

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. David Andrews T.D.

At the Strand Two Negotiations, 20 October 1997

I am happy to set out again the position of the Irish Government on Articles 2 and 3. As the negotiations progress, we will discuss proposals for change in the Irish Constitution as part both of balanced constitutional change and of an overall agreement. This is a shared position with the British Government, as set out formally in the Framework Document. The achievement of an overall agreement is what we are now about, and all items are of course on the table as of now, including balanced constitutional change, and are open for discussion. The overall agreement, including its balanced Constitutional dimension, will of course be put to the people in referendums at the same time.

Let me make one further point, and this again repeats what I said this morning. The Irish Government is deeply aware of the sincerely held views of the Unionist community on Articles 2 and 3, and we are listening carefully to what is being said to us here by their delegation about these Articles. But Unionist concerns about Articles 2 and 3 are mirrored by the deep significance of these Articles for the identity of the Nationalist community. If we are to reach an honourable agreement, both of these realities must be addressed together or, as Seamus Mallon has put it, what is needed are arrangements to ensure "equality of allegiance".

I have no illusion about the complexity and the difficulty of meeting the above challenges, including that of finding a balanced constitutional accommodation. But that is the challenge and that is the responsibility that has been given to all of us. The Irish Government will not be found wanting in meeting this challenge and this responsibility.