

THE HANDLING OF NORTHERN IRELAND TOPICS (INCLUDING EXCHANGES WITH THE IRA)

1. The meeting is due to start at 11.00am in Dublin Castle. The sequence of events will be:

- tete-a-tete between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach. The Taoiseach will want to concentrate on peace initiatives
- (in parallel) meeting between the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Mr Spring. This can be devoted entirely to Northern Ireland matters. The Secretary of State and the Foreign Secretary could take this opportunity to talk to Mr Spring about the Parliamentary Statement on Monday on exchanges between the IRA and the Government, and the corrections to the dossier made on Wednesday night. Mr Spring is reportedly still sore about the fact of these exchanges. An explanation of the previous need for absolute secrecy may help. It may also be possible to prepare some of the ground on security co-operation
- plenary session. Again, this can be devoted entirely to Northern Ireland matters. The main focus will be on the Joint Declaration and other related texts
- lunch, programmed to start at 1.15pm. The suggestion is that lunch should be used for the discussion of EC and other non-Northern Ireland matters
- press conference. It has not yet been decided whether separate press conferences will be held.



2. Some points to make on the exchanges between the British Government and the IRA leadership are attached, together with Thursday's notes for supplementaries on this subject.

1. This particular channel has functioned on and off for nearly 20 years, and during successive administrations.

2. The nature of the channel has, over the years, deteriorated to a minimum security. There is no doubt that lives have been put at risk, and still could be, by widening the circle of knowledge about the operation of the channel.

3. No one in the Northern Ireland Secretary's Ministerial team had been briefed about the existence of the channel before last week.

4. Sir Robin Butler's briefing of the Irish Government was given as soon as it became apparent that an authentic document relating to the channel was going to be published.

5. The exchanges were not set up as an alternative agenda to the Joint Declaration. They were necessitated by the duty to respond to the Provisional leadership's initial request for advice in its message of 22 February. Notwithstanding Sir Robin Butler's denial, there is no doubt that this message came from Martin McGuinness.

6. We will continue to protect the details of the working of the channel. But we will naturally be very ready to keep you in touch with developments.

7. Our discussions today will rightly focus on the Joint Declaration, the British draft Joint Statement, and other possible related texts. You can be assured that the disclosure of the exchanges and the channel does not detract in any way from the seriousness with which we address these issues.