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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH TAOISEACH: PRESS REPORTS: 25
FEBRUARY

SUMMARY

1. IRISH PRESS EMPHASISES THE 'SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP' BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH AT THEIR MEETING ON 26 FEBRUARY: NO DRAMATIC MOVES EXPECTED BUT IT WILL SET THE TONE FOR THE FUTURE. COMMON IRISH GOVERNMENT/SDLP APPROACH TO THE MEETING. TAOISEACH SAYS HE WILL BE LOOKING FOR A NEW APPROACH TO PEACE, AND THAT 1920 GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND ACT WILL BE ON THE TABLE WITH ARTICLES 2 AND 3.

DETAIL

2. ALL TODAY'S IRISH NEWSPAPERS CARRY TRAILERS ON THE MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH ON 26 FEBRUARY. THE IRISH TIMES REPORTS THE TAOISEACH'S HOPE THAT IT WILL PLACE NORTHERN IRELAND 'HIGH ON THE AGENDA OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT' AS A RESULT OF A SERIES OF INCREASINGLY POSITIVE SIGNALS FROM LONDON THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT NOW ACCORD A HIGHER PRIORITY TO NORTHERN IRELAND THAN HAS BEEN THE CASE FOR SOME TIME. THE TAOISEACH IS REPORTED AS SAYING THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S PERCEPTION IS THAT NORTHERN IRELAND IS 'A MAJOR PRIORITY', AND HE AND MR MAJOR WOULD 'TRY TO FIND A NEW APPROACH TO PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND'.

3. AN IRISH INDEPENDENT PIECE EXPECTS NO DRAMATIC MOVES TO RESULT FROM THE MEETING. THE PRIME MINISTER'S ATTENTION WILL BE ON DOMESTIC POLITICS, AND THE TAOISEACH HAS BEEN TOO SHORT A TIME IN OFFICE TO GET A FULL GRASP OF NORTHERN IRELAND ISSUES. AN EDITORIAL CONCLUDES THAT THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM IS ON 'HOLD' WHILE THE BRITISH ELECTION TAKES PLACE, BUT THAT THE TAOISEACH'S APPROACH TO NORTHERN IRELAND WILL BE WATCHED WITH INTEREST.

4. THE IRISH PRESS FOCUSSES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS AND SUGGESTS THAT THEIR'SO-CALLED SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP' WILL COMMAND ALMOST AS MUCH ATTENTION AS THE

TOPICS THEY DISCUSS. IT LOOKS FORWARD TO RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LONDON AND DUBLIN, 'WHICH BLEW HOT AND COLD DURING THE HAUGHEY/THATCHER ERA', ENTERING A MORE STABLE PHASE. THE CORK EXAMINER SUGGESTS THAT GIVEN THE CLOSE POLITICAL FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO LEADERS, 'ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO BELIEVE THAT THE AUSPICES ARE AS BRIGHT NOW FOR NORTHERN IRELAND AS THEY HAVE BEEN IN MORE THAN TWO DECADES'. THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR FIRST MEETING WILL BE IN SETTING THE TONE FOR WHAT IS TO COME.

5. THE TAOISEACH'S MEETING ON 25 FEBRUARY WITH AN SDLP DELEGATION IS NOTED. HUME IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT THE FACT THAT THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS HAD PUT NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE TOP OF THEIR AGENDA REPRESENTED PROGRESS. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT SAYS THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND THE SDLP REACHED AGREEMENT ON GENERAL STRATEGY ON NORTHERN IRELAND.

6. THE TAOISEACH IS ALSO REPORTED AS SAYING THAT IN ANY STRAND II (NORTH/SOUTH) TALKS, ARTICLES 2 AND 3 OF THE CONSTITUTION WOULD BE ON THE TABLE, AS WOULD THE 1920 GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND ACT. 'THAT'S WHAT WE MEAN WHEN WE SAY THAT EVERYTHING SHOULD BE ON THE TABLE'. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT COMMENTS THAT THIS TAKES US BACK TO PARTITION AND TO BASICS: 'THERE MAY BE SENSE IN THIS APPROACH, IF ONLY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW THAT EVERY OTHER APPROACH HAS FAILED'.

BLATHERWICK

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