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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH TAOISEACH, 10 OCTOBER

Background

The **first day of substantive discussion in the Talks on Tuesday was generally constructive and workmanlike**, despite occasional displays by the UUP of hostility to Sinn Féin and suspicion of Irish involvement. There was an apparent willingness on the part of them and other parties to embark vigorously on the agenda.

Relations with the Irish have been generally excellent; the Strand Three meeting was very cordial. The Irish have, on the whole, worked hard to bring the Talks to this point, and shown greater flexibility than might have been expected of a Fianna Fail Government. Ray Burke – who on Tuesday announced his resignation as Foreign Minister, and from political life, following allegations of corruption – exemplified this approach.

The Prime Minister can **acknowledge and welcome the closeness of our relationship** which has permitted us to overcome a great many obstacles in making negotiations a reality. He can **look forward to close and frank working relations** for the future.

It may be worth emphasising to the Irish the **primacy of the Talks process**. It will only be a success if the parties can be co-opted, and given the greatest possible sense of ownership. They must negotiate not with the Governments, but with each other: we got over some of the main obstacles in negotiating the procedural motion (24 October) only when the contending factions started to talk to each other. The Irish sometimes give the impression that the Governments can sew matters up largely among themselves: this is unrealistic.

The Irish have been questioning us about the **Prime Minister's meeting with Mr Trimble** on Wednesday. The Prime Minister may wish to volunteer a fairly full report.

The **principal difficulty in relations with the Irish at the moment concerns the proposal to extend the remit of the Parades Commission**. Their understanding of our position is that though the provision for any extended remit will be in the Bill, it will never be activated – a

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position they would reluctantly live with. They are likely to seek confirmation. The affair has the potential to become a serious irritant in relations, and dissipate much trust that built up in recent months.

We understand that **the Irish may also press on the need to make "gestures to Sinn Fein"**, perhaps with undertones that such gestures may be the price of keeping the anti-ceasefire elements in line. We should not encourage the Irish - or through them Sinn Fein - to think that any of this will be easy.

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