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Oifig An Aire Ghnothai Eachtracha

Memorandum for the Information of the Government

Recent Political Developments in Northern Ireland

1. At its meeting of 19 Meán Fomhair the Government was informed that an assessment of the state of political opinion on both sides in Northern Ireland based on current contacts with officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs would be circulated for information.
2. The Minister for Foreign Affairs wishes to bring to the attention of the Government information on recent developments in Northern Ireland. The Taoiseach, the Tanaiste and the Minister for Foreign Affairs will brief the Government on their recent confidential discussions with an SDLP delegation comprising John Hume, Seamus Mallon, Eddie McGrady and Joe Hendron.
3. Three issues have dominated politics and political discussion over the last few months in Northern Ireland. By far the most important is the continuing search by the Irish and British Governments to reach agreement on proposals concerning Northern Ireland. A second factor is the presence since last May of 59 elected Sinn Féin representatives on 17 of the 26 district councils. The third is the effect within Northern Ireland of the decision taken by the RUC Chief Constable, and backed up by the British Government, to ban and reroute some of the more domineering Orange parades, particularly those in Portadown.
4. The Taoiseach, accompanied by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Labour, met with the SDLP leadership on 20

September last. Officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs in recent weeks have met individually with a wide cross section of moderate nationalist opinion, including from the SDLP Messrs. Hume, Mallon, McGrady, Hendron, O'Donoghue, Haughey, Maginness, Feeley, Currie, McQuillan, Attwood, McGonnell and Hanna, solicitors McGrory and Napier, Bishop Cathal Daly, Fr. Faul as well as the chaplains in the Maze and Armagh prisons.

5. On the unionist side the current situation has been discussed with, among others, the Official Unionist deputy leader, Harold McCusker M.P., the OUP spokesman on security, Ken Maginnis M.P., the OUP General Secretary, Frank Miller, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, John Carson, and with a large number of moderate unionists. Contacts have also been maintained with two DUP members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a matter which is extremely secret and sensitive because of the physical danger for those involved should these contacts become known. Officials have also met individually with a wide spectrum of clerical opinion including the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, Dr. Armstrong, the Bishop of Down and Dromore, Dr. Eames, the Presbyterian Moderator, Dr. R. Dickinson and the Presbyterian Church Clerk, Dr. T. Simpson, Canon Eric Elliott of the Two Traditions group, and Presbyterian Ministers such as John Dunlop and John Morrow, who is also Director of Corrymeala.

6. In addition individual meetings have been held with the leader of the Alliance Party, John Cushnahan, the director of the Fair Employment Agency, and one time Alliance Deputy leader, Bob Cooper, the Secretary of the Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Terry Carlin, economists such as Professor Des Rea and John Simpson and a very wide section of journalists, from both nationalist and unionist traditions.

District Councils

7. The district council elections last May confirmed the Official Unionist Party (OUP) as the largest in Northern

Ireland with 30% of the vote. Next came the Democratic Unionists (DUP) of Ian Paisley with 24%, followed by the SDLP with 18% and Sinn Fein with just under 12%. The Alliance vote dropped from a high of 14% in the 1977 district council elections to 7% in 1985. Including independents the unionist share of the first preference vote was approximately 60%, the nationalist share approximately 33% and the Alliance 7%.

8. The election had the effect of drawing the two main Unionist parties together. They both campaigned on a "smash Sinn Fein" slogan hoping thereby through fear to maximise their share of the unionist vote. Many unionist politicians feel that the British Government, in permitting Sinn Fein members to take their seats on district councils, is asking unionists to associate with Sinn Fein in a manner which British Ministers, who do not meet Sinn Fein members, refuse to do. In addition most unionists believe, and have good reason for so doing, that Sinn Fein councillors support the violent campaign of the IRA. They recall that unionist politicians like Edgar Graham, Robert Bradford M.P. and Charles Armstrong then Chairman of Armagh district council, have been murdered by republicans. The support of Sinn Fein councillors for such deeds has been most dramatically put by the Omagh district council chairman, Kerr, who publicly states he would support the IRA in killing a member of the council staff who was a trained British soldier, i.e. a UDR member.

