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AN RUNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

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Time 14.00 Date 23.4.

22 April 1987

Mr. E. O Tuathail
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

1987.
20705

PSM
PSS
MR. Nally
MR. Ward
A.I. Section
Emb. London
Emb. Washington

Dear Eamon

It has not been our custom to provide an assessment from here of particular meetings of the Conference. It might, however, be of some interest to make one or two general comments on today's meeting, as it was the first since the change of administration in Dublin, giving also an indication of what we have been able to glean of the reaction of the British side.

My own assessment, based on having attended nine earlier meetings of the Conference, is that the occasion was successful in itself and that it created a positive public impact, both from the point of view of nationalist concerns and from the point of view of the anxieties of our partners in the Agreement.

The position immediately before the meeting had seemed much more difficult: King had been on leave for a week and had, it appears, not been reading the messages that were sent to him. These messages had arisen (i) from the preparatory meeting in the Taoiseach's office on Thursday last on the Irish approach to the question of the public presentation of the meeting and specifically on the communique and (ii) from ~~the~~ the weekend controversy about the attendance of the British Ambassador. King heard about these matters for himself for the first time last night and reacted badly. On top of this was an article on the front page of this morning's Irish Times about the approach

of the Irish Government at today's Conference on a number of matters (note: the article reflected briefing by the British side as well). This had also prompted anxieties on the British side as to the way in which Irish Ministers might present the outcome.

In the event the formal meeting went very well indeed. The atmosphere was relaxed and businesslike. We have been told that King and Scott were greatly encouraged by the interest and commitment shown by the Tanaiste and the Minister for Justice on the problem of subversive violence. I also had the impression that the Tanaiste was impressed for his part by the willingness of King, Scott and Hermon to pay serious attention to concerns expressed by him on behalf of the nationalist community here.

I have been told that the British side, and King in particular, found the frank approach of Irish Ministers in the tete-a-tete to be useful. In particular I have been told that the British side gathered three essential points from the Tanaiste and the Minister for Justice in the area of security co-operation:

- our side sees the conduct of security co-operation as being essentially a matter between the two police forces;
- our side would resent suggestions from the British side for assistance on faits accomplis, such as the South Armagh observation posts, on which we had not been consulted in the first place;
- our side regard it as unhelpful to be confronted with unrealistic proposals such as that which envisaged the questioning of persons in Garda custody by members of the RUC.

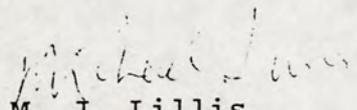
Again, the other side were convinced at the tete-a-tete of the seriousness of the commitment of our new Government to act against terrorists of whatever tradition.

I have also gathered that the British side found the public presentation by the Tanaiste at his press conference this afternoon to be helpful on the issue which is of most concern to them i.e. security co-operation.

I would also feel that nationalists in the North, listening to the Tanaiste on radio or television, would have found his presentation on fair employment to be encouraging. I was struck by the fact that, while the emphasis in the Northern media today was on equality of opportunity, the Southern media focussed on security matters.

It was useful, I think, that the political discussion on fair employment had been prepared by meetings of officials and in several exchanges of papers: this was reflected to some extent in the quite positive attitude of the British side and particularly in their statement that many of the Irish suggestions were being taken on board in the revision of the "Manpower Guide" in the short term, and in the preparation for the drafting of new fair employment legislation later this year. The "Manpower Guide" when it emerges, as well as this new legislation, should be matters to which our Government would be able to point as involving a substantial contribution directly from Dublin. I think it was encouraging that King in his public remarks tried quite deliberately not to misrepresent the position of the Tanaiste on the MacBride Principles.

Yours sincerely


M. J. Lillis
Joint Secretary