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Brooke interview. Irish Times. 27th September. 1991

1. I spoke to Robert Alston this morning before he was due to meet Mr. Brooke for a briefing session. The British had been told of the Minister's concern about Mr. Brooke's interview in the Irish Times last Thursday and had asked for an indication of what had troubled us in particular. I said that the Minister was away at present and might wish to raise his concerns directly tomorrow, but I gave the following general guidance:

- Mr. Brooke had been more pronounced in his references to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution ("modification of Articles 2 and 3 would seem to me to be an extremely powerful instrument") and to our position ("slightly general inconsistency and incoherence in the Republic's position") than we could recall from previous comments. I also said that Mr. Brooke had engaged in a good deal of interpretation of Article 1 of the Agreement using language which did not quite represent the position ("the whole principle of Article 1 and indeed of the 1973 Act is that free men should be allowed to determine their own future").
- In several parts of the interview Mr. Brooke had appeared to give the Agreement a less than ringing endorsement, e.g., the British Government in 1985 took the decision that the Agreement was "on balance an Agreement worth signing"; "whatever the plusses and minuses of the Agreement as expressed by historians in the future ..."; "what has happened since 1985 is itself a demonstration that unless you can get everyone to sign up you will not have something that will survive"; "the Anglo-Irish Agreement will overturn itself if it tries to carry more weight than it is at

any time capable of carrying". In relation to the last remark, I pointed out that the Agreement was between the two States and could only be "overturned" by them. Indeed, that had been a large part of the thinking behind the Agreement.

- Lastly, although we took into account that Mr. Brooke was speaking to a Unionist journalist, he was also speaking to a Southern newspaper and his responses seemed to have been geared almost entirely towards the Unionist position. There had been no indication of sympathy with nationalist concerns or any reference to nationalist political aspirations.

2. Alston seemed to take the point about the Agreement. He argued, however, that what Mr. Brooke had been talking about in relation to the Agreement "overturning" itself was the taking on of new areas and competencies (Millar had asked if its work and area of influence should be greatly expanded). I said it appeared to us to refer to the implementation of the Agreement within its existing scope and agenda; and we had been struck that Mr. Brooke had said nothing positive about the Agreement, its work or its institutions.



Declan O' Donovan
30 September, 1991