9. The result has been a unionist pact. A small working group of six has been set up, three from the OUP (Millar, the general secretary, Ross, the MP for Derry and Peter Smith) and three from the DUP (Robinson, the deputy leader, Wilson, the articulate press officer who is also a Belfast City councillor, and Foster, the "third force" leader from Fermanagh). The purpose of the working group is threefold - to prepare for a joint reaction to the expected Anglo-Irish agreement, to head off the attempt made in the wake of the rerouting of the Orange marches to establish a broad loyalist front to "supplement" the

efforts of the constitutional unionists and to provide a strategy for unionists in dealing with Sinn Fein on district councils.

10. The reaction of local unionists to Sinn Fein has differed from place to place. On Craigavon council (which includes Portadown and Lurgan) the DUP (six seats) and the OUP (11 seats) have a majority between them. This is traditionally an area of considerable sectarian feeling and there have been many sectarian murders in the area. Led by the DUP the unionists first sought to exclude Sinn Fein from council deliberations and then sought to have council members sign a pledge against violence. In each case the council was taken to court and lost. It now looks as if the council will in effect suspend itself. The view of at least one member of the joint unionist working group is that such action should be taken wherever possible, so as to have the maximum number of legal suits and appeal them to the highest possible authority, the purpose being to have the British Government take their responsibilities seriously and to proscribe Sinn Fein. Another member of the group personally favours a unionist boycott of the councils and the assignation of their functions to commissioners. These views, however, are not shared by all unionist councillors, particularly some of those in nationalist controlled councils and it is not without significance that OUP councillors are not boycotting Omagh and Fermanagh councils on which there are Sinn Fein chairmen. The long term prospects for the councils, which provide a focus for confrontation, cannot be very good, and recent developments in Antrim, Armagh and in Lisburn where the councils have suspended meetings for a month, on foot of a letter from Molyneaux to support Craigavon, would seem to indicate that the unionists are serious in their talks of boycotting the council. Belfast City Council last night rejected a DUP motion that it should adjourn for a month, and decided instead to seek talks with the new Secretary of State. It may be that the OUP refused to support the DUP because they want to retain the option of an adjournment in the

event of an Anglo-Irish Agreement. However, the differences between the OUP and the DUP in Belfast may indicate a fragility in the OUP/DUP pact. Some legal opinion would indicate that there could be a sustainable case to take against a council which adjourns itself for political reasons.

11. As with the unionists the SDLP approach to the district councils varies from council to council. In principle the SDLP have taken the view that whatever the unsavoury nature of their views no democratically elected councillor should be denied his right to perform his duties. In some councils such as Omagh and Fermanagh Sinn Fein have more seats than the SDLP and the latter tend to come under great pressure; in others such as Derry or Down the SDLP have retained their control. The securing by Sinn Fein of 36.5% of the nationalist vote in the seventeen seats it contested and 34.3% of the overall nationalist vote, as against 50.75% and 51.7% respectively for the SDLP has created, in some areas, serious difficulties for the SDLP.

12. A significant result of the district council elections, and perhaps in the long term one of the more significant results, has been the decision of Sinn Fein, who hitherto had been abstentionist, to participate in politics. Adams has recently admitted that the district councils have provided Sinn Fein with a political platform on which to put forward its views. It is much too early to say if this is creating significant tension within the republican movement between those who favour participation and those who wish to rely completely on the so called armed struggle but it is a very important development, which the unionists are determined to thwart. McGrory, who acts as solicitor for the leadership of Sinn Fein and for leading IRA activists, and who also acted for Sinn Fein when they took Craigavon Council to Court told us in confidence that there was considerable hesitation and even opposition in the "movement" to those who wanted to take the council to court.

The Marching Season

13. The marching season saw a very significant shift in the attitude of the RUC to selected marches, in which the Orange Order sought to demonstrate its traditional right to march through Catholic areas. John Cushnahan believes that Sir John Hermon, the RUC Chief Constable, has for three years been trying to implement a rerouting policy but that it was not until this year that he succeeded in obtaining political backing for his views. Cushnahan is probably right. The views of the Government, which is against provocative parades, were made known privately to the British as were the views of prominent clergymen including both Archbishops of Armagh. The SDLP took a very forthright line on the issue.

