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cc. Eo  
Press  
Bag.

Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

23 Sep 1996

London SW1A 2AH

Dear John,

Prime Minister's Meeting with Irish Journalists: Wednesday,  
25 September

/ The Prime Minister has agreed to give an interview at 1800 to 1830 on Wednesday 25 September to a selection of Irish journalists, here in Britain on a sponsored visit to cover the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body (BIIPB) Conference in Bath on 23 - 25 September. The Prime Minister gave an interview to a similar group of journalists last year which was seen by both sides as a great success and from which we reaped considerable benefit in terms of the bilateral relationship and the opportunity to put across HMG's policy on Northern Ireland to a number of influential Irish opinion makers. The group of journalists this year is even more heavyweight than last. I enclose a list of the journalists with brief background on them and their affiliation.

/ The journalists will be travelling to London from the BIIPB in Bath where the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will have given his key-note speech on Wednesday morning. I enclose a draft copy of this speech and the BIIPB programme. The journalists will be meeting Dr Mowlam directly after their meeting with the Prime Minister.

Objectives

/ I enclose Points to Make and Background for the meeting. These are unusually extensive as the Irish journalists might raise a variety of issues.

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The main focus of the interview will naturally be Northern Ireland. The NIO will be submitting briefing to you direct. Our main objectives on NI issues are:

- to put across HMG's commitment to the Talks Process and our wish to see real and substantive progress to be made soon;
- to reiterate that there must be a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire before sinn fein can enter the Talks; and
- to underline the importance we attach to our relationship with the Irish Government in seeking a lasting settlement for Northern Ireland.

On bilateral issues our key objective is to stress our good relationship with the Irish, and in particular the positive steps on bilateral co-operation taken since the Prime Minister and Taoiseach's initiative on co-operation last December. The highlight was of course President Robinson's visit in June. Defensive briefing on sensitive bilateral issues such as Sellafield and prisoners is included: the objective is to deflect any Irish criticisms whilst recognising and seeking to assuage their concerns. It is possible that the question of improving RTE television reception in Northern Ireland may be raised. We are in favour of this. Officials are trying to iron out the remaining technical difficulties.

The journalists may be more than usually interested in European issues given the current Irish Presidency. Our objectives are to explain how the UK views IGC progress during the Irish Presidency and to reassure the Irish audience that the UK is taking a realistic and constructive approach to EMU. The interview may also provide an opportunity to put across our views on BSE.

Given the close interplay between the British and Irish economies, the journalists might also be interested to ask about the UK domestic economy.

It is possible that the journalists might raise other international issues such as Iraq. The Irish reactions to the US action in Iraq were unhelpfully neutral. If this subject is raised, it would be an opportunity to set out our view of Saddam's threat to regional security and his clear flouting of SCR 688.

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I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (NIO) and  
Colin Budd at the Cabinet Office.

*Yours m,*

*Dominik*

(D J Chilcott)  
Private Secretary

John Holmes  
10 Downing Street

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continuity of contracts). As it is an Informal Ecofin, it will not produce formal conclusions/binding decisions, but it may reach political agreement on some issues. Ideally, we would like to see it clearing up some of the uncertainty surrounding matters such as the legal base for the euro legislation.

18. Ireland is publicly committed to EMU membership in 1999 and seems to stand a reasonable chance of qualifying, especially in view of the inbuilt flexibility in the debt criterion of the Treaty. Until recently, the biggest question mark over its membership has been its close trading links with the UK. However an independent report commissioned by the Irish Government from the Economic and Social Research Institute in July concluded that on balance, EMU membership would be favourable for Ireland whether the UK is in or out. However it accepted that the most favourable scenario would be for the UK and Ireland to join together. If we do opt out Ireland wants us to join the revised ERM in order to shield its economy from the effects of exchange rate fluctuations between sterling and the euro.

(iii) Third Pillar

19. Drugs: Irish priorities for EU action against drugs are very close to our own. The Irish are making good progress and are drawing heavily on the expertise of the UK in the development of new initiatives.

20. The Caribbean initiative is proceeding well. Work in the EU is now focussed on matching available funds to specific projects.

21. Child Abuse: The focus of attention in the EU is three draft instruments to enhance police and judicial cooperation in dealing with cross-border manifestations of paedophilia. Two of these (establishing a directory of special skills and a training exchange programme) present few difficulties for us. However, the Belgians have also proposed an extremely ambitious Joint Action on judicial cooperation which presents difficulties for many Member States besides the UK. We hope to persuade, with others, the Belgians to accept a more realistic and better focussed document. This will be a major subject for discussion at the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Dublin on 26-27 September.

BSE

22. The Irish media reacted negatively to Mr Hogg's intervention at the Agriculture Council. The general tone was one of incredulity that Britain should want to reopen Florence so soon. The Irish Agriculture Minister, Yates, made it clear in an impromptu press conference last week that he believes the Florence Agreement, the slaughter programme and the lifting of the ban are all inextricably linked. Although he



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was adamant that there could be no rowing back, he conceded that the UK Government has not itself talked in terms of drawing back from Florence.

23. Press reaction to the announcement that the Government is not proceeding with the selective cull been critical. Beef farmers in Ireland are feeling the effects of the crisis and thousands are expected to demonstrate outside the Informal Meeting of Agriculture Ministers in Killarney on 24 September. There is however some sympathy in Ireland for a regional approach to lifting the ban, provided Britain carried out a selective cull. This has been talked up by Yates and the media, and the Taoiseach apparently reacted favourably when approached with a suggestion along these lines by Northern Ireland MEPs during his visit to Strasbourg last week. An all-Ireland solution would suit the Irish well, both from a national and a Presidency point of view.

24. The Commission Decision approving the UK Eradication Strategy explicitly allowed the plan "to be adapted if necessary in the light of scientific or epidemiological developments." The Florence Framework was based on this strategy as agreed by the SVC and endorses the principle that "any action must be soundly based on the best and latest scientific evidence."

#### International issues

##### (i) Iraq

25. The recent crisis in Iraq was precipitated by renewed fighting between the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). We urged both parties to stop fighting and supported US efforts to broker a cease-fire, which came into effect on 28 August.

26. We became aware of Iraqi build-up of troops south of Irbil and, on 29 August with the Americans, warned the Iraqis against military intervention. On 30 August, Iraqi troops attacked Irbil.

27. Iraq's action flouts SCR 688, which seeks to stop Iraqi repression of its civilian population. The coalition response was to extend the southern No-Fly Zone (NFZ) and US military strikes to destroy Iraqi missile and radar sites to ensure the safety of coalition aircraft. The UK tabled a resolution condemning the Iraqi behaviour, but after intense negotiations was withdrawn because of the threat of a Russian veto.

28. The Secretary-General has announced that he has delayed the deployment of personnel under SCR 986 (oil for food) due to the security situation. The Security Council has urged him to implement the resolution as soon as conditions permit.

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29. UNSCOM was established under UNSCR 687 to oversee the dismantling of Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programmes. Iraq is still far from compliance with the destruction of these weapons. We agree entirely with UNSCOM Chairman's Ambassador Rolf Ekeus's view that the extent of Iraqi WMD is alarming. Iraq has obstructed recent UNSCOM activities. This is unacceptable. UNSCOM must be allowed unrestricted access to all the sites it wishes to enter.

30. The Irish reactions to the US action were unhelpfully neutral.

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