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2/ February 1991

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Frank Millar

The following points of interest arose yesterday in a conversation with Frank Millar about the Brooke initiative.

The Irish Government paper

- Millar's source for his story in Monday's Irish Times, he indicated to me circuitously, was the NIO. He appears to have been given sight over the weekend, probably by an official rather than a political source, of key formulations contained in the Irish paper. He hinted that he in fact obtained the precise language on the "UK delegation" but chose to paraphrase it, rather than quote it directly, in order to protect his source.
- His private view of the paper is that, in tactical terms, the Irish Government has made a skilful move. It has forced the Unionists back onto the defensive. However, he sees no likelihood that the Unionist leaders will accept any of our formulations. "They are not going to shift their position".
- Millar speculated that the Unionist response would be to link together the two key formulations (the "arbiter" provision, with no reference to consultation with the parties, and the "UK delegation" language) and to claim to Brooke that Dublin is involved in a grand conspiracy to undermine the Union and NI's place within it. They will claim that Dublin is specifically vetoing any reference to the UK in the text. They will claim to Brooke that it was he who first proposed the idea of the Unionists forming part of a UK delegation, and that he should not back down on this point.
- On the "arbiter" point, a senior Unionist politician told Millar this week that, as a matter of practicality, he could not imagine a

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situation in which the Secretary of State would first meet with the NI parties "in one room" and at a certain point, acting entirely on his own, would go "next door" and say "we're ready" (for North/South talks).

- Millar sees merit in the NIO argument (which he has heard on a few occasions) that the degree of certainty required by Dublin on timing can never be delivered as the Unionists, if they want to, can refuse to cooperate at any stage. I challenged this argument on various grounds.

- However, referring to the likely Unionist hostility to our language on the "UK delegation" point, Millar reflected that nobody would ever have imagined that the Unionists would accept the "fudge" offered last year on the Secretariat - yet they did. "Perhaps we are in for some surprises yet".

- Millar's strong conviction, however, is that the Unionists will not respond positively to the new Irish proposals.

Possible meetings

- When he asked in the NIO yesterday if Brooke planned to meet any of the parties in the next few days, Millar was given a blunt "No" as an answer.

- On the other hand, he has heard suggestions that a meeting with the Unionists could well be arranged for later this week (to facilitate Ian Paisley who is returning from Strasbourg).

- Irritation was also expressed by the NIO about Millar's drawing attention, in his Monday article, to the NIO's continuing failure to arrange meetings. This is a point, however, which Millar regards as entirely valid and worth highlighting, given the importance which the Irish paper now holds for the success of the process.

- Millar also suggested (to me) that, if no meeting took place with the Unionists shortly, Molyneux would be in a position to claim that he had heard of the Irish proposals only from the media and that this suggested Brooke did not attach much significance to them.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue

David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer

Annex

UK Delegation

1. In a recent discussion with Frank Millar, he said that a senior Unionist contact (I suspect Peter Robinson) had emphasised in private to him recently that the Unionist leadership would not back down on the UK delegation issue, "not least because Peter Brooke had suggested it". Brooke (Millar's Unionist source said) had, at an early stage of the process, said to Molyneaux and Paisley that "of course, you'll come as part of a UK delegation".

2. The Unionist source went on to say that constitutionally the Unionists considered the suggestion from Brooke a bit odd - rather like John Major bringing Neil Kinnock and Paddy Ashdown with him on a visit to see President Bush! However, it was a useful concession and they had decided to pocket it; and, as he said, there was now no question of moving back from it.


Dermot Gallagher

22 February, 1991