14. The initiative to oppose the decision to reroute the parades in Portadown came from the local Orange Order leaders. They received some support and encouragement from both the DUP and the OUP leadership, with more from the former and less from the latter. Both the UDA and the UVF were present in Portadown during the disturbances on 12/13 July, though their attacks on the police were relatively muted and their commitment was less than total. The RUC for two days prevented all attempts by the Orangemen to march through the Tunnel and on the evening of the second day they launched a counter attack in which they used their batons freely. A number of demonstrators were arrested, including two full time members of the UDR.

15. The police activities have had a number of consequences. Firstly a small number of police families have been driven out of their homes on the Killycomain and Rectory estates in Portadown, as well as in Cookstown. According to Bishop Eames this has important consequences for relations between the ordinary constables and their superior officers and for the relationship between the police and their community (Protestant). He thinks, however, that the Chief Constable has the matter under control. Secondly a number of unionist

politicians have indicated that their support for the police is now qualified. The most significant was Harold McCusker, the OUP deputy leader who said that as a consequence of the banning and rerouting of Orange marches by the RUC he will no longer be giving the RUC his total and unqualified support. McCusker is however, well known as a mercurial character who is given to the use of intemperate language and who frequently fails to follow through on his declared intentions. Though he is the local M.P. he was not present in Portadown for the 12/13, preferring instead to march in Banbridge and he was away from the area on his holidays for a month thereafter returning only in late August. In effect, he allowed others to take the initiative and his late intervention may be seen as an attempt to regain the initiative.

16. The third consequence is that Alan Wright, the local Orange leader, has established a United Ulster Loyalist Front (UULF). Underlying this development, according to the OUP General Secretary and to others, is a belief that the efforts of constitutional unionist politicians are failing to preserve the unionist position and that it is now necessary to supplement the efforts of constitutional unionist politicians. A 13 member committee has been set up by the UULF on which the UDA is represented by John McMichael. Two other members are the extremist DUP councillors, George Graham and Ethel Smyth, both of whom were prominent during the Orange disturbances. [One recent interesting development is that Graham and Smyth have had a public row because the latter has put herself forward, without backing from DUP H.Q. for a by-election to the Northern Ireland Assembly.] The view of the OUP spokesman on security, Ken Maginnis, and of other senior OUP spokesmen and well informed Protestant clergy is that this agitation is past its zenith. The UULF arose in response to a specific situation - the rerouting of Orange parades. A further point is that it failed in its objective to secure an Orange march through the Tunnel. The OUP have distanced themselves from the agitation and Paisley, possibly

because of the pact and because of the OUP/DUP working arrangements, has been reasonably cautious. It looks as if this particular issue is now almost closed. It has had the effect, however, according to some constitutional unionists, of putting them on the defensive vis-a-vis less constitutionally-minded loyalists.

Anglo-Irish Talks

17. While the unionist concern about the councils has not waned they are now also directing their attention to the Anglo-Irish talks, to the speculation about the possible content of those talks and to what they should do about them. An important factor in assessing the current mood is that there has been widespread leaking by the British side of the progress and detail of the discussions taking place between the two Governments. The leaks have been to the effect that there is likely to be an Anglo-Irish Agreement which would include some form of role for the Irish Government in representing nationalist views to the British government; that this would consist of a development of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, possibly with some form of Irish presence in Belfast, that significant changes are being sought in the security area, involving the RUC and the UDR, and that the Irish side want a joint court for the trial of terrorist offences.

18. Molyneaux, the OUP leader, is, in the words of a very distinguished churchman who knows him well, blinkered and unimaginative. He is, nonetheless, clearly in control of his party. He is a Privy Councillor and it is very likely that the British Government have kept him well informed under Privy Council rules of Anglo-Irish developments as the talks have progressed. It is also clear that officials in Northern Ireland have been made aware of different aspects of the talks in recent months. It seems most unlikely that they would not have passed on that information to their unionist friends and acquaintances. The overall conclusion must be that leading unionist politicians, both OUP and DUP, are well informed about the parameters of the Anglo-Irish talks and in some instances

about the detail. This thesis is borne out by numerous contacts with both the OUP and the DUP.

