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SUBJECT: VISIT TO BRITAIN BY PRESIDENT ROBINSON: 4-7 JUNE

SUMMARY

1. SUCCESSFUL VISIT, WITH POSITIVE IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS.

DETAIL

2. ON HER DEPARTURE FROM YORK ON FRIDAY, PRESIDENT ROBINSON DESCRIBED HER VISIT AS A HAPPY ONE. IT WAS CERTAINLY HISTORIC. SEVENTY FOUR YEARS AFTER IRISH INDEPENDENCE, AND ALMOST 60 SINCE THE OFFICE OF PRESIDENT WAS CREATED UNDER THE 1937 CONSTITUTION, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC VISITED BRITAIN AS AN OFFICIAL GUEST OF GOVERNMENT. SHE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE TANAISTE, MR DICK SPRING. WHILE THE GLAMOUR OF A STATE VISIT WAS ABSENT, SHE WAS WELCOMED WHEREVER SHE WENT WITH GENUINE WARMTH.

3. PRESIDENT ROBINSON'S INITIAL ENGAGEMENTS CENTRED ON HER INTEREST IN SOCIAL ISSUES. SHE HAD TEA WITH THE PRINCE OF WALES, FOLLOWED BY A PRESENTATION OF THE WORK OF THE PRINCE'S TRUST VOLUNTEERS. LATER FUNCTIONS ON THIS THEME INCLUDED A RECEPTION FOR MEMBERS OF THE CARING PROFESSIONS AT THE IRISH EMBASSY, AND A VISIT TO A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IN CAMDEN (TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE PUPIL WHO HAD ORIGINALLY WRITTEN TO INVITE HER).

4. THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAMME INCLUDED SEVERAL HIGH PROFILE POLITICAL MEETINGS, EVEN THOUGH THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE IN THE REPUBLIC PRECLUDE INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL DEBATE. THE LEADER OF THE OPOSITION, THE LEADER OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND ALL PAID COURTESY CALLS. THE SPEAKER OFFERED COFFEE IN HER PARLIAMENTARY APPARTMENT, AND THE MINISTER FOR OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ACCOMPANIED THE PRESIDENT TO YORK.

5. THE MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER IN THE GARDEN AT DOWNING STREET FOLLOWED BY LUNCH FOR 60 PEOPLE INVOLVED IN IRISH AFFAIRS WAS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE

VISIT. THE OCCASION ENABLED BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER TO NOTE THE HISTORIC NATURE OF THE OCCASION AND THE GENUINE AND CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL RELATIONS. THESE THEMES WERE TAKEN UP IN THE BRIEF PRESS CONFERENCE AFTERWARDS, WHEN INEVITABLY THE QUESTION OF A VISIT TO DUBLIN BY THE QUEEN WAS RAISED. THE PRIME MINISTER RESPONDED THAT SUCH A VISIT WAS NOT YET IN PROSPECT.

6. THE VISIT TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE WAS AN IMPORTANT FOCAL POINT OF THE PROGRAMME, PROVIDING A MEMORABLE COMBINATION OF PAGEANTRY AND INTIMACY. THE SIGHT OF THE PRESIDENT, ACCOMPANIED BY HRH PRINCE EDWARD, INSPECTING THE GUARD OF HONOUR PROVIDED BY THE 1ST BATTALION IRISH GUARDS WAS WITHOUT PRECEDENT, AS WAS THE PLAYING OF THE IRISH NATIONAL ANTHEM. A SMALL AND INFORMAL LUNCH WITH THE QUEEN FOLLOWED.

7. THE REST OF THE PROGRAMME IN LONDON, INCLUDING DINNERS AT THE GUILDHALL AND LANCASTER HOUSE, A VISIT TO THE BRITISH COUNCIL, AND A TOUR OF WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL WHERE THE PRESIDENT LAID A WREATH IN MEMORY OF IRISH SOLDIERS WHO FELL IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, PASSED SMOOTHLY. SO TOO DID THE DAY IN YORK, WHERE THE PRESIDENT VISITED PLACES WITH LINKS TO IRELAND, INCLUDING CASTLE HOWARD, ONCE HOME TO LORD CARLISLE, A FORMER LORD LIEUTENANT OF IRELAND. THE ECUMENICAL SERVICE IN THE MINSTER, ATTENDED BY HRH THE DUKE OF YORK, PROVIDED A FITTING FINALE TO A VISIT DESIGNED TO FURTHER PEACE AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN IRELAND AND BRITAIN. IT WAS A PITY THAT THE ARCHBISHOP'S THOUGHT-PROVOKING SERMON ON THIS THEME WAS NOT BETTER REPORTED.

