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DAIL DEBATE ON NORTHERN IRELAND, 1 APRIL

## SUMMARY

1. DAY'S DEBATE OPENS WITH STATEMENT BY THE TAOISEACH WHICH IS UNHELPFUL IN TONE IF NOT IN CONTENT. TANAISTE DELIVERS MANIFESTLY DIFFERENT LINE. OPPOSITION POINT UP DIFFERENCES IN THE COALITION. WE SHOULD SAY SIMPLY THAT THERE IS NOTHING NEW IN EITHER STATEMENT.

## DETAIL

2. ON 1 APRIL THE DAIL HELD A ONE-DAY DEBATE ON NORTHERN IRELAND. IT BEGAN WITH PREPARED STATEMENTS BY THE PARTY LEADERS (INCLUDING THE TANAISTE). MIFT SUMMARISES THE MAIN SPEECHES (MOST TEXTS FAXED TO RID AND NIO).

3. THE GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS BROKE NO NEW GROUND. THE TAOISEACH SOUGHT TO GIVE AN IMPRESSION OF READINESS FOR CHANGE, WHILE REASSURING FIANNA FAIL BACKBENCHERS THAT CURRENT POLICY WAS IN LINE WITH THE TRADITIONAL REPUBLICAN APPROACH. AFTER STRESSING THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO SECURITY CO-OPERATION WITH HMG HE LISTED THE BENEFITS OF ARTICLES 2 AND 3, WHICH COULD BE CHANGED ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF A LONG-TERM AGREED IRELAND (AN AMBIGUOUS PHRASE WHICH TO MANY IN FIANNA FAIL CAN MEAN IRISH UNITY). HE CALLED FOR THE RESUMPTION OF TALKS, CAME NEAR TO ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE LAST ROUND HAD ALMOST REACHED AGREEMENT ON AN INTERNAL NORTHERN IRELAND SETTLEMENT, AND REFERRED TO THE SCOPE FOR NORTH-SOUTH ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION.

4. THE TANAISTE IN AN ANODYNE SPEECH CONTINUED HIS THEME OF SEEKING AN UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN UNIONISTS AND NATIONALISTS: HIS AND THE TAOISEACH'S STATEMENT WERE MARKEDLY DIFFERENT IN TONE. HE INCLUDED A STRONG LAST-MINUTE PASSAGE ON CONFIDENCE ISSUES.

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5. BRUTON, THE FINE GAEL LEADER, SPOKE UNUSUALLY POWERFULLY. HIS SCORN AT THE TAOISEACH'S OLD-STYLE REPUBLICANISM WAS NO DOUBT DESIGNED PARTLY TO DISCOMFIT THE LABOUR COALITION PARTNERS, AND WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED.

6. DURING THE DEBATE DECLAN BREE, A MAVERICK LABOUR BACKBENCHER WITH MARXIST REPUBLICAN VIEWS, CALLED FOR BRITISH WITHDRAWAL. HE WAS LATER REBUKED BY SPRING, WHO SAID THAT HIS VIEWS WERE NOT IN LINE WITH PARTY POLICY.

## COMMENT

7. THE TAOISEACH'S SPEECH WAS DRAFTED BY HIS (FIANNA FAIL) ADVISER MARTIN MANSEERGH, NOT BY THE DFA. ONE OF ITS PURPOSES WAS NO DOUBT TO GUARD THE TAOISEACH'S BACK AGAINST RECENT ACCUSATIONS FROM THE FAITHFUL THAT HE IS SOFT ON ARTICLES 2 AND 3 AND LETTING LABOUR DICTATE POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND. WHILE THE TONE IS A FAR CRY FROM SPRING'S SPEECH OF 5 MARCH, HE WAS CAREFUL NOT TO CLOSE ANY DOORS. BUT IT WAS A LESS THAN HELPFUL CONTRIBUTION TO RESTARTING THE TALKS, AS UNIONIST REACTIONS HAVE ALREADY SHOWN.

