

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Reference Code: | 2007/116/749 |
| Creation Date(s): | 16 May 1977 |
| Extent and medium: | 22 pages |
| Creator(s): | Department of the Taoiseach |
| Access Conditions: | Open |
| Copyright: | National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives. |

S. 18650

cc. copy to - RSM
PSS

A/S Dublin ✓
Mr Macken (WISCE)
16/5/77

SECRET

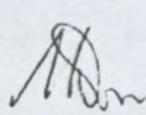
16 May, 1977

Dear Ambassador,

I am enclosing herewith a typed-up version of my notes on the discussion between the Minister and Archbishop Casaroli at the Vatican on 28 March, 1977.

Although I dictated these notes at the time, I have only recently had them typed up - in part because of subsequent absences. Even at this stage however you may wish to have them for your file.

Yours sincerely,



His Excellency Gerard Woods,
Embassy of Ireland,
HOLY SEE.

Notes on Discussions between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Archbishop Casaroli at the Vatican on 28 March 1977

The Minister was accompanied by the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs Mr. R. McDonagh, the Ambassador to the Vatican Mr. G. Woods, Mr. N. Dorr, Department of Foreign Affairs and Mr. D. O'Donovan, PSM.

Northern Ireland

Dr. FitzGerald said that since the Sunningdale Conference, despite occasional disagreements, there had been a substantial measure of agreement between the British and the Irish Governments on the need to promote power-sharing in Northern Ireland. The main obstacle was the intransigence of a part of the Protestant population in Northern Ireland. This was of course understandable because of their fears that this would be a way of bringing about the unity of the country against their wishes.

For its part the Irish Government over the past four years had followed three main lines of policy:-

1. The suppression of the I.R.A. in our part of Ireland. There had been no contact on the part of our Government with the I.R.A. - indeed in this we had been much firmer than the British Government had been. This had had an effect on Protestant opinion in Northern Ireland and had helped to relieve some of their fears.

2. Reunification, in our view, must be something which if achieved (in a future which we did not wish to prescribe exactly) would be achieved only by the wishes of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. It would not be imposed. Our aim in this connection had been to try to calm fears in the area.

3. The Government had tried to build up and maintain personal contacts with leaders of Protestant opinion in Northern Ireland. This had now been achieved to a considerable extent and there seemed to be a growth of trust - which comes naturally enough with people with whom one "breaks bread". The situation had now been established that leaders of the Protestant majority such as the Rev. Martin Smith could come to Dublin and be entertained there at official functions or privately. In turn the Minister, on his visits to Northern Ireland, now (in contrast to some years ago) would be received and entertained by these people.

These were the aims we have been trying to secure. Our long term aim is reconciliation in Northern Ireland and between North and South. The question is what have been the results? The success to date has certainly not been spectacular. We have felt at times that the U.K. Government has not pursued with sufficient vigor the policy which they have accepted - that power would be returned to a local administration in Northern Ireland only

on a power-sharing basis. Accordingly our diplomacy has sought to persuade the United Kingdom Government and the Opposition to restate their policy clearly and firmly in this matter and this they did in the Autumn of last year. Our present feeling is that moderate Protestant leaders in Northern Ireland are seeking

a way to get off the hook of opposition to power-sharing on which they are stuck at present. There is a question of looking for some kind of half-way house - some kind of parliamentary body which might have a consultative role or indeed something more than this but would not have an executive. Such a body might for example call for Ministers, who rule Northern Ireland directly at present, to answer parliamentary type questions.

We do not even know as yet whether this would be acceptable to the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland however. The problem is that politicians in the area have no forum since the Convention ended. Our aim has been to get the United Kingdom Government to give their support on the minority side to the S.D.L.P. as the Party which has held the line against violence and kept to political means. There has been some success in this but a good deal will depend on the morale of the Party. Its willingness to accept the ideas mentioned might be better after the local elections in Northern Ireland in May.

