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Press Conference given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Mr. Peter Barry TD at the Irish Embassy in London 28 July 1983

Minister: I told him that we are troop subscribers to the UNIFIL forces at the moment but that we will want to see what the new mandate would be in the coming months before we could give a guarantee that we would subscribe after the run-out of the present mandate which is about 19 October. I also discussed a matter which is of great concern to the Irish Government at the moment, that / the financial difficulties of the EEC and the solutions to those problems that are rumoured to be proposed in Brussels at the moment and one of those rumours is the super levy on milk products. Now, of course the Irish Government would not hold that any policy should not be properly administered but our concern is that agriculture in Ireland accounts for 18% of the workforce and that milk products are 6% of our GNP. This is by any standards a very high dependence on any one product in any country, I'd say, so that if a super levy was imposed it would in effect mean that our farmers who, for historical reasons, which you'll possibly all be aware of, have not had yet the time to develop to their full production potential. The imposition of a super levy would have the effect of saying that we must stay at that level of production forever and we think this would be the opposite of the spirit of the Community under which it was founded. I wanted to take the opportunity while I was here in London of impressing these points on Sir Geoffrey Howe and I think he undertook to study our proposal in that regard as I did, he said he was putting other proposals and I undertook to study those. We also agreed between Sir. Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Prior and myself that the Anglo-Irish Encounter Group should be formally set up. This

was, as you know, anticipated in the joint communique that was issued after the summit meeting between the Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and Mrs. Thatcher in November of 1981. I presume most of you have got the press release, all of you, I hope, have got the press release regarding that. If anybody hasn't, the terms of reference of the organisation are that the objective of both Governments in initiating the Anglo- Irish Encounter organisation is to contribute to the improvement of relations between their people in the interest of peace, reconciliation and stability. The two joint chairmen have been nominated. They are Dr. Ken Whitaker and Sr David Orr. We would anticipate that they will bring with them onto a committee representatives of a wide range of people in both countries and that that committee will then set about producing a series of studies, organising seminars, organising conferences, the reports of the conclusions of which will be conveyed to both Governments and I believe that this new organisation will be a significant tool for the betterment of relationships between our two Governments. I want to repeat here something I said upstairs a few minutes ago and to other people and in the last three days, I want to pay public tribute to Dr. Eamon Kennedy and the staff of the Irish Embassy here. Dr. Kennedy, as many of you know is leaving London this week and will be our Ambassador to Rome. I have from politicians, from Irish associations, from the gentlemen of the press and the ladies of the press, from anybody I came into contact with who has had any contact with the Irish Embassy I've had nothing but the highest of praise for our Ambassador to London and regret, genuine regret expressed everywhere at the fact that he is leaving. I want to express my

appreciation of the job he has done here for his country over the last five years. Thank you, Dr. Kennedy. Are there any questions?

Q.: Tom McMullan of the Press Association. In your speech last night you talked about the improvement and normalisation of relations between Britain and Ireland. Could I ask you how badly these relations were damaged by the Falklands and do you regret the Irish stand?

Minister: I think that relations between countries normally go through phases where they are very cordial and then the cordiality cools off at other periods. I think that without going into the reasons why there was a strain between our two Governments for the last number of years, I think they haven't been as cordial as I would like to see them. I believe that in the last six months we have with genuine goodwill on both sides set about re-establishing a good relationship between our two countries and I think with the summit coming up at the end of the year between the Taoiseach and Mrs. Thatcher I believe they will be back to normal then.

Q.: Where is the summit going to be held?

Minister: It hasn't been decided. At Stuttgart the Taoiseach and Mrs. Thatcher agreed that they would meet formally in the summit towards the end of this year. The details of where and the date have not yet been worked out. Both offices are now engaged in fixing those details up.

Q.: Has the country even been decided?

Minister: Nothing has been decided yet.

Q.: I wonder if you could give us an example of the kind of thing that the Encounter Group will be discussing, what areas?

Minister: I think they can discuss anything in the very widest of areas.

They might discuss energy cooperation, they might discuss sporting contacts, they might discuss cultural exchanges, virtually everything is open to them to discuss. We would see this organisation as being largely self-motivated and they will choose their own subjects and they will choose their own venues and they will choose their own groups of speakers or lecturers and they will produce their own reports which they will then submit to both Governments.

Q.: Do you expect the membership to include people from Northern Ireland?

Minister: Again, it's a matter for the two chairmen to decide but I would think they would be very conscious of the position of Northern Ireland and the relationship between the two countries and they would make an effort to see that they are represented but it's a matter for them.

