

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Speech by the Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, T.D., in Dail Eireann
on 19th November, 1985 on Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985.

I move:

"that Dail Eireann hereby approves the terms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985, between the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom which was signed at Hillsborough, Co. Down, on 15th November, 1985 and copies of which have been laid before Dail Eireann"

Introduction

No one in this House, or in this country, is in any doubt about the importance of the matter under discussion here today. Nor can there be any doubt about the importance not merely of the outcome of our discussion of this Agreement now before the Dail, but also about the importance of the manner in which we carry on this debate.

I believe it to be the wish of this House that our debate be conducted in a calm and serious way, that partisan or party political comments be avoided; and that, above all, nothing be said that could in any way exacerbate fears, or arouse passions, in Northern Ireland. It is in that spirit that I shall be approaching this matter, and I know that it is the sincere wish of all my colleagues on these benches to follow along this road. I hope, and I believe, that the same is true of those on the other side of the House, even where they may disagree with us in relation to this Agreement, or to aspects of the Agreement.

Because of my concern that this debate should be carried on in as calm and uncontroversial a manner as is possible, I do not propose to argue the merits of the motion put down by the Opposition, beyond making one comment on the

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actual proposition contained in the final and operative paragraph of the motion. This requests the Government to call upon the British Government to join in convening under the auspices of both Governments a constitutional conference representative of all traditions in Ireland to formulate new constitutional arrangements which would lead to uniting all the people of Ireland in peace and harmony.

This proposal has been made in the past. The conclusive answer to it was given on 10th May, 1949 by Mr. De Valera when he said in the Dail (Vol. 115 Col. 815-816)

"I have heard it suggested, even in this House, when I was in charge of External Affairs, that the representatives of the Government of Ireland, of the British Government and of the Six Counties should get together and sit down at a table and try to work out a solution. Surely everybody knows what would be the result of that. As long as one member of the Conference is going to say, "No, I will not accept that", the end of such a conference would obviously be worse than the beginning. You cannot do it like that".

I have nothing to add to what Mr. De Valera said on that occasion.

In the days that have elapsed since the Agreement was signed, there has, of course, been considerable public debate, between politicians amongst others. Different stances have been adopted, and different arguments put forward, for and against the merits of what has been agreed between this Government and the British Government. These initial reactions now lie behind us. Our task now, as members of this House, is to look at the Agreement objectively, without attempting to take any political advantage of each other in respect of it, and with only one thought in mind: how best to speak, to act, and to comport ourselves in this debate, in the interests of all the people of our country. The people of Northern Ireland must be at the centre of our

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thoughts - nationalists and unionists alike. It is they who have borne the main burden of the suffering brought about by the violence of the past sixteen years. Lives have been lost here too, and in Britain, but the vast majority of those who have died, or who have been mutilated, or psychologically scarred by this violence, are people who live in Northern Ireland.

The Trauma of Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland

Moreover, in somewhat different ways, members of both communities in Northern Ireland, whose memories go back beyond the beginning of the present cycle of violence, have suffered over many decades from the situation in which they found themselves following the events of sixty-five years ago.

Northern nationalists from 1920 onwards found themselves part of a State with which they could not identify and the institutions of which were alien to them and appeared in many ways to be designed to make them strangers in their own land - in the island in which their ancestors had lived for several millenia. Nationalists suffered from a sense of second-class citizenship, and were discriminated against in housing and employment, in ways that drove many of them to withhold their allegiance from the system of Government and others to emigrate, who might, in different and more equitable circumstances, have been able to remain in their own land.

But unionists suffered also, in a different way. Of course, for half a century they controlled the levers of power, and these levers were moved so as to ensure for that community a dominant position in the society of Northern Ireland. That this happened reflected however - and we should have sufficient insight to understand this - a sense of fear leading to a siege mentality, arising from finding themselves in a corner of an island in the greater part of which the nationalist population, after centuries of subordination to external rule, were at last accorded the power to which their

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numbers entitled them. In a sense, unlike many people in this part of Ireland, the unionist population of Northern Ireland never really accepted the division of this island; they never felt secure about this division, or accepted in their heart of hearts that it afforded them the protection which they felt they needed against an ethos which to them was alien, and appeared threatening.

These fears diminished them; it led them into ways of thinking and of acting, that did less than justice to the fundamental generosity of spirit which they share with those on this island who belong to the other, nationalist, tradition.

