

PAPER SUBMITTED BY THE IRISH GOVERNMENT DELEGATION

Identity, Allegiance and Underlying Realities

Background

1. The heart of the problem in Northern Ireland is a conflict between two separate identities. They involve conflicting allegiances which transcend the confines of Northern Ireland itself. This conflict is the legacy of the difficult and often tragic relationship between these two islands, centred predominantly on the question whether and to what extent Ireland should enjoy the right of self-determination, vis-a-vis Great Britain.
2. The difference of opinion on this issue was reflected also within the population of Ireland. Various Home Rule measures to meet Irish nationalist demands for autonomy foundered on the refusal of the unionist minority to accept any arrangement, even within the UK, under which the island would be governed by the nationalist majority.
3. Unionist recourse to paramilitary force, including the first illegal shipment of arms into Ireland in modern times, in order to negate the will of the British Parliament on this issue, was a major influence in turning the nationalist population to similar postures and methods, with results which reverberate to our own day. It was however successful insofar as serious British negotiation with the nationalist tradition took place only after the creation of Northern Ireland as a separate entity dedicated to the rule of the unionist community.