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NOTE

By prior arrangement the Minister met Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the British Foreign Secretary, at 9.45 a.m. on 15th instant at the residence of the British Permanent Representative to the European Communities in Brussels. The Minister was accompanied by the Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Secretary was accompanied by a note-taker. This was the first occasion on which the two Ministers had met. The meeting, which was cordial throughout, lasted approximately 40 minutes.

After an exchange of courtesies Sir Alec Douglas-Home referred to our common membership of the European Communities and to the fact that there would be many issues on which we might have a similar point of view. He referred to the question of regional policy. This was important for Scotland which is his own home area. The British Government already gives a considerable amount of regional assistance by way of hill subsidies etc. and he was not sure whether this would be allowed to continue. Sir Alec also mentioned their interest in the older industries in these areas some of which are in difficulty. The Minister emphasised our interest in regional policy also but pointed out that for us it was perhaps more important for the rural areas of the country rather than the urban areas. He also referred to the possibilities for North-South cooperation in this field as the problems of the areas west of the Bann and west of the Shannon were in many respects similar.

Turning to the problems of the North, the Minister referred to the sectarian bitterness which existed at the extremes of both communities in the North but pointed to the area of moderate opinion in both communities. He

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suggested that there was scope for setting up structures to tap the cooperation which would be forthcoming from these moderates. It was important that any Council of Ireland to be provided for in the proposed White Paper should provide for these structures. Sir Alec intervened to suggest that any Council must begin very modestly. The Minister emphasised that such a Council must be seen to have scope for expansion. At the same time it would founder if not seen to mean something and, therefore, it is important that, from the very beginning, it should be given real functions. He mentioned, by way of example, that the Tourism Boards in both parts of the country could be put under the Council and financial provisions therefor funded from both sides. He also saw scope for early activity in the field of regional policy.

Sir Alec again urged that one must begin cautiously in view of the high feelings in the North. He agreed that tourism was an obvious area of cooperation. He went on to say that he had not talked to Mr. Whitelaw recently but his own feeling was that any new assembly to be set up for the North must have something substantial to it as otherwise it would not attract worthwhile people like Mr. Faulkner etc. The Minister emphasised that there could be no return of security to a unionist dominated assembly. He also asserted that the minority must be represented on the Executive. In order to ensure that there would be no return to discrimination by unionism he wondered whether the Council of Ireland might not be given some Ombudsman role to ensure fair play by the Executive. Sir Alec thought there might be some case for an Ombudsman particularly in relation to Local Government matters.

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Sir Alec indicated that, while the British Government had not yet made up their mind on the timing of the White Paper, he expected that it would be between mid-February and mid-March. He could not say whether it would be before or after the proposed plebiscite. The Minister commented that our views on the plebiscite are already well-known and therefore he did not propose to repeat them.

In reply to an enquiry as to whether the Provisional IRA were weakening the Minister remarked that they had been quieter since the new Offences against the State legislation had been passed. He referred to the recent conviction of the President of Sinn Féin (Kevin Street). He emphasised the importance of making progress on the political front as this would help to take away support from the extremists on both sides. Sir Alec indicated that he was very worried about the developing situation especially as Robin Chichester-Clark and other moderate Unionists are opting out. The British had tried to persuade these to carry on but were unsuccessful. He thought that there might be violence in the North at the time of the publication of the White Paper. The Minister agreed that there may be some violence but he thought that it could be isolated and would have to be faced up to. Sir Alec was particularly disturbed by the sectarian killings and no one knew who would be next. The Minister commented that emotional attachments for extreme groups in the North were being dissipated by these killings.

Sir Alec then mentioned the Reverend Ian Paisley. He said that Paisley had an awful beginning in the House of Commons in Westminster but has since evolved in such a way that he now has the ear of the House. Miss Bernadette Devlin, on the other hand, began extremely well - she did

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not put a foot wrong - although he did not agree with what she said, but she has progressively deteriorated to the point that she no longer has the ear of the House.

Sir Alec brought up the question of cooperation on the Border and enquired whether it had recently been increased. The Minister replied that there had always been cooperation. He said that explosives are strictly controlled and that the numbers in our police force had been stepped up considerably. Sir Alec commented that a lot is still happening in Border areas and he wondered how the Russian rockets had got into the North. The Minister thought that they probably went directly by sea into Northern Ireland. He did not think there could be very many of them as they are expensive items. He referred to the recent efforts of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Justice in the United States to dissuade people from there sending money to Ireland for arms. The Minister then brought up the problem of a police force in the North which would be acceptable to both communities and would be seen to be fair. He wondered whether, in addition to the ordinary police for routine police duties, there should not be some kind of gendarmerie on the continental line for dealing with violence. It is a matter which might appropriately be studied in the context of a Council of Ireland.

The conversation then turned to the European Communities. Sir Alec thought that the big problem in 1973/74 is how the Community should deal with the United States. We want to achieve a European identity but not an exclusive European society. He wondered whether Britain and Ireland would not have an identical approach on this question. The Minister indicated agreement. Sir Alec went on to say that the Germans are also keen on a similar

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approach because of the security link. He emphasised the importance of getting the machinery right. He said that France started off with the exclusivity approach with high tariff barriers etc. but she became more cooperative on this question of relations with the United States at the Summit Conference.

Sir Alec then commented on the unsatisfactory manner in which the machinery of the EEC had been working. He was appalled to find the Council of Ministers devoting hours to issues which should have been ironed out at Civil Service level. He thought that the Council of Ministers should concentrate on broader issues - the essentials rather than the details. He indicated that he intended to mention this towards the end of the Council meeting that afternoon.

The meeting then ended with mutual assurances of keeping in touch for the future.

23 Jan 1973