It is right, as we contemplate in this House the Agreement which is submitted here for approval, that we recognise these facts for what they are: in other words that we recognise that the division of this island, whatever the motivation that lay behind it at the time, had the effect of limiting, albeit in quite different ways, the capacities of the two communities in Northern Ireland to fulfill their human, political and cultural potential.

It is our task, and we now, perhaps, have an opportunity to undertake it in a way that had not hitherto been thought possible, to attempt to heal these divisions, to remove the alienation of one community, and to still the fears of the other. I believe that an opportunity to achieve these aims is one that we should not pass up lightly. It is in that spirit that I approach this debate.

EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO HELPED AND THOSE WHO HAVE EXPRESSED SUPPORT

Before proceeding further, I want to thank all those who have contributed to the achievement of this accord. I want to thank particularly those members of my Government who helped to steer the negotiation, and who had at times to participate most actively in it, notably the Tanaiste and the Minister for

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Foreign Affairs, as well as the Minister for Justice and the Attorney-General. I want to express the debt of gratitude which all our people owe to our negotiators, the Civil Service team, whom convention prevents me from naming, but who have worked with a dedication and skill which history will record as having been without parallel in the annals of the history of our public service.

And I want to thank also the British Prime Minister who, once she became convinced that the direction and path set out in this Agreement was the right one to follow, engaged herself courageously and with such full commitment towards its successful conclusion - and also her Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Geoffrey Howe, and successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Jim Prior, Mr. Douglas Hurd and Mr. Tom King - together with their team of negotiators, whose commitment to this most difficult of tasks most amply matched that of our own.

May I also, at this point, express my appreciation, and that of my colleagues for the courteous and effective security provided by the RUC at Hillsborough last Friday.

I must also express my thanks to the Governments of so many countries who during the past year have offered us such encouragement in pursuing this path towards peace, and who have been good enough since the signature of the Agreement to express their congratulations on the successful outcome of what we have attempted. I want to thank particularly President Reagan, Speaker O'Neill, Senator Kennedy and the Friends of Ireland whose support has been so unstinted, and whose generosity in offering to back this Agreement with financial aid is so unprecedented and so heartening.

I want to thank Chancellor Kohl, Foreign Minister Genscher and the German

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Government for their expressions of German support; President Mitterand and Foreign Minister Dumas for their warm messages of support on behalf of France; the Italian Government for their message of support; Prime Minister Lubbers for what he said on behalf of the Netherlands; Prime Minister Martens and Foreign Minister Tindemans who have spoken on behalf of Belgium; Foreign Minister Elleman-Jensen who has spoken for Denmark; Deputy Foreign Minister Pangalos who has spoken for Greece; the Government of Luxembourg for their message from their Cabinet Meeting; Prime Minister Hawke and Foreign Minister Hayden who have spoken for Australia; the Spanish Government for their words of encouragement; the Portuguese Government for their message on behalf of the Portuguese people; - and many, many others, including the Federation of Irish Societies and Council of Irish Counties Associations in Britain, the Committee for a New Ireland in the United States, and the President of the Commodore John Barry Division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, amongst others. And at international level I welcome particularly the messages of support from the Secretary General of the United Nations and the President of the European Commission.

It is I think fair to say that no action directly involving a Government of Ireland has ever received such extraordinary and unanimous support from across the world as the action we have taken in entering into this Agreement with the Government of the United Kingdom.

And I feel I must add that in the days since the signature of this Agreement I have been heartened, and indeed deeply moved, by the quite extraordinary warmth of the reception given to it by men and women of all walks of life and of every political persuasion, whom I have met personally both in Dublin and in Cork, and who have written to me from all over the country. Theirs is no partisan feeling, and it certainly contains no element of triumphalism; it is quite simply an expression of a deep-seated desire to see peace and stability

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returned to the other part of our island, and a profound and touching hope that this Agreement may, in some way, lead towards this objective.

THE ORIGINS OF THIS AGREEMENT

Before coming to the actual content of the Agreement, let me now go back a few years to the origins of the process which culminated at Hillsborough last Friday. I need not recount to this House the history of the years from 1969 onwards, filled with dramatic and tragic events. I shall just take as my starting point the failure of the power-sharing experiment that was the product of Sunningdale. The years that followed the destruction of that unique attempt to bring representatives of the two communities to work together in undertaking devolved executive functions in Northern Ireland, led to a vacuum. Repeated attempts were made by successive British Governments to fill this vacuum, but all of them failed. And with each failure the alienation of the minority from the system of government of Northern Ireland, intensified. Faced with the resolute refusal of the political representatives of the unionist majority to contemplate any form of participation in executive power for the representatives of the minority, an increasing proportion of that minority began to despair of the constitutional process itself. And increasingly those who retained faith in constitutional politics looked towards this State to find some way to break this deadlock.

