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PAGES TO FOLLOW: 20

MESSAGE:



OIFIC AN TANAISTE AGUS AN AIRE GNÓTHAÍ BACHTRACHA
OFFICE OF THE TANAISTE AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILLE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

18 December 1995

Mr David Trimble MP
Leader
Ulster Unionist Party
3 Glengall Street
Belfast BT12 5AE

Dear David

Thank you for your letter of 4 December, responding to my invitation to the Ulster Unionist Party to participate in preparatory talks, as referred to in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Communiqué adopted by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on 28 November.

In your letter, you wonder on what basis I wrote to you. The following might help.

The twin-track process, of which the preparatory talks are part, is a joint initiative of the Irish and British Governments. In paragraph 3 of the Joint Communiqué, the two Governments announced their intention to invite the parties to intensive preparatory talks, having agreed, in advance, that these invitations would be issued by means of similar letters which the Secretary of State and I would address to party leaders.

Given that the remit of the preparatory talks is to prepare for all-party negotiations which the two Governments intend should lead, in the words of the Downing Street Declaration, "to a new political framework founded on consent and encompassing arrangements within Northern Ireland, for the whole island, and between these islands", it is hard to imagine how these talks could be adequately prepared other than through the close cooperation and involvement of the two Governments.

I understand that this agreed approach to the management of the talks is entirely consistent with that practised in respect of the 1991-92 talks, in which both Governments were centrally involved and in which your party, and, I understand, you personally took part. (I might mention incidentally that, contrary to your suggestion on RTE Radio recently, I myself was not a party to those talks, although I fully supported them). As in 1991-92, the Irish Government is not

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seeking to participate in talks dealing with relations within Northern Ireland. This fact is signalled in the Communiqué, which refers to the Governments being involved "in appropriate strands". My approach to you therefore did not depart either from what had been agreed between the two Governments, or from existing precedent.

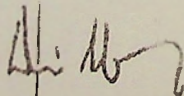
I note from your letter that your party does not consider the preparatory talks track to be the best way forward. Notwithstanding that, I hope, given the vital need for dialogue, that your party will be willing to participate in the preliminary talks on the full understanding that these talks will have an open agenda, allowing your party to put forward your views on how you see the best way forward.

I also understand from your letter that while, as in 1991-92, your party does not wish to talk to the Irish Government about the internal affairs of Northern Ireland, you are ready to discuss aspects of North-South relations. I would very much welcome a meeting at your earliest convenience, to discuss how the two Governments and the parties might reach widespread agreement on the basis, participation, structure, format and agenda of substantive negotiations, including on the relationship between the various strands. It would of course be open to you in that context to raise matters relating to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Constitution of Ireland, such as you mention in your letter. I will be happy, in turn, to set out for you the views and policies of the Irish Government on these matters.

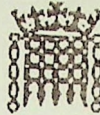
I believe that the present cessations of violence offer political leaders unprecedented opportunities, which our people would wish us to use to the full. We have it in our power together to lay to rest the old antagonisms and suspicions which caused so much unnecessary suffering in the past. Let us ensure that our collective stewardship in this critical period will be seen in retrospect to have risen to the challenge of achieving a transformation for the better of all our relationships. We should begin, as of now, to lay the groundwork for the negotiations necessary to achieve that goal.

I hope we can soon meet again to take our dialogue on these matters further.

Yours sincerely



Dick Spring TD
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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11 January 1996

Dick Spring TD
Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Mr Spring,

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 1995.

I note your implied willingness to stick to existing precedents and hope that you will follow those precedents with regard to any future inter-party talks.

In particular I welcome your statement that the Irish Government is not seeking to participate in talks dealing with relations within Northern Ireland.

As you know it is our firm opinion that the best way to approach substantive negotiations is through an Elected Body and that so far as the Northern Ireland parties are concerned, only those who can obtain a democratic mandate in these new circumstances should be considered for participation in those negotiations.

It is obviously for those who meet this criterion to discuss the way in which substantive negotiations will evolve from the Elected Body. As you know we have made suggestions on the way in which the Irish Government can make its views known to the Elected Body on relevant issues. It will also be necessary, at an appropriate stage to agree on how the Irish Government can participate on those relevant issues, but I think it would be premature and somewhat presumptuous to try to settle those matters now without the participation of all those who may meet the criteria for inclusion in the negotiations.

OFFICE NO. 2
16 JAN '96 8:13

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The most urgent matter before us, particularly in the light of the recent wave of murders and other outrages committed by Sinn Féin/IRA, is to ensure that we have a genuinely permanent cessation of violence in the terms agreed by you and the British Government in the Downing Street Declaration two years ago.

My understanding of the 1991-92 talks is somewhat at variance with that expressed in your letter. There was no joint management by the British and Irish government of those talks. The concept of joint management is deeply flawed. The two governments are two distinct parties who represent different interests and cannot with integrity portray themselves as acting with identical views. In any event the concept of joint management is inconsistent with equality of esteem for the other participants and with a genuine search for agreement, freely entered into. The process will only succeed if those in government seek such agreement.

I am deeply conscious of the opportunities and the perils of the present moment. For this reason I have continued our close contact with our Government and the Alliance, Democratic Unionist and Social Democratic and Labour parties. I hope that from those contacts there will soon emerge agreement on the role and structure of the Elected Body so that we can set in motion the procedures for an election in the spring or early summer. I hope that this can be done even before the target date referred to in the Communiqué of 29 November 1995.

We would then be in a position to discuss the way in which the Irish Government can make its constructive contribution to realising the opportunities before us. I look forward to such discussion and would in any event be glad to hear any ideas you may have on how this timetable and the criteria referred to above can be met.

Sincerely

David Trimble

David Trimble MP
Leader, Ulster Unionist Party