8. PRESS COVERAGE OF THE VISIT WAS FAVOURABLE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE IRISH SEA. IT WAS NATURALLY MUCH MORE DETAILED IN THE REPUBLIC (ON WHICH WE WILL REPORT AT GREATER LENGTH SEPARATELY), WHERE THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WHOLE OCCASION WAS FULLY UNDERSTOOD BY COMMENTATORS.

9. SERIOUS COMMENT IN BOTH COUNTRIES, HOWEVER, FOCUSED ON TWO ISSUES NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE VISIT ITSELF: FIRST, THE POSSIBILITY OF PRESIDENT ROBINSON SUCCEEDING MR BOUTROS BOUTROS GHALI AS SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, A TOPIC ON WHICH SHE IS RIGHTLY RETICENT: AND SECOND, THE PROGRESS OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ALL-PARTY TALKS SCHEDULED TO START IN BELFAST TODAY. IT WAS FORTUITOUS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT FELL AT A CRITICAL TIME IN THIS RESPECT. MR SPRING USED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONFER MORE THAN ONCE WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AND OTHERS. AT TIMES THESE DISCUSSIONS WERE TENSE, BUT EVENTUALLY AGREEMENT WAS REACHED, PAVING THE WAY FOR THE TALKS TO START ON SCHEDULE WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF SENATOR MITHCELL AND HIS TEAM.

10. OVERALL, THIS VISIT MADE A STRONGLY POSITIVE IMPACT. NO HOSTILE OR UNTOWARD EVENT AROSE TO SOUR THE ATMOSPHERE. THE FACT THAT THE VISIT TOOK PLACE IN ADVANCE OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND DEMONSTRATED THAT THIS ISSUE NEED NOT BLIGHT THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. IDEALLY, THE TWO GOVERNMENTS SHOULD NOW BUILD ON THE GOODWILL GENERATED BY THIS VISIT, PERHAPS BY IDENTIFYING A HIGH PROFILE JOINT PROJECT TO SYMBOLISE THE CLOSENESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP, PERHAPS BY PROMOTING FURTHER HIGH LEVEL VISITS. I WILL PROVIDE THOUGHTS ON POSSIBILITIES, ALTHOUGH THE IRISH ARE UNLIKELY TO HAVE TIME FOR NEW INITIATIVES UNTIL AFTER THE END OF THEIR EU PRESIDENCY.

SUTHERLAND

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FCO PLEASE ADVANCE TO LAMONT, RID.

SUBJECT: VISIT OF PRESIDENT ROBINSON: SCENE SETTER

SUMMARY

1. THE FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO BRITAIN BY AN IRISH HEAD OF STATE: A SYMBOLIC STEP FORWARD.

DETAIL

2. PRESIDENT ROBINSON WILL VISIT THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM 4 TO 7 JUNE AS A GUEST OF GOVERNMENT. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SINCE IRISH INDEPENDENCE IN 1922 THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY INVITED AN IRISH HEAD OF STATE TO THE UNITED KINGDOM. THE INVITATION WAS ISSUED BY THE PRIME MINISTER FOLLOWING THE SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO DUBLIN BY THE PRINCE OF WALES IN MAY LAST YEAR. THIS WAS AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT, WHEN THE TWO TERRORIST CEASE-FIRES HAD BEEN IN OPERATION FOR SOME MONTHS.

3. THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT COMES AT A MORE DIFFICULT JUNCTURE. THE IRA CEASE-FIRE BROKE DOWN ON 9 FEBRUARY. THERE IS NO INDICATION WHETHER IT WILL BE RESUMED IN TIME TO ENABLE SINN FEIN TO TAKE PART IN ALL-PARTY TALKS ON 10 JUNE, ALTHOUGH SINN FEIN PARTY MEMBERS ARE CAMPAIGNING VIGOROUSLY IN PREPARATION FOR THE QUALIFYING ELECTIONS TODAY, 30 MAY. MOREOVER, WHILE THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS SHARE THE AIM OF BRINGING LASTING PEACE TO IRELAND, THEY STILL DIFFER ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TALKS, AND SPECIFICALLY ON THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO HANDLE DECOMMISSIONING. RECENT INTERGOVERNMENTAL DISCUSSIONS INDICATE THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO REACH AGREEMENT IN TIME TO LAUNCH THE TALKS ON 10 JUNE, BUT THE PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS THEREAFTER REMAIN OBSCURE. TENSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS AS THE TALKS PROGRESS MAY WELL ARISE, PARTICULARLY IF THEY END IN DISARRAY.

4. THE BACKDROP TO THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT IS THEREFORE LESS PROPITIOUS THAN A YEAR AGO. SHE WILL BE SENSITIVE TO THIS, AND WILL WISH TO ENSURE THAT THIS HISTORIC VISIT MAKES A REAL, IF SYMBOLIC, CONTRIBUTION TO RESOLVING THE PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE

AFFLICTED OUR TWO COUNTRIES FOR SO LONG.

5. PRESIDENT ROBINSON IS WELL QUALIFIED FOR THIS TASK. AN OUTSTANDING LAWYER, AND A SENATOR FROM 1970-87, SHE BUILT UP A CONSIDERABLE REPUTATION IN THE 1970S AND 1980S AS AN ADVOCATE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND FAMILY LAW REFORM. SHE ALSO SHOWED A SENSITIVITY TO THE PROBLEMS OF NORTHERN IRELAND RESIGNING FROM THE LABOUR PARTY IN 1985 IN PROTEST AT THE FAILURE TO CONSULT THE UNIONISTS ABOUT THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT. HER ELECTION AS PRESIDENT IN 1990 AT THE AGE OF 45 SYMBOLISED THE MANNER IN WHICH IRISH SOCIETY IS CHANGING. SHE OBSERVED AS SHE TOOK OFFICE THAT SHE HAD BEEN ELECTED /BY MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL PARTIES AND NONE, BY MANY WITH GREAT MORAL COURAGE WHO STEPPED OUT FROM THE FADED FLAGS OF THE CIVIL WAR AND VOTED FOR A NEW IRELAND... AND ABOVE ALL BY THE WOMEN OF IRELAND WHO INSTEAD OF ROCKING THE CRADLE ROCKED THE SYSTEM./ THE PRESIDENT ECHOED THOSE WHO SEE THIS NEW IRELAND AS MORE OPEN, PLURALISTIC AND OUTWARD-LOOKING THAN HITHERTO: AN IRELAND IN WHICH THE INFLUENCE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS DIMINISHED, AND WHICH SEES ITS FUTURE AT THE CENTRE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION. IN 1992 SHE EXPANDED THESE IDEAS WHEN, ON HER OWN INITIATIVE, SHE ADDRESSED A JOINT MEETING OF THE TWO HOUSES OF THE IRISH OIREACHTAS (PARLIAMENT), AND PRESENTED A REMARKABLE EXAMINATION OF IRISH IDENTITY, BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH.

6. HER PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN CHARACTERISED BY HER VISIBILITY AND OPENNESS. DESPITE THE LARGELY CEREMONIAL NATURE OF HER OFFICE, SHE HAS MADE A MARK ON A RANGE OF ISSUES. HER VARIED INTERESTS HAVE BROUGHT HOPE TO MANY PEOPLE INCLUDING THE DISABLED, THE UNEMPLOYED, THE TRAVELLERS, WOMEN'S GROUPS, THE STARVING IN SOMALIA AND THE DESTITUTE IN RWANDA. THE MANNER IN WHICH SHE EXECUTES HER DUTIES IS A SOURCE OF PRIDE TO IRISH PEOPLE AND SHE REMAINS ENORMOUSLY POPULAR. HER PUNISHING PROGRAMME OF OVERSEAS VISITS ENSURES THAT IRELAND IS BETTER UNDERSTOOD ABROAD. THERE IS SPECULATION IN IRELAND, THAT: RATHER THAN RUNNING FOR A SECOND TERM IN 1997, SHE WILL TAKE UP A HIGH-PROFILE POSITION IN THE UNITED NATIONS.

