

CONFIDENTIAL

PRIME MINISTER

*See record  
F76  
M2/3.*

From: John Holmes  
Date: 26 February 1998  
  
cc: Jonathan Powell  
Philip Barton  
Alastair Campbell

TRIMBLE

You know the position on Sinn Fein. Trimble may mention the Conway murder. You should just say that the Chief Constable has told us that he cannot yet be sure who killed him - he suspects PIRA involvement, but the level of authorisation is unclear.

On process, you need to discuss again how to negotiate the right kind of paper, in the light of what you agreed with Ahern. I assume we should feed Trimble bits of text, when we have them (I hope this weekend) on a very confidential basis. You should also press Trimble on a week away in Jersey or Wales (Mo is desperate for you to do this - one argument to use is that we do not see such a week as the final session).

On substance, I attach:

- my record of your last meeting with Trimble;
- the paper the UUP tabled in the talks a couple of weeks ago;
- an NIO note on the main issues.

I suggest you try to cover the following points:

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### Strand 1

- Simple majority voting in the Assembly: will this really run? Weighted majority on contentious issues?
- UUP ideas on devolution too limited (bound to need legislative powers)?
- Can they consider some kind of Cabinet/collective government? Will it work without this? General Purposes Committee at least?
- Better to look at Scotland model (rather than Wales?).

### Strand II

- Relationship of the Council of the Isles to North-South bodies? Umbrella okay, but explicit subordination won't run.
- Assembly mandate: ratification needed as well? A bridge too far?
- Principle of implementation bodies still okay if the rest is right?
- Irish desire for agreement on some specific North-South bodies: will listing areas where such bodies could exist be enough?
- Language to deal with "dynamic" issue? Evolution/development?
- Freedom of Heads of Department to take part in North-South Council? UUP model too restrictive?

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*agreed with  
preparations  
Conference  
some years down  
the line because  
meeting to have  
went by  
gone.*



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- Irish desire for legislation to establish North-South Council? (Can probably get round.)

**Strand III**

- Irish/nationalists seem relaxed, apart from "subordination" of North-South bodies?
- Remit for Council of the Isles (e.g. transport links, cultural issues, minority rights/languages, EU subjects).

**Constitution**

- Further progress with Irish?
- Hope to share possible wording on British change before long.

**Other Issues**

- Any advance on policing? Will a Commission be enough for Irish/nationalists? Possibility of devolution in this area?
- Discussed prisoners last time. Any other thoughts?
- "Equality agenda" important for Irish/nationalists, even though much of it does not mean a lot. [NB Trimble will hate Mo's proposals on fair employment if/when they come out – papers in the weekend box again.]
- How to deal with security/decommissioning?