19. Earlier in the summer unionists concentrated their attention on their opposition to any reform of the police, of the UDR and of the courts. They have now turned their attention to the possibility of an Irish presence in Northern Ireland saying this would be incompatible with sovereignty. One of the main tasks of the OUP-DUP working group established during the summer has been to prepare a unionist strategy to deal with the Anglo-Irish talks. On 30 August Molyneaux and Paisley met with Thatcher in London and handed over a document which was designed to offer an alternative to the Anglo-Irish talks. They informed Mrs. Thatcher that OUP and DUP members of a devolved Northern Ireland government would be prepared to meet their opposite Ministerial numbers in the South to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern within the purview of respective departmental responsibilities and would be prepared to form part of a UK team in Anglo-Irish talks on matters affecting the two states exclusive of those touching on UK sovereignty over Northern Ireland. The conditions laid down by Molyneaux and Paisley for such cooperation were that the Government would be required to withdraw its "territorial claim" to Northern Ireland and that UK sovereignty over Northern Ireland remains undiminished. They sought assurance that Mrs. Thatcher's interpretation of sovereignty accorded with their own and specifically that sovereignty precludes any "British-Irish" machinery dealing only with Northern Ireland. They said they want a devolved government in Northern Ireland satisfactory to unionists and submitted that "a continuing SDLP veto over internal political development and a continued denial of local democracy in the wake of any Anglo-Irish Agreement could only further erode the confidence of the unionist majority in the constitutional process." (underlining supplied). The document added that the OUP and DUP would be prepared to consider reasonable proposals for the protection of nationalist interests in Northern Ireland short of seats in a

cabinet for minority representatives.

20. A written reply was received from Mrs. Thatcher on 13 September which a DUP source described as "slamming the door in our faces". Mrs. Thatcher said she is convinced that the present dialogue with the Irish Government represents her best hope of improving cooperation in a number of areas, including security, and of promoting enduring peace and stability in Northern Ireland. She also assured them that sovereignty over Northern Ireland will be undiminished. In their response of 30 September Paisley and Molyneaux said they concluded from her letter that British-Irish machinery for dealing with Northern Ireland is contemplated and that they see these proposals as clear infringements of British sovereignty. They said that justice dictates that the people of Northern Ireland, either through their elected representatives or in some other appropriate manner should be afforded the opportunity to accept or reject what the British Government has negotiated "before the deal is finally struck". They also requested a further meeting with Mrs. Thatcher.

21. One DUP member of the working group told an official recently that they assume the British Government will try to sell an agreement to the unionists with the argument that it would help to defeat the IRA and to eliminate Sinn Fein from the political process. That, according to the informant, would not be enough to compensate for what unionists will see as an infringement of sovereignty. Another member of the group, the OUP General Secretary, has told us the OUP will oppose any agreement which impinges on sovereignty. In his view any role for Dublin, other than a minimalist consultative one, would draw forth that opposition. If the two Governments were to argue that the outcome of the talks is within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, meeting from time to time in London and in Dublin, the OUP could accept it as a continuation of the arrangements begun in 1980. If, however, a Ministerial or official presence in Belfast were involved it would be very difficult for unionists to see that as other than

an infringement of sovereignty.

22. Speaking at the weekly DUP press conference on 24 September the DUP deputy leader, Peter Robinson, said he expected unionists would be called upon to defy and oppose an Anglo-Irish Agreement. He threatened that if Mrs. Thatcher tried to impose a settlement on unionists against their will unionists would end up in conflict with the security forces. They would not allow an Irish Government secretariat to operate in Belfast. He hinted, as have other DUP spokesmen, that they want a referendum in Northern Ireland to test support for an agreement. From other sources it appears that the OUP/DUP plan envisages a series of measures designed to underscore their dissatisfaction with an Anglo-Irish Agreement. The first would be withdrawal from the district councils and perhaps area boards, which has been heralded by action in Antrim, Armagh, Lisburn and Cookstown councils. This might be followed by token strikes. There has also been some consideration of an all out political strike as in 1974. However, Molyneaux, on 1 October, implied that their initial reaction might be for some or all of the Westminster M.P.s, the Northern Ireland Assembly members and the Council members to resign their seats and seek re-election on an anti-Agreement platform. It will be recalled that the general election in February 1974 provided them with such a platform. One particularly informed contact with whom a Departmental official talked on 1 October said the way for the British Government to handle that is to say beforehand that it would expect the same people to be elected as had resigned their seats, and the election wouldn't signify anything. An election, or series of elections might, however, create difficulties for the SDLP.

