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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 November 1996

Dear John

Visit by the Taoiseach

As you know, the Irish have accepted the proposed arrangements set out in your letter of 4 November for the visit of the Taoiseach on 9 December.

Not every meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to discuss Northern Ireland has been characterised as a Summit. The original purpose of the Taoiseach's visit was to prepare for Dublin II. The Irish have confirmed that they expect this issue to predominate. Since there is to be an element of informality about the exchanges, it may suit us to avoid describing the event as a Summit, with all the expectations that creates about the outcome. But this is a matter which is essentially for you to decide with the Northern Ireland Office, and the Irish, in the light of the political situation nearer the time.

Attendance

The Taoiseach's Department have not yet focussed on who they expect to travel with the Taoiseach to London. They will let us know in the course of the next few days, and we shall advise accordingly on participation on our side.

EU Issues

The Foreign Secretary suggests that the EU business should be covered first, from 1100 to 1230. He will attend this part of the talks (he will then have to leave for a pre-Dublin lunch of EU Ambassadors).

The Taoiseach's visit comes at the end of a full tour which he has made of EU capitals, with only Paris to follow. By 9 December we shall have the Presidency's draft Treaty together with covering papers. These will, indeed, be public documents, and the subject of intense media interest which will build up, through the Commons EU debate scheduled for 12 December, to the Dublin Council on 13/14 December. A Franco-German Summit takes place on the same day as the

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Taoiseach's visit. It is unlikely that the trumpeted Kohl-Chirac letter, which is intended as a major contribution to the Dublin Council, will have issued by the time of the Prime Minister's talks. The Taoiseach, however, may already have a private copy.

It is too soon to predict what are likely to be the key EU points for the meeting. If the draft Treaty text contains elements which are simply not acceptable to the UK, the Prime Minister will need to make that clear beyond doubt to the Taoiseach, to warn him that unless changes are made the Dublin meeting will be difficult and unproductive. (Meanwhile we are, of course, doing all we can to influence the Irish Presidency's thinking. The Foreign Secretary will be talking to Dick Spring in Brussels next Monday.)

Other Issues

Given that the main agenda item will be Dublin II, the Foreign Secretary suggests that other issues (Northern Ireland and other bilateral issues) are covered during the working lunch. In recent years, we have tried to broaden the agenda of meetings between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, so that matters other than Northern Ireland are discussed. However, the political importance of European issues and the delicate stage we have reached over Northern Ireland suggest that we should not overload this meeting by trying to inject other matters for discussion. The Irish share this view. It is, however, worth trying to sustain and develop the improvement in "East/West" relations which has taken place over the last couple of years. It seems fitting on almost the first anniversary of the Prime Minister and Taoiseach's agreement on a programme of bilateral cooperation, prepared on the Prime Minister's initiative, that they should refer to the achievements of the past year and look ahead to opportunities for building on these in 1997. That could be achieved if the Cabinet Office and the Taoiseach's Department were able to work out a very short text for adoption on 9 December, covering the following points:-

- (a) satisfaction at progress achieved under Programme of Co-operation agreed in December 1995 and determination to sustain improvement in 1997;
- (b) endorsement of enhanced programme of co-operation in the youth sector; and
- (c) instruction to officials to consider the scope for promoting closer co-operation in the non-governmental sphere.

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Discussions with the Taoiseach's Department suggest that their thinking is on the same lines; they intend to discuss their thoughts with the Cabinet Office early next week.

A. Programme of Co-operation

The Programme of East/West Co-operation adopted by the two Heads of Government in Dublin last December has produced a notable breaking down of barriers. Among the more visible events have been the first official visit to Britain by President Robinson and visits by Royal Navy ships to the Republic of Ireland. There have been six visits by Cabinet Ministers to Dublin, even ignoring meetings related to the Irish Presidency. There is improved co-operation in the battle against drugs; the Secretary of State for Social Security is pursuing the possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation against fraud; and the recent visit to Dublin by the Minister of the Armed Forces was particularly notable in the light of Irish advice a year ago that such a visit was not politically possible.

B. Youth

At their meeting in London in June, the Prime Minister suggested to President Robinson that we should look for areas in which the two governments were seen to co-operate together, setting aside the problems of Northern Ireland. Some important areas of co-operation develop best without the glare of publicity. Security co-operation and co-operation on drugs are examples. The Foreign Secretary recently agreed, however, that we should put to the Irish Government some proposals aimed at achieving a sustained improvement in co-operation in the youth sector. I attach a copy of the paper which we have given the Irish. Experience elsewhere suggests that a sustained programme of co-operation targetted at young people can, over time, produce a tangible improvement in relations. France and Germany are an example. Our proposals require no extra funding. They offer the opportunity for high-profile media attention, both at local and national level. Initial Irish reactions are favourable, but it would be helpful within the Irish system if these proposals were approved at least in principle at Head of Government level. Any follow-up work can be pursued by the UK/Irish Working Group on Education and Culture which will have its next meeting in late January or early February.

C. Non-governmental co-operation

Our Embassy in Dublin has done very useful preliminary work in identifying private funds in Ireland which might be

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tapped in order to benefit East/West co-operation. There is considerable scope for enhanced links between academic institutions, cities, and a variety of cultural and other interest groups, which could be stimulated by a political signal and supported by access to private funds. The principle of exploring the prospects for wider co-operation ought not be difficult for the Irish, and it would be worth putting the matter to them for endorsement in December.

I would be grateful for your confirmation that we and the Cabinet Office can orchestrate with the Irish a short text on these lines for the Prime Minister and Taoiseach to endorse and publicise on 9 December.

Although other issues are unlikely to arise, we shall provide with the briefing package in due course defensive lines on prisons and nuclear issues.

I am copying this letter to Ken Lindsay (NIO), Jan Polley and Brian Bender (Cabinet Office), Veronica Sutherland (HMA Dublin) and Sir Stephen Wall (UK PermRep, Brussels).

yours km,

Dominick

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