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Meeting in Moscow between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major - 9 May 1995

*for info. JCH
12/5*

*Mr. Hill
S.H. 18
9/5/95*

The meeting took place over an informal lunch in the British Embassy on the afternoon of Tuesday 9 May while both were in Moscow to attend ceremonies marking the end of World War II in Europe. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed throughout. Those present were: Irish side: Messrs. Teahon, O'hUiginn, Kenny and Dorr; British side: Messrs. Rod Lyne, Christopher Meyer, and David Ogden.

The following is a reconstruction from notes in the form of direct speech. (It is not a verbatim account).

Taoiseach

May I begin by expressing regret for what happened in Derry. I am very worried about the possibility of further demonstrations. Sinn Féin overestimate their capacity to control these demonstrations and they think they can maintain a two-track approach.

Prime Minister Major

Thank you for that. It was regrettable. This was not the real face of Derry. There were a lot of people waiting in a friendly way to say hello to me. The whole Derry Council except for Sinn Féin came to the Airport and they all invited me back.

I admit it is slightly dispiriting. There was to be another demonstration some days before that in connection with a march but the march was cancelled and the demonstration did not take place. I know that the canisters and the eggs which were thrown in Derry did not appear spontaneously.

Paddy Mayhew was pleased at the ceremony at Island bridge and at what you said there and he was pleased also at the results of the Anglo-Irish Conference. I am also glad at the way the intended visit of the Prince of Wales has been received.

I bumped into President Robinson in Paris yesterday and we spoke about it. I didn't know that they knew each other so well. She told me that she had met him several times including in Cardiff where they sang "God Bless the Prince of Wales" and he commented to her "it is nice to hear one's own tune"!

Taoiseach asked about the next steps in relation to Northern Ireland? There are two separate processes but each will have an impact on the other. What are your expectations about what Sinn Féin will do or say in regard to decommissioning when

they meet with Michael Ancram? Will there be progress? And when will things move if there is not progress?

Major

Sinn Féin expect that the exploratory talks can be over quite quickly and that they will then move to bilateral talks with the other parties. I never saw it that way. Progress on this matter will not be easy. I expect that Sinn Féin will want to go back to their own people to check each step along the way. So it will be a measured pace.

I believe however it will be easier for Sinn Féin to progress as the dialogue proceeds. Indeed it will be easier also for us to progress as it goes on. There will be no miraculous breakthrough. The attention of public opinion is fixed on the decommissioning issue. I want to say one or two things about that.

The first is that Sinn Féin believe we have hit on it as a rock to sink the ship. That is not true. Unless there is agreement in principle and agreement on modalities and some practical decommissioning then neither the Unionists nor the Alliance Party will sit down with them.

We will try to persuade Sinn Féin that our engagement is intended to be productive and genuine and intended to lead to cross-party talks. This is not a game we are playing. I don't know whether Sinn Féin know and accept that.

As I said there will be no miraculous breakthrough. I am prepared to have the patience of Job. It is no good Sinn Féin saying "let's go straight to talks after three meetings". I cannot do that. When Al Gore was in London he said the same to me privately - and indeed he said it also publicly. Your comments in the Dáil on 25th April were helpful. I believe if we crack this open we will also crack other (obstacles) but it is a pillar without which the cathedral will not be built.

Taoiseach

I do not understand Sinn Féin either but I raised the matter with Gerry Adams. I asked him what would he say to Ancram. He said he was willing to get into the modalities if there was movement on other issues - for example prisoners which is the most emotive issue and also the one where the greatest goodwill could be earned. I am worried however as I said about demonstrations.

O h'Uiginn

Also if they feel that you (i.e. the British) are entering into a developing dialogue with the other parties there will be difficulties. The more specific to each party you can keep the dialogue the better.

Taoiseach

It could be helpful if you were to lift the restriction on meeting Sinn Féin Councillors at Ministerial level on local issues.

O h'Uiginn elaborated further on this.

Major

I was going to meet them in Derry before the demonstration took place....

Taoiseach

If you could meet them on specific local issues.

O h'Uiginn

We also are picking up from the prison chaplains in the Maze a strong concern about prison releases. You might perhaps revert to your position of 1988 which allowed for a 50% remission of sentences?

Major

I cannot do that simply by executive order as the American phrase has it. I would need legislation for that. I hope they will raise it in private so that it will not become a public issue [the implication was that he might be able to consider it on that basis]. If it is raised in public it becomes a big issue - like the Framework Document leak.

Taoiseach

What do you see happening in relation to the Unionists?

Major

Our relations with them are substantially repaired since their [adverse] reaction to the Framework Document. We are engaged in private talks with them. The DUP will come and talk but on the pretence that they are not actually talking about the Framework Document.

