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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH: 8 MAY 1997

BACKGROUND

Europe/IGC

1. The IGC is now approaching the endgame, with consensus that the objective should be to conclude at the Amsterdam European Council on 16/17 June. The Dutch Presidency are carrying forward discussion on the basis of the work of the Irish Presidency. They are planning to circulate a new draft Treaty in the run up to the 20 May foreign ministers' meeting. The main sticking points in the Conference remain: Justice and Home Affairs, CFSP and Defence, flexibility, and institutional reform.

Irish views on key issues:

2. Justice and Home Affairs: Can agree to communitisation of asylum and immigration. Sceptical about QMV and a greater role for the ECJ in rump Third Pillar, though support a greater role for the European Parliament. Worried about the implications of Schengen incorporation; anxious that non-Schengen countries should not be squeezed out.

3. CFSP: Willing to consider QMV for implementation only. Support planning cell. Favour Secretary-General becoming Mr CFSP. Support full inclusion of Commission in Troika. Support financing by Community budget.

4. Defence: Oppose framing of common defence policy and EU/WEU merger, but open to WEU subordination. Want EU decision-making over Petersberg tasks.

5. Flexibility: Prepared to consider an enabling clause in the First Pillar, but the Commission should have the sole right of initiative. Will continue arguing for agreed by all, but may fold in the end-game. Constructive abstention in CFSP. In JHA differentiation should be kept to a minimum; not convinced of case for an enabling clause.

6. On institutional issues (QMV reweighting, Commission size) the IGC is still split between the large and the small member states and is likely to remain so until the eleventh hour. There is therefore little point in raising the subject at this short meeting.

Bilateral Relations

7. The relationship with the Irish can be volatile, particularly over its key element, Northern Ireland. Bilateral cooperation has however increased significantly

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following an informal agreement between Mr Bruton and Mr Major in Dublin in December 1995. President Robinson paid a groundbreaking official visit in 1996.

8. On 5 May the Taoiseach issued a statement outlining areas in which the UK and ROI could cooperate further (copy attached). These cover education, training, crime, food safety, homelessness and the environment (particularly in relation to Sellafield, a constant irritant with the Irish). Although the nuclear issue will have to be handled carefully, Bruton's proposals are at first sight fresh, imaginative and realistic. Prime Ministerial commitment to developing new areas of cooperation would give a high-profile stimulus to the process. Coordination of a UK response, including any other ideas, could be taken forward by Cabinet Office, who have direct dealings with the Taoiseach's Department.

Irish General Election

9. An Irish election must be held by November. 6 June is currently the most likely date, for which Bruton would need to make an announcement next week. Bruton's Fine Gael/Labour/Democratic Left Coalition was formed in December 1994 following the collapse of the previous Fianna Fail/Labour Government. Although the economy has continued to boom, a series of scandals have undermined Government support. Opinion polls forecast a return to power by Fianna Fail, but their lead over the "Rainbow Coalition" is narrowing.

President Robinson's candidacy for UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

10. The Taoiseach is likely to seek British support for President Robinson's candidacy for the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which became vacant in March. It is the UN Secretary-General's responsibility to put forward a nomination which then has to be endorsed by the General Assembly. Mrs Robinson's stature, experience and commitment to human rights make her the outstanding candidate from the West. But the Secretary-General is likely to come under heavy pressure from other regional groups to appoint someone from a developing country. Overt Western support for Mrs Robinson risks being counter-productive. The Secretary-General's decision is not expected until June/July and the final list of runners is still unknown.

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