We had some fears that the recent United Kingdom political crisis may have slowed down the progress towards realism in Northern Ireland. This could have been the case if the Unionist politicians at Westminster found both parties with whom they had dealings (i.e. Conservatives and Labour) becoming soft in their dealings

with them. We did not know in fact whether this had been the case and it might be indeed that they had found both Parties firm on the questions relating to Northern Ireland and that this in itself would help to promote a more realistic outcome there.

Accordingly we had some modest hopes for the future but of course we may be deceiving ourselves in this. However our aim had been always to try to create the conditions on the lines he had mentioned which would help to contribute to a peaceful settlement. This indeed we thought of as an approach to the problem in a Christian spirit. The I.R.A. violence however continued though their recent campaign against Protestant businessmen in Northern Ireland might help to isolate them. Recently the I.R.A. had been trying to give the impression that they had some support from the Carter Administration in the United States because of its concern for Human Rights. Accordingly on his recent visit to the United States he had sought to dispel this idea and had been quite successful in doing so. We had had the support of the Carter Administration and a joint statement had been issued by himself and Secretary of State Vance. We had also been greatly encouraged by the statement by four Irish-American leaders - Senators Kennedy, Moynihan, Governor Carey and Speaker O'Neill. We hoped that all of this had helped to dispel any illusion created for propaganda purposes by the I.R.A. that it had support from American Government circles for its policies.

Archbishop Casaroli responded by saying he would like to summarise what he conceived to be the policy of the Irish Government to see if the Minister would agree. He believed that the long-term policy of the Government, which they hoped to be well founded, was to prepare a long-term solution which would be the unification of Ireland. This was the fundamental point. In the meantime they sought to prepare the conditions for the achievement of this.

Dr. FitzGerald said that this was broadly true and that he thought that no one in the Republic would have any other aim. But it was also clear to us that past attempts to force this aim against the wishes of the majority in Northern Ireland had created tensions and these tensions had exploded into violence. Accordingly while this was our general aim we had also made it clear that the only way forward was by agreement. Our aim therefore was to create conditions which would lead to peace in Northern Ireland and normal relations between North and South. Unification, when and if it came, would be in any case by way of a federation. Our immediate policy was dominated by concern for the immediate effects of violence in Northern Ireland. Until violence was ended it was not even possible to begin on the road towards what we would like to see emerge eventually.

There was also the danger - the very serious danger - that full scale civil war might erupt in Northern Ireland. If that happened the net outcome could only be a repartition of the country and possibly the frightful prospect of a massacre of some or all

of the 200,000 Catholics in the ghetto areas of Northern Ireland. We must therefore not only seek a positive solution but also do everything to avoid that worst possible case which if it occurred would lead to a refugee problem unprecedented in Western Europe since the war and also create a problem which would be inherently insoluble.

It is worth considering some of the alternative policies which have been advocated from time to time over the past few years:-

1. Independence for Northern Ireland

We see great dangers in this. We cannot see how internal security would be maintained-particularly because of the large number of Protestant para-militaries and because in the nature of things the Security Forces in Northern Ireland at present are predominantly Protestant. We cannot see any possible external force which would be willing and able to intervene to prevent for example a coup. Thus even if an independent Northern Ireland were set up by agreement and on a power-sharing basis it would be hard to see how the settlement could be adequately guaranteed.

2. United Kingdom Withdrawal

We see this as very dangerous too at present. If the United Kingdom withdraws we could not see how another force to replace ^{the British army} / could easily be found - particularly one which the Protestant population would be willing to accept. There would therefore be a vacuum left in the area and the Catholic

population of Northern Ireland would be very vulnerable.

3. A Declaration of Intent to Withdraw by the U.K.

It has been suggested that this would give the I.R.A. an excuse to cease its violence. We cannot of course prove this but the Irish Government feels that there is a very grave danger that once such a Declaration had been announced by the United Kingdom the para-militaries would try to pre-empt the situation and the United Kingdom would simply not have sufficient resolution to maintain itself and act against them over the period envisaged before the actual withdrawal. There would therefore in effect be a quick slide to possible civil war. We cannot say positively that this would happen but the danger if it were to happen would be so great that the Irish Government considers that it would be irresponsible to risk it.