So much is, I believe, common ground between us.

The present Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Haughey, when he came into office at the end of 1979, clearly identified this problem and decided that it had to be tackled between the two Governments. For myself, I held the view that a solution centred on a participatory or power-sharing devolved government in Northern Ireland remained a viable option until a somewhat later date. These

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are fine matters of judgement and for the purpose of this debate I have no desire to contest between us the issue of timing in relation to this proposition.

I am content to record that the Anglo-Irish process which has culminated in this Agreement was in fact initiated by the Leader of the Opposition, as Taoiseach, in the Spring of 1980, and I accept that the basis of what has happened since was laid down then, at the meeting in London in May of that year, when Deputy Haughey as Taoiseach, in the Communique following that meeting, reaffirmed that it is the wish of the Irish Government to secure the unity of Ireland by agreement and in peace, while at the same time accepting that: "any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland".

It is on these twin pillars - the maintenance of the aspiration to Irish unity, as a legitimate objective of Irish nationalism on the one hand, and the acceptance of the need for the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland for any change in the status of that area on the other - that progress has been made, during the past five-and-a-half years, although not without many setbacks and difficulties.

It was the clear view of our Government from the outset that in the situation now existing in Northern Ireland, it would be impossible to end the alienation of the minority from the structures of Government and from the security and judicial systems, unless there existed within the structures of the Government of Northern Ireland a significant role for the Irish Government, towards which the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland look - just as the unionist majority look to the Government of the United Kingdom.

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THE CONTENTS OF THE AGREEMENT

It was towards this end that we directed a large part of our efforts and the results of this part of the negotiation are to be found in Article 2 (b) of the Agreement in which the British Government accept that the Irish Government will put forward views and proposals on matters relating to Northern Ireland within the field of activity of the Conference, insofar as those matters are not the responsibility of a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. The British Government agree moreover that, in the interest of promoting peace and stability, determined efforts shall be made through the Conference to resolve any differences. The range of issues that are within the field of activity of the Conference are described in the Communique as political, security, legal, economic, social and cultural, viz. most of the matters in respect of which the public authorities of a State exercise responsibility.

This provision, going beyond a consultative role, but necessarily because of the sovereignty issue falling short of an executive role, provides, in the Government's view the most effective method by which to ensure the existence of structures capable of eroding the alienation of the nationalist minority, which has been such a destabilising factor since Northern Ireland came into existence sixty-five years ago, but more particularly in recent years.

The structure thus established, through which this procedure is to operate, includes, as Deputies will know, an Intergovernmental Conference concerned with Northern Ireland and with relations between the two parts of Ireland which will meet at Ministerial or official level as required. When the Conference meets at Ministerial level it will be presided over by an Irish Minister designated as the Permanent Irish Ministerial Representative, and by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Deputies will be aware of the decision to designate the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peter Barry, as the first Permanent Irish Ministerial Representative and Joint Chairman.

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Deputies will also be aware that within the framework of this Conference other Irish or British Ministers may hold or attend meetings as appropriate; that when legal matters arise for consideration, the Attorneys General may attend; and that Ministers may be accompanied by their officials and their professional advisers so that, for example, when questions of economic or social policy or co-operation are being discussed, Ministers may be accompanied by officials of the relevant Departments, or when questions of security policy or security co-operation are being discussed, they may be accompanied by the Commissioner of the Garda Siochana and the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. And the Conference will, of course, be serviced on a continuing basis by a secretariat to be established by the two Governments, in Belfast, where the Conference itself will normally meet.

The terms of reference of this Conference, as set out in Article 4 of the Agreement are that it shall be a framework within which the two Governments work together for the accommodation of the rights and identities of the two traditions which exist in Northern Ireland, and for peace, stability and prosperity throughout the island of Ireland by promoting reconciliation, respect for human rights, co-operation against terrorism, and the development of economic, social and cultural co-operation.