8. FOR US THE STRONG TEMPTATION, AS SO OFTEN, IS TO SAY AS MUCH IN PUBLIC. BUT THE OPPOSITION HERE, AND TODAY'S PRESS, HAVE DONE THE JOB FOR US. A ROW WITH THE IRISH WILL NOT HELP GET THE TALKS RESTARTED. THE BEST REACTION IS TO SAY SIMPLY THAT WE FIND NOTHING NEW IN THE GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS (A LINE WHICH IS NOT ONLY TRUE BUT NEATLY PUTS THE KNIFE IN).

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MIPT: DAIL DEBATE ON NORTHERN IRELAND, 1 APRIL: MAIN STATEMENTS

1. THE TAOISEACH OPENED THE DEBATE EMPHASISING THAT (ALONG WITH REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT) ESTABLISHING PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND WAS ONE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S TWO PRIMARY OBJECTIVES. HE STRESSED IRISH COMMITMENT TO SECURITY COOPERATION AND REJECTED ANY SUGGESTION THAT THE REPUBLIC WAS A /SAFE HAVEN/ FOR PARAMILITARIES OR SOFT ON TERRORISM. CHANGES TO EXTRADITION LAWS WOULD BE INTRODUCED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

2. ARTICLES 2 AND 3 WERE NOT EXCEPTIONABLE. THEY EXPRESSED THE NATION'S RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, "ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE BRITISH IN 1920-1", WHILE LIMITING EFFECTIVE JURISDICTION TO THE 26 COUNTIES. THEY COULD BE CHANGED ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF A BROAD RANGING NEW AGREEMENT, WHICH INCLUDED A "BALANCED CONSTITUTIONAL ACCOMMODATION" AND RECOGNISED THE VALIDITY AND LEGITIMACY OF AN AGREED IRELAND AS A LONG TERM GOAL. EVERY IRISH LEADER SINCE DE VALERA HAD SOUGHT CREATIVELY TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL PROGRESS, MAKING EFFORTS TO ADVANCE AND REACH OUT. HIS GOVERNMENT HAD A SIMILAR DUTY TO STRIVE FOR A "DECISIVE POLITICAL BREAKTHROUGH".

3. HE CALLED FOR AN EARLY RESUMPTION OF TALKS, "A PROMISING FOUNDATION EXISTS UPON WHICH WE CAN BUILD". WHEN TALKS RESUMED, THE IRISH GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE ITS OWN PROPOSALS: "WE ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS EVERYTHING, ONCE WE RETURN TO THE TABLE". THE IRISH SET NO PRECONDITIONS, OTHERS SHOULD NOT DO SO EITHER. EVEN IF ONLY LIMITED PROGRESS WAS POSSIBLE ON CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES FOR THE MOMENT, IT WAS STILL WELL WORTHWHILE TO SEEK AGREEMENT "IN AREAS WHERE MORE UNITES US THAN DIVIDES US". THERE WAS SCOPE FOR AGREEMENT ON SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTIONAL PARTIES - ALTHOUGH THIS WOULD (IN SOME WAY) HAVE TO "TRANSCEND THE CONTEXT OF NORTHERN IRELAND". THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE SCOPE FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION WHICH, IN THE ABSENCE OF A NEW POLITICAL AGREEMENT, THE IRISH WOULD PURSUE

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VIGOROUSLY WITHIN THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE.

4. THE TANAISTE STRESSED THE NEED TO BRING AN END TO VIOLENCE, AND ENSURE THAT THE "BOMB AND BULLET SHALL NOT REPLACE THE BALLOT". THIS MEANT AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO TRADITIONS IN IRELAND. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AGREED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CHANGE IN THE STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF A MAJORITY WHO LIVE THERE, AND THAT IF A MAJORITY CONSENTED TO A UNITED IRELAND BOTH GOVERNMENTS WOULD GIVE EFFECT TO THAT WISH. THIS AMOUNTED TO A RECOGNITION OF THE EQUAL VALIDITY OF BOTH ASPIRATIONS. HE CALLED FOR AN EARLY RESUMPTION OF TALKS, BUT SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE NO VACUUM UNTIL THEN. THE GOVERNMENT WOULD VIGOROUSLY PURSUE THE AGENDA OF THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT IN ALL ITS PARTS, ENHANCE SECURITY COOPERATION TO THE MAXIMUM NECESSARY, WORK TO IMPROVE HUMAN RIGHTS AND END DISCRIMINATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND DEVELOP CROSS BORDER ECONOMIC COOPERATION. HE ADDED A LESS HELPFUL LENGTHY LAST MINUTE SECTION TO HIS SPEECH ON CONFIDENCE ISSUES AND THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE SECURITY FORCES