The Irish Government must give precedence in its policy to concern for the fate of the people of Northern Ireland - especially, because of their position, the Catholics of East Ulster. The

200,000 Catholics in the ghetto areas here in fact dominate our policy thinking. It was true that the Opposition in Ireland had adopted a call for a declaration of intent by Britain as their policy last year but to a considerable

extent this was in a sense accidental and the Leader of the Opposition who had been more or less obliged to accept this policy had been trying to pull back from it. Accordingly the Opposition were not pressing the point although they had formally accepted it as policy.

Archbishop Casaroli said that as far as the Holy See was concerned he could assure the Minister that they followed the question with very great interest not only because Ireland is a Catholic country but because they are committed to the cause of peace everywhere. For them it was important to know the ideas of the Government of Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom in regard to the situation. This was of help in fixing their position - he would not say "policy". They in the Vatican saw reunification as the better (sic.) solution for the future but they fully understood the reasons which led the Government of Ireland not to speak of it for the time being - especially as it was not philosophically necessary to do so. They were convinced that what was most important was to avoid this situation of violence and to prepare for the better coexistence of the two parts of Ireland.

Accordingly they followed the situation most sympathetically and were prepared to do their best - not only the Church in Ireland but also the Holy See. He himself would be prepared to receive information on the question from the Ambassador and to study proposals to see how the Holy See could help. Therefore the views outlined by the Minister had been very useful and he would keep them in mind. They were a hundred per cent "in our line" (sic).

He recalled that there had been some doubts about certain concrete measures which the Minister and he had spoken about in 1973 but as far as these general lines were concerned he was quite sure that the Holy See is very sympathetic.

Dr. FitzGerald said that at this point he thought he should mention that there is an underlying problem which we are all ambivalent about in Ireland in a sense. One of the effects of the partition of Ireland was to leave in the South an independent State which had an over-whelmingly Catholic majority. This situation did not truly reflect Ireland's past (when something like one quarter of the population had been Protestant) or future (where we looked to a federal solution). It was inevitable in this situation that the religious views of the over-whelmingly Catholic majority should be reflected to some degree in our laws and institutions. We had at the moment in Ireland some confusion as to how to approach this question. They in the Holy See might look at the present day State in Ireland as very Catholic. But this view of the situation would be incompatible in its full form with the idea of a united Ireland which would inevitably be much more of a pluralistic State.

We all had a certain ambivalence in this matter and this might cause some difficulties. On some occasions viewpoints expressed by the Hierarchy indicate that they may feel that we should hold firmly to those elements and aspects of the State which derive from this very particular situation (i.e. arising from partition, which left the State as it is over-whelmingly Catholic) - though they say they would be willing to accept appropriate

adjustments when and if unity is achieved. Some of us however in Ireland feel that it is difficult to say to the Protestant population that certain things which could not be accepted now would somehow become tolerable at the moment when unity is achieved. From the viewpoint of the Holy See, he could see that Ireland would appear a very Catholic country at present. He could understand this but it could be an obstacle to the reconciliation of which he had spoken.

It was necessary to find a way through this problem. One could argue about any particular measure which might be proposed - indeed there had been some disagreement with some ideas he himself had suggested and it could be that he had perhaps exaggerated to an extent in some of his proposals. But whatever about particular proposals what was important was the spirit in which the matter is approached and here there had been, and is, a problem. This is that in the general approach of the authorities of the Catholic Church in Ireland there is not seen to be sufficient generosity to create the conditions necessary to reconciliation. Individuals in Ireland might make different assessments of what should be done and he did not wish to press on any specific point - for example on the question of divorce in the Constitution (though he himself thought that divorce should best be taken out of the Constitution). What mattered however was the spirit with which the matter was approached.

