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Mrs. Thatcher and Ireland in the British election campaign

1. The section on Northern Ireland in the Conservative party manifesto, published on 18 May 1983, contained five main points:

- (i) commitment to upholding law and order;
- (ii) pledge of continuing economic support for the North;
- (iii) assurance that the Assembly will continue;
- (iv) reiteration that there will be no constitutional change without the consent of the majority, balanced by an assurance that there will be no devolution of powers without 'widespread support throughout the community';
- (v) a reference to Anglo-Irish relations:

"We believe that a close practical working relationship between the United Kingdom and the Government of the Republic can contribute to peace and stability in Northern Ireland without threatening in any way the position of the majority community in the Province."

2. During the daily Conservative Party press conference Mrs. Thatcher was occasionally questioned about Irish topics. In response she was generally cautious, rarely adding much of significance to the manifesto. She commented on three occasions about Anglo-Irish relations. On 25 May she stated:

"We cooperate with the Irish Republic very much in defence and economic policy areas across the Border. We believe in keeping very friendly relations with the only country with which we have a land border." (Conservative Central Office confirmed to the Embassy London that the PM meant Security when she used the word defence).

She accepted that relations had deteriorated after the Falklands crisis:

"There were not specific bilateral talks taking place of a kind which we had before. We thought it better to wait a bit. Of course, I see the Taoiseach at European Council meetings".

On 26 May, when asked when the next bilateral meeting with the Taoiseach would take place, she stated that she had not yet resumed bilateral meetings with the Taoiseach although she had met him at the European Council. Though she would not give a

date, she said a meeting between her and the Taoiseach would take place.

On 2 June, Mrs. Thatcher reiterated much of the above. Pressed as to future relations, she referred to existing co-operation, instancing cross-border security, and said that they would carry on as before.

Anglo-Irish Section

June 1983