5. BOTH JOHN BRUTON (FINE GAEIL LEADER) AND MICHAEL MCDOWELL (PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRAT SPOKESPERSON ON NORTHERN IRELAND) DENOUNCED THE TAOISEACH'S SPEECH SAYING THAT IT DID NOT MEET THE NEED FOR CHANGE. MCDOWELL SUGGESTED THERE WAS A CLEAR DIFFERENCE IN APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS IN NORTHERN IRELAND BETWEEN THE COALITION PARTNERS AND THE SPEECHES HE HAD JUST HEARD HAD CONFIRMED THIS. RATHER THAN BEING FORWARD THINKING AND CONSTRUCTIVE THE TAOISEACH'S SPEECH WAS BACKWARD LOOKING AND REPRESENTED MERELY A "COOK'S TOUR" OF FIANNA FAIL CONSTITUTIONAL THINKING OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS. BOTH CALLED FOR LEGISLATION ON EXTRADITION TO BE INTRODUCED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY. MCDOWELL REMINDED THE TAOISEACH THAT IT WAS THREE YEARS AGO THAT THE PDS HAD MADE CLEAR TO THEIR COALITION PARTNERS THE NEED TO AMEND THE EXTRADITION LAWS. LEGISLATION WAS STILL AWAITED. HE INVITED THE JUSTICE MINISTER TO SPECIFY LATER IN THE DEBATE WHEN A DRAFT BILL WOULD BE PUBLISHED.

6. BRUTON REPEATED HIS PROPOSAL (WHICH THE TANAISTE HAD MADE IN OPPOSITION) THAT THE MAIN PARTY LEADERS IN THE DAIL SHOULD MEET TO DISCUSS "THE RESTORATION OF PEACE ON THESE ISLANDS" IN VIEW OF THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION. "THE SAFETY OF OUR PEOPLE IS THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OF DAIL EIREANN. THE PEOPLE HAVE MOVED ON. THEY DO NOT WANT STERILE POLITICAL DEBATE ABOUT ANACHRONISMS IN OUR CONSTITUTION". HE CAST DOUBT

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ON THE GOVERNMENT'S REAL DETERMINATION TO STAMP OUT TERRORISM AND CAME CLOSE TO CALLING FOR INTERNMENT, RECALLING SUCCESS AGAINST THE IRA IN THE LATE 1950S. ON TALKS, HE SUGGESTED THAT BOTH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE SDLP SHOULD TREAT AS A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION THE UUP PAPER TABLED AT THE END OF THE LAST TALKS. HE SAW SOME POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN IT, NAMELY THE UNIONISTS' PROMISE THAT MINORITY RIGHTS WOULD BE GUARANTEED WITHIN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THAT NATIONALISTS WOULD HAVE A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN ADMINISTRATION. ALSO, UNIONISTS HAD PROPOSED A BILL OF RIGHTS AND AN INTER-IRISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE. THE UNIONISTS' PAPER WAS NOT IDEAL, BUT THE IRISH GOVERNMENT COULD USE IT AS A BASIS ON TO MAKE COUNTER PROPOSALS. IF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT NOW WANTED A CHANGE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND ACT 1920 THEY SHOULD "STATE IN VERY PLAIN LANGUAGE WHAT EXACTLY THEY WANT IN ITS PLACE" AND HE CALLED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO STATE UNAMBIGUOUSLY THAT IT "WILL" BE PREPARED TO PROMOTE A CHANGE TO ARTICLES 2 AND 3 IF THERE IS AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT.

7. GEOGHEGAN-QUINN (MINISTER FOR JUSTICE) CONFIRMED THAT LEGISLATION ON EXTRADITION WAS A PRIORITY, TO COVER THE POLITICAL OFFENCE EXEMPTIONS AND OTHER ISSUES ARISING FROM THE MAGEE, MCKEE AND SLOAN CASES.

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