Occasionally some incidents attracted particular attention. He did not wish to intrude into Church affairs but he thought he should mention a particular example recently. The Bishop of Down and Connor had an approach in regard to the question of Confirmation which he thought was not shared anywhere else

This was that he refused to confirm Catholic children in his diocese who did not attend Catholic schools. A recent TV programme in Ireland which he (the Minister) had heard about, though he had not seen it, ^{and which} included a discussion with four Irish Catholic Bishops (in itself an innovation and one which he welcomed) had drawn attention to a particularly difficult case. It appeared that a woman in the Down and Connor diocese who had sent her children to a local State school rather than sending them by bus fourteen miles away to a Catholic school, which was dangerous in view of the fact that the bus had been attacked on several occasions, had seen her child refused Confirmation by the Bishop.

Frankly this case was a source of scandal to many Catholics. Indeed he himself speaking as a Catholic and not as a Minister had found it a source of scandal that a Sacrament could be used as a weapon of that kind. Certainly the incident gave further fuel to the propaganda of extreme Protestants in Northern Ireland.

There would shortly be a further meeting of Catholic and Protestant Church Leaders at Ballymacscanlon. In his view it was very important that the Catholic side should approach these talks with great generosity, accepting that there had been misunderstandings on all sides, and seek to find solutions to common problems. It was necessary to show a spirit of great generosity. To do otherwise would be damaging to the Church - and here he himself was speaking as a Catholic.

As another example he could cite a document on violence which had been drawn up by some leaders from the various Churches including Bishop Cahal Daly, a Bishop for whom he had great respect. This document which had been prepared last October was an excellent document. When he had appeared on a radio programme with Bishop Daly in the latter part of last year, the Bishop had responded to his question as to why the document had not been formally endorsed by the Irish Hierarchy by saying that the reason for the delay in endorsing it was a purely technical one. He (the Minister) was distressed that the document had not received the formal endorsement of the Catholic Church - especially as reports exist that this failure to endorse it reflects an actual resistance to it on the part of some ecclesiastics. He was not altogether sure that he was correct in this but he understood that the document had once again not been adopted at the recent meeting of the Irish Hierarchy in Maynooth. The failure to adopt such a document, which has as its opening sentence the point that "there is no excuse for the existence of para-military forces in Ireland," could be seriously misunderstood. He therefore urged that this document should be adopted since not to do so would give rise to speculation. Bishop Daly had done fine work on it and there were no good theological or political reasons not to adopt it.

These were some areas where there was not an entire coincidence of interest between ecclesiastical, and official Government, policy. He himself did not think that the questions of legislation which he had mentioned earlier were pressing ones but he thought it necessary to mention these other issues to Archbishop Casaroli, with all respect, as being perhaps more

immediately important.

Archbishop Casaroli said that the problem was a delicate one. It must be studied with all deliberation. It would be unfortunate to create a new division. He thought a solution will be possible. "We all - the Minister and Government and the Irish Hierarchy and the Holy See - have to study the problem carefully and in real terms."

The Minister had spoken of the possibility of a federation in Ireland eventually. That could give some possibilities of catering for the particular positions of some confessional groups in a concrete way. It could permit the maintenance of the situation in one part and a different situation in another. This of course was only his personal thoughts on the matter - he was speaking fairly personally.

Dr. FitzGerald said that we do not of course exclude this. There was an example for us in a sense in the situation in Britain where the divorce law is different in Scotland and in England although both ^{form} a United Kingdom. On the other hand however there would be difficulties (to which a federation in itself would be no answer) if we in the South were seen to adopt positions which ^{were} unfair to the Protestant minority in our part of the island.

Archbishop Casaroli said he saw this. (Apparently returning again to his point in regard to a federation) he said that there are examples to be found in Northern Italy where for regional - not religious - reasons, certain areas live under a special statute and have a special status. There were for example certain areas which were ethnically French or ethnically German but were now under Italian administration. The general rules were the same but in some respects it had been possible to take account of the exigencies set by regional differences.

