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British Embassy
DublinTp. JEM
PB

24 September 1997

George Fergusson Esq
RID
FCOBy faxH2
In
24/9

Dear George,

BRITISH/IRISH COOPERATIONIntroduction

1. Congratulations on your new job. You may find it useful to have at the outset an account of recent efforts to intensify cooperation between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, with suggestions for follow-up action.

Government to Government Cooperation

2. The exercise to intensify bilateral co-operation was launched at the end of 1994 by Messrs Major and Bruton. Since then, progress on cooperation between the two Governments across a wide range of activity has been considerable. It is recorded in a number of documents, most recently the paper prepared by the Taoiseach's Office in March. This is due to be updated. Responsibility rests with the Cabinet Office/Taoiseach's Department. Wally Kirwan and Michael Pakenham plan to meet later in the autumn, possibly November. I will be looking to discuss options with both of them before then.

3. Meanwhile, we are giving greater coherence to our efforts in the Embassy. Responsibilities have been re-ordered, giving Catherine Royle, the newly arrived First Secretary Economic, specific responsibility for identifying new areas offering scope for increased co-operation across the range of Government business. She has already identified possibilities for joint action on urban regeneration. I am confident that we shall shortly be able to put forward ideas in the field of education. We also hope to suggest ways in which we can build on the excellent work done in other areas, including defence, in spite of the (reflex) reluctance of some Fianna Fail Ministers to work too closely with the British.

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Non- or Quasi- Governmental cooperation

4. Much effort has also been devoted to identifying projects which are wholly non-governmental or in which Government plays a relatively modest role. We have had some successes, particularly in using the AUSPB to promote seminars on topics of mutual interest, e.g. labour relations. The launch of the Liverpool University scholarship for research into the background to the Famine was another high profile joint effort.

5. Other efforts to identify significant projects have so far not come to fruition, despite considerable effort on the British side. The list below sets out a number of ideas, together with a progress report, as appropriate.

Specific Projects

- i) Youth Exchanges: There has been a limited amount of activity on this front for some years now, with the potential to do more never fully exploited, if only because of a lack of resources and because of competing claims from e.g. European countries. In an effort to revitalise British/Irish exchanges, the British side launched an initiative in the education and culture sub-group of the AIIC, proposing that around £120,000 of new money should be channelled through Leargas (the Irish Government educational exchange body) and the YEC to this end. Actual progress on this has been slow, largely due to bureaucratic inertia at the Irish end. However, the successful Encounter Seminar on Youth Exchanges in Malahide in June is likely to give a kick-start to the Irish process when its long-awaited report finally emerges next month. The Encounter Board reviewed the final draft at their Seminar in Oxford from 19-21 September, endorsing the conclusion that Leargas (and the YEC) should now get the money to get on with the proposed projects. Meanwhile, Leargas have been doing what they can to give an East/West flavour to their European programme, to the point where, by mid-summer, some 60% of their "European" exchange projects were in fact Irish/British.

Action: It will be for the YEC and Leargas to carry this forward. Meanwhile, the Embassy will follow up with Irish Departments/Leargas as appropriate, in support of the original proposals and in the light of the impending Encounter report.

- ii) School Exchanges - Leargas have operated an extensive programme in which the Embassy has not had reason, nor opportunity, to have been closely involved. I recently indicated to the Chairperson that I would like to change this, and to have contact with at least some of the many schools involved in these exchanges. One innovation I would like to promote is an annual essay competition with a prize to be presented by the Ambassador of the day. This might require £100-£200 or so a year from the local budget/frais.

Action: RID to give their blessing.

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- iii) Glencree - The possibility of linking the Reconciliation Centre at Glencree to a similar centre to be established in Warrington has been raised from time to time, cf my minute to Ken Lindsay of 31 July (copy attached for ease of reference). Since then, the Secretary of State, Dr Mowlam, has agreed to see the Director of Glencree, Mr Ian White, who intends to invite her to open the recent extension to their premises, in the company of Ray Burke (and the new Director-General of CFSP). The question arises of whether we can link any such official ceremony to a wider launch of a clearly defined project to expand the reconciliation effort, for which we might solicit funds from the private sector. We could approach experienced people, for example, Ian White, Colin Parry and Cooperation North on a non-committal basis, to see how such monies might be spent on a specific project. Alternatively, and in order to avoid giving rise to possibly false expectations, we could ask an independent consultant to evaluate proposals (which are, I believe, available in London) already put forward by Ian White, and Colin Parry in Warrington, to see whether they could form the basis of a practical project. Whichever route we took, we could then use the Secretary of State's visit, for which no date has been agreed, to launch a fund-raising campaign to enable the project to go ahead.