The responsibilities of the Conference will extend to the whole range of matters mentioned earlier. Both Governments support the policy of devolution of certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on a basis which would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community, viz. on a basis of power-sharing or participation at executive level. To the extent that devolution on this basis proves practicable, the Conference will obviously not have to concern itself with these matters. But should it prove impossible to achieve devolution on a basis which secures widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland, or if devolution once achieved is

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not sustained, the Conference will be, or will once again become, a framework within which the Irish Government may, where the interests of the minority community are significantly or especially affected, put forward views on proposals for major legislation and on major policy issues which are within the purview of the Northern Ireland Departments and which remain the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

It is extremely important to understand that even in the event of devolution the Conference will still have a wide range of functions, concerning matters of particular interest to the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland. These include measures to recognise and to accommodate the rights and identities of the two traditions, including measures to foster the cultural heritage of both traditions, measures to protect human rights, and to prevent discrimination - changes in electoral arrangements, the use of flags and emblems, the avoidance of economic and social discrimination and consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of a Bill of Rights in some form in Northern Ireland. It will consider the security situation in Northern Ireland, both addressing policy issues, and considering serious incidents and forthcoming events, including parades and marches. It will be concerned with the relations between the security forces and the community, establishing a programme of special measures to improve these relations, with the object, in particular, of making the security forces more readily acceptable to the nationalist community.

And the Communique makes clear that at its very first meeting the Conference will be considering the application of the principle that the armed forces, which include the Ulster Defence Regiment, operate only in support of the civil power, with the particular objective of ensuring as rapidly as possible that, save in the most exceptional circumstances, there is a police presence in all operations which involve direct contact with the community. The

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Conference will also at this first meeting consider ways of underlining the policy that the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the armed forces in Northern Ireland, discharge their duties evenhandedly, and with equal respect for the unionist and nationalist identities and traditions.

Moreover, the Conference may consider policy issues relating to prisons, as well as individual cases involving prisoners, so that information can be provided or inquiries instituted.

All these matters, together with the possible harmonisation of the criminal law applying in the North and in the South respectively and measures to give substantial expression to the aim of ensuring public confidence in the administration of justice, considering inter alia the possibility of mixed courts in both jurisdictions for the trial of certain offences, will be the responsibility of the Conference, and will under the terms of this Agreement remain so, even in the event of devolution. //

The Communique makes it clear, moreover, that at its first meeting, the Conference will also consider its future programme of work in all the fields - political, security, legal, economic, social and cultural - assigned to it under the Agreement. Moreover it says that it will concentrate at its initial meetings, both on ways of enhancing security co-operation between the two Governments, and on relations between the security forces and the minority community in Northern Ireland, as well as seeking measures which would give substantial expression to the aim of underlining the importance of public confidence in the administration of justice. The Communique adds that in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, the two sides are committed to work for early progress in these matters, and against this background I have said that it is the intention of my Government to accede as soon as possible to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

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Other matters covered by the Agreement include the functions of our Government with regard to putting forward views and proposals on the role and composition of a number of bodies in Northern Ireland, including the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, the Police Complaints Board, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Fair Employment Agency and the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

Also included is the whole area of cross-border co-operation, not merely in relation to security, but also in relation to promoting the economic and social development of those areas of both parts of Ireland which have suffered most severely from the consequences of the instability of recent years. Provision is made for the two Governments to consider the possibility of securing international support for this work, and this aspect of the Agreement has already attracted interest and a promise of tangible support from the Government and Congress of the United States. Other indications of similar interest have come from a number of other Governments in Europe - both in the Community and elsewhere in Western Europe - and from other countries overseas.

There are two other matters to which I must refer, before concluding this brief analysis of the Agreement. These are the provision for a review by the two Governments of the working of the Conference at the end of three years, or earlier if requested by either Government, to see whether any changes in the scope and nature of its activities are desirable, and the indication, for the first time, of a readiness by both Governments to lend support, to an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body of the kind referred to in the Anglo-Irish Studies Report of November, 1981. This last matter is, of course, one for this House itself, and Seanad Eireann, to consider.

There are indications of widespread support in the British Parliament for the establishment of such a body and I would hope that in the period ahead our two Parliaments can agree on such an initiative, which I believe will be a

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constructive development, giving to the Opposition parties and to parties in Northern Ireland, in addition to the two Governments, a role with respect to the whole range of Anglo-Irish relations, including naturally those to which I have just been referring.

I should tell the Dail that this Agreement will enter into force on the date on which the two Governments exchange notifications of their acceptance of this Agreement, which will follow shortly after the approval of this Agreement by the Dail and at Westminster, where, I understand, the Agreement is to be debated next week. Like all international agreements this one, must, of course, be registered with the United Nations under the mandatory requirement of Article 102 of the Charter of that body.

