

PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

23 December 1997

Dee Joe,

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 18 December about the respective cast lists for the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 12 December.

I have always been amazed by the insistence of the Irish on sending teams of experts to hasty meetings between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in the margins of European Councils. In my experience, they are not able to contribute much to the meetings in practice and have to spend huge amounts of presumably expensive time waiting around for these rushed exchanges to be squeezed in between other events. The Irish cast list on the latest occasion was particularly astonishing, so I do not think we should be imitating Irish practice.

On the other hand, I take your point on the case for having one Northern Ireland specialist on hand where serious and detailed exchanges on the talks process are likely. As a general principle, I fully agree and I will try to have this very much in mind next year.

Yours
John

JOHN HOLMES

Joe Pilling Esq CB

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