7. THE PRESIDENT, WHO IS MARRIED TO A PROTESTANT, HAS MADE IT PLAIN FROM THE START THAT HER PRIORITY IS TO HELP HEAL THE WOUNDS RESULTING FROM CENTURIES OF HOSTILITY BETWEEN BRITAIN AND IRELAND. SHE HAS CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED HER FRIENDSHIP AND AFFECTION FOR BOTH COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND. SHE HAS VISITED THE NORTH ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS, TALKING TO GROUPS IN BOTH COMMUNITIES. SOME OF HER GESTURES, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN CONTROVERSIAL. HER HANDSHAKE WITH GERRY ADAMS IN 1993, FOR EXAMPLE, WHICH MANY FOUND OFFENSIVE, NO DOUBT STEMMED FROM THE BELIEF THAT THIS GESTURE WOULD EXERCISE A BENIGN INFLUENCE ON HIM. MANY IN THE REPUBLIC NOW CONSIDER THAT SUBSEQUENT EVENTS VINDICATED HER ACTION.

8. ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, SHE SHOWED INITIATIVE IN BECOMING THE FIRST IRISH PRESIDENT TO MEET MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH ROYAL FAMILY. HER DECISION TO TAKE TEA WITH THE QUEEN AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE IN 1993 WAS AT THE TIME A DRAMATIC BREAK WITH TRADITION. IT PAVED THE WAY FOR A MORE RELAXED MEETING ONLY TWO YEARS LATER WHEN THE TWO HEADS OF STATE MET AT THE RECEPTION AT ST JAMES'S PALACE FOR THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGES (BELFAST, CORK AND GALWAY).

9. THE PRESIDENT'S 4-DAY PROGRAMME IN ENGLAND (DURING MOST OF WHICH SHE WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE TANAISTE, MR DICK SPRING) WILL GIVE HER THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET THE QUEEN, THE PRINCE OF WALES, THE PRIME MINISTER AND LEADING POLITICIANS, AND TO TRAVEL OUT OF LONDON FOR AN ECUMENICAL SERVICE IN YORK

MINISTER. ALL THIS SHOULD RUN SMOOTHLY AND PROVIDE HER WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THE MANY SOCIAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES IN WHICH SHE IS SO KEENLY INTERESTED.

10. SHE WILL ALSO WISH TO TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANT CHANGES WHICH ARE TAKING PLACE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE REPUBLIC. WHILE AVOIDING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND THE DETAIL OF EXCHANGES ON NORTHERN IRELAND, SHE WILL BE WELL AWARE OF RECENT EFFORTS TO ADD MORE SUBSTANCE TO THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EVER INCREASING FLOW OF VISITORS BETWEEN LONDON AND DUBLIN. ROYAL AND MINISTERIAL VISITS, ONCE SOMETHING OF A RARITY, ARE NOW COMMONPLACE: IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS, IN ADDITION TO RECIPROCAL VISITS BY THE TANAISTE AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE PRINCESS ROYAL AND PRINCE EDWARD HAVE STAYED IN DUBLIN, AND THREE CABINET MINISTERS HAVE VISITED, AS HAVE A CONSTANT STREAM OF MPS FROM THE THREE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES. VISITORS IN THE OTHER DIRECTION ARE ALSO FREQUENT, THE MOST RECENT BEING THE IRISH MINISTER OF DEFENCE. EXCHANGES OF A MORE TECHNICAL NATURE INVOLVING FOR EXAMPLE FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL ISSUES, THE POLICE, THE ARMY AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, ARE NUMEROUS. ALL THIS REPRESENTS A DRAMATIC CHANGE OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, AND EVEN DURING THE YEAR IN WHICH I HAVE BEEN HERE.