At this point I want to make one thing absolutely clear. The Agreement and the Communique stand on their merits. There are no secret agreements and no hidden agendas. When we started this negotiation both sides insisted that this was the principle on which they were acting: and both have fulfilled this understanding in complete good faith. Let there be no ambiguity on this crucial point. The transparency of the Agreement is an essential prerequisite to its future acceptance by the parties most intimately affected.

I should add that both sides are determined that the Agreement will work. I would like all to appreciate this fact.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT

I want to say also that this Agreement is not an end in itself. It is a framework for progress, which must be worked with understanding and goodwill by all parties to it, if we are to achieve the results of which it is capable viz. an end to the alienation of the minority in Northern Ireland from the processes of government, and progress towards peace, stability and

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reconciliation between the two communities in this island, which have been for so long so bitterly divided. I have no illusions, and would not wish by any word of mine, or by omission, to convey that I have any illusions about the difficulties that this will entail. In many ways this Agreement represents not so much the culmination of a process of intricate and complex negotiation - although it is that, of course - as the beginning of a difficult, and - let us face it - even dangerous, process of implementation.

Many forces will be at work seeking to wreck the process that has now been established. Quite apart from the normal hazards that such a process will inevitably face, given the room for legitimate divergences of views on how various issues and problems should be handled, there may well be deliberate attempts to contrive situations that will test the capacity and the will of the two Governments to agree on how contentious matters should be dealt with. It will require not merely good faith, which I believe exists on both sides, but good judgement and good luck to withstand the pressures to which this process will be subjected. But so much hangs on the joint ability of the two Governments to resolve these issues that, with God's help we shall, I believe surmount all these obstacles.

THE STATUS ISSUE

I want to come back at this stage to the matters covered by Article 1 of this Agreement. As indicated at the outset, the process that has led to this Agreement was started five-and-a-half years ago at a meeting between the then Taoiseach, now leader of the Opposition, Deputy Charles J. Haughey and the British Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher. The starting point for this Agreement has been the section of the Communique issued after that meeting, in which the then Taoiseach declared that any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. This affirmation in a formal Communique

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issued jointly on behalf of the two Governments had, as I recall, the assent of all Parties in this House. It provides one of the corner-stones of what has now been agreed, even though the word "constitutional" has been omitted from this phrase in the text of the Agreement before the House.

I support most strongly this affirmation, to which, indeed my own Party explicitly committed itself as long ago as 18th September, 1969. I believe that no sane person would wish to attempt to change the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of its people. That would be a recipe for disaster and could, I believe, lead only to a civil war that would be destructive of the life of people throughout our island. All Parties in this House repudiate violence, or the threat of violence, as a means of attaining our national aspiration, and the value of this affirmation in this Agreement, when approved by this House and by the Westminster Parliament, and then ratified, is not to be underestimated as a stabilising factor in the Northern Ireland situation.

This affirmation involves no diminution of the nationalist aspiration, which has indeed, as I shall have occasion to point out later, been incorporated specifically in the third paragraph of the Preamble to this Agreement, and has been given formal recognition there by the Government of the United Kingdom. For our aspiration to the political unity of this island is, as a matter of political and moral principle, conditional on the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We do not, and could not, seek to attain this aspiration against the wishes of a majority of the people of that part of our island, as was recognised by Deputy Haughey and his Government in May, 1980.

But while this provision in the Agreement diminishes in no way the nationalist aspiration to unity, and, of its very nature cannot affect our Constitutional position, the third clause of Article 1 of the Agreement advances that

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aspiration significantly. For in that clause, the British Government, as well as the Irish Government, declares that if in the future a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland, they will introduce and support in their respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.

The commitment in this clause to introduce such legislation is the first clear affirmation in any binding Anglo-Irish Agreement since 1921 that Britain has no interest in the continuing division of this island and that its presence in this island, undertaking the responsibility of government in Northern Ireland, continues solely because this is the wish of a majority of the people of that area, and will not continue beyond the point where that consent is changed into consent to Irish unity.

I have to emphasise at this point that the content of the Agreement itself represents those things to which both Governments can give their assent; of its very nature it contains no unilateral statements.

What is in fact most striking about this Agreement is the extent to which the two Governments have been able to give their common assent to a series of principles which correspond, in the most specific and detailed ways, to what the Forum proposed as necessary elements of a framework in which a new Ireland could emerge.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FORUM PRINCIPLES IN THE AGREEMENT

Let me for a few minutes demonstrate the extent to which this Agreement is founded directly on these Forum principles, to which, because they were drawn up by the Forum in a spirit of openness and generosity - showing equal respect for the two identities in Northern Ireland - have been able to command the assent of the British Government as well as of the Government of Ireland.

