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cc/PB

Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

15 September 1997

File
JH
15/9.

Dear Sir,

Foreign Visitors to Northern Ireland

I have seen a copy of Richard Lemon's letter to you of 10 September, proposing a number of options to encourage visits by Heads of State and Government to Northern Ireland.

We see the attractions to the NIO of including Northern Ireland in the range of locations for EU informals. As far as the specific proposal to hold the Regional Policy Informal Council meeting in Northern Ireland is concerned, we have no objection in principle but see this primarily as a matter for the Departments concerned. Our main concern is timing. We will soon have to let partners and the Council Secretariat know the details of our programme of informal meetings. An early decision is therefore required.

We remain interested in examining opportunities provided by bilateral meetings, and FCO officials will shortly meet their NIO counterparts to look at the option. Apart from holding a bilateral summit in Northern Ireland, we could consider a Northern Ireland visit following a summit held elsewhere. We could also encourage Heads of State and Government on official visits to go to Northern Ireland unless there are good reasons for other regions to take priority, particularly if the visit has some particular relevance to Northern Ireland.

I am copying this letter to Richard Lemon (Northern Ireland Office), John Alty (DTI), Michael Lugton (Scottish Office) June Milligan (Welsh Office) and to Jan Polley at the Cabinet Office.

Yours es,
JH

(John Grant)
Principal Private Secretary

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