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10 DOWNING STREET  
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From the Private Secretary

29 April 1997

*Dear Dominick,***PROPOSED CALL BY THE TAOISEACH, 8 MAY**

Thank you for your helpful letter of 17 April. I have subsequently discussed this idea with the Irish Ambassador here, Paddy Teahon, Sean O'hUiginn and Veronica Sutherland.

There is no doubt of Irish keenness for this meeting to take place during the Taoiseach's planned visit to Britain. If he came to London then and did not see the Prime Minister, this could not be presented in domestic Irish terms as anything other than a snub. Paddy Teahon made clear to me that, if we were to say that a call on the Prime Minister was not possible, Bruton would not come to Britain at all.

In turn, I have made clear that the proposal is not ideal from our point of view, being so early. This would be particularly difficult for a new Prime Minister, who would not have had time to work through Northern Ireland policy in any detail with his new team and would in any case be anxious not to seem to give any of the main Northern Ireland players a head start over the others.

I have therefore taken the line that, while no decision can be made until after the Election, I am sure that neither the existing nor a new Prime Minister would wish to decline to see the Taoiseach. But, from our point of view, it would be desirable to present such a meeting as a courtesy call, for example over a cup of tea, rather than any kind of substantive summit. This impression would be reinforced if the Taoiseach was accompanied only by a minimal team, and if press expectations were kept down as far as possible.

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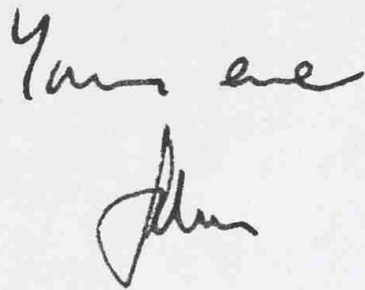
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The Irish side claim to have no great difficulty with this and understand the reasoning behind it. They have suggested from their side that it might help if Europe is given at least as much billing in preparation for the meeting as Northern Ireland, and possibly more. This would not just be an artificial device, since there is genuinely a lot to discuss between us and the Irish in the run-up to the IGC. I have agreed that this makes a lot of sense.

I do not think we can take this further forward until after the Election. I hope all concerned will sing the same tune to the Irish in their various contacts meanwhile. I will be in touch with Paddy Teahon and/or the Irish Ambassador here as soon as I have been able to consult the Prime Minister after the Election.

I had incidentally hoped that the likelihood of early elections in the Irish Republic might cause the Taoiseach's visit to Britain to be cancelled. But it is clear that this was a vain hope. 6 June now looks the most likely date for the Irish election, which means that it would not be officially announced until after the Taoiseach's visit. In any case, it is also clear that being seen to work closely with the British Prime Minister is regarded as electorally advantageous in Dublin, and more important than the possible loss of a couple of days of local campaigning.

I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).



JOHN HOLMES

Dominick Chilcott, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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