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EC SUMMIT: MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH: JOINT DECLARATION

The Prime Minister is due to meet the Taoiseach in the margins of the European Council in Brussels tomorrow to review progress on work towards a Joint Declaration.

It is envisaged on both the British and Irish sides that the meeting in the margins at Brussels should be played down publicly. It should not stoke up expectations or fears about the progress which is being made. On the assumption that, following the Brussels meeting, we remain on track, it is envisaged that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach might hold a further meeting in London next week, at which the Joint Declaration would be made. If possible, this would deliberately be somewhat in advance of media expectations.

It will be helpful for the two Heads of Governments to exchange ideas on the general handling of the Joint Declaration. The Prime Minister may wish to explain that he will be taking steps to rally support for the Declaration, particularly among key opinion formers on the nationalist side in Northern Ireland and in the Catholic community in Great Britain. In addition to this there are five main points to be settled:

(i) The text, on which I attach a separate note, covering the amendments now proposed by both sides;

(ii) The timing and handling of the Taoiseach's separate announcement of the establishment of the Irish Convention;

(iii) The date and time of the meeting next week when the Joint Declaration will be made;

(iv) Advance warning of HMG's attitude to a Northern Ireland Select Committee (in the hope that the Taoiseach will rein back John Hume's threats to withdraw from the Talks process over the issue);

(v) The Press Briefing Line to be used after the meeting.

The attached points to make cover points (ii), (iii) and (iv). The textual points are dealt with in the attached note, which includes briefing on the amendments proposed by Dr Mansergh as recorded in Sir Robin Butler's note to you.

On the date and time of the next meeting, there are three options;

(a) meeting on Tuesday afternoon, followed by a statement on Wednesday;

(b) meeting on Wednesday morning, followed by a statement the same afternoon;

- (c) meeting on Wednesday afternoon, followed by a statement on Thursday.

In Parliamentary terms, there is little to choose between a statement on Wednesday or on Thursday. To reduce the opportunity for leaks, we favour the earliest possible announcement - option (a). But if the Prime Minister wants to minimise the gap between an announcement and a Parliamentary statement, option (b) is the best.

The Press Briefing Line for Brussels might be in these terms:

"The Prime Minister and Taoiseach had a useful discussion. They reviewed the on-going work which officials were commissioned to do at their meeting in Dublin last week. There is more to be done, though both sides believe progress is being made. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach plan to meet again before Christmas."

Michael Ancram's meeting with Jim Molyneaux produced the following points:

- (i) some minor textual suggestions in paragraph 4, reflected in the attached note on the text. (He returned to his wish to add "new" in the first sentence of paragraph 5, but did not press it.);
- (ii) he noted the new reference to consent and constitutional reform (paragraphs 5 and 7) with appreciation, and the other amendments of his which have been secured;

(iii) he opined that if the Irish Convention were called the Forum, it would be much less objectionable. (The implication was that, on that basis, he could even accept the relevant paragraphs in the Joint Declaration, though we do not suggest changing our posture on that);

(iv) he is broadly supportive, continues not to "expostulate", but believes the reaction of some others will be rough.

I am copying this letter to John Sawers and Melanie Leech.

Declaration in London on (Tuesday 14 December) at a joint press conference, and that we will both be making statements to our respective Parliaments the following day?

Suggest that our officials should co-ordinate closely on Monday to clear the ground.

Press line

Hope we can dampen down expectations of our meeting today. I am concerned that we should not stoke up fears in Northern Ireland about the progress which is being made. We do not want to be blown off course now. I suggest we say:

JONATHAN STEPHENS

"The Prime Minister and Taoiseach had a useful discussion. They reviewed the on-going work which officials were commissioned to do at their meeting in Dublin last week. There is more to be done, though both sides believe progress is being made. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach plan to meet again before Christmas."