

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT TEAM AND THE ALLIANCE PARTY DELEGATION AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS ON 22 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

Talks Secretariat

Mr Rodell

Also Present

Mr Pawson

The Government Team and the Alliance Party delegation held a bilateral meeting in Parliament Buildings between 14.03 and 14.24 on 22 May 1991.

2. The Government Team said that they were now in a position formally to propose that the Northern Ireland venue for strand two should be Parliament Buildings. The Alliance Party said that they accepted this proposal. They asked if the Government Team's understanding of the SDLP's position was that they were content for the Secretary of State to resolve this issue. The Government Team said that it was, but that they would be pursuing the matter with the SDLP.

3. The Government Team went on to say that they wished to discuss the question of the ground rules surrounding the independent chairman. They had identified a number of areas on which they would appreciate comments from the parties, they included:

1. The Role of the chairman;
2. The machinery for dialogue between the chairman and the participants on the handling of business;

3. The Staff that the chairman might require; and
4. The Standing Order/Rules of Procedure under which the chairman would operate.

4. The Alliance Party said that they saw the role of the chairman to be that of a facilitator rather than that of an arbitrator or a decision-maker, though they recognised that there would be occasions when, having done his best to produce a meeting of minds, he would need to put forward his own proposals for the resolution of an issue based on his best assessment of the positions of the various participants. They recommended that whoever was chosen should be a native English speaker or at least fluent in English. They said that they thought that the business decisions of the second strand might be handled by a business committee on which all the delegations would be represented; they suggested that it might be helpful if the committee did not include the heads of the delegations. They had no particular thoughts on the question of the staff that the chairman might require and were content for the Secretary of State to make what arrangements he considered necessary. As to the standing orders, these should provide sufficient structure to ensure that the proceedings were orderly but leave as much room for flexibility as possible.

5. The Government Team asked the Alliance Party if they had any comments to make on the following suggestions for Standing Orders:

- That the Chairman should have the power to convene, postpone and adjourn the meetings;
- That there should be rules on the length of contributions;
- That it should be possible to have bilaterals and sub-plenary working groups as well as full plenary meetings;
- That the Chairman and the participants should be bound by a rule of confidentiality; and

- That Minutes should be kept.

6. In response, the Alliance Party said:

- That they were content for the Chairman to decide when the meetings should begin and end;
- That they found the idea of restricting the length of contributions tempting but that they were sure that everyone was already aware of the time constraints under which they were all working;
- That they hoped the freedom to engage in bilateral discussions would extend to the chairman as well as to the participants and that although they accepted that these bilateral meetings could take place anywhere they hoped that this would not lead to an unnecessary amount of time being wasted on travel.
- That there was little point in having a rule of confidentiality but that the Chairman at least should be advised of the need to be extraordinarily careful in what he said; and
- That they would welcome a summary record of each meeting along the lines of those which were currently being produced.

7. The Alliance Party asked if the Government Team intended to say anything to the press that evening. The Government Team replied that they hoped that it would be possible for them to do so and that they believed that it would be good for the process if they were. The Alliance Party concurred.

TALKS SECRETARIAT