23. It is widely believed among serious observers and among middle class moderate unionists that the vast majority of the unionist population want peace and stability and would be prepared to accept a role for the Irish Government and some form of power-sharing for Northern nationalists if the result

were to be peace in Northern Ireland. The view is certainly not publicly enunciated by unionist politicians, though some of them are much more forthcoming in private. It can be argued that unionist tactics at present are in essence the tactics of bluster, which have been successful down through the years. Indeed, some reliable journalists are convinced there is no intention other than bluster. It is certainly true that the unionist politicians with whom contact has been maintained are much less belligerent in private and not as concerned in private as they are in public about the weakening of their position as a result of the Anglo-Irish talks. It would seem that the public statements are designed more to obtain concessions from the British Government through threats than to inflame unionist opinion in Northern Ireland.

24. The danger of the bluster is that it could encourage support for the loyalist paramilitaries. The evidence which is available to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and which is based on information from a very wide range of unionist contacts, is that the loyalist paramilitaries, at the moment, lack the resources for a sustained military campaign of a major nature. This is not to say they are incapable of sectarian attacks and of occasional bombings either within or without Northern Ireland. They have been weakened by their involvement in racketeering and are deeply infiltrated by the police. They could also come under pressure from their supporters to show that they are active by, e.g. killing Sinn Fein agents. One such attack was made on a Sinn Fein candidate on 27 September. They could only mount a sustainable campaign in the event of widespread political and grass root support as in 1974. As of now that support is not evident. A further important element would be the attitude of the security forces and the determination or otherwise of the British Government to deal with such a major threat to its rule.

25. Terry Carlin, the Secretary of the Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, told an official on

1 October that there is no evidence that the paramilitaries and the loyalist activists are organising a workers strike as in 1974 and 1977. In 1977 he had advance notice of the strike six weeks before it occurred. In his opinion there are crucial factors which would make the repetition of a 1974 type general stoppage virtually impossible. If there is a workers strike, and he thinks it most unlikely, it will be of a 1977 limited kind. The reason why it was defeated in 1977, as distinct from 1974, was because the then Government with Mason as Northern Ireland Secretary and the then RUC were determined to break it and had the support of people like himself in the trade union movement. Those factors still hold good and his view is that a strike, which is unlikely, would in all probability fail. He added that on the last two occasions when the unionist politicians and the paramilitaries called for token one day stoppages, following the murders of Lord Mountbatten and Robert Bradford M.P., the stoppages had not taken place. While he wouldn't rule out a token stoppage he thought it unlikely to be successful.

26. On 26 September, the Alliance Party leader, John Cushnahan, also referred to the bluster saying that unionist attacks on the Anglo-Irish talks were extremist. He added that unionist leaders who whip up feelings about the talks are prepared to lay down others lives but not their own. Unionist scare mongering threatens Northern Ireland's constitutional position more than an Anglo-Irish Agreement or the IRA. He had recently visited the Maze where prisoners from all organisations had indicated to him a regret that they had listened to the activities of certain politicians who when the crunch had come disappeared back into the woodwork. In recent conversations Cushnahan gave some indication that Alliance had intended to make a submission to the New Ireland Forum, and was not as hostile to the Anglo-Irish exchanges as he had been. He also felt that there probably would be no Anglo-Irish agreement because he does not believe Mallon will support anything with which the two Governments could agree.

27. Sinn Fein criticism of the Government has increased in recent months. One particularly good source has said that the IRA and Sinn Fein are deeply disturbed about the likely outcome of the Anglo-Irish talks, and by the effectiveness of the Government, and particularly the Minister for Foreign Affairs in reaching out to the minority. Sinn Fein have been particularly vociferous in their attacks on the Minister and they claim that he has no right to speak for Northern nationalists. They would see an Anglo-Irish Agreement as evidence of collaboration by the Government with the British to prop up unionist control in Northern Ireland and designed to defeat republicanism. Officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs were told some weeks ago by persons who are in close contact with republicans that in the event of an Anglo-Irish agreement the republican paramilitaries might launch a campaign designed to defeat it. These same informants believe that it is only by providing remedies for nationalist grievance, be it of an economic, political or security kind, that violent republicanism would be overcome and they would urge the completion of an Anglo-Irish agreement. It now appears however, that the Provisional IRA/Sinn Fein may have decided to take a different course.

