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IRISH LANGUAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

RESPONSE TO BRITISH PAPER OF JUNE 1986, AND FURTHER PROPOSALS

GENERAL POLICY

1. The Irish Government welcomes the response of the British Government to the interim Irish paper on the Irish language of January 1986, and in particular the statement of the principle that:-

"The UK Government recognises and supports the wish of individuals to speak and use the Irish language",
(Summary of Conclusions).

The Irish Government believes of course that the Irish language is a vital part of the cultural background and traditions of Ireland North and South and that a more positive effort is required in certain aspects by the authorities in Northern Ireland to ensure that the language is properly fostered and developed.

2. In the British paper it is suggested that certain measures would provoke opposition in the majority community and should not be proceeded with as the overall objective is to promote reconciliation between the communities. The Irish Government wishes to draw attention to the statement in 'The Way Forward' by the Ulster Unionist Party indicating that Unionists would not object to "State recognition of the legitimacy of the fostering of distinctively Irish cultural activities in Northern Ireland". The Irish Government fully supports the vital objective of reconciliation, but believes that positive measures are needed to achieve it. Widespread provision for and encouragement of the use of Irish would not only satisfy legitimate Nationalist claims, but would also counter the efforts of non-constitutional Nationalists to appropriate

it and use it for their own ends and so help to demythify the language for those Unionists who may regard it at present as something unknown and feared. In the light of the above considerations, the Irish Government believes that support and encouragement of the language should not be based on the importance of numbers of Irish speakers at present

3. The Irish Government also wishes to draw attention to the European dimension in cultural and linguistic matters, for example, the European Community's support for the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages based in Dublin. The Arfe Report and Resolution of the European Parliament in 1981 and subsequent resolutions called on all Member States to recognise the position of minority languages in the fields of education, the media and public affairs.

INTERIM PAPER PROPOSALS

4. In relation to place and street names the Irish Government is pleased to note that a number of issues are being examined with a view to making positive changes, but is concerned that changes should be introduced quickly. Sinn Fein are already active in several parts of Northern Ireland in erecting Irish language street names.
5. Irish language place names for Northern Ireland are to a considerable degree, known and recorded; it is a matter of filling in gaps and setting up administrative arrangements for recognising them. In this regard, the Irish Government renews its offer of the assistance of An Coimisiun Logainmeacha (The Place Names Commission). It draws attention to the Irish language mapping work of the Ordnance Survey (samples of which are provided separately) which may be helpful in preparing an Irish language map of Northern Ireland. The proposed map and directory would

indeed be useful and should form a basic resource for inter alia, tourist information supplied by the N.I.T.B. and for official publications. The major service involved in the recognition of Irish place names by public authorities would be the postal service and our postal authority, An Post, is ready to offer advice and assistance in this matter. A copy of their place names directory, Eolai an Phoist, is supplied for information. The decision in principle in favour of allowing local residents decide if they want bilingual street names is welcomed and the Irish Government is confident that the appropriate authorities can make arrangements to implement this. It looks forward to receiving further information on the matter.

6. The negative view on road signs is regretted, and the Irish Government requests that the matter be re-examined. It proposes that power be vested in the responsible Ministerial and departmental authorities to erect bilingual road signs where this would be appropriate.
7. In relation to official business, it is indicated in the British paper that Welsh has 'parity of esteem' with English because of the numbers of Welsh speakers. The case for recognising the Irish language in Northern Ireland, as indicated above, is based on wider considerations than the scale of the numbers of Irish speakers. It is the view of the Irish Government that the Irish language should be given 'parity of esteem' with English and that the practical expression of that esteem should be as wide as possible.
8. It recognises that there are practical difficulties in this area and proposes a gradual approach starting with simple measures which are of considerable importance to individuals. The Irish Government considers that official recognition of Irish names and addresses by communications and licencing authorities, and the courts, and bilingual

versions of basic forms such as birth certificates should be introduced as a matter of urgency. It suggests that an examination be undertaken of more complex measures such as the use of Irish in the courts. It believes the study of Irish should be accommodated and encouraged in the civil service generally and arrangements made so that if a member of the public writes in Irish, they will receive a reply in the same language.

