

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Chun an Aire Gnothai Eachtracha: To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement on Government relations with Libya.

- Mervyn Taylor.

For written answer on Thursday, 28 June, 1984.

REPLY

Ireland and Libya agreed in July 1977 to establish diplomatic relations on a non-residential basis. The Irish Ambassador to Italy is currently also accredited to Tripoli. The head of the Libyan People's Bureau in London had been accredited to Dublin; following the breaking of relations between the U.K. and Libya no new arrangement has yet been made for Libyan accreditation to Dublin.

The Government were gravely concerned by remarks reported to have been made in April and May by Colonel Gaddafi about possible Libyan support for the IRA. We have made clear in a number of subsequent contacts with the Libyan authorities the total unacceptability of Libyan support for, or offers of support for the IRA. This matter is the subject of continuing contact with the Libyan authorities.

Economic co-operation between Ireland and Libya is to be discussed at the next meeting of the Irish-Libyan Joint Commission in Tripoli. Discussions with the Libyan authorities on a date for this meeting are proceeding. Ireland has a substantial trading relationship with Libya. Over 100 Libyans are involved in study or training courses in this country and several hundred Irish citizens are working in Libya.

Background Note

1. It would seem that Deputy Taylor's question is prompted by the events in London in April when a woman police constable was killed by gunfire from inside the Libyan People's Bureau and Britain subsequently broke off diplomatic relations with Libya and by concern at the possibility, mentioned in interviews by Gaddafi, of renewed Libyan support for the IRA. Both of these matters are viewed by the Government with considerable concern. There has been follow-up among the Ten with discussion of how to achieve a common approach against terrorism and the abuse of diplomatic privileges. Bilaterally Ireland has insisted to the Libyan authorities on the unacceptability of support for, or offers of support for, the IRA. At the same time this country (in common with partners in the Ten and many other western countries) has a substantial trading relationship with Libya which it seeks to maintain and expand if possible. Overall therefore relations with Libya require careful handling and the striking of a balance between simple commercial interests and consideration of the unacceptable nature of some of Colonel Gaddafi's policies.

2. The UK/Libya dispute began with the killing of WPC Fletcher by gunfire directed from the Libyan People's Bureau in London on 17 April. It has led to the closure of the Libyan mission in London and of the British mission in Tripoli and to the breaking of diplomatic relations between the countries. It has intensified international concern about abuses by Libya of diplomatic privilege. There has not however been any wider move towards breaking relations with Libya (the US had already suspended relations) nor did Britain seek or suggest such action. The affair has been used instead to focus attention on the problem of state terrorism and the use of diplomatic premises in support of terrorism. Political Directors of the Ten agreed at their meeting on 17/18 May to convene an ad hoc group of officials to examine this area, using as starting point a discussion paper by Britain. The group is to meet in Paris on 4 June and it is envisaged that it will report to the Political Committee meeting in July which in turn will report to Ministers meeting on 23 July (Irish Presidency). A range of possible responses, individual and collective, by the Ten to outrages such as that committed in London have been suggested by Britain. Ireland has welcomed the UK initiative.

Result?

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3. There are certain practical consequences for relations between Ireland and Libya of the break in relations between the UK and Libya:

- (i) no arrangement has yet been made for accrediting a (non-resident) Libyan representative to Dublin in place of the head of the Libyan People's Bureau in London
- (ii) the consular protection of Irish citizens in Libya can no longer be carried out by the UK. Italy has agreed to perform this function for us; the assent of the Libyan authorities is awaited.

The Irish Ambassador in Rome remains accredited to Tripoli and much of the day-to-day conduct of relations is carried out through this channel.

#### 4. Libya/IRA

Colonel Gaddafi made public reference to the possibility of Libyan support for the IRA in the context of the UK/Libya dispute in media interviews on 30 April and 2 May. The Government stated on 2 May that Colonel Gaddafi's remarks were viewed with grave concern and were being taken up with the Libyan authorities.

- (a) On 3 May the Ambassador in Rome contacted by telephone a high-ranking official of the Libyan equivalent of a Foreign Ministry and read out the text of a note of protest.
- (b) On 7 May the Ambassador called by appointment to the Libyan People's Bureau in Rome and in the course of a 45 minute meeting with the head of the Bureau explained fully the Government's position on the IRA.
- (c) On 16 May the head of the Rome Bureau assured the Ambassador that Gaddafi had no quarrel whatever with the Irish people or their government. What Gaddafi had said about the IRA was aimed at the British. The Ambassador said that the IRA was a murderous threat to the existence of the democratically elected Irish Government and that to give them support in Libya would be to threaten our own institutions. The Ambassador formed the impression during the meeting that the Libyan side was implying that the threat to support the IRA was more an off-the-cuff bit of anti-British rhetoric than a thought out plan. In contacts we have had with the British authorities in the matter a similar view has been expressed.

- (d) On 23 May the Ambassador availed of a telephone conversation with a senior official in the Foreign Liaison Bureau (Foreign Office) in Tripoli to reiterate in forceful terms the Government's concern about the IRA. He said that the IRA is a threat to the Irish Government and the Irish State and that expressions of support for them - such as those made by Colonel Gaddafi - cause serious problems for the Irish Government. These remarks were noted by the Libyan official who commented that the Libyan authorities did not wish this to interfere with our relations.

#### 5. Economic and commercial relations

In 1983 Irish exports to Libya were worth over IR £49m. while imports were valued at IR £25.8m. The largest components of the exports were cattle and bone-in beef and crude petroleum was the only import of note. During the first quarter of 1984 Ireland has sold goods worth IR £10.9m. to Libya and there have been no imports in that period.

A Joint Commission for Economic, Industrial, Scientific and Technological Cooperation between Ireland and Libya held its first session in Dublin in May 1983. The Irish side was led by the Minister for Agriculture and the Libyan side by Dr. Zlitni, the Libyan "Minister" with special responsibility for relations with Ireland. The second session of the Joint Commission is due to be held in Tripoli this summer and discussions are proceeding with the Libyan authorities in the matter. The question is complicated by Libyan insistence that the oil/cattle-beef barter issue be resolved before the holding of the Joint Commission. The latest proposal from the Libyan side had been for a meeting beginning on 23 June but this does not suit the Minister for Agriculture.

There were 438 Libyans registered as aliens in Ireland on 31 December 1983 according to the Department of Justice. Many of these would be on training or study courses. The Department has conveyed to DEVCO and HEDCO and direct to Aer Lingus the Minister's view that we should not take any steps to encourage an influx of Libyan students to Ireland following the deterioration in British-Libyan relations.

Officer responsible for draft reply: P. Gunning  
1 June 1984