Thus, in the Preamble to this Agreement, having first of all stated the common wish of the two Governments further to develop the unique relationship between their peoples and the close co-operation between their countries as friendly neighbours and as partners in the European Community, the text continues by stating the two Governments' recognition of the major interest of both their countries, and, above all, of the people of Northern Ireland, in diminishing the divisions there, and achieving lasting peace and stability. This reflects the wording of the very first principle laid down by the Forum, viz. that a fundamental criterion of any new structures and processes must be that they will provide for lasting peace and stability.

The next paragraph of the Preamble to the Agreement recognises the need for continuing efforts to acknowledge and reconcile the rights of the two major traditions that exist in Ireland. This, together with the sixth paragraph of the Preamble, which commits the two Governments to recognise and respect the identities of the two communities in Northern Ireland and the right of each to pursue its aspiration by peaceful and constitutional means, echoes the very wording of the fourth Forum principle viz. that the validity of both the nationalist and the unionist identities in Ireland, and the democratic rights of every citizen on this island must be accepted; and that both of these identities must have equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and protection.

The second part of the third paragraph of the Preamble specifically refers to and recognises the rights of those who aspire to a sovereign united Ireland achieved by peaceful means and through agreement - words which echo directly the wording of the third Forum principle which refers to the political arrangements 'for a new and sovereign Ireland'. The simultaneous assertion of this right by the Government of Ireland, and recognition of this right by the British Government for the first time is a crucially important feature of this Agreement.

In the fourth paragraph of the Preamble the Governments have reaffirmed their total rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence - a direct reflection of the second of the Forum principles viz. that attempts from any quarter to impose a particular solution through violence must be rejected, along with the proponents of such methods.

The fifth paragraph of the Preamble is also a recognition by both Governments that the condition of genuine reconciliation and dialogue between unionists and nationalists is mutual recognition and acceptance of each other's rights. These words are, of course, taken directly from Chapter 4, paragraph 15 of the Forum Report which outlines the solution both to the historic problem and the current crises of Northern Ireland. The same point precisely is also made in the fifth principle of the Forum - that lasting stability can be found only in the context of new structures in which no tradition will be allowed to dominate the other, in which there will be equal rights and opportunities for all, and formal and effective guarantees for the protection of individual human rights, and of the communal and cultural rights of both nationalists and unionists.

In the sixth paragraph of the Preamble the two Governments proclaim their recognition of and respect for the identities of the two communities in Northern Ireland, and for the right of each to pursue its aspirations by peaceful and constitutional means. The wording here draws closely upon the fourth Forum principle that the validity of both the nationalist and unionist identities in Ireland and the democratic rights of every citizen on this island must be accepted.

And in the final paragraph of the Preamble the two Governments reaffirm their commitment to a society in Northern Ireland in which all may live in peace, free from discrimination and intolerance - just as the Forum in its sixth

principle says that civil and religious liberties and rights must be guaranteed, and that there can be no discrimination or preference in laws or administrative practices on grounds of religious belief or affiliation.

The incorporation in this Agreement of almost the whole corpus of the principles set out by the Forum as necessary elements of a framework within which a new Ireland could emerge, is a tribute to the four constitutional parties which drew up this set of principles on a consensus basis.

In these negotiations it was the task of the Irish Government not merely to present to the British Government, and secure their acceptance of, the principles agreed by the constitutional and nationalist parties - which has visibly been achieved - but to seek the agreement of the British Government to one or other of the structures set out in paragraphs 5.7 to 5.9 of the Forum Report, or, in default of an agreement on these, to discuss with the British Government other views that might contribute to political development, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 5.10.

The Government adhered loyally to this negotiating brief and it was only after exploration of the different models set out in paragraphs 5.7 to 5.9, and after it emerged that the British Government was not prepared to agree to any of these models, that the Government proceeded to seek agreement, on the basis of paragraph 5.10, upon proposals that would in some other way accommodate all the necessary elements of the framework proposed by the Forum in paragraph 5.2 of its Report.

