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CC PB
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PM/97/028

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

All good, writing stuff.
Assuming no relations with the
Irish can't take a note - dine
over the weekend, are you content
for me to give this your
endorsement?

UK/Irish Relations

1. Your meeting with the Taoiseach on 3 July was inevitably dominated by discussion of Northern Ireland. But there was agreement in principle to developing the wider relationship. A Fianna Fail-led Government may be less instinctively committed to improving the relationship across the board. But Ahern is a pragmatist. He has spoken privately to our Ambassador and in public of the possibility of developing a new era in UK/Irish relations. Better so-called "East/West" relations have intrinsic value and will improve the climate for our exchanges with the Irish over Northern Ireland.

2. Now that Irish Ministers have their feet under the table, and following up your meeting with Ahern, we should therefore develop specific proposals. Before their election, the Irish signalled interest in a number of areas, including food safety. For our part, we stand to gain from enhanced cooperation on a range of issues, including military links, social security and education. There would be advantage in developing a sustained dialogue with the Irish Justice Department. We also need to address our handling of environmental policy: nuclear issues are particularly sensitive and have been given added prominence by recent revelations about Beaufort's Dyke.

3. We have identified cooperation in the youth sector as a particularly valuable area to support. In particular, we should look for ways in which we and the Irish could establish a common agenda of benefit to the young unemployed. The Franco-German Youth Office have programmes

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which, they claim, have an 80% success rate of getting young people into jobs after training and time spent in the partner country. There are many sectors in which young people from the UK and the Republic could benefit from experience gained in the other country: agriculture, tourism, retail, software development and the food and drink industries are obvious examples. If we were able to devise practical, joint programmes in this area, we could look to the Ambassadors in both countries to engage the groups of business people with whom they meet regularly. They could seek practical support and funding. It would be helpful to the image of British companies in Ireland if they were seen to be engaged in an effort to address youth unemployment in their host country. I know that the DfEE already has good links with the Irish through youth exchanges, EU contacts and representation on the Employment and Labour Market Committee on which they might build.

4. It would be very helpful if colleagues could seek reports from their officials about existing contacts with the Irish and consider ways in which they could be strengthened and revitalised. Personal contacts between officials and Ministers of the two Governments are particularly valuable. The FCO's Republic of Ireland Department would be happy to act as a sounding board for any proposed initiatives.

5. In the past the Cabinet Office and the Taoiseach's Office have produced coordinated reports on cooperation between the two Governments. It might be helpful if, later in the year, the Cabinet Office could ask Departments to report further on their relationships with the Republic of Ireland.

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6. I am copying this minute to members of the Cabinet, to Sir Robin Butler and to HM Ambassador in Dublin.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Robin Cook".

ROBIN COOK

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
16 July 1997

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