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CABINET

OFFICIAL COMMITTEE ON ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

Minutes of a Meeting held in Conference Room D,
Cabinet Office on Monday 9 October 1995 at 11.00 am

PRESENT

1. cc PS / Sir J. Fall
~~Mr. Review. Sec~~
2. Mr Brown.

1, cc Mr Bell
Mr Watter
Mrs Sear/

850

13.10

Mr P Lever
Cabinet Office
(Chair)

2 file: E/W
relationships

Mr I Burns
Lord Chancellor's Department

Mr D Faulkner
HM Treasury

Mr M Gillespie
Home Office

Mr A Galsworthy
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Mr D Lamont
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Ms A Woodward
Department of Trade and Industry

Mr J Rogers
Department of the Environment

Mr P Cleasby
Department for Social Security

Mr P Bell
Northern Ireland Office

Ms C Checksfield
Northern Ireland Office

Mr S Broadley
Department of National Heritage

Mr G Archer
Department of Education
and Employment

Ms E Hodkinson
Department of Education
and Employment

Mr W Hopkinson
Ministry of Defence

Mr P McConn
Department of Health

Mr J Neve
Department of Transport

Mr A J Lebrecht
Ministry of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food

Mr E Ferguson
Scottish Office

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A Landsdown
Welsh Office

Mr P Matwijw
Citizens Charter Unit,
Cabinet Office

Mr M Russell
Deregulation Unit
Cabinet Office

SECRETARIAT

Miss K Collins

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1. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

THE COMMITTEE had before them a letter dated 29 September 1995 from the Chairman to the Private Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

THE CHAIRMAN said that the Prime Minister had agreed with the Taoiseach, Mr Bruton, at the recent informal European Council in Mallorca that the level of cooperation between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland should be stepped up across a wide range of business in which there were shared interests. The Committee had been asked to propose a package of measures which the Prime Minister might agree and develop with the Taoiseach. As a first step, the Chairman would meet representatives of the Taoiseach's department in Dublin on 12 October in order to explore possible areas of cooperation. For this purpose he would wish to offer some possible headings for discussion, with a view to drawing up a programme of activity over the following twelve months. He envisaged that such a programme might include some new initiatives but would rely heavily on the extensive existing contacts which departments had with their Irish counterparts, drawn together in a more structured and visible way. Although the strengthening of bilateral relations would be important in the context of the Northern Ireland peace process, there was no requirement that the measures proposed should have a specific Northern Ireland dimension. He was grateful for the contributions which some departments had sent in writing; he now invited them to speak to their contributions and highlight those items which in their view should be given priority. He would be grateful to receive in the light of the Committee's discussion, a brief paragraph from each contributing department setting out the specific

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proposition or propositions and indicating how it might be followed up (for example, by a Ministerial visit, official level discussions, a joint project, etc).

The following measures were proposed:

Deregulation

THE CABINET OFFICE (Deregulation Unit) said that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster planned to visit his counterparts in all European Union (EU) member states over the next six months to seek support on lobbying the European Commission to take full account of the desirability of minimum regulation when proposing legislation. If it was not possible to arrange a visit to Dublin before the end of the current year, he would consider inviting his Irish counterpart to London instead. In addition representatives from the Irish Department for Enterprise and Employment were due to visit British officials in late October, and those contacts would continue. It was expected that the Irish Government would be sympathetic to the United Kingdom's position, and that there might well be similarities in the regulatory systems of the two Governments. The Deregulation Unit would provide a paragraph for the Chairman's use when he visited Dublin describing the nature of the common interest, the visits in prospect and proposals for taking this forward by joint work and lobbying of the European Commission.

Trade and Investment

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY said that there were a number of topics on which bilateral discussion might be useful. A joint seminar had been held in Dublin in June for private companies about how to become involved in major projects overseas, and follow up action to this seminar would be identified. Other measures to introduce cooperation in

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export promotion in overseas markets were under consideration, although there was little support for the proposition that commercial sections in British Embassies should also be available to serve Irish interests. There seemed little scope for cooperation in attracting inward investment: the United Kingdom and the Republic both had successful track records in attracting investment from outside Europe and were major competitors in this field. The Department would however examine the potential for stimulating reciprocal investment. Further consideration would also be given to encouraging the Irish Government to adopt a British style, lighter export control regime. It was agreed that it would probably be unproductive to reopen the question of subsidies for inward investors. It was noted that a visit to the Republic by the President of the Board of Trade might be desirable; the Department of Trade and Industry would consult their Ministers about a visit at Ministerial level.

