

# **THICKENING OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

## **High Level Visits**

- Princess Royal and Prince Edward in Dublin in January 1996.
- President Robinson as a guest of Government in June, the first such visit by an Irish Head of State.

## **Foreign Policy**

- PUS to Dublin on 10 May for discussions with the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, following a visit to London by Paddy MacKernan in December.
- Visits to Dublin by DUS (Defence) and by Heads of Department on Security Policy, OSCE matters, as well as numerous EU-related visits.

## **Defence (illustrative)**

- Nicholas Soames met the Irish Minister for Defence and the Marine on 10 September during the first visit to the Republic by a British Defence Minister.
- The CDS visited the Curragh on 10 July, the first such visit since independence.
- The First Sea Lord and HMS Manchester visited Cork in July for the 50th anniversary of the Irish Naval Forces.
- General Sir Michael Rose gave a lecture to Irish Defence Forces at the Curragh.

## **Justice, Legal Matters and Drugs**

- The Attorney General met his Irish counterpart in Dublin in March 1996, and agreed on closer contact between their two departments. Officials met in London on 18 October to agree a set of guidance notes on extradition procedures and paper work.
- The Permanent Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Chief Executive of the Courts Service Agency gave evidence on 15 January 1996, in Dublin, to the Working Group on a Courts Commission, established by the Irish Minister of Justice, to report on the desirability and best ways and means of establishing a Commission to administer courts.
- The Lord Chancellor's Department is considering means for the discussion of issues of shared interest, along the lines of contacts already established with certain other EU countries.
- The FCO International Drugs Coordinator, Derek Plumbly, visited Dublin for discussions on drugs cooperation on 19 September.
- Arrangements for the Minister for Justice to meet with the Home Secretary, in London, are being pursued.

## **Financial Services**

- The Economic Secretary to the Treasury met the Minister of State for Finance in Dublin on 13 June. Areas of discussion included a Memorandum of Understanding between the Treasury and the Security and Investments Board and their Irish counterparts to strengthen cooperation and information exchange; and progress on a number of single market financial services Directives.

## **Deregulation**

- On 5 February the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster visited Dublin for talks with the Minister of Enterprise and Employment. He also met senior members of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation.

- Senior British and Irish officials met in Dublin on 23 May to discuss regulatory reform and single market issues.

- UK Deregulation Unit officials worked with officials from the Department of Enterprise and Employment and the Revenue Commissioners in their preparation of an EU workshop on simplifying tax administration held in Brussels on 13 March 1996.

## **Tourism**

- 28 June saw a meeting to review cooperation between the Department of National Heritage, the British Tourist Authority, the Department of Economic Development (Northern Ireland), the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Bord Failte and the Department of Tourism and Trade. A number of areas were identified for closer cooperation. In particular, the Tourist Boards would jointly consider the prospects for joint promotion. A progress meeting will be held in 1997.

## **Transport**

- The UK Secretary of State for Transport met the Irish Minister for Transport, Energy and Communications in Luxembourg in June. They discussed a range of transport questions including the policy priorities for the Irish EU Presidency and co-operation on transport infrastructure issues. They agreed that the constructive contacts which had been established at official level should continue, and that there should be further meetings at Ministerial level should the issues so require.

## **Social Security**

- An E-mail link has been developed between the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Social Security Contributions Agency to speed the processing of some forms and improve customer service delivery by about five days. The new link became operational on 25 June and is expected to handle 300 cases a month.

- Officials from the Child Benefits Centre and their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland have been developing closer links to combat fraud.

- During Secretary of State's visit to Dublin, there was



discussion of possible MOU on fraud.

### Health

- The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health and the Irish Minister for Health met in London on 25 January and agreed a forward programme of cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as exchanges of information on drugs issues and ongoing cooperation on specialist medical training.

### Education/Employment

- BE Dublin and the Irish Dept of Enterprise and Employment jointly hosted a successful one-day seminar on unemployment on 11 March in Dublin.

- Two jointly-funded research programmes, one in the medical field, the other connected with Social Services, have been established by the Department of Education.

- The Education and Cultural Working Group of the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council met in London on 26 April.

### Culture and Heritage

- A meeting was held early in 1996 between the Museums and Galleries Commission and the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht and the institutions under its aegis. Under discussion was collaboration on cultural initiatives, notably in programmes involving museums, performing arts, books and reading, exhibitions, the built environment, and heritage routes.

### Broadcasting

- A new partnership agreement between the Irish Arts Council and the British Council was signed in March.

- The Radiocommunications Agency has reached agreement with the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications for the use of transmitters located in Northern Ireland for the prospective Channel 5 service in a way which will not affect transmissions in the Republic of Ireland.

- Technical difficulties involved in broadcasting RTE to all Northern Ireland may have been overcome.

### Environment/Marine

- The Irish Minister for the Environment met the Secretary of State for the Environment in May. They agreed to establish a more formal structure for cooperation on the Irish Sea, including regular Ministerial meetings approximately every 18 months.

- The Minister of State at the Department of the Marine visited London, on 29 February, to discuss the management and monitoring of weapons dump sites with the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence and with the Minister for Agriculture and the Environment at the Scottish Office.

### Agriculture/Fisheries

- The Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food meet regularly, usually twice a year, to discuss matters of mutual interest. The last meeting was in Dublin on 3 July.

- The Minister for the Marine met the Fisheries Minister in London on 16 May.