

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
SOCIALIST GROUP**



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*With Compliments*

FAX COVER SHEET

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TO: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR: JOHN ALDERDICE

FROM: MARK DURKAN

Total number of pages, including this cover sheet: 4

Brief description of material: \_\_\_\_\_

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Draft Text for the launch of Talks  
to facilitate Political Progress  
(based on Irish proposals)

[Handed over in Secretariat on the 7th February]

1. Mr Speaker, I am pleased to be able to inform the House that, following extensive discussions with the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland - the Alliance Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party - and with the Irish Government, a basis for formal political talks now exists. I frankly acknowledge to the House that this would not have been possible without the goodwill and determination of the Northern Ireland parties and the helpful and constructive approach taken by the Irish Government. The stated positions of all these parties are well known.

2. The endeavour on which we have all agreed to embark is an ambitious one - we are setting out to achieve a new beginning for relationships within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland and between the peoples of these islands. While a successful outcome cannot be guaranteed in advance, I am confident that all the potential participants are committed to an imaginative and open-minded approach. For their part, the two signatories of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - the British and Irish Governments - have made clear that they would be prepared to consider a new, more comprehensive and more broadly based agreement or structure if this can be arrived at through direct discussion and negotiation between all of the parties concerned.

3. To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue the two Governments have decided not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference in the period between [x and y]. All of the parties concerned will make use of this interval for intensive discussions to seek the new and more comprehensive Agreement which I have just described.



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4. As the Conference will not be meeting between the specified dates the Secretariat at Maryfield will accordingly not be required for that period to discharge its normal role of servicing Conference meetings provided for in Article 3 of the Agreement.

5. It is accepted that discussions must focus on the three main inter-linked relationships: those within Northern Ireland, among the people of the island of Ireland and between the two Governments. Some arrangement will be needed for liaison between the different strands of these complex discussions. It is common ground between all the parties that hope of achieving a new and more comprehensive Agreement rests on finding a way to give adequate expression to the totality of the relationships I have mentioned and to their inter-linkage.

6. Talks will accordingly take place in three strands corresponding respectively to the three relationships. All the Northern Ireland parties will participate actively and directly in the North/South discussions. In accordance with the particular request of the Unionist parties, who wish their participation to be formally associated with my presence, I will attend these discussions in my capacity as Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

7. It is accepted by all those involved that, so as to make full use of the interval between meetings of the Conference to achieve an overall agreement satisfactory to all, it will be necessary to have launched all three sets of discussions within weeks of each other.

8. A first step towards getting related discussions under way in all three strands will be the opening, as soon as possible, of substantive talks between the parties in Northern Ireland under my chairmanship. It has been agreed by all the



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participants that shortly thereafter, when I judge that an appropriate point has been reached, I will propose to the Irish Government that the other two strands should be launched. My judgement as to timing will be governed by the fact that all involved have agreed that the three sets of discussions will be under way within weeks of each other.

9. The internal talks, like the talks in the other strands, will follow a demanding and intensive schedule. In order to ensure a full airing of the issues, the talks to take place in each strand will be without preconditions as to subject matter. All concerned have assured me they will participate in good faith and will make every effort to achieve progress.

10. It is accepted by all the parties that points discussed at the earlier stages of the talks process will need to be re-examined, refined and confirmed in the light of progress in the later stages; nothing will be agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole and confidentiality will be maintained thereunto.