28. In a somewhat defensive speech on 25 September last Adams, the Sinn Fein President said that if small gains are secured from the present process they should be seen as just that. They will have been won by the suffering of Northern republicans, and by their support for Sinn Fein. They will not be sufficient to resolve the national question. He added that London's role will be to curtail the unionists while Dublin's will be to lower nationalist aspirations so that "both governments can pursue their joint objective of defeating republicanism". Speaking to a group of Sinn Fein councillors in Dublin on 29 September Morrison said the IRA would not be engaging in any special campaign of violence to scuttle the

talks. Sinn Fein could claim "full credit for forcing the Dublin Government and the SDLP into setting up the Forum." He added it is in the interest of Sinn Fein and the IRA to use the inability of constitutional nationalists to obtain freedom and independence from Britain demonstrated. P.J. McGrory, who acts as solicitor for Adams and for the Sinn Fein leadership, and who is a consistently reliable source of information on Sinn Fein/IRA strategy, has told an official that Morrison's words that the IRA would not be engaging in a campaign of violence to scuttle the talks represents Sinn Fein policy. They believe there will be an Anglo-Irish Agreement, that the "small gains" which will be made will not be sufficient to deal with nationalist alienation and that people who now support the SDLP, once the failure of the Anglo-Irish arrangements to deal with their grievances becomes obvious, will give their support to Sinn Fein. McGrory said that Sinn Fein/IRA thinking is that a campaign of violence aimed at the Agreement could lose Sinn Fein that expected new support.

29. In an editorial the Irish News, which is the main nationalist newspaper in Northern Ireland, described Adams' speech of 25 September as revealing an underlying disquiet in the republican camp that more will be achieved than they had cynically predicted. There must be some benefit for the ordinary sane citizen if both Sinn Fein and the sabre-rattling unionists are opposed to it. "The truth is that Sinn Fein cannot face up to the prospect of what may be achieved by constitutional politics".

30. Fr. Faul, who is close to grass root feelings believes that Sinn Fein are "on the run", because of the success of providing an alternative to the armalite for assuaging nationalist grievance, and because of recent IRA excesses. He is supportive of the Government and believes that if what he has read of the talks in the newspapers is accurate then it is a process which will work. Bishop Cahal Daly believes that the Provisionals in Belfast are weaker than they have been for some time and thinks they might not find it possible significantly to intensify their campaign.

In particular he thinks their support in West Belfast is weaker at present than at any time in the recent past.

31. Members of the SDLP executive, and presumably some SDLP councillors outside that small group, are aware that some of their colleagues have been briefed by the Government. They believe that expectations have been toned down and that the agreement envisaged will not be a final settlement or solution to the problem. They recognise that a 32 county republic is not a possibility at present. They say they want "fair play and justice". According to one SDLP contact what will count is the visible practical consequences of an agreement at street level. Nationalists will judge the agreement by, for example, the attitude displayed towards them and their aspirations by the security forces in contrast to what existed previously. There is scepticism in some sections of the SDLP about the intentions of the British Government. They are, however, encouraged by the police handling of issues such as the Portadown parade. At the SDLP constituency representatives' meeting on 29 September (i.e. those elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the party officials) there was general support for an agreement though concern was expressed about the UDR. It is understood that only one member (O'Hare) seemed opposed to an Agreement of the kind envisaged, though it is believed he will support his colleagues.

32. Most SDLP contacts are of the view that the Government could not easily enter into arrangements with the British without the support of the SDLP for those arrangements. It would appear that a clear majority in the party would wish to support any agreement made by the Government. All SDLP contacts have said that they believe it important that if the SDLP support the arrangements it should be the SDLP in its entirety. Many in the SDLP see the talks as a logical follow-up to the Report of the New Ireland Forum and believe the future of the party and of constitutional nationalism depend on the success of the process.