

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PAB/5119/DP

FROM: S A MARSH, PAB
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Mr Miles - B

cc Mr Spence - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Blackwell - B
Mr G McConnell - B
Mr J McConnell
Mr Shannon - B

NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Following the meeting which you held on Monday, I now attach a draft paper which I hope reflects the various points which were made. I should be grateful for any comments from you and copy recipients.

I am not entirely certain as to the use to which the final version of the paper will be put, but I should of course be happy to top and tail it in whatever way you consider appropriate.

[Signed]

S A MARSH
Political Affairs Division
SH Ext 232

DP/3670

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NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Introduction

Since the war, the various institutions of the European Community, together with the principles to which they give effect, have gone a long way towards bringing to an end traditional enmities and distrust between states in western Europe. This note considers whether we should be making more use of the European idea in working towards solutions to the problems in political, and other, relationships within the island of Ireland. The Irish, incidentally, and the SDLP, set great store by this approach and it will be important to ensure that so far as possible we move in harmony. The note does not deal with 1992, or with the specifically economic aspects of the EC.

2. If there are any lessons to be learnt, they are not likely to be able to be put into effect quickly. The Government's present stance towards the EC is equivocal to say the least. And it must be remembered that (as with so much else) views towards Europe in the Northern Ireland body politic are polarised. On the one hand, for example, the SDLP are urging us to think European, while on the other the DUP appear to regard the EC and its institutions as an unmitigated evil, except where the prospect of cash handouts is concerned.

Political

3. On the Anglo-Irish front, the EC has been instrumental in fundamentally changing the relationship between London and Dublin. There are now regular meetings between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, nearly all of which take place under the EC umbrella; the regular EC summits provide opportunities for such high level encounters to become part of the political furniture. Without them some other mechanism would have to be invented. Although this paper is not the place to develop the theme, there is also the possibility of using Europe to thicken the Anglo-Irish relationship by

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establishing common cause with Dublin against EC initiatives which might have an adverse effect on the island of Ireland as a whole.

4. On another front, the European Parliament provides a forum on neutral ground for the three Northern Ireland MEPs and their supporting staffs to come across each other regularly. It might be possible to build on this, perhaps even including Irish MEPs, in order to get local politicians into the habit of talking to each other more at least about non-contentious issues. One way of doing this would be to stimulate the European Commission into seeking specific contributions from our MEPs when proposals which might affect them are discussed.

5. Another possibility, which would need very careful handling domestically, and might be a non-starter at the moment, would be to stimulate the creation of a specific European occasion on which MEPs and possibly others with an interest in Northern Ireland could meet together for a conference. Such a conference could be similar in format to the regular gatherings held by the BIA, or to the very successful occasion held some years ago at Airlie House in the United States.

6. But it has to be recognised that the beneficial effect of any such initiative would be limited. And the people who might be attracted, or involved, are those who would naturally speak to each other anyway. Moreover, at least at the moment, the European Parliament is not an institution which commands any great respect in the UK.

Security

7. It might be possible to seek to manoeuvre Anglo-Irish relationships over security cooperation into line with what appears to be happening in the rest of Europe, where increased contact across borders and harmonisation of laws seems to be the norm. Further consideration is being given to this in the context of working up the NIO's approach to 1992. But two points have to be remembered. First, much of the apparent movement in Europe appears

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to be still in the field of rhetoric rather than reality. And secondly, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic is not a normal one in European terms; it is an emotional issue for the Irish and any change in the current arrangements would necessarily involve amendment to Irish attitudes to what many would regard as their national territory. Perhaps we should leave well alone.

8. It must therefore be the case that we have more chance of securing improvements in cross-border security under the Anglo-Irish Agreement than by working in a European context. But there would be no harm in seeking to encourage the Irish to participate more in the various European fora and we should always leave open the possibility of using opportunities in Europe to press them on specific matters as appropriate. We are already alive to this, and do so from time to time.

Social

9. There are in existence many European programmes aimed at fostering social and cultural links between nations; it is for consideration whether we should make a concerted effort to harness these in order to let some fresh air into thinking in Northern Ireland. However, as always, the people who might take advantage of such links will be those who would participate in activities of this kind anyway. The people whom we most need to influence would only benefit indirectly through the system. But that does not mean that we should not be vigorous in ensuring that we secure our fair share in any programmes going.

10. Another point - which is also of more general relevance - is that the Irish are far better organised in Brussels than we are. They have many nationals working in the European institutions and they are adept at fighting their corner there; this, coupled with HMG's apparent unwillingness to devote sufficient attention to matters European, means that we are always liable to be pushed into initiatives and programmes where we might not necessarily want to go.

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Economic

11. The economic sphere is, perhaps paradoxically, the one in which we are most likely to be at odds with the Irish. The Irish are net beneficiaries from the EC, whereas we are the second largest contributors. Northern Ireland is also in competition with the Republic in terms of transport links to both GB and mainland Europe. In addition, the Irish 48-hour rule puts them at odds with us, and with the rest of Europe, in terms of cross-border trade.

12. Notwithstanding the hidden dangers for Anglo-Irish relations in the various economic proposals coming forward from the EC, there are some definite benefits to be had. Opening the border more widely to commerce must have beneficial side effects in terms of broadening opinions, and any harmonisation of tariffs which might limit smuggling would be enormously useful in closing off a valuable source of funds to paramilitary organisations. Again, work on this front is being taken forward in the context of developing a cohesive NIO approach to 1992.

Conclusion

13. The question remains of how to put into practice what little there is of a positive nature in this note and which is not already being handled on other channels in the office. Especially given the Government's present stance towards the EC, there seems little point in seeking to play a more vigorous part in the Whitehall debate on the strength of it. We might however give some more thought to the possibility of involving NI (and possibly Irish) MEPs in constructive discussions outside the debating chamber of the EP itself.

14. One point which there might be merit in noting now is that the momentum of European political development is gathering pace whether we like it or not. If we are not careful we might find ourselves on the defensive if and when the Anglo-Irish relationship and the status of NI, comes under scrutiny, possibly at Irish behest. For this reason we should see to ensure that we are sufficiently involved in Brussels and Strasbourg so as to take positive advantage of any such developments.

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