11. THE PRESIDENT WILL SEE HER VISIT IN THIS PERSPECTIVE, AND WILL BE DETERMINED TO MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT. BUT SHE WILL ALSO BE AWARE THAT, THROUGH NO FAULT OF HER OWN, CONTROVERSY MAY PROVE UNAVOIDABLE. THE IRISH ARE ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF ANY SUGGESTION THAT WE DO NOT TREAT THEIR COUNTRY AS AN EQUAL. SENSITIVITIES OVER THE STATUS OF NORTHERN IRELAND SHOULD ALSO NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. OUR REFUSAL TO DESCRIBE MRS ROBINSON AS PRESIDENT OF IRELAND IN THE PROGRAMME, FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE CORRECT, STILL RANKLES IN SOME QUARTERS HERE.

12. RECENT EVENTS HAVE VINDICATED THE DECISION AGAINST A STATE VISIT, BUT ADVERSE COMPARISONS MAY BE MADE BETWEEN THE TREATMENT SHE RECEIVES, AND THE POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH SURROUNDED PRESIDENT CHIRAC'S VISIT EARLIER THIS MONTH. UNFAVOURABLE COMPARISONS MAY ALSO BE MADE WITH THE LAVISH PREPARATIONS FOR HER VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES ON 11-15 JUNE THE FOLLOWING WEEK. SHE HERSELF WILL BE PERSONALLY DISAPPOINTED THAT SHE WILL NOT BE ADDRESSING PARLIAMENT, WHEREAS SHE HAS BEEN INVITED TO ADDRESS A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS IN WASHINGTON. WHILE SHE WILL BE FAR TOO DISCREET TO VOICE ANY HINT OF COMPLAINT HERSELF, THERE IS A RISK THAT PERCEIVED INADEQUACIES IN THE MANNER IN WHICH SHE IS RECEIVED WILL GIVE RISE TO CRITICAL COMMENT IN IRELAND. THIS CAN TO SOME EXTENT BE PRE-EMPTED BY CAREFUL ADVANCE PRESS-BRIEFING FOCUSING ON THE OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VISIT, AND EMPHASISING THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WERE KEEN TO INVITE PRESIDENT ROBINSON IN RECOGNITION OF THE POSITIVE ROLE SHE PLAYS IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP.

13. A MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM WOULD ARISE IF THE IRA WERE TO MOUNT A SPECTACULAR ATTACK IN BRITAIN OR NORTHERN IRELAND SHORTLY BEFORE OR EVEN DURING HER VISIT. IF SUCH A DISASTER WERE TO STRIKE, THERE WOULD BE SOME WHO WOULD SEEK THE CANCELLATION OF SO HIGH-PROFILE A VISIT. IT WOULD BE TRAGIC IF SUCH ARGUMENTS WERE TO PREVAIL. IT HAS TAKEN 74 YEARS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS TO MATURE TO THE POINT WHERE A HEAD OF STATE'S OFFICIAL VISIT IS POSSIBLE. NO TERRORIST ACT SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO IMPEDE THIS DEVELOPMENT, AND PARTICULARLY NOT AT A TIME WHEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE SEEN TO ACT IN UNISON IN THE FACE OF SUCH BEHAVIOUR.

14. I HOPE THESE SOMBRE THOUGHTS WILL PROVE GROUNDLESS. THE

VISIT SHOULD PROVIDE THE OCCASION TO REVITALISE THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, AND TO INJECT INTO IT SOME THE ENTHUSIASM DISCERNABLE IN LAST YEAR'S HIGH PROFILE EXCHANGES. THIS IS CERTAINLY THE HOPE OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS TAKING CARE NOT TO AROUSE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF THE VISIT.

15. IDEALLY FURTHER HIGH LEVEL EXCHANGES WILL FOLLOW. THE PRESIDENT MAY EVEN MENTION THE POSSIBILITY OF A VISIT TO IRELAND BY HM THE QUEEN. THE IRISH GOVERNMENT KNOW HOWEVER THAT THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE FOR A FORMAL INVITATION. THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IS CERTAINLY IMPROVING, BUT THE ARRIVAL OF THE QUEEN (WHICH IS THE TOPIC OF ENDLESS SPECULATION IN THE REPUBLIC) WOULD REQUIRE FURTHER PROGRESS TOWARDS THE RESOLUTION OF THE LONG-STANDING DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT SIGNALS A SIGNIFICANT STEP ALONG THIS PATH.

SUTHERLAND

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