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Aonad Idir-Reannach um an Tuaisceart  
Inter-Departmental Unit on the North of Ireland

CONFIDENTIAL

Minutes of First Meeting held on 18th June  
1970 at the Department of External Affairs

Present

Mr. S.G. Ronan, Chairman	Department of External Affairs
Mr. E. Gallagher	Department of External Affairs
Mr. D. Ó Súilleabháin	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. R. Ó Foghlú	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. J.F. MacInerney	Department of Finance
Mr. R. McDonagh	Department of External Affairs
Mr. F. O'Riordan	Department of External Affairs
Mr. J. Small, Secretary	Department of External Affairs

The Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Patrick J. Hillery, addressed the meeting and the text of his remarks is annexed hereto. Mr. Ronan took the Chair when the Minister withdrew.

The Chairman suggested that, as its first task, the Unit might consider its terms of reference as set out in the Government's decision ref. S.9361U of 28th May, 1970. This decision was based on a Memorandum for the Government submitted by the Department of External Affairs requesting the establishment of a special section within that Department that would be responsible for keeping in constant touch with all matters having a bearing on the North, including the study of short-term problems and possible long-term solutions. Now, in addition, an Inter-Departmental Unit had been created, comprising representatives of the Departments of External Affairs, the Taoiseach and Finance.

A discussion then followed on the terms of reference of the Unit in the light of the Government decision and the opening remarks of the Minister for External Affairs. In this connection the Chairman quoted the wording of each part of Section (a) of the Government's direction, reproduced below together with a brief account of the ensuing discussion on each item.

- (i) "To keep in touch with all aspects of Anglo-Irish relations having a bearing on the Six Counties"

The Chairman explained that this, in fact, is what the Department of External Affairs is doing from day to day and that the whole subject of Anglo-Irish relations having a bearing on the Six Counties was under constant re-assessment. The Minister was kept fully informed and he in turn was in a position to discuss the matter with the Taoiseach when necessary. There was periodic contact at official level between the Embassy in London and officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Home Office. There was also contact between the Ambassador and Mr. George Thomson. The Minister for External Affairs had been

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seeing Mr. Thomson and he had had discussions last year with other Ministers also - Mr. Stewart and Lord Chalfont. Thus channels have now been opened up with the British on the North that we did not really have before, a situation that has been facilitated by Britain's assumption of direct responsibility for security in the area. Existing contacts would continue and be increased and the Minister proposed to see Mr. Thomson or his successor very soon after the British election. Even if the Conservatives won the election, we would have to keep up the pressure for reform in the North even though they might be less amenable to persuasion. There would also be a meeting of officials next week and it was likely that Mr. Gallagher would accompany the Ambassador at these talks in London. At the moment three stages, covering perhaps a generation, were envisaged in the process leading to the reunification of the country; present demographic trends which were becoming more favourable to the minority lent support to that view. The first stage would cover a year or two and be centred on the enactment and implementation of all the reform programme as well as the law and order and security aspects of protection of the minority in the North. British guarantees have been repeatedly given in this connection - by Lord Caradon at the United Nations, by members of the British Government, by the FCO and by the British Ambassador. The intermediate phase would be one of reconciliation during which the objective would be to intensify North-South cooperation and eliminate existing barriers. Efforts would have to be made to eliminate the genuine but unreal fears of the majority in the North and to show that life in the South was attractive. The final stage would hopefully see a constitutional settlement.

Mr. Gallagher gave a brief analysis of developments in the North over the past year with particular reference to their effects on the Unionist Party. That Party had moved a good deal to the Right and was coming more and more under Paisley's influence. Mr. Ó Súilleabháin enquired whether, in the event of Paisley becoming the recognised official leader of Unionism, negotiation with him would be possible. Mr. Gallagher replied in the negative and said that such an emergence by Paisley would witness the end of Stormont. The creation of a Central Housing Authority and the reform of local government had yet to be implemented and it was quite possible that the Chichester-Clark administration would be unable to see these through. Heretofore, it was in the areas of housing and local government that most practical discrimination had been perpetrated and it was difficult to see the Unionists reforming themselves to the point of accepting equality and fair play in this regard, unless constantly kept under pressure. It might be decided to ask the British for cancellation of the Orange parades this year but we would probably be satisfied if they limited them to three or four instead of the nineteen envisaged.

- (ii) "To arrange for the study in depth of possible long-term solutions (e.g. the federal solution) as well as short-term problems"

The Chairman expressed the view that it would be difficult to study long-term solutions until we examined in depth and compared the economies of both parts of Ireland so that divergences and their extent could be identified and measured over the past half century in economic, social, cultural etc. matters. Also, the effects of common membership of the EEC on these disparities should be estimated. The assistance of a qualified economist or econometrician would be necessary for this purpose and the Economic and Social Research Institute came to mind in this regard.

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If commissioned to carry out such a study, the Institute's precise terms of reference would have to be worked out very carefully and here the Department of Finance could be of the greatest assistance. Mr. MacInerney said that his Department had in fact prepared a paper on the Northern economy though it might not be sophisticated enough for the purposes contemplated. He undertook to examine it again, circulate it and also to have prepared in Finance before the next meeting a draft outline of the type of study envisaged so that the terms of reference could be worked out in case it is decided to commission a detailed study. The Chairman remarked that all the members of the Unit might give some thought to this matter before the next meeting. A discussion then followed on the use to be made of commissioned studies, whether they should be published and the question of timing where publication is insisted upon. Mr. McDonagh and Mr. O'Riordan pointed out that if special studies on the North are commissioned it would be necessary to make provision for them in the Estimates of the Department of External Affairs and in this connection it was agreed that a figure of, say, £2,000 should be included provisionally for the year 1971/72. They emphasised that this did not take cognisance of the cost of possible distribution abroad.

Mr. Gallagher mentioned that studies of the nature contemplated could be useful in that they might provide material to answer much of the Unionist propaganda about disparities in the standards of living in the North and South. However, we were not looking for propaganda material but basic facts on comparisons and relative progress in different spheres in both parts of the country over the past fifty years. Such matters as the distribution of GNP in the Six Counties, the extent and effects of British subsidisation, a closer examination of trade figures to establish the degree of exaggeration, etc. might in fact show that progress in the North was not really greater than ours. Mr. Ó Suilleabhain and Mr. MacInerney raised some questions about the publication and timing of commissioned reports and said that publication might reveal the existence of the Inter-Departmental Unit, although the fact that it had been constituted by the Government would probably emerge in any event. Mr. MacInerney thought that publication might possibly be arranged without disclosing the fact that it was commissioned. The Chairman explained that the British have been apprised of the establishment of the Unit and consequently should not be surprised if something were published. It was also mentioned that it might be possible to involve the Universities, North and South, in some of the proposed studies.

- (iii) "To advise on the creation and maintenance of contact with various responsible groups in the Six Counties and - through the Embassy in London - in Britain"

The Chairman and Mr. Gallagher briefed the meeting on the nature and extent of present contacts, both in the North and in London. Mr. Gallagher visits the North regularly every couple of weeks to maintain contact with minority leaders. Now that a special section on the North had been established in the Department of External Affairs it was hoped to widen these contacts to include eventually, if possible, members of the Unionist Party. The Chairman said he met Mr. John Taylor socially in Dublin recently and had had a twenty-minute friendly non-political conversation with him. Mr. Gallagher had been introduced to another Minister (Dr. Simpson) in the North. The Minister and the Department of External Affairs had in the past year received several visits from prominent Northern minority leaders including delegations of M.P.s. When we were speaking to the

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British about Six County affairs it was good that they realise that our assessments are based on continuous contact with such people. Mr. Ivan Cooper M.P. has suggested that we open a passport office in the North and this might provide the germ of an official presence in the North, though the probability was that such a presence might be a focus for demonstrations. The creation of a cultural committee in the North financed or subsidised openly by us, if necessary, might be a possible means of helping many Unionists to discover their Irish traditions. In London, our Embassy was in touch regularly with Irish groups and M.P.s and we had in fact been in direct contact a couple of times with the British Representative in the North, Mr. Burroughs. His telephone numbers were available to the Department of External Affairs in the event of an emergency.

(iv) "To guide and direct information activity abroad on the subject"

Mr. McDonagh and Mr. O' Riordan briefed the meeting on the current and projected information programme of the Department of External Affairs in this regard and will circulate a paper shortly on this matter. London is the really important centre for such activity but a Press Officer has also been appointed to cover North America. In London the Ambassador will be taking an active part in cultivating and entertaining representatives of the Press, radio and T.V. and he is being provided with an additional Third Secretary to assist him and the Press Officer in this task. The objective was to influence comment on the North in the British press as much as possible as it was no longer necessary to prove the existence of discrimination and injustice. Apart from having a useful effect on British public opinion, such favourable comment would also be read by Unionists in the North where British newspapers have a wide circulation. British Overseas Information Services as well as BBC Overseas programmes often quote extensively from the British press.

London was also of vital importance as regards the foreign press corps because about 80% of news appearing in the foreign press on Irish affairs including the North was believed as a result of studies carried out by the Information Division to be disseminated through London. Thus, it would be important that our Embassy in London should concentrate on these pressmen, particularly the representatives of newspapers from EEC countries and the United States.

In the general discussion that followed it was felt that the GIB might be asked to pass on for briefing to the Department of External Affairs foreign journalists who are particularly interested in the North. Such a procedure would ensure an appropriate assessment of which journalists were sufficiently important to be recommended for interviews with the Taoiseach and Minister for External Affairs. Mr. Ó Súilleabháin undertook to contact the GIB in this connection before the next meeting. The Chairman felt that there should also be more liaison with Telefís Éireann as they receive many foreign TV crews here and sell many of their programmes abroad. A meeting with RTE might be useful to work out a workable procedure. It was mentioned that Irish radio and TV programmes would be very helpful in demolishing Northern fears and misconceptions about life in the South. It was pointed out by the Chairman and Mr. Gallagher that GIB considered making a feasibility study last year in connection with the beaming of television into the North by RTE. Mr. Ó Súilleabháin drew attention to the tremendous contribution television has made towards a proper appreciation of life and happenings in the Six Counties and undertook to contact the GIB about the feasibility study before the matter is broached with the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. It was decided that the Department of External Affairs should write to Mr. Ó Súilleabháin in the matter.

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- (v) "To act as a clearing-house for the activities of other Departments in relation to the Six Counties from the point of view of drawing attention to possible conflict with general policy and of encouraging positive action where this is considered desirable"

The Chairman distributed for consideration a draft circular letter to all Government Departments requesting their assistance in the preparation of a survey of the extent, nature and usefulness of current contacts between them and Northern Ministries and among subordinate bodies of both. The long-standing policy of such cooperation is encouraged unless political complications should intervene and Departments are requested to identify existing obstacles to further cooperation as well as suggest new areas of cooperation which might be developed. The members of the Unit were invited to telephone to the Department of External Affairs any amendments they might wish to suggest so that the circular could be issued without delay.

Mr. Gallagher mentioned that the Irish language requirement had the effect of debarring Northern candidates from entry to the Civil Service here. A possible solution might be to give otherwise qualified Northern candidates an opportunity of gaining the required proficiency in Irish in the course of the probationary period. Mr. Ó Súilleabháin said that his Department was responsible for maintaining existing requirements but that a recommendation from the Inter-Departmental Unit might lead to a review of the position. In addition the abolition of the competitive examination for E.O. and its replacement by the Leaving Certificate examination results meant that GCE holders from the North were effectively excluded. Section (b) of the Government decision was noted.

It was decided that the next meeting will be held on Thursday 9th July at 10.00 a.m.