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European Parliament Political Affairs Committee decision
to prepare a report on Northern Ireland

The Political Affairs Committee (PAC) (which has one Irish member, Mr. Lalor) on 24 February, 1983 discussed the texts of three draft resolutions on the situation in Northern Ireland. These motions were:

- PE 1-630/82 on Northern Ireland - submitted by Mr. McCartin, Mr. O'Donnell and others on behalf of the PPE group;
- PE 1-637/82 submitted by Mr. Hume, Mr. Glinne and others on behalf of the Socialist group;
- PE 1-752/82 submitted by Mr. Davern, J. Junot and others (DEP group). (Texts attached).

As a result of the discussion it was decided that the PAC would draw up a report on Northern Ireland. This decision was endorsed by the enlarged bureau of the Parliament on 9 March 1983, "on the basis of the limitations that the EP could not involve itself in work affecting the constitutional position of Northern Ireland". President Dankert, after the meeting, also referred to an understanding that there would be no question of public hearings.

These reservations are obviously made in an attempt to quell British government displeasure at the decision. Reaction on the right wing of the Conservative party has been particularly hostile, and the matter has already been raised in the House of Commons in a PQ by Mr. Harvey Proctor. Nor has the Labour party evinced any enthusiasm for the proposed report, probably reflecting Labour's negative attitude towards the Community.

Paisley and Taylor, following their original motion in November 1982 denying European Community competence in Northern Ireland, tabled various resolutions seeking to highlight problems in Corsica, Wallonia, Thrace etc. as well as what they view as the disadvantaged position of Protestants in this State. The Permanent Representation reports that these resolutions are not likely to have any significant impact other than to provoke hostility towards their sponsors. - John Hume's offer to co-sponsor a resolution with Paisley and Taylor on the

treatment of minorities in all of Ireland was an effective response. Paisley and Taylor are now calling on the British Government to go to the European Court over the Bureau's decision and Taylor has further called for a withdrawal of the British Conservative Members from the Parliament.

Niels Haagerup was appointed as Rapporteur at the meeting of the PAC held on 14-16 March. Haagerup is a Danish Liberal MEP, former journalist and expert in strategic studies, who has in recent years chaired an ad hoc group in the Parliament on Northern Ireland. He has been quoted in the British media as saying that he does not expect his report to touch on constitutional issues. Indeed the London Times of 5 March quoted him as suggesting that the question of Northern Ireland was "better off in the hands of the Committee". rather than on the floor of the Parliament where Haagerup feels it could lead to open confrontation. The Dane is generally close in his political views to British Conservatives. It will be recalled that Fianna Fail MEPs have expressed serious reservations about him and effectively accused him of being pro-British (in the context of his activities as chairman of the European Parliament ad hoc Committee on Northern Ireland).

On 11 May Mr. Haagerup met Ambassador O'Rourke in Brussels to discuss his approach to the issue (see Section below). During the period 30 May - 1 June 1983, Mr. Haagerup visited Dublin and had preliminary discussions with the Taoiseach, the Tanaiste, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Haughey, and officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs. During his second visit, in early September Mr. Haagerup accompanied by Richard Moore (a British official who is Secretary of the Political Committee of the Liberal and Democratic Group in the European Parliament), intends to have in depth discussions in Dublin on 1 and 2 September before proceeding to Belfast on 3 September.

Some press reports about the precise terms of reference of the report to be compiled have been misleading. In addition to the limitations apparently imposed by Parliament President Dankert at the Bureau meeting it should be noted that Haagerup will not be bound to pursue the proposals in any of the resolutions tabled by Irish MEPs.

Mr. Haagerup outlined his own approach to his task to Ambassador O'Rourke on 11 May, and during his preliminary discussions in Dublin 30 May - 1 June. Particular areas of interest include:

- the legal position of Ireland vis a vis the North:
Mr. Moore, who is a lawyer by training, will be advising Mr. Haagerup on legal matters;
- Irish-British co-operation in security matters:
Mr. Haagerup has a particular personal interest in the problem of terrorism;
- New Ireland Forum: Mr. Haagerup hopes that he will be able to take note of the final report of the Forum in his own report;
- increased EC involvement in the Irish issue, including greater economic assistance, and the possibility of exploiting the common membership of the EC to forge closer ties between North and South without involving constitutional changes;
- the idea that Northern Ireland interests are more in line with those of this state than the U.K.

Mr. Haagerup has stressed that his report will be objective, and has indicated that he will consult with us, as well as with the British, over its contents. The report will be written by Mr. Haagerup and Mr. Moore, and will be in two parts, an explanatory memorandum, and a draft resolution. The former will also have appendices containing statistical information and some documentary material. The resolution will be considered and finalised by the PAC, probably in December and may go before parliament in January 1984, but, if necessary, could be delayed until February 1984. The authors are anxious that it should not be any later so as not to coincide with the run up to the European elections, planned for June.

Our public response so far to the PAC decision has been broadly based on the following elements:

In general we would welcome whatever our European partners

might do to encourage two of their fellow members states i.e. Ireland and Britain in their efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in this troubled region of the community. The development of a cooperative approach to the problem of Northern Ireland by the two countries will facilitate assistance to the area from the other member states. We would not see the Community's role as one of "interfering" in Northern Ireland as some commentators have alleged. What we do welcome from our partners is whatever political and economic support the Communities' institutions can give to democratic progress and consensus leading to a resolution of the division between the two Irish traditions. The two member states who must play the lead role in tackling the problem of Northern Ireland are of course Ireland and Britain. It is clear, however, that a community which was after all set up to end division among the people of Europe has a role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. We welcome the interest expressed by members of the European Parliament in Northern Ireland and consider that the decision of its Political Affairs Committee to draw up a report on the situation there in a positive development. The Irish Government will cooperate in every way with the members of the Parliament in the preparation of the report. It is entirely appropriate that the members of that Parliament should be anxious to be informed about the causes for the continuing violence and division affecting Northern Ireland.

The SDLP and Fianna Fáil have, of course, strongly welcomed the PAC decision.

The PAC decision is significant in that for the first time a report on Northern Ireland will be prepared for a committee of the European Parliament which by definition is concerned with political affairs. It is unlikely that such a report could be compiled in such a way as to completely avoid the central constitutional question. At official level, in the Parliament Secretariat, it has been suggested privately, however, that with Haagerup as the Rapporteur the ensuing report will contain nothing radical