- 9. Furthermore, it suggests that it would be very helpful if the elements of the British Government's policy on Irish were brought together in an official document and if the legislative changes proposed were, insofar as is possible, included in a single law or regulation.
- 10. The Irish Government welcomes the proposal to survey interest in the Irish language. The survey should be so structured as to provide useful results given the expected distribution of interest in and knowledge of the language, which may be highly concentrated in some geographical areas. The Irish Government would welcome consultation in due course on the questions to be included in the survey.
- 11. On financial support, the Irish Government is pleased to note the invitation to the Arts Council to consider whether it would like additional funds for the traditional arts, in particular for Irish language and cultural activities. It is considered that the current level of subsidy is not sufficient to support Irish language publications and cultural events.
- 12. It appears that the aims of the separate body to promote the Irish language, proposed in the Irish paper of 6 January 1986, may have been misunderstood and the Irish side would welcome an opportunity to clarify this idea.

FURTHER VIEWS AND PROPOSALS

13. Further to the points raised in the paper of 10 January the Irish Government wishes to raise for discussion three further areas of concern in relation to the Irish language and to put forward certain views and proposals in relation to them. These areas are Education, Broadcasting and Prisons.

EDUCATION

14. A wide range of representations have been made to the Irish Co-Chairman of the Conference concerning both the availability and also the quality of Irish language teaching in Northern Ireland. In the light of these, and of the importance attached to parental wishes in education in, for example, the Education and Libraries (N.I.) Order 1986, the Irish Government considers that all pupils in both maintained and controlled schools should have the option of studying the Irish language at an appropriate standard, and that adequate support should be given to schools providing instruction through Irish. Likewise, demand for adult classes in Irish should be met. The Irish Department of Education is willing to cooperate generally in any way requested by the Northern Ireland Authorities in relation to the teaching of Irish. The Irish Folklore Commission has collected a considerable volume of material on the traditional Folklore and dialects of the Irish speaking communities of all parts of Ireland including all the Ulster counties and this is of course available for use by the Northern Ireland Authorities and others who are suitable qualified.

15. The provision of the option at school level involves some method of enabling parents to signal their wishes, and the availability of teachers. As Irish is not taught in many schools at present, there may be a case for employing Irish language teachers who might teach in several schools to meet demand which might be small in each individual school. (It is understood that such treatment is currently available for music). We would welcome the British side's views to how more might be done to encourage trainee teachers to equip themselves to teach the Irish language.

It is understood that there has been some reduction in in-service courses for primary teachers while new Primary Guidelines are being prepared. The Irish Government believes that in-service training in Irish is very important and draws attention to the in-service courses on Irish provided under the auspices of the Irish Department of Education which are open to teachers from Northern Ireland. While the quality of the inspectorate service on Irish is understood to be excellent, the Irish Government would welcome discussion on whether increased support could be given for teachers of Irish by way, for example, of increasing the inspectorate time devoted to the subject or perhaps by establishing a Training Institution concentrating on teaching methods for Irish teachers at all levels. A project for cross-border co-operation on Donegal Irish currently being planned by N.U.U. and the Department of Gaeltacht might also be of value in this regard.

16. In relation to Primary level education it appears that there is no approved Irish language syllabus but that guidelines are currently being prepared on the teaching of Irish (and French). The Irish Government would appreciate being informed about the contents of the proposed guidelines and when they will be completed, and notes that

its Department of Education has available an extensive range of Irish language text books for primary (and more advanced) levels.

17. Some useful official support is already given to Belfast and Derry schools using Irish as a medium of instruction. It is noted that the schools are now fed by at least five nursery schools in Belfast and two in Derry. The establishment of a second Bunscoil in Belfast is planned. A common fear expressed is that without State support some of the nursery schools may not maintain sufficiently high standards and may be prey to paramilitary influence in the communities in which they operate. We suggest that state support should be available for those parents wishing to educate their children through Irish. We further suggest that the following measures should be instituted as soon as possible, which would send an important and positive signal to such parents throughout the minority community:-

- (i) The granting of maintained status to the nursery school attached to the Shaw's Road Bunscoil which caters for approximately 100 infants.
- (ii) Further support for the Bunscoil itself including approval for the purchase of land and buildings needed for this years (September) intake of 80 pupils and future expansion.

At second level a considerable emphasis is laid on oral Irish and 25% of the marks at A level and 40% at O level are awarded for spoken Irish. About 20,000 students currently study Irish at second level and it is considered that the Irish language should not be seen to suffer any disadvantage in comparison to other modern languages in Northern Ireland. We suggest that consideration should therefore be given to engaging Irish speakers as assistants. (It is appreciated that the exchange of

language skills which arises in the exchange of assistants with other European countries would not arise in this case). Visits to the Donegal Gaeltacht would particularly benefit students preparing for oral examination and we would be interested in being informed about any current arrangements for providing scholarships to students. Second level syllabi have been developed on both sides of the border and there may be some possibilities for rationalisation by promoting convergence between them.

