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NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

24 FEBRUARY 1983

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon James Prior MP, said in the House of Commons today that the European Parliament has no business to discuss the internal political affairs of a member state.

Answering a question by Mr James Molyneaux (Antrim South), Mr Prior said:

"The Political Affairs Committee of the European Parliament decided yesterday to make a report on the situation in Northern Ireland on the basis of 3 motions for resolutions before it. No decision was taken on a fourth resolution, in the name inter alia of the Hon Member for Antrim North. Nor has the Committee taken a decision about the appointment of a rapporteur. There is not therefore any clear indication as to how the Committee will seek to take this forward.

"The Government's view on this matter is clear. My hon friend the Member for Pentlands stated it in the House on Monday. The European Parliament has no business to discuss the internal political affairs of a member state. These resolutions, insofar as they cover such affairs, are therefore in our view not within the competence of the Parliament.

"Moreover, in June 1981 the European Parliament itself accepted that it had no competence to make proposals for changes in the constitution of Northern Ireland. It follows that any conclusion the Committee may reach can have no practical effect and the decision of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliament can have no constitutional implications for the United Kingdom. The Government was not in a position to prevent yesterday's decision, which we regret. It remains the Government's wish to promote the greatest possible understanding of its policy in Northern Ireland amongst our partners in the European Community in the Parliament and elsewhere but this decision will do nothing to advance such understanding."

Mr Molyneaux had asked the Secretary of State if he would make a statement on the constitutional implications of the EEC's decision to interfere in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland.