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Reference Code: 2021/97/5

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

Confidential

28 November 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn
 Second Secretary
 Anglo Irish Division
 Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Second Secretary

Further update on Clinton visit

I spoke this morning to Peter Bell about the possibility of Prime Ministerial involvement in the Clinton visit to Northern Ireland and the arrangements for contact with the political parties as they stand at present.

Bell believes that a visit by the Prime Minister is now unlikely, though he would not rule it out categorically. He hoped to be able to provide the definitive outcome on this point later today.

The position in regard to contact with the parties remains highly fluid. These are likely, however, to be concentrated in and around the reception scheduled for Thursday evening in the Whitla Hall at Queen's.

The Americans originally wished to host this reception themselves and to confine it to around 120 participants (almost exclusively political representatives). At a later point, they proposed a joint reception. The British side insisted that the Secretary of State should host it and this has now been agreed. This has enabled them to expand the guest-list to a projected attendance of around 300 so as to include the business community, community groups and other non-political interests. The ostensible intention is to enable the President to meet a wider range of people in Northern Ireland. The real purpose, of course, is to de-emphasize the political nature of the occasion and to create a broader "community" event which, the British calculate, will make it easier for Unionists to attend alongside Sinn Fein.

The individual parties are being invited to nominate groups of representatives who will form "pods" at the reception (a UUP pod, an Alliance pod etc.). In other words, each will form a distinct cluster of people to whom the President will be introduced in turn (on the lines of Buckingham Palace receptions). The numbers in each "pod" will be determined on a pro rata basis in the light of respective electoral strengths. The PUP and UDP will form a single pod.

The Secretary of State will accompany the President and his entourage around the hall, introducing them to the key individuals in each pod. There will be provision for private exchanges between the President and the latter in a number of private rooms adjacent to the reception hall.

It is expected that John Hume will have an opportunity for a tete-a-tete with the President in Derry. Bell's understanding is that a similar opportunity will be provided for David Trimble in the form of a shared journey with the President in the Presidential limousine from Whitlea Hall to the Europa Hotel after the reception. As of now, no specific arrangements have been made in relation to Messrs Paisley, Alderdice and Adams (the British are citing a general US reluctance to include formal commitments of this kind in the President's programme). The general assumption, however, is that the President will take relevant individuals aside for separate private conversations on the margins of the reception.

As I have been invited to the reception myself, I hope to be in a position to report on developments later on Thursday evening.

The arrangements for photographs are still being worked on. According to Bell, the Americans would prefer to avoid a handshake photograph between the President and Adams.

As for other details of the programme, Bell promised to supply up-to-date information in the light of a meeting with the Secretary of State which is scheduled for later today. He understands that a visit to Shorts is included and that the President will breakfast at a West Belfast industrial location (BCO?) prior to the speech at Mackie's.

Yours sincerely

David Donoghue
Joint Secretary