

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

**CONFIDENTIAL**NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
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*Dear Stephen***TALKS BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL LEADERS: 11 FEBRUARY**

After the Prime Minister's meeting with the Northern Ireland political leaders on 11 February we discussed follow-up action. This letter, which was prepared before we received your letter of yesterday evening, which has just arrived, offers an initial response.

First, the Prime Minister might like to have a brief report on how we envisage moving forward the political development process with the party leaders. The Minister of State has now invited the party leaders to attend the first of a series of presentations on the working of government in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State is about to invite the party leaders to a further discussion with him of matters of common concern, initially in the economic development sphere. That meeting will also provide an opportunity to invite the party leaders to explain how their private talks about the prospects for launching substantive dialogue are progressing. Meanwhile our Political Affairs Division will be monitoring developments closely through its normal range of contacts.

You mentioned that the Prime Minister might find it helpful to have a clearer picture of our overall gameplan before he meets Mr Reynolds. The enclosed Annex sets out, for the Prime Minister's own information, what we might hope to achieve from the talks process if we could get it re-started and carried through to completion.

As to the meeting with Mr Reynolds, we suggest that the Prime Minister might, if there is enough time, touch on a fairly full agenda of Northern Ireland issues with the new Taoiseach. (We assume that, as usually happens at these Summits, there will also be an agenda of EC and other international issues to discuss. In relation to the EC, the FCO suggest that future financing, the follow-up to Maastricht and the CAP will be particular priorities for discussion.) We and the FCO see advantage in the Prime Minister's signalling clearly to Mr Reynolds at the outset that there is a wide range of Northern Ireland issues in relation to which the attitude taken by the Irish Government is of great importance. The meeting would also provide an opportunity to reassure Mr Reynolds that the Prime Minister's commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement remains solid and that he recognises the Taoiseach will be subject to his own political and public pressures in relation to Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister could add that the British Government has introduced a range of reforms which have implemented much of the traditional nationalist agenda, and which are also addressing their current concerns.





- extradition. This follows on from the previous item. The Prime Minister might say that this is a particularly important point for us and for the Unionists; and could ask Mr Reynolds to update him on Irish plans for amending legislation closing loopholes in Irish law in relation to the political offence exception. For their part, the Irish might want to touch on speciality, which is now being jointly examined by British and Irish officials under the auspices of the Anglo-Irish Agreement

- social and economic co-operation. The Prime Minister might want to explore with Mr Reynolds the ways in which the EC provides a developing context for co-operation. He may also want to pursue specifics, such as the Belfast-Dublin railway. In addition, it might be valuable to engage Mr Reynolds' personal interest in the scope for improving visits and other links between the people of the Republic and those of Northern Ireland

- confidence issues. These are probably best pursued between officials. But the Prime Minister might want to touch briefly with Mr Reynolds on some of the reforms which have been instituted or which are in hand to enhance the confidence of the minority community in the security forces. If he does so it would be important also to stress that confidence is not a concept confined to the minority community, and that it is vital that all the people in Northern Ireland should be united behind the security forces and the action which they take against terrorists

- the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a two-way street. The Prime Minister might want to reassure Mr Reynolds about the British Government's commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, while stressing that it is vital that it should be seen as far as possible to operate in an even-handed way which benefits all the people of Northern Ireland

- the Prime Minister might also want to emphasise to Mr Reynolds that a central relationship in any comprehensive form of political progress in Northern Ireland is that between Dublin and the Unionists. This brings in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. It is most unlikely that Mr Reynolds will be prepared to consider any movement on Articles 2 and 3 in advance of further round table talks. The Prime Minister might indicate to him that he understands this as a matter of practical politics, but might also explain to him the strength of Unionist feeling on the subject (and the extent to which, in our judgement, movement on Articles 2 and 3 could transform Unionist attitudes) and signal our view that movement on Articles 2 and 3 will be an essential element in any comprehensive political accommodation.

The fourth follow-up point which we discussed was the need to provide you with advice on what response should be given to Dr Paisley's DUP dossier on security. We will let you have shortly a draft reply to Dr Paisley which, without ducking the specific proposals contained in the dossier, responds positively on the action which the Government has already taken or has in hand on

resources and legal powers. We envisage that the letter might also not close the door on the DUP proposals, but rather suggest that they should be discussed at an early meeting with the Secretary of State, to which the other party leaders would also be invited.

I will write again shortly both with the further advice outlined in this letter and with material on the additional points raised in yours.

I am copying this letter to Richard Gozney, Simon Webb, and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

*Yours*  
*William*

W R FITTALL