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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

5 May 1997

Dear Daninich,

CALL BY THE TAOISEACH, 8 MAY

Further to my letter of 29 April, I have now discussed this again with Paddy Teahon. We have agreed that the Taoiseach should call here for an hour at 1600 on Thursday, 8 May. We would plan to hold the meeting in the White Room here, to emphasise its informality, rather than in the Cabinet Room. The Taoiseach will be accompanied by the Tanaiste, and by one or two officials. I hope that on our side the Foreign Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary can be present, probably without accompanying officials, again to emphasise the informal nature of the occasion.

The agenda, insofar as there is one, should cover not only Europe and Northern Ireland, but also East/West issues. Teahon said that the Taoiseach was not at all happy about how Sinn Fein had been talking since the Election, and wanted to down play the Northern Ireland aspect of the meeting. Talking about cooperation between the Republic and Britain in areas such as education would contribute to this. I said that I saw no difficulty with this from our side.

We also discussed press handling. I said that I thought we would not announce the meeting, but simply confirm it as necessary, not least since there was a general expectation that it was happening anyway. Teahon agreed. I also said that I thought we would probably wish to avoid the Prime Minister and Taoiseach going out into the street to speak to the press afterwards, as they would after a normal Summit. They would otherwise face mostly awkward questions from the Irish press about the IRA and Sinn Fein, which both might prefer to avoid for the moment. Teahon was inclined to agree, but suggested that Shane Kenny and Alastair Campbell should discuss this further on the telephone in the next day or two.

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I would be grateful if the FCO and NIO could prepare appropriate briefing for the meeting. It should be extremely short, covering only the main points the Prime Minister should seek to get across. The idea is to have a general exchange to get the feel of respective priorities, rather than any kind of detailed negotiating session.

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

Yours ever
John

JOHN HOLMES

Dominick Chilcott Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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