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY agreed to provide a short paragraph covering a possible Ministerial visit, trade cooperation in overseas markets, follow-up to the June seminar and export control regimes.

EU Issues

It was noted that a number of the items proposed by Departments had significant EU aspects. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office said that it would be helpful to have further discussions with the Irish side about defence issues in the context of the Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC), following the visit to Dublin by the Head of the Security Policy Department. Some coordination was also desirable in anticipation of the Irish Presidency of the Council in the second half of 1996, as part of which a visit by the Foreign Minister, Mr Spring, to include a meeting with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary would be valuable. The Home Office

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indicated that they would wish to discuss Third Pillar issues and stepping up contact between senior immigration officials in relation to the Common Travel Area, but they doubted that the present exercise would be a productive avenue for taking these measures forward.

It was agreed that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office would provide a brief paragraph dealing with the IGC, preparations for the Irish Presidency and a visit by Mr Spring.

Economic/Financial

THE TREASURY said that there was already a substantial degree of contact at both Ministerial and official level. A proposed visit by the Irish Minister of Finance, Mr Quinn, had been cancelled but they would consider, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whether it might be rearranged and might include a meeting with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury would be willing to visit Dublin to discuss financial services, and this contact might be followed up at official level. The Treasury would investigate the possibility of establishing a dialogue between the Bank of England and its Irish counterpart. An exchange of officials between the Treasury and the Ministry of Finance would begin in 1996 as part of the Cabinet Office exchange programme. A senior Treasury official was currently in Dublin to discuss issues related to a single European currency.

It was agreed that the Treasury would provide a contribution covering a possible visit by Mr Quinn, discussions at Ministerial and official level about financial services and, if appropriate, dialogue between the Banks.

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Defence

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE said that contacts were being built up steadily, through attendance at defence courses and colleges and at senior levels. The Irish Chief of Defence Staff was due to visit the United Kingdom the following month. The Minister (Armed Forces) would be ready to visit Dublin when the time was right. Discussions were beginning on peacekeeping which might be an area of growing shared interest.

It was agreed that the Ministry of Defence would provide a short note on attendance at courses and colleges and, if appropriate, possible discussions about peacekeeping.

Citizen's Charter

THE CABINET OFFICE (Citizen's Charter Unit) said that the Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Horam had recently received a visit from Mrs Doyle, the Irish Minister responsible for Civil Service reform. It might be possible to interest the Irish Government in adopting a Chartermark scheme. The Citizen's Charter Unit would provide a short contribution covering this point.

Lord Chancellor's Department

THE LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT noted that the Republic was the only European country apart from the United Kingdom with a common law system. Despite this, there was little existing contact between the relevant departments. Possible items of shared interest would be the procedure of the civil courts; summary criminal jurisdiction, and the operation of the legal aid scheme. The Lord Chancellor might be willing to visit Dublin, where he might meet both the Minister for Justice and the Chief Justice of Ireland. It might also be possible to

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interest the Irish side in regular meetings, perhaps based on an annual forum. The Lord Chancellor's Department would provide a short note covering these issues. The meeting also noted that the Irish Attorney General had visited his counterpart in London in March 1995.

Social Security

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY said that a joint exercise had been conducted with the Irish authorities against social security fraud, in which the records of payments to resident nationals of the other country had been checked to detect abusive applications. It might be possible to conduct a further exercise and to extend it to different kinds of benefit, such as pensions. This might lead to a formal mutual assistance agreement under the existing bilateral convention. They would provide a short note on these points.

Education

THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT said that the Republic was a priority country for educational links and exchanges, although English schools had shown little interest in developing these. The then Parliamentary Secretary (Mr Boswell) had visited the Republic in May 1995 to discuss the development of bilateral relations. The Irish Education Minister was due to visit the United Kingdom on 27 November. The Irish Government had recently published a wide ranging White Paper on education reform, which included some issues which the Department were particularly keen to discuss with them. A further possible area of interest was in the mutual recognition of academic qualifications. The Department for Education and Employment would provide a short note on these matters, in consultation with the responsible departments in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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Transport

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT said that the joint United Kingdom/Irish group on transport links was due to hold its annual meeting in early 1996. A joint study the previous year funded by the European Commission, into the opportunities provided by the opening of the Channel Tunnel had proved disappointing. The Welsh Office said that substantial EU funding had made available for projects concerning the transport links between the western part of Wales and Ireland, and the Irish Government were interested in the development of the road network from the Welsh ports. The Irish Transport Minister was due to make a visit.

