



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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2. found later as requested.

Annex A.

First Draft of Secretary of State's statement in Commons
(received 4th July 1990)

General Tone

1. In a key statement of this nature, it is essential to acknowledge the perspectives and concerns of both communities and to try and offer reassurance and encouragement to both. We found this balance missing in the draft. The overall tenor of the statement seemed designed to take account of Unionist sensitivities without sufficient recognition that there is an equivalent degree of sensitivity on the nationalist side. In particular, the references at the beginning of the text to the Constitution provided a most unhelpful context for what followed.
2. Moreover, the objective of North-South talks was described in the draft in restrictive terms which were bound to be unacceptable to nationalists. The text effectively defined the subject matter of these talks in advance as "the relationship between any new Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government"; a broader statement of objective, which accommodated also the nationalist view that a wide-ranging discussion of relationships on this island is a pre-requisite for progress, would have been essential to a balanced text.

Conditionality on North-South Talks

3. The text is highly conditional in its approach to the timing of North-South talks (see Annex 1 for specific quotations). While the last sentence of paragraph 11 is clearly intended to be helpful, it too is qualified in its approach. The Secretary of State is not making a simple statement that he is sure North-South talks will begin half-way through the gap but is instead saying that he is sure "progress will be sufficiently rapid" to enable them to get underway.

4. Overall, we find that the approach in the draft offers no assurance that the North-South talks would in practice get underway within the timeframe envisaged - the language is qualified throughout by references to the need for substantial, real or rapid progress to be first achieved in the inter-party talks.

Government's Approach

5. The approach consistently articulated by the Government and by constitutional nationalists in the North is that relationships on this island must be comprehensively addressed before the elements of a way forward can be established. It follows from this approach that discussion on a North-South basis is an essential ingredient in the achievement of progress. Any requirement that "substantial progress" must be achieved in advance of the opening of North-South talks is therefore fundamentally at variance with the nationalist analysis; to structure the talks on such a basis would almost inevitably lead to misunderstanding and dissension in the crucial early weeks of discussions - thus gravely jeopardising the chances of ultimate success of the entire process and thereby possibly giving a new credibility to the men of violence.
6. There is a further, quite distinct, reason for our concern about the precondition of "substantial progress" being achieved in inter-party talks. Unionist assurances about their desire for intensive discussions, hopefully leading to rapid progress, are no doubt given in good faith. However, it is perfectly clear that there are major differences within and between the Unionist parties as to the optimum way forward. The issues at stake have been under discussion within Unionism for some time, without any sense emerging - at least publicly - that a consensus view is developing. In these circumstances, it is difficult to see how there can be a realistic basis for hopes that, within a few weeks of

talks beginning, the differences within Unionism (let alone between unionists and nationalists) could be bridged to the extent that "substantial progress" could be deemed to have been achieved.

Need for Specific Timeframe

7. It is for these reasons that we reiterate our view that the timeframe for all three strands of the talks must be established in advance with sufficient firmness to ensure that there is no subsequent slippage. We have indicated our acceptance that the internal talks should get underway first; we would hope that it would now be possible to secure an unqualified commitment on the early start of the other two strands.

Other Issues

8. We continue to be concerned about the formula (para. 10) being employed on the Secretariat (particularly the use of the phrase "normal role"). We also feel that the reference to an "interval of some months" between Conference meetings (para. 9) is perhaps too loose.

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ANNEX 1

Textual Difficulties

Timing of North South Talks

Para. 4 "we would envisage a meeting to open such discussion as soon as substantial progress had been made in inter-party talks on arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland".

Para. 5 "But as real progress is made on inter-party talks (which I expect to be intensive).....it will be both necessary and important to get all three sets of discussions under way within weeks of each other. With this in mind, I would intend, at an early stage in the proposed inter-party talks, to invite the parties to consider the future timetable of the talks process".

Para. 11 "Given the commitment shown by the potential participants, progress in these talks will, I am sure, be sufficiently rapid to require the launch of the other strands of discussion by half way through the period before the next Conference meeting".

Description of Participants in North-South Talks

Para. 5 ... "including the Unionist parties as members of the UK team,"

Subject Matter of North-South Talks

Para. 4

(Unionists) "share with me the recognition that the implementation of any agreement between the Northern Ireland parties on arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland would be strengthened if agreement were also reached on the relationship between any new Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government".

Para. 6

"It is common ground that the simultaneous resolution of such talks would need to comprehend the transfer of power to locally accountable political institutions, the relationship between such institutions and the Irish Government and the implications for the relationship between the British and Irish Governments".

Duration of the "gap"

Para. 9

.... "An interval of some months between two specific Conference meetings would facilitate the opportunity for the political dialogue and negotiations which we now anticipate".

Formula on the Secretariat

Para. 10

"As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates, the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement".

Text to replace last three lines of paragraph 4,
paragraph 5 and final sentence of paragraph 11
in Mr. Brooke's draft statement of 4th July

Indeed it is because the Northern Ireland parties all look, as I do, to address each of the three relationships that the talks I have described will necessarily involve discussions between the Northern Ireland parties; discussions between the Northern Ireland parties, with the Secretary of State, and the Irish Government; and discussions between the two Governments about relations between the UK and the Irish Republic, including any implications for the Anglo-Irish Agreement. These discussions may not necessarily start at the same time; however, in order to reach a conclusion that will address all three of the underlying relationships, it will be both necessary and important to get all three sets of discussions underway within weeks of each other.

It is agreed between all the potential participants that the inter-party talks, as soon as they get underway, will be intensive. I have been assured by all the parties that it is their intention to participate actively from the outset in order to seek to achieve rapid progress. It is further agreed by all participants that, so as to reach a conclusion within the timeframe envisaged, it will be necessary, as I have just indicated, to launch the three strands of discussion within weeks of each other.