Q.: The fact is that the Irish co-chair, Dr. Whitaker, is from Northern Ireland.

Minister: That's right. In fact, Sir David Orr was born in Dublin, Dr. Whitaker was born in Warrenpoint in County Down.

Q.: Minister, what would you say to those British supporters of Sinn Fein like Ken Livingstone, Sinn Fein you described as blatant fascists last night, what would you say to those people, British people supporting Sinn Fein?

Minister: I don't know the gentlemen concerned. I think they are misguided in having done that because they are under the impression, I think, that Sinn Fein is a democratic organisation that is concerned about the democratic process. In fact, quite the reverse is true as I've pointed out a few times in the last few days. Mr Adams, speaking in Ireland about a month ago addressed his audience as 'fellow gunmen and fellow gunwomen' and another one of his lieutenants at

one stage said their intention was to take power in Ireland with an armalite in one hand and a ballot paper in the other. If they are using the procees of elections now it's only because it happens to serve them at this point but when it ceases to serve them, then they will in conjunction, at the same time or alternatively use other methods.

Q.: Are you saying then that people like Ken Livingstone damage real Anglo-Irish relations?

Minister: I think he was mistaken in what he did, yes. He didn't damage Anglo-Irish relations but I think he was mistaken in what he did.

Q.: Brian Walker of the BBC. When you were talking to the rank and file of the Irish community did the topic of Sinn Fein come up very much - was it a matter of great concern? A lot of them, of course, have contacts with the Labour Party - did you take any attitude towards the Labour left wing and their attitude to Sinn Fein?

Minister: No, I didn't. I don't think it came up in any one of my meetings with them. What did come up was their concern as I've said about the damage that has been done to their relationship with their neighbours by the activities of Sinn Fein in the North of Ireland.

Q.: Do you visualise that the Irish Government might have talked to the British Government about defence policy in view of the report last week by a Labour Cabinet Minister that

Minister: I don't remember seeing that. I presume you are speaking about Merlyn Rees, is that correct?

Q.: No, Wedgewood Benn.

Minister: Well the response to that by Merlyn Rees said that they had a sub-committee in their Cabinet which discussed all

aspects of the Irish problem as they called it and looked at all the alternatives all the time but that they had rejected what Wedgewood Benn, what Tony Benn said was the recommendation of the Chief of Staff.

Q.: Are you planning to make any suggestions to Britian about defence?

Minister: No, no defence was not discussed, nor is it ever discussed when there's meetings at Ministerial level or any level between members of the Irish and the British Government. It is never discussed.

Q.: Do you think the British Government needs assurances on this neutrality issue?

Minister: No, I don't think so. I mean, the British Government recognise that we are a sovereign independent state and our attitude on all these is a matter for us and if we declare a policy of neutrality they respect that and that has been said a number of times in the last few months, that they respect our attitude and our right to adopt a position of neutrality. It's never been discussed and they wouldn't dream of questioning us about it or anything else. They accept that we are sovereign and independent and can make up our own minds about these things.

Q.: So, you don't think they need any assurances?

Minister: They don't look for or need, nor would it occur to them that they would seek assurances on these matters. They respect us as being an independent, sovereign state that makes up its own mind about this matter and they recognise our right to do that.

Q.: Minister, hasn't it always been a bipartisan position in Irish politics that given a united Ireland that the Irish Government would be willing to guarantee that the united Ireland would never become a military threat or the base for a military

threat to Britain?

Minister: Oh yes, that has been the attitude long before 1977, I think from the very foundation of the state that guarantee has been given, I think - no I better not quote from it as I'm not absolutely sure whether I'm right or not, - but I think long before 1977 that has been the position.

Q.: Did you discuss with Mr. Prior the possibility of getting the SDLP somehow into the Assembly?

Minister: This is my third meeting with Mr. Prior and we agreed at our first meeting that anything we talked about would remain confidential between the pair of us because we decided that the best possibility of building up an atmosphere of trust and of achieving something was by remaining, of all our discussions remaining confidential. That applies to today's as well as to the last two.

Q.: Did you suggest the British Government should make some sort of concessions to the SDLP to get them into the Assembly?

Minister: Will I repeat the reply to your last question?

Q.: Would you characterise today's talks as very much laying the foundation for deeper talks later in the year?

Minister: I would characterise today's talks as being part of the normal process of good relations between our two countries where we have a lot of common problems and a lot of common interests and while the summit is a very important part of the contacts between our two Governments, before the summit and after that summit there will be also contacts between Mr. Prior and I on a continuing basis.