In speaking of this he was of course putting forward a very personal solution. The spirit should be thought to be that every Irishman should feel at home in a united Ireland (i.e. in each part?). The problem was a very delicate one and there must be a willingness to move little by little. Major changes would be more difficult.

Accordingly he could understand the pre-occupation of the Irish Bishops, even though he was not fully informed on each particular episode (for example he had not known the point about Confirmation in Down and Conor). They were concerned not to lose the tradition of centuries in Ireland. He could also understand the viewpoint of the Irish Government as explained by the Minister.

Dr. FitzGerald said that it was not simply a question of his own views - the situation of violence between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland was also in the strictest sense a scandal.

Archbishop Casaroli agreed. He said he thought the general principles mentioned would be accepted by every Bishop. It was more difficult to apply particular measures in concrete cases but it was not impossible to do so. He personally had never met Bishop Philbin so far as he could recall (the Ambassador mentioned that Bishop Philbin had been in Rome in December and Archbishop Casaroli recalled that he himself had been away).

Dr. FitzGerald said that he had met Bishop Philbin when he was Bishop of Clonfert and he had seemed quite liberal at the time particularly in some economic matters. It seemed that the Bishop had found a difficult situation with the local clergy when he moved to Belfast. For whatever reasons some manifestations of his attitudes on particular issues had given rise to problems.

Overall, Dr. FitzGerald concluded, the Irish Government needs help and sympathy in seeking to resolve these problems in the most Christian manner possible.

CSCE Review Conference in Belgrade

The discussion then turned to the above topic.

Archbishop Casaroli said that the Holy See is not finding it easy to prepare for the Conference. It finds difficulties on each side - on the one hand it wishes to speak up for freedom in Eastern Europe but on the other it must be conscious that there are some many religious interests in Eastern Europe (not only Catholic interests) which might suffer. They are quite conscious that the structures of the Government systems in Eastern Europe will not permit a very great deal of movement and they must take account of this.

Some people would wish the Church to adopt a policy of "prophecy" (i.e. that of speaking out at all costs on every issue) but this could create worse conditions for the people in Eastern Europe. Certainly the situation of Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and Muslims there would not be better. For this reason the Holy See does not think this would be a good policy. It will however be very difficult to maintain its position since many await a lead from the Holy See in speaking out on matters of religious freedom at Belgrade.

It was good that President Carter had spoken openly on Human Rights questions but he could do this more easily because the United States is strong. It was not so easy for the Holy See. Accordingly it hoped that other countries would speak out in regard to freedom. It was necessary to speak of freedom "tout/court" and not simply of religious freedom as such. He hoped that there will be common action (by the West) but a wise action.

Dr. FitzGerald said that as a matter of information he could mention that at the European Council in Rome some days previously Prime Minister Callaghan in reporting on his visit to the United States had said that in his view President Carter was inspired by genuine religious conviction in adopting his positions on Human Rights. President Carter's policy statements on these matters reflected the work done in the transition period before his administration took over. Some 2 million dollars had been provided for this purpose and the positions taken by the President derived from the work done then and had not been simply blurted out on the spur of the moment. Mr. Callaghan's assessment however was that President Carter, inspired as he was by genuine religious convictions on these points, would not draw back from his positions. He understood however that difficulties would arise ^{in trying} to implement them. He was therefore likely not to continue to rub the wound unnecessarily but he would not draw back from what he had said. Another possible reason why he thought it well to speak out so much was that he recalled that under the previous administration the Congress had established a kind of linkage between Human Rights and negotiation on strategic issues. President Carter by speaking out firmly on Human Rights matters possibly wished to ensure this linkage would not be made.

