculture and Welsh language issues could be covered.

9. We support a visit by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on EC Legislation to London this autumn.

Conclusion

10. We should be grateful for

- (a) agreement to work up a programme of visits on these lines
- (b) an indication from the Group of any priorities, for North/South visits
- (c) clarification that NIO would be willing to pay the costs of any visits to Northern Ireland.
- (d) RID's views on the specific proposals in paragraphs 7 (c) and (d).

J W Thorp
(SIGNED)