Q.: Mr. Barry, is there not a problem about the agenda for the summit, if it will be a substantial - it looks as if, from what you say, it is going to be held at a time when it's by no means certain the deliberations of the Forum will be complete -

would the Taoiseach, then, not be under considerable constraints in asking very much of Mrs. Thatcher much less concluding anything with her if he doesn't take the whole, the Irish parliament and indeed the SDLP with him?

Minister: The summit will almost certainly be held before the Forum produces its report but that doesn't mean there won't be other matters for the Taoiseach and Mrs Thatcher to discuss and there won't be other concerns that they both want to make the other aware of nor does it mean that they won't both express their hopes and their fears about the future, I think a summit, whether the Forum is sitting or not, will take place and hopefully even after the Forum has reported there will be other summits in the future. I think the original intention from the November 1981 communique was that summits should take place at regular intervals. It was never specified but I believe the understanding then was three every two years or two every one year, something of that nature, so we'll be back to a process of the Taoiseach and Mrs. Thatcher meeting regularly over the years to come. They have just been elected to Government and presumably have a fair term of office in front of them. We're there since last December and hopefully we have four years as well so that in that time we are going to build quite a close relationship which I'm sure will be continued by whatever Government replace both of us after that.

Q.: Do you anticipate any discussions with the British Government either publicly or confidentially about the Assembly and about the whole political system in the North and also about the developments in the Anglo-Irish Council?

Minister: I would think that confidentially and publicly all matters relating to relationships between the two Governments will continue to be discussed at all levels.

Q.: Do you visualise the summit will take place before the Common Market Heads of Government meet in Athens?

Minister: I don't know. When is that? Give me the date for that.

Q.: I think it's about 13 December.

Minister: Well given the fact that there is only about a fortnight between that and Christmas the probability is that it will, but I'm not sure of that yet, I couldn't give you any firmer indication than that.

Q.: In other words, the summit is likely to concentrate on EEC finances rather than

Minister: That's certainly one of the points on which we will both have a deep and abiding interest.

Q.: Henry Scanlon of the Times. Can I just check a fact with you. In your introduction when you referred to..... did you say that it represented 6% of the Irish GNP?

Minister: No, no that milk does.

Q.: Oh, meat does, I'm sorry.

Minister: Milk, milk, milk.

Q.: Oh, milk.

Minister: Milk, yes, m-i-l-k, bainne.

Q.: In your talks with the two Labour front bench spokesmen on the North did you deduce from them that they are going to press on with the policy for a united Ireland, were you able to support that?

Minister: Oh, yes, they did, Yes . They said that that policy had been put into place after a great deal of very hard work on behalf of both spokesmen and that they now saw that as being for the foreseeable time in the future the policy of the

Labour Party but of course they both said also that at the moment they couldn't say anything about the Labour Party between now and October because they would be changes in October and consequential changes on the changes in the leadership so that they were in that sense saying that at the moment we are working in a kind of limbo or a vacuum until we'll see what happens in the Labour Party leadership in October.

Q.: Did you test them about the second sentence in their manifesto which was that the unionist population would have the right to remain if they wanted to and the extent to which that contradicted the first part.

Minister: Yes, well they had been in Dublin of course, twice, I think since Christmas, representatives of the Labour Party, and we have gone through their policy very carefully with them line by line to see what they understand as being the implications of every aspect of it.

Q.: Does it seem to make sense to the Irish Government?

Minister: Well their explanations would certainly, I accept what they explained to me about it.

Q.: Do you think Mr. FitzGerald when he comes, when the summit takes place, might be in a position to propose changes in the Irish Constitution to remove the claim to Northern Ireland.

Minister: I wouldn't see that at that stage when the summit takes place that there would be any propositions of that nature or any other nature in relation to the North of Ireland on the table because the Forum won't still have reported.

Q.: Could you say what the thinking of the present Irish Government is on this idea?

Minister: Yes, the Irish Government haven't considered this because our efforts at the moment are being put into the Forum in trying to bring forward a proposal out of the Forum that will be seen as being the voice of all the nationalists on the part and not just the Government but all the nationalists in the country as to what way they see the future of Ireland developing.

Q.: Minister, I'm sorry at this stage, I have one final question but I wonder would you like to comment on the fact that some of the British columnists here are defence correspondents or people who have in the past specialised as defence correspondents. Do you think that is significant?

Minister: I didn't know and I don't see it as significant either. I presume in times of holidays people wear a number of hats but I didn't know there were defence correspondents here..

Press Section

Department of Foreign Affairs

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