



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

5th February 1985

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 19th December about the ideas which the Conservative Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee intend to work-up on cooperation with the Irish.

These are interesting thoughts, and we look forward to seeing your proposals. Some are very much in line with your own thinking. There may be practical difficulties about some of them for our own system, and you will no doubt be considering whether these might be overcome.

It is, of course, essential that we build a sound working relationship with the Irish Government. We now have a good base from which to start, but there will be difficult and sensitive issues. We have to recognise in particular that while we must develop security cooperation, we shall need to look at other areas. At this stage, there will be most value in quiet discussions, rather than public exchanges. Our talks with the Irish must of course be within the limits which we have stated as regards the constitutional position.

The work which you and your colleagues have done up to now has already been most helpful to us and I should be interested to see your Memorandum when it is available. I hope we can avoid the Government having to take too firm a public position on any of your ideas at that stage, since that could make our discussions with the Irish more difficult. Douglas Hurd would, of course, be happy to discuss the issues with you if that would be helpful, and I know that you and he are in touch.

Yours ever
Margaret

Sir John Biggs-Davison MP

From: Sir John Biggs-Davison MP

19th December 1984

I write to tell you of the relief of the Officers of the Conservative Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee at the renewed cordiality of your relations with the Taoiseach, who can be helpful in your search for a solution to the Ulster question.

Our Committee shares the Government's view that, faced by a "common enemy" - a phrase used by Dr. FitzGerald, among others- and sharing many common interests, the United Kingdom should pursue co-operation with the Irish Republic in all appropriate fields.

Equally, we give full support to the policy of conducting such co-operation within a clear framework that excludes proposals that could undermine British sovereignty.

In the next two months, the Committee intends to examine the various courses which have been put forward since the publication of the report of the New Ireland Forum. Thereafter we should like to submit a short memorandum.

Our preliminary consideration has disclosed interest in the following:

- 1) the establishment of a joint security commission to co-ordinate the anti-terrorist campaign throughout the British Isles;
- 2) a suggestion made by Ivor Stanbrook, who is one of our two Vice-Chairmen, that judges of the Irish Republic might sit in on trials in the United Kingdom, as is already the practice with visiting judges from Commonwealth countries;
- 3) the opening of direct contacts between the British and Irish Armies;
- 4) arrangements for the Royal Irish Constabulary and the Garda Siochana to interview suspects in the Republic and UK respectively;
- 5) co-operation in commercial and energy matters and tourism.

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Sir John Biggs-Davison to the Prime Minister

Some at least of the above should help to give the minority in Northern Ireland more confidence in the security forces and encourage it to support Her Majesty's Government in Northern Ireland.

Work in this sphere has already been done by the independent study group presided over by Sir Patrick Macrory and published by the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies. Besides Peter Utley, the group included Peter Lloyd, Nick Budgen and myself. I am glad that you have seen our report.

Your office should also have my personal submission to the Forum. Despite its voluminous documentation, the Forum failed to publish it although it issued a record of the session at Dublin Castle during which I was questioned by the party leaders. I enclose a further copy for your convenience.

The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
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SW1