It was agreed that the Department of Transport and the Welsh Office would each provide short contributions on these points.

Environment

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT and THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY said that issues concerning nuclear energy were highly sensitive and they did not recommend pursuing them with the Irish Government in the context of the present exercise. It was noted that there was an Irish Sea Forum which might provide a subject for discussion. The Department for the Environment undertook to provide a defensive note on United Kingdom/Irish contacts on nuclear energy issues and a short note on the Irish Sea Forum.

Interior Matters

THE HOME OFFICE said that the Irish Government were becoming seriously concerned by a growing drugs problem. This was to have been the main theme of a meeting between the Home Secretary and the Irish Minister for Justice, Ms Owen, which had been cancelled. The Irish side would be keen to reinstate

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that meeting and to undertake further discussions on the question of drugs. A further possibility might be a bilateral treaty relating to the confiscation of the proceeds of crime, which would be relevant to both drug trafficking and other organised crime. Crime prevention was a further possible subject as was a possible operational link between the United Kingdom's police national network and that of the Garda, facilitating telephone calls and data exchange. The Home Office undertook to provide a short note covering these points.

Agriculture and Fisheries

THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD said that the Minister of Agriculture was due to meet his Irish counterpart in the next month or two. There were wide differences of interest in the development of the common agricultural policy, which did not seem to be a profitable area of cooperation, but there was good practical bilateral collaboration on issues such as fisheries and animal health. They would provide a short note on these points.

Health

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH said that there were a number of areas for possible discussion, including mutual arrangements for emergency treatment of resident non-nationals of the European Economic Area; joint applications for EU funding for telematics; twinning of hospitals; two way referrals for specialised treatment; an exchange programme, and collaboration in public health policy. Of these, hospital twinning was an attractive item in principle, although its value depended upon how enthusiastically the scheme was operated; and discussions on mutual arrangements for emergency treatment might lead to the signature of a new agreement to replace the existing one dating from 1973, and

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would also be financially advantageous to the United Kingdom. The Committee noted a strong Northern Ireland interest in these areas. The Department of Health agreed to provide a short note.

Department of National Heritage

THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HERITAGE identified a number of items of possible shared interest, including existing arrangements for joint arts projects between Northern Ireland and the Republic; cooperation in EU arts fora; and arrangements for the possession and display of cultural and heritage items. There would be some interest in sharing experiences about the operation of the respective national lotteries, although it would be important to avoid any suggestion that the Government intended to follow the Irish Government in using lottery proceeds to finance mainstream public expenditure. There might be some interest in the joint overseas promotion of tourism, but the various national tourism agencies which would need to implement this might find that they had conflicting interests. Tourism cooperation was already being developed on an all-Ireland basis. The Department of National Heritage would provide a brief note.

There was a brief discussion of whether a new structure was required for taking work forward with the Irish Government. It was generally agreed that some central mechanism was needed to ensure that the programme as a whole was making satisfactory progress, but that this should not constitute an additional layer of supervision over individual departments' contacts with their Irish counterparts, nor should it require a large forum at which all departments were represented. The Chairman said that he would seek the views of the Taoiseach's Department on this at his meeting on 12 October.

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THE CHAIRMAN, summing up the discussion, said that departments should send the Secretary brief written contributions describing their proposals and suggesting how they should be followed up. The Cabinet Office would coordinate a paper for discussion with Irish representatives at his meeting on 12 October. He would seek Irish views on a future coordinating mechanism. A report of that meeting would be circulated, and individual topics would be taken forward with departments as appropriate. Those departments which expected to have a strong or continuing interest should inform the Secretary and would be included in the membership of the Committee. Other departments could attend meetings or receive papers as necessary.

The Committee -

Took note, with approval, of the Chairman's summing up of their discussion and invited departments to proceed accordingly.

Cabinet Office
10 October 1995

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