The Agreement before the Dail is the outcome of these negotiations, which took place over a period of eighteen months, involving two Summits between the British Prime Minister and myself; four informal meetings between us in the margin of European Council meetings; three joint meetings between the

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Tanaiste and the Minister for Foreign affairs on behalf of the Irish Government and the Secretaries of State for Foreign Affairs and Northern Ireland on behalf of the British Government; ten meetings between the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs with the Foreign Secretary and/or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; and about 35 meetings of the negotiating group led by the Secretaries of the two Cabinets, convening often as frequently as every week, as well as many other meetings of officials in the margin of these structured encounters.

The length of these negotiations and the involvement in them of the Heads of the two Governments, of senior Ministers in the two Governments, of the Secretaries of the two Cabinets and of senior officials of a number of Departments of each Government, reflect the extreme complexity of the issues being tackled and the delicacy of the issues at stake. From the outset, and indeed at various points during these negotiations, there were many people in the political systems of our two States, and large sections of public opinion, which frankly doubted the possibility of securing an agreement that would fulfil the objective set out in paragraph 4.15 of the Forum Report. As Deputies will recall, this states that the solution to both this historic problem and the current crisis of Northern Ireland as well as of the continuing problem of relations between Ireland and Britain necessarily requires new structures that will accommodate together two sets of legitimate rights:

- the right of nationalists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity; and
- the right of unionists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and their way of life.

I want to conclude my remarks by addressing myself to two themes, one related to the Irish nationalist community, and the second to the unionist community.

THE NEED FOR UNITY AMONGST NATIONALISTS

So far as the Irish nationalists in this island are concerned, what has been achieved in the last three years has been the fruit of a quite exceptional degree of co-operation amongst parties with distinct and different historical traditions, parties which came together in the Forum, the terms of reference of which were the advancement of peace and stability in this island.

If it had not been for the willingness on the part of all parties concerned to come together in that body, on the basis of these terms of reference, transcending the differences between Government and Opposition and the differences between North and South, and to produce a Report which set out the principles upon which we should proceed, we would not be here today debating this Agreement.

I know that in the aftermath of the Forum, different views have been expressed and different interpretations given. There is no point in attempting to obscure that fact. I know also, as do you all, that in the weeks prior to the signature of this Agreement, as well as in the days since its signature, there have been criticisms of its terms, either as they were anticipated in advance, or as they emerged in the actual Agreement.

I hope that any differences that have emerged will be narrowed rather than broadened in the course of this debate. It is towards that end that I have directed my remarks here this afternoon - towards that objective above any other. For the setbacks to Irish nationalism in the past, and there have been many, have owed much to divisions amongst the nationalist people of this island - divisions which subsequent generations have often found hard to

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comprehend, and in respect of which they have at times been harshly critical. The Forum showed us how much can be achieved when we unite towards our common objective of securing peace and stability in this island while holding fast to the aspiration to Irish unity which all of us share. Let us not forget that lesson.

I would ask - indeed I have already asked - all the members of the parties on this side of the House to bear this in mind when speaking in this Debate. Let no one, in arguing the case for approval of this Agreement, be tempted to claim for it more than it contains or to enter into disputes or wrangles about its contents, about the process of its negotiation, or about its significance. And let us above all avoid any word that might endanger the lives of people in Northern Ireland by claiming that any kind of advantage has been obtained through this Agreement vis-à-vis the Unionist population in Northern Ireland.

THE NEED TO CONVINCE UNIONISTS OF THE VALUE OF THE AGREEMENT TO THEM

For that unionist population has had to live through many months of uncertainty about their future, an uncertainty that has fed fears and hatreds that lie not far below the surface in that unhappy part of this island. Some of their leaders have chosen - whether because they have not been able to, or have not wished to, grasp the real implications of this Agreement - to heighten still further these fears and tensions. Let nothing said in this House give any fuel to those who would wish to fan the flames of hatred and discord, for whatever motive.

Towards that end I want myself, turning towards those 900,000 unionists, to assert quite plainly and without equivocation that if they read what this Agreement contains, and in particular if they read Article 1 of this Agreement, they will see that, while as nationalists we retain our aspiration

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to Irish unity achieved by free consent and agreement, we repudiate formally, and do so now in an international agreement, any question of seeking the unity of this island otherwise than with the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland.

This is not merely an assurance of good intentions. It is a commitment that this State will not be a party to any attempt to constrain the people of Northern Ireland against the will of a majority to any change in the status of Northern Ireland. Unionists who, following the publication of the Forum Report, criticised that Report because the Forum did not acknowledge the current reality, which is that a majority in Northern Ireland are against change, should be reassured by the acceptance of that fact by our Government in the context of the re-affirmation of the principle of consent being required for any change in the status of Northern Ireland.

