

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Visit of Neils J. Haagerup MEP

Steering Note

Objectives:

1. These might be defined as:

- ensuring that Haagerup in his report takes into account the Irish view of the Northern problem and the aspiration of the nationalist community in the North.
- steering Haagerup towards the central issues at stake in Northern Ireland, and making him aware of the urgent need for constructive political action.
- defining the way in which we view EC involvement in the Northern problem.

Obstacles

2. The decision by the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliament to investigate this issue aroused considerable opposition amongst British MEPs and has been coldly received by the British government. The limitation of the terms of reference to exclude consideration of constitutional matters, and the appointment of Haagerup (together with a British assistant) to write the report may, from the British point of view, have made the proposal more acceptable. However, from the Irish point of view, Mr. Haagerup's links with the British give rise to concern. It would appear logical that his imminent appointment as Press Spokesman for NATO might influence his judgement between Irish and British interests, and ensure, at the least, that his report is not gratuitously offensive to the British. Certainly, over the past year there has been evidence that he has been particularly amenable to UK contacts and suggestions. It is important to us that neither these links with Britain, nor the limited mandate, should lead Mr. Haagerup to produce an unbalanced report, or one which

takes a restricted view of the Northern problem as, say, essentially a security problem. The detailed briefings he will receive during his present visit therefore affords an opportunity to ensure that he takes a broad and a balanced view of the problem.

Possible Approach:

3. The Irish Government has welcomed the interest expressed by members of the European Parliament in Northern Ireland and consider that the decision of the Political Affairs Committee to draw up a report on the situation there to be a positive development. We would not, as some commentators have done, see the Community's role as interfering in Northern Ireland. It is entirely appropriate that the MEPs should be anxious to be informed about the causes of the continuing violence and division affecting Northern Ireland.

4. Our major concern about the content of the report is that it should take account of the reality of the Irish nationalist viewpoint and its political and constitutional implications. It may therefore be mentioned that, just as we take seriously the reality of Unionism and its aspirations, so too the British must acknowledge the existence of the nationalist community and the validity of its aspirations. Any report which lost sight of the second of these elements would do a disservice to the cause of a peaceful resolution of the Northern problem.

5. Recent developments in Northern Ireland, in particular the General Election of June this year, suggest that, amongst the nationalist community, a dangerous degree of alienation from the peaceful democratic process is taking place. If this process of alienation is to be contained, let alone reversed, political progress is essential. The British must demonstrate their willingness to face up to the irreducible reality of Irish nationalism, and take positive political steps towards the nationalist community.

6. The Irish Government, for its part, has demonstrated its preparedness to consider realistically the implications of unity by entering into the New Ireland Forum. One of the many elements which the Forum has to consider is precisely how the 'Irish/Irish' source of identity of the nationalist minority in the North can be accommodated with the British/Irish identity of the Unionist majority.

7. In searching for structures which can accommodate these two identities the EC has a significant role to play. The Community and its institutions constitutes one of the few focal points of consensus where representatives of both communities are prepared to work together for the good of Northern Ireland. The present consideration of the Northern problem could usefully focus attention upon areas where the Community's institutions can provide support for democratic progress and consensus leading to a resolution of the division between the two Irish traditions. Practical economic assistance would, of course, be a major help in alleviating the severe social and economic problems which lie behind much of the violence in the North. In this regard, the recent approval by the European Council of the Belfast housing scheme is particularly to be welcomed. We understand that a proposal is currently under consideration in the Commission to develop an integrated programme for development for the entirety of Northern Ireland: the Irish Government would strongly support such an initiative as a practical and positive development.

8. The fact that the Community constitutes almost uniquely a focal point of consensus in Northern Ireland creates a particular obligation on the Community to be as positive as possible in its public posture towards the problem of Northern Ireland. It is important that the Community should:

- express support for joint Anglo-Irish efforts to resolve the problem;

- clearly condemn violence as a means to secure political objectives;
- express support for political movement and progress while at the same time recognising that the Community itself cannot prescribe the elements of a solution;
- state that the Community is aware that the issues arising from membership are of common interest to the people of Northern Ireland irrespective of political, ideological or religious affiliation;
- President Carter in 1977 stated that the United States would provide investment assistance in the event of a solution to the problem of Northern Ireland acceptable to both sections of the Community and to the British and Irish Governments being devised; this was welcomed by both the British and Irish Governments at the time; the Community might, for example, envisage making such an encouraging overture.

Anglo-Irish Section

Department of Foreign Affairs

30 August 1983