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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Representation in Northern Ireland

Belfast, 11 June 1998

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URGENT

NOTE TO SPYROS PAPPAS

Message regarding Northern Ireland Administration

The British Government has decided to arrange an intensive Programme of Education for ALL the Assembly members in August, September and October. The elections to the Assembly take place on 25 June and a Shadow Administration (Cabinet) will be set up in July. Power is expected to be devolved to this administration in March/April 1999. All Assembly members and some officials will be invited to take part in a number of Northern Ireland based day-long modules on such issues as Structures and Mechanisms of Government, North/South co-operation and external relationships with non EU countries.

There will be a specific module on how a new Northern Ireland administration will deal with EU policy and relations. This is likely to take place in the first week in September. It will be arranged by the Northern Ireland Office in association with the Commission Representation in Belfast and financed by the NIO. It will involve Speakers drawn from Government Departments and the Commission (the specific programme has yet to be decided) and dinner with a keynote speaker. It is anticipated that the same programme may run again in November.

On top of this the Government intends to arrange two Conferences, one in the United States and another in Brussels. While it is anticipated that these will deal with important issues, Dr. Mowlam has stressed the need for bonding between the politicians themselves as well as the officials. She sees this as a vital element of the process, which can be better achieved away from home base.

The US event is being handled by Boston College, Harvard University and Toronto University and will take place during September. The programme has not yet been finalised but will include academics and others addressing conflict resolution, mechanisms of Government, Business schools and some inward investment issues. President Clinton, Prime Minister Blair and Taoiseach Ahern may at some point attend it.

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The Brussels event is being pencilled in for three days in the first week in October. The Northern Ireland Office want a more businesslike programme of activities, which will inform the participants of all aspects of Northern Ireland's relationship with Europe, international experience and Cross Border dimensions.

This will involve perhaps as many as 150 delegates staying in Brussels for three nights. There would be an expectation that the Commission will lay on a high profile and effective programme, in collaboration with the NIO, involving President Santer and a number of Commissioners as well as seminars with officials. Again British and Irish Ministers will participate at some point. This is, in part, a follow on from President Santer's visit in March when he met all the parties in Belfast.

I have been asked and agreed to a request from the NIO to serve on a small working group to organise and co-ordinate these events. It is a package with the British Government funding all Northern Ireland events. The United States administration is meeting the full cost of the American programme, including travel and accommodation expenses. There is therefore an expectation that the European Commission will contribute in a generous way to the Brussels event.

The Government also wants to publish a brochure explaining the Northern Ireland, American and European elements of the programme. They would like to present this to the Assembly in a small ceremony in July. For this event they are requesting endorsement of the brochure and programme and perhaps a short video of good wishes to the Assembly from President Santer. In order that the brochure can be printed it is important that agreement on the European programmes can be achieved soon. It has also been suggested to me that, in an ideal situation, President Santer might address the Northern Ireland Assembly next year.

We are dealing with fast moving political events in Northern Ireland. It is my view that with respect to all the European elements of this proposed programme we should be as co-operative as possible and match the US interest. It is vital that we take a lead. In any event a response should be given as soon as possible.

Jim Dougal
Head of Representation