

20 April 1994

TO: PS/Mr Smith

FROM: W D A Haire
Equality Division

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
PS/Mr Michael Ancram (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Loughran
Mr Semple
Mr Gibson
Mr Watkins
Mr Bell
Mr Wood, Info Services
Mr Canavan
Mr Daniell, ESL
Mr MacCabe, PAE
Mr Hamilton
Mr Hewitt
Mr Dodds
Mr McAleer
MC

**VANDEMEULEBROUCKE REPORT ON DISCRIMINATION IN THE FIELD OF EMPLOYMENT
NORTHERN IRELAND: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VOTE**

Introduction

On Friday, 22 April the plenary session of the European Parliament should vote through without debate, the resolution prepared by the Social Affairs Committee (copy attached). Following comments by Dr Paisley and Mr Nicholson, it is possible that there may be some additional press interest. This note covers a line to take if the Ministers are questioned. Since our aim is to play down the importance of this European Parliament initiative, we do not however need to initiate press interest.

Background

My minute of 16 March provided background on the handling of this "own initiative" report, which had been instigated due to pressure in particular by Neil Blaney MEP in 1992. Once the European Parliament had decided that such a initiative should be taken, it was impossible to stop a Report. It had been hoped that pressure of work prior to the European Elections would have swallowed it up, but Vandemeulebroucke, the Report's author, has a leading part in the Rainbow Group of MEPs and has used the access this provides to press for completion of this exercise.

In the summer of 1993, we gave full co-operation to Mr Vandemeulebroucke to prepare his Report, but he clearly has been heavily influenced by his close contacts with Neil Blaney MEP and those, such as Oliver Kearney, who argue for quotas as the only solution to problems of fair participation. Therefore while the Report does contain much descriptive material which

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we have given Mr Vandemeulebroucke, his conclusions include criticism of the effectiveness of our legislation, arguments about the need for goals and time-tables for the ending of the unemployment differential between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and also suggests that European Union assistance to Northern Ireland should be made conditional on the achievement of these goals and time-tables.

We have found sympathy for our position not only among the Conservative and Christian Delegate MEPs, but also among the Socialist group, while the European Commission, although staying neutral on the politics of the issue, has not been interested in the concept of conditionality which would open up difficult precedents throughout the Union, and which we believe anyway would be beyond the Commission's powers. As a result in the Social Affairs Committee the Socialist and European Peoples Party Group worked together to put forward a large number of amendments, deleting the concept of conditionality, and produced a much weakened resolution (copy attached). The latter indeed emphasises the importance of political progress in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the Report by Vandemeulebroucke will be available to commentators, and still contains his criticisms. We need to emphasise that only the Resolution has been agreed by the Parliament.

Once the Resolution is passed by the Plenary Session of Parliament, the President of the European Parliament will send copies to the Commission and HMG, but since there is no legal basis for the Parliament's work there is no need for further action.

I would suggest that there is no need for Ministers to make a press release on this issue, but if Ministers feel it appropriate to comment to press questioning I attach a line to take.

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LINE TO TAKE

VANDEMEULEBROUCKE REPORT AND RESOLUTION

I understand that the European Parliament has voted through a Resolution on the Report prepared by Mr Vandemeulebroucke on employment discrimination in Northern Ireland. It is my understanding that the Resolution has indeed come to somewhat different conclusions to that of Mr Vandemeulebroucke.

Last summer, when we were aware that the European Parliament had asked Mr Vandemeulebroucke to prepare a report, we gave him our full co-operation and briefed him extensively. The Fair Employment Commission and the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights also provided briefing for him. I am afraid that the many points that were made to him were not fully reflected in his Report. In particular we, like the European Parliament, reject his suggestion that funds should be made conditional on the achievement of specific reductions in the unemployment differentials between the two communities. Indeed MEPs in their Resolution have appreciated the real difficulties of reducing this differential, and how limited an indicator of progress it is. I am also very pleased that the Resolution recognise the strength of our Fair Employment Legislation in Northern Ireland and the importance of political progress.

What we need to achieve in fair employment is the combination of our strong Fair Employment Legislation and new investment which will create new jobs. Government is fully committed to both. We have to particularly target the very many long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland, to give them the skills to get back into the labour force.

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The European Union, through its structural fund assistance, and through spreading a clear understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland, has an important role to play in assisting us to improve investment opportunities. I am pleased that the Parliament clearly recognises this. The plan presented by us to Brussels for the next 6 years of structural fund assistance emphasises the importance of all the European investment in assisting achieving fair participation for both Protestants and Roman Catholics.