Archbishop Casaroli thanked Dr. FitzGerald for this information. He mentioned again that it would be easy for the Holy See to speak out earnestly on issues of freedom, particularly religious freedom, but they were not sure that this would be the best thing to do. In taking this position they exposed themselves

to dangers in two ways:-

- (a) it might be said that the U.S. were speaking out fearlessly and since this is so why could the Holy See not do the same;

- (b) the Helsinki Final Act has in fact been a kind of flag, in the good sense, around which people have rallied in Eastern Europe. Undoubtedly the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act is contrary to the underlying ideas of Government structures in the area.

His own hope was that little by little the spirit of Helsinki would work its effects-especially on the youth in Eastern Europe. We must realise that the two years since the Final Act is not a very long period. Allowance should be made for this in the sense that we should not press to an undue extent since this could have a very negative effect if Eastern Europe in consequence broke off the whole process.

So far as the Holy See was concerned they had seen some results of the undertakings in the Final Act. For example they had been able to get permission to send some liturgical objects (?) to the Soviet Union. This of course was very little but still it represented some progress.

Accordingly the view of the Holy See would be that the process should continue at Belgrade and that the Eastern side should be encouraged to give more and more in the matter of concessions. The Review Conference should not however be approached in a polemic way.

Dr. FitzGerald said that we of course are conscious of the need in preparing for the Review Conference to take a measured approach. We would be careful not to be unnecessarily polemic but the issues did exist and public opinion was exercised about them. Indeed in Ireland there had been some opposition to the Final Act itself.

At this point Dr. FitzGerald referred to Mr. Dorr and some further discussion took place on the CSCE Review Conference in the course of which we mentioned to Archbishop Casaroli that Ireland has been playing a small but useful role within the Nine over the years on the CSCE. We mentioned that the Nine are preparing for the Review Conference and Archbishop Casaroli recalled that he had recently met with the Ambassadors of the Nine to the Holy See and discussed the topic.

We also outlined for Archbishop Casaroli our view that it was necessary to avoid the extremes of- on the one hand letting the Final Act be a dead letter in the sense of simply an incident in history two years ago which would not be looked at again, and on the other hand an over-polemical approach. The CSCE itself had been unique in certain ways - for example it proceeded by consensus of 35 countries at all times and this

in itself was unprecedented. It was also something of a new development to provide for a Review Conference within a few years of the undertakings in the Final Act. The effect of this provision was to keep life and "tension" in the Final Act as a document since it was clear to all that its contents and how they had been carried through would be under review in due course.

In further discussion in response to our questions Archbishop Casaroli seemed to envisage the Review Conference as lasting for three weeks. Mr. Dorr mentioned that the Nine, though not taking up inflexible positions at this stage, envisaged rather a preparatory meeting of some four, five or six weeks beginning in mid-June followed by a Conference which might last for three months and begin in September. Archbishop Casaroli seemed somewhat surprised at this - at least so far as the length was concerned. We also mentioned that there had been some suggestion from certain countries on the Eastern side that the Preparatory Conference would address itself to the question of the "political concept" of the main Conference. There was therefore some possible reason to think that the Preparatory Conference might be fairly difficult.

Dr. FitzGerald towards the end of the discussion mentioned the use made of the Strasbourg Case by Press commentators in the Soviet Union. He explained to Monsignor Casaroli that he had sought to refute this in his recent speech in Washington by pointing out the very important differences which exist between the situation in Western Europe where countries accept an international investigation procedure in Human Rights matters

(i.e. under the provisions of the European Convention) - a situation very different from that in Eastern Europe.

Archbishop Casaroli took the point at once, and agreed completely.

A further point mentioned in relation to the CSCE Review Conference by Dr. FitzGerald was that the review should be done not on the basis of mere statistics of the numbers of translations produced etc. but on the basis of an assessment of the respective positions of the countries involved taken overall.

After some general discussion of the CSCE on these lines the meeting concluded and Archbishop Casaroli again thanked Dr. FitzGerald for the exposition he had given him of his views.

WD

cc Minister

Secretary

Mr Dunsin

Ambassador Holy See