I want this message to get through. I want it to penetrate the haze of emotion and the miasma of fear into which some political leaders in Northern Ireland have sought to plunge the unionist population in the period before and immediately after the signature of this Agreement.

And to those unionists who believe that we are seeking a role in Northern Ireland akin to that of a Trojan horse, I ask them to read those sections of this Agreement, which have been included in it on the proposal of our Government, providing that if devolved Government within Northern Ireland can be agreed upon, the InterGovernmental Conference now being established shall no longer have any competence in those areas affected by devolution.

I want to say to the unionists of Northern Ireland, as someone who has always been concerned for both communities in that part of the island, that what has motivated me, and our Government, most powerfully towards seeking and securing this Agreement with the British Government has been the objective of ending the alienation of the minority in Northern Ireland. We have sought this both

for its own sake, because that alienation reflects the effects of injustices, but also because, if that alienation can be ended, the terrorists of the IRA, whose objective is to maim and murder members of the unionist community in the hope of bludgeoning them into submission, will suffer such a profound rejection amongst the minority in Northern Ireland that those terrorists would no longer be able to continue their bloody campaign.

Through this Agreement all the people of this island, together with the people of our neighbouring island Britain, can join together, not merely to confront terrorism by measures of security - though this we shall do together by joint action of the most effective kind - but also, and in the long run perhaps more importantly, by undermining the very basis of support for these evil men who seek to destroy society in Northern Ireland. Their objective, as we in this State know well, is ultimately to destabilise our State also, and to establish throughout this island the kind of reign of intimidation and terror which they have already brought to bear in many parts of Northern Ireland. We shall fight the battle against these terrorists to the utmost of our power, for ultimately our survival as a democracy is at stake as well as peace in Northern Ireland. In this we make common cause with all the people of Northern Ireland of both communities who abhor violence and terrorism; and I ask them to make common cause with us.

I make no apologies for addressing my closing remarks towards the unionist section of the community in Northern Ireland. The nationalist minority there, led by John Hume, Seamus Mallon, Austin Currie, Eddie McGrady, Joe Hendron and the rest of that courageous team, upon whom the survival of the democratic system in that part of our island has depended for so long, are now sustained by the knowledge that henceforth the Irish Government will be playing an effective role in removing the causes of nationalist alienation, and will be playing that role not from a distance, but in Northern Ireland

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itself, in its capital city Belfast. The leaders of the nationalist people in the North have given their wholehearted support to what we have done in negotiating and signing this Agreement.

But they, and those whom they represent, are potentially at risk if this Agreement is successfully misrepresented or widely misunderstood amongst the unionist community, enabling the evil men - and there are just as evil men in that community as in the IRA and INLA - to incite violence against the nationalist minority in the weeks and months ahead. That is why we must try to convey our convictions, and our sincerity, to the unionists of Northern Ireland.

I trust that I shall be followed in this debate by others who will reinforce what I have said, and that together we can carry conviction sufficient to ensure that this Agreement not merely provides an opportunity to bring peace and stability to Northern Ireland in the medium-term, but that it is not allowed to contribute in any degree to violence or instability in the short-term.

Conclusion

Let us, in conclusion, face together the fact that there are few political problems in the world today as intractable and as complex as that which this Agreement seeks to address. With such deep-seated fears and passions as exist in Northern Ireland, and lurk also under the surface in this State, we cannot pretend that we know with certainty how these problems may best be addressed. There will, therefore, inevitably be those who in good faith believe either that we have sought and secured too little, or that we have sought and secured too much. Such divergent views must be respected, where they are genuinely held, by people of real goodwill, who have themselves faced the realities both of nationalist alienation and of unionist fears, although I must add that the

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views of those who have refused to face one or other of these realities, or in some cases either of them, deserve less consideration.

The Government, together with the British Government, has sought painstakingly, employing every resource of knowledge and imagination that they possess, to find the optimal way forward between the dangers that beset us on either side: the danger of nationalist alienation overflowing into such widespread tolerance of or support for the IRA as to risk an escalation of violence by the terrorists of the persuasion; and the alternative risk of so destabilising the unionist population as to create the danger of an escalation of violence by the other terrorists in the loyalist camp. I believe we have, together, come as near as is humanly possible to achieving the right balance at this time. And I commend to the House the results of our work, which has been designed with honesty and dedication for one purpose alone: to bring peace and stability to Northern Ireland, and to preserve peace throughout these islands.