

IN CONFIDENCE

RECORD OF A BILATERAL MEETING WITH THE ALLIANCE PARTY ON THE  
AFTERNOON OF 14 MAY AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS

Government Team

Secretary of State  
Minister of State  
PUS

Alliance Party

Dr Alderdice  
Mr Neeson  
Mr Close

Talks Secretariat

Mr Hallett

Others Attending

Mr Pawson

The Alliance Party requested the meeting to seek clarification on a number of points in the Government team's draft proposals for resolving the procedural issues for strands two and three. The meeting began at 16.50 and concluded at 17.10. The Alliance Delegation asked whether the Irish Government had been consulted about the proposals and had agreed. The Government team confirmed that this was the case.

2. On paragraph 3, the Alliance Delegation asked whether the question of rotating chairmanship had been considered. The Government team indicated that they did not consider this to be practicable. The Alliance Delegation asked whether particular individuals had been identified for the independent chairmanship. The Government team replied that the search for a chairman would not begin until all parties had agreed in principle. No criteria for determining independence had yet been drawn up. The person chosen could be English or Irish and need not be limited to the EC member of state. Fluency in English would be necessary however.

3. The Alliance Delegation asked whether the two Governments would decide the choice of chairman and what sort of consultation of the parties was envisaged. The Government team replied that the two Governments would have to agree but that it was also necessary for all the parties to be content.

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4. The Alliance Delegation expressed concern that the choice of chairman should not cause the same difficulty as the issue of venue had done. It was important to avoid this becoming a contentious issue.

5. The Alliance Delegation sought the clarification of the Secretary of State's role vis a vis the parties if he were not to be chairman in the light of the references to the "UK team" in the 26 March statement. The Government team replied that they would remain independent and would not clear their position with the other parties, but if one or other of the parties wished the Secretary of State to participate in any bilateral meeting they wished to hold, he would, in principle, agree to do so. The Unionists had sought the "UK team" concept merely in order to cover what they perceived to be their lack of locus vis a vis the Irish Government in the second strand of talks.

6. On paragraph 5, the Alliance Delegation asked whether the independent chairman would determine the location. The Government team replied that this matter would have to be decided during strand one, and could not therefore be left to the chairman.

7. The Alliance Delegation asked about the role of the independent chairman in convening "non plenary" meetings and where these would take place. The Government team replied that this provision had been included to make it possible, on grounds of practicality or to facilitate the wishes of one or other of the parties, for such meetings to take place in other locations such as London or Dublin. The Alliance Delegation stressed the need to ensure that the chairman's terms of reference were not such as to facilitate too many bilateral meetings.

8. The Alliance Delegation sought clarification regarding the liaison arrangements referred to in paragraph 7 for the third strand. The Government team replied that these were still to be decided and were likely to involve one person from each team. The Alliance Delegation commented that the location of strand three

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which would probably alternate between London and Dublin, created some practical difficulties with regard to liaison. The Government team confirmed that any party would be free to meet either Government at any stage during strand three.

9. The Alliance Delegation asked in which strand of the talks would the final meeting be included. This had important implications regarding participation and location. The Government team said that this matter had not yet been addressed but that it might be necessary for the final session to be outside the three strands. It would be necessary to decide this matter in advance.

10. The Alliance Delegation concluded by indicating that, while they were not likely to create any difficulties over the proposals, it was possible that if the substantive discussions in strand one got into difficulties, others might seek to divert attention from them by reverting to the procedural issues in strand two which were not yet settled. They also expressed the hope that confidentiality would be maintained. They looked forward to meeting the Government team again at 11 o'clock the following day.

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POLITICAL TALKS

Practical Issues Concerning Strands Two and Three

1. There has been extensive discussion of the venue for strand two, and other related practical questions, over the last two weeks.
2. In the light of that, with the benefit of the views expressed, and after close consultation with the Irish Government, I have decided to indicate the basis on which these talks would be held.

Strand Two

3. All meetings of strand two will have an independent chairman whose identity will be announced by the two governments after consultation with other participating parties.
4. Opening plenary meeting of strand two to be held in London.
5. Bulk of substantive exchanges in strand two to be held in Northern Ireland in a location to be determined. (It will of course also be open to the Chairman and the participants to hold non-plenary meetings wherever suits their mutual convenience.)
6. A plenary meeting of the strand two discussions to be held in Dublin towards the end of June.

Strand Three

7. While participating parties remain free to discuss strand three issues with the governments, strand three discussions will be concerned with the relationship between the two governments, and will take place between the two governments:

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- other participating parties will be kept in touch with progress during strand three by regular liaison
  
- the two governments will meet other participating parties at their request for further discussion of strand three issues while strand three is taking place the outcome of strand three will be considered by all the participants alongside the outcome of the other two strands and nothing will be finally agreed in any strand until everything is agreed in the talks as a whole.

8. The strand one formation or the strand two formation, as appropriate, may consider issues further in the light of progress in strand three.