

RECORD OF A BILATERAL MEETING WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY HELD IN
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON THE 8TH MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson
Mr Dickson
Mr Morrow
Mrs Bell
Mr McBride

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Lindsay

Also present

Mr Pawson

The meeting began at 10.37 am.

2. The Government Team had called the meeting to establish the position of the parties on location of the second strand in the light of the impasse which obtained at the end of proceedings yesterday. The position as understood by the Government was that the Alliance Party was flexible but preferred Belfast for practical reasons; the SDLP were prepared to contemplate alternation, starting with London and then back to the island of Ireland preferably in Dublin but possibly Armagh; the Unionists insisted in principle on GB, preferably near London, with the possibility of a meeting in Ireland late in the process but not in the Republic or at Stormont. The Irish Government position of last week was for the first meeting to be held in Ireland, not necessarily Dublin, and then alternating with London.

3. The Alliance Party repeated that this was not a matter of principle for them and they would meet wherever others agreed. They did see Parliament Buildings as a sensible location, given the resources which had been invested in setting it up for the talks, but the issue was one of practicalities for them.

4. The Alliance Party tabled other suggested alternative venues such as Hillsborough, the Irish Embassy in London and the British Embassy in Dublin. They suggested that these might not be acceptable to other parties if their point of origin was made known. Another possibility was for the two Governments, who would be mainly involved in strand three to alternate between London and Dublin. This might ease the problem as it was expected that strands two and three could run concurrently. Dr Alderdice also offered to participate in a meeting of Party Leaders if that would be helpful.

5. The Alliance Party referred to leading articles in the Newsletter and Irish News which clearly expressed a wish for a resolution of the venue problem. They also mentioned that ordinary citizens, including people they had met while canvassing for a by-election recently, wanted progress and were not concerned at where this might take place. A range of locations within Northern Ireland but without the symbolism of Stormont would be worth exploring.

6. The Government Team recognised venue as a problem but did not regard debate about it as an ill omen for the talks as a whole. It was a self-contained issue but one which needed to be resolved as a trigger to moving to plenary sessions.

7. The meeting concluded at 11.06 hours.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

RECORD OF A BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT TEAM AND AN ALLIANCE PARTY DELEGATION HELD IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 8 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
 Minister of State
 PUS
 Mr Fell
 Mr Pilling
 Mr Thomas
 Mr McNeill

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
 Mr May

Also Present

Mr Pawson

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
 Mr Close
 Mr Neeson
 Mr Dickson
 Mr Morrow
 Mrs Bell
 Mr McBride
 Mr Maguire
 Mr McGarry

The Government Team and an Alliance Party delegation held a bilateral meeting in Parliament Buildings between 1555 and 1614 on 8 May.

2. The Government Team updated the Alliance Party delegation on the latest position with regard to the location of the second strand. Since their previous meeting with the Alliance Party, the Government Team had held morning bilaterals first with the SDLP and then with the Unionists and had seen the SDLP once again after lunch. The meeting with the SDLP had not made a substantial difference to the venue issue. There had followed a longer meeting with the Unionists in which the Government Team had clarified the position regarding the Unionists visiting Dublin at some point later in the process. The Unionists had explained that they would not go to Dublin in strand two but envisaged that in strand three the Northern Ireland political parties would want to be able put propositions to the two Governments to ensure there was no misunderstanding regarding their positions. The Unionists were prepared to go to Dublin at this point and clearly envisaged all parties having a clear idea of the elements any package under consideration to the extent that Articles 2 and 3 might not be such inhibiting factors as they were at present.

3. The Unionists had recognised the disadvantages of a European location but believed it should be seriously examined if no other solution seemed viable. They had explained this to John Hume separately in a bilateral of their own, in which the Government Team had not been involved.

4. The Government Team had, since lunch, met the SDLP delegation again. The position of the Unionists in relation to visiting Dublin had been explained and the European alternative outlined. The SDLP had seen serious difficulties, both in terms of practicality and public expenditure, with a European location and did not think it was a serious runner. The discussion had then moved on to consider a larger role for Northern Ireland as a venue for the second strand. The specific proposition was put that a symbolic first meeting would take place in London followed by a series of substantial meetings in Northern Ireland, at a location yet to be decided (but not the Stormont Estate). At the close of strand two there would be a symbolic meeting in Dublin which would also act as a bridging meeting in the transition to strand three, which would also begin in Dublin. The SDLP had suggested that the meeting in Dublin at the end of strand two should take place in the Throne Room in Dublin Castle.

5. In response to a question from the Alliance Party, the Government Team explained that the SDLP had not agreed the proposition, but neither had they rejected it out of hand. The Government Team said that one of the attractions of the proposition was that neither the SDLP nor the Unionists had ownership of the proposal, and therefore neither side need feel they were giving ground to the other.

6. On logistics, the Government Team proposed that a few key members of each team might stay behind for some time in case further bilaterals should be necessary to clarify or alter the proposition on the table. There should then be time to reflect, and for the Government Team to consult with the Irish Government who had been patiently awaiting news. Meetings might then resume on Monday, with the option of contact before that should any or all of the parties find it desirable. This would give parties the chance to gauge the

views of their supporters. If no progress could be made on Monday, then the Government Team said that it seemed the process would have to be drawn to a conclusion.

7. The Government Team emphasised the importance of maintaining the agreement regarding media contacts. The Alliance Party agreed but commented that it was frustrating when the media seemed to be so well informed from other sources.

8. The Alliance Party said they were concerned at the level of detail that some journalists seemed to have acquired of meetings. The Government Team said that one reason for using the first floor Conference Room was to lessen the likelihood of technical eavesdropping devices being used.

9. The meeting concluded at 1614.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

RECORD OF A BILATERAL MEETING WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY HELD IN
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 8 MAY 1991

Government Team

Secretary of State
Minister of State
PUS
Mr Fell
Mr Pilling
Mr Thomas
Mr McNeill

Talks Secretariat

Mr D J R Hill
Mr Lindsay

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice
Mr Close
Mr Neeson
Mr Dickson
Mr Morrow
Mrs Bell
Mr McBride
Mr Jones
Mr McGarry
Mr Maguire

Also present

Mr Pawson

The Government Team held a bilateral meeting with an Alliance Party delegation between 1720 and 1726 on 8 May.

2. The Government Team reported that at a meeting held with the combined Unionist Delegations a short time previously, a strong view was expressed that all the Parties should reconvene the following morning (Thursday 9 May). This was to prevent a hardening of attitudes over the weekend and also a rash of media speculation. The Unionists argued that only by keeping on at the problem would it be resolved.

3. The Alliance Party said they would be happy to return the following morning. The Government Team said that before then it would circulate to all parties a written version of the proposition described earlier. A copy is attached as Annex A.

TALKS SECRETARIAT

Annex 'A'

1. Opening meeting of strand 2 to be held in London.
2. Bulk of substantive exchanges in strand 2 to be held in the Belfast area in a location to be determined.
3. The provisional conclusions of the strand 2 discussions to be summarised at a meeting in Dublin which would also launch the discussions between the two Governments in strand 3, providing an initial opportunity for the Northern Ireland parties to put forward proposals relevant to that strand of discussion.