Action: Could RID, in conjunction with NIO, please consider the possibility of using the Secretary of State's visit for such a purpose; if so, then authorise us to explore possibilities with peace and reconciliation groups on a non-committal basis, or, alternatively, RID to set up and fund an evaluation, on the basis of previous papers, including possible funding from the AUSPB, and/or the NIO.

- iv) Anniversaries/Millennium: Earlier in the year I saw some advantage in our considering the possibility that the Irish celebrations to mark the 200th Anniversary of the United Irishmen Rising might present opportunities for reconciliation. The successful launch of the Liverpool University Scholarship was a concrete manifestation of that thought. It now seems likely, however, that the moderate approach involving Britain and both parts of Ireland that had been endorsed by the previous Irish Government may not be sustained by the present. We will be staying close to the Taoiseach's Department as their plans develop. But at this stage, everything points to our keeping a discreet distance until such time as we can assess their true intentions (much as we have done over the Famine). The Millennium, however, offers real opportunities for enhancing the bilateral relationship. We have already fed this thought in at Ministerial level. The problem, at the moment, is the failure of the Irish to grip the issue. Again we will stay close to them.

Action: The Embassy to report on Irish plans. RID to prompt guidance from London on potential projects arising from our own national plans.

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- v) Diana, Princess of Wales - The unprecedented wave of sympathy in the Republic of Ireland following the Princess's death prompts me to wonder whether some kind of more permanent memorial to her might be established here. My initial reaction is that if this were to be done, the memorial should be related to one or more of the charities with which she was involved. I should therefore welcome guidance on whether there is any central planning on this.

Action: RID to pass any guidance to us.

- vi) Royal Matters - There has been recent discussion in London of the Prince's Trust becoming more active in the Republic. The Trust has already run one small project in Wexford which received a positive response here. The difficulty of enlarging such activities is the absence of any counterpart Irish body. A new President might possibly be prepared to look at this again, but any early move is unlikely. Meanwhile I hope that consideration will continue to be given to running some kind of pan-European training course, sponsored by the Trust, similar to the one which took place in Annecy in 1996.

Action: RID to advise how best to approach the Trust. (I would be willing to speak to Tom Shebbeare, whom I have already met).

Alternative Opportunities

6. The above list is not exhaustive, but it covers the ideas which seem at present the most likely to yield practical results. Other organisations with whom we have been in touch, e.g. Co-operation North and the Ireland Funds, have expressed interest, indeed enthusiasm, but have not come up with practical ideas. The Ireland Funds also present the particular difficulty that Tony O'Reilly (millionaire extraordinary) who launched the Funds, would probably hog any publicity. For this reason we have not pressed our enquiries too hard. However, I recently talked to Maurice Hayes - former senior Roman Catholic Northern Ireland civil servant, now a Fine Gael Senator here - who is involved in the British fund-raising arm of the Fund. He expressed considerable interest in using the Fund to promote East/West exchanges. He said he would look into the possibilities and get back to me.

Conclusion

7. Hitherto, we in the Embassy have dealt mainly with the Taoiseach's Department on all of these issues, governmental and non-governmental. Our efforts with them have to some degree been inhibited by the reluctance of Sean O'hUiggin and his staff at the DFA to show equal enthusiasm. However, during my

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introductory call on Dermot Gallagher (Sean's successor) he expressed interest in the agenda of East/West exchanges. I should like to follow this up with him as soon as I can, in the hope that he may be able to help inject some dynamism into our efforts. I should therefore be very grateful for a first response to at least some of the action points outlined above. (I am lunching with him on 10 October.)

8. I am giving this a limited distribution. Please copy it further if necessary.

Yours ever,

Veronica.

Veronica Sutherland
Ambassador

cc: PS/Sofs NIO
PS/Mr Murphy
Sir John Chilcot, NIO
Mr Thomas, NIO
Mr Stephens, NIO
Mr Bell, NIO
Ms Bharucha, NIO
Mr Tebbit, DUS, FCO
The Hon M A Pakenham, Cabinet Office
Mr Holmes, PS/No.10

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