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John Holmes Esq
Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
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11 November 1997

Dear John

FOREIGN VISITORS TO NORTHERN IRELAND: EU MEETINGS

Thank you for your letter of 16 October about the Prime Minister's support for an EU meeting to be held in Northern Ireland. I have also seen Kenneth Thompson's letter to you of 3 November about the regional policy Informal.

The plans for the regional policy Informal, to be held in Glasgow on 8 and 9 June, are clearly now well advanced and we accept that it will not be possible for Northern Ireland to host that Informal, or indeed any other during our Presidency.

We have, however, some more positive news to report. Contact with the Department of Social Security suggests that Northern Ireland will be the venue for an EU meeting on Women's Issues scheduled for next May. While not termed an Informal as such, it will involve the EU Ministers for Women and should be a high profile event.

We are keen to explore the scope for attracting other such events or high-level visitors to Northern Ireland, and we are continuing to work closely with the FCO and others on this. We note that the Bureau of the EU's Committee of the Regions traditionally meets once per Presidency in that member state, and that the location for their UK meeting has not yet been agreed. We would very much like that



meeting to take place in Northern Ireland, which we also consider would be particularly appropriate in policy terms.

I understand that it is for the Committee of the Regions to decide on the venue and, subject to the views of you and copy addressees, we would like to encourage them to hold their meeting in Northern Ireland. Paul Murphy plans to visit Brussels on 19 and 20 November, and has accepted an invitation to meet members of the Committee. This would offer an ideal opportunity to float the idea of holding their meeting in Northern Ireland with them. I would therefore be grateful to know whether you or copy addressees would have any objection to this, by Monday 17 November if possible.

I am copying this letter to Jeff Jacobs (Deputy Prime Minister's Office), Dominick Chilcott (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), John Alty (Department of Trade and Industry), Kenneth Thompson (Scottish Office), June Milligan (Welsh Office) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours
Daniel K. L.
for W K LINDSAY