18. In relation to adult education it would be helpful to have details of the obligation (if any) on Education and Library Boards to provide adult classes in particular subjects. Our present understanding is that Irish classes are in principle provided in response to demand but that a frequently reported constraint is the lack of suitably qualified teachers.
19. The Irish National Teacher's Organisation has proposed that a Consultative Document be produced on the Irish language in education in Northern Ireland. Such consultative documents have been produced in Wales and have proved very useful to parents and teachers. We would welcome an outline of British thinking on this matter in the context of Northern Ireland.

BROADCASTING

20. Those concerned with the Irish language in Northern Ireland seek more Irish language programmes on BBC Radio Ulster/Foyle and such programmes where there are none at present on BBC TV, UTV and Downtown Radio. We have noted recent positive developments including the decision of Radio Ulster to increase Irish language output for adult speakers from 15 minutes a week at present to half an hour each day in the near future and the appointment of a second Irish language producer. The Irish Government would be

interested to hear British views on ways in which the broadcasting institutions in Northern Ireland might be encouraged to expand (or initiate as the case may be) Irish language output. It is understood that a marketing survey conducted for UTV last year showed a potential audience of 70,000 for Irish language educational programmes.

21. The British side will be aware of proposals to establish a community-based Irish language radio station in Belfast. There have also been suggestions for an Irish language radio station for Northern Ireland which would co-operate with Radio na Gaeltachta and Radio na n-Ilean in Scotland. A British Government announcement on 30 June 1986 indicates that it has been decided not to proceed with a community radio network for the moment and that a Green Paper will be published in the autumn. We would welcome British views on the implications for the setting up of a local Irish language station.

22. The question of the reception of RTE services in Northern Ireland is currently being discussed in another forum (Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council's Co-ordinating Committee meeting of 4 July 1986). In this paper the Irish side wishes to draw attention to the particular difficulty caused for those in Northern Ireland who are interested in the Irish language and culture and who are unable, or able only with special and costly equipment, to receive RTE services. Both RTE channels carry Irish language and cultural programmes of interest and it is the view of the Irish Government that steps should be taken to ensure that it is possible to receive RTE broadcasts in all parts of Northern Ireland.

PRISONS

23. The Irish side recalls that at the Intergovernmental Conference meeting of 10 January 1986, Minister Scott

stated that more Irish language books are being made available in the prisons and some prison officers and some members of the RUC had volunteered to learn the language. At the most recent meeting of the Conference Minister Scott said there are 120 prisoners studying Irish apparently for exams or assessment connected with the award of the Fainne (a symbol of proficiency in and commitment to the language).

24. However, it appears that the authorities have refused to allow the wearing of a cloth Fainne on the grounds, we understand, that if a ban on the wearing of any badge or emblem were relaxed, paramilitaries would seek to wear their own insignia. The Irish Government would not accept that the Fainne should be associated with paramilitary insignia. It is a symbol of commitment to the national language and is awarded under conditions stipulated by Comhdhail Naisiunta na Gaeilge a co-ordinating body for all voluntary groups concerned with the Irish language.
25. The Irish Government requests that this matter be reviewed and would also welcome an outline of the present position in the prisons regarding the following:
 - the use of Irish during visits
 - the use of the language in letters
 - the provision of Irish classes and language learning aids
 - the provision of religious services in Irish
 - the availability of reading material in Irish such as books, magazines, newspapers (including daily national papers originating in Dublin and the Irish weekly Anois).

CONCLUSION

26. As indicated, a broader approach than that of the British paper to the Irish language is in our view indicated, but nevertheless the Irish Government again welcomes the

positive developments foreshadowed in the British paper of June 1986 and notes that they have been favourable received by constitutional nationalists in Northern Ireland. It is vital that implementation of these and of the further measures described in this paper be arranged as quickly as possible and the opportunity to discuss these matters at Secretariat level is welcomed. The further proposals made in this paper by the Irish Government take account of a considerable volume of representations received by the Irish Co-Chairman and the Irish Government is anxious that progress would be made rapidly in these areas.

4 July, 1986