You yourself are in touch with the Unionists too? (A reference to the expected meeting in London on the following day. You are meeting Jim Molyneaux? Is it to be kept private?)

Taoiseach

I have the impression recently that they are not as excited as I thought at first about the privacy issue.

Major

That is how we see it. Paddy Mayhew has spoken about "one strand talks" but said that people are at different points on the strand. The more we can talk in private the better. We must not have megaphone diplomacy (with Sinn Féin). The less that the British Government and Sinn Féin say in public the better. It is not a good idea to have a detailed read out after each meeting.

Taoiseach

We will keep repeating to them the importance of decommissioning.

Major

It is our intention and our purpose to get Sinn Féin into talks. But other parties won't talk unless there is movement on this issue. We are not trying to put them in a box.

Taoiseach

It is hard to tell their long-term intentions. They say on the one hand that they won't be ready for decommissioning at this stage. But I have information that they have been in touch with another Government, and one which you would find readily acceptable, to help to arrange possible decommissioning. I have the impression that Sinn Féin's own internal reporting is not good. When I mentioned to Gerry Adams my information that they had made contact with another Government he professed not to know anything about it.

Major

Is that very likely? We have the impression that he is in close charge.

Teahon

They seemed to us to be very stretched recently in their communications.

O h'Uiginn

It is something of a chicken and egg situation for Sinn Féin in so far as decommissioning on the one hand and talks on the other are concerned. We feel it would be very dangerous if either side walked away and got themselves on a hook on some issue. Also the more the Secretary of State himself can be involved the better.

Major

The longer it goes on the more we can put into it. For my part I spend a lot of time trying to think myself into the mind of Sinn Féin.

Lyne

He seems to have got some confidence back but I am not sure in regard to his party.

Major

No, they are off to the four winds.

Major asked about the candidature of McCartney for the forthcoming bi-election in Down?

O h'Uiginn suggested that the Unionists were in a dilemma, not knowing whether to run Empey who is a strong candidate against McCartney and risk losing or in effect concede the seat to McCartney from the outset by fielding a weaker candidate.

[There was some brief discussion of McCartney's background and character].

Lyne

We see him [McCartney] as more Burnside than Jim Molyneaux!

Major

Is Jim (Molyneaux) going to say anything worthwhile to you?

Taoiseach

No, but the mere fact of the meeting is important.

Major

I agree.

Taoiseach

They still have to evolve a response to the Framework Document.

Major

We need to steer them into inclusive talks. If only they would say publicly that if there is progress on decommissioning they could move to inclusive talks - that would unlock a lot. But they won't.

To return again to Sinn Féin. We will concentrate on political issues in the exploratory talks. But we also need to discuss many practical matters with them such as health, education, etc.

I think we can get into engaging with them in meetings with local Councillors but I don't want to announce that yet.

It is also helpful that the SDLP have been in discussion with Jim Molyneaux.

O h'Uiginn

Will you meet them (i.e. the SDLP and UUP leaders)

Major

Yes. I think another cathartic event will be the Washington Conference. I was very struck by the difference which investment has made in Derry.

Taoiseach

I am not sure that much will happen at the Washington Conference itself.

Major

I hope so.

Taoiseach

I think the contacts in the lobbies will be more important.

Major

I wish I could see clearly into the Sinn Féin mind. Have they mapped it all out as a strategy or is it rather a case of "suck it and see" as they go along?

Taoiseach

They seem to distinguish peace in this generation from the possibility of recurrence at some other time. Those who are involved are not of a mind to go back to violence themselves but the question for them is the possibility of recurrence at a later time in another generation [if there is not a permanent settlement now]. They seem to have bought into the ideas of self determination and Hume Adam talks etc. I doubt if they are so innocent to believe that this will result in a change in the nature of the Union.

Major

Yes I agree - they are hard-headed and not dreamers.

Taoiseach

To return again to the Unionists - they see this Framework Document not as a settlement in embryo but as a staging post on a route to a single destination. We don't see it that way. We would be happy if the Framework Document became a permanent arrangement whatever about Sinn Féin - though it is of course necessary to keep them in the game.

Is there a way the Unionists could be brought to see that they could accept the Framework Document perhaps with small modifications?

Major

I am not keen to take that approach. If you do give a concession then they will simply look for further concessions. I would much prefer to say the Framework Document is there. Some of their worries about it are just plain wrong. They are genuinely worried about cross-border structures. They read the devil's work into a good honest artisan's job.

Then there are a few points of concern. They believe that their officials would be forced by the British Government to appear (at North/South Talks?). I am inclined to leave the Framework Document on the table and let the talks develop around it. If it gets fudged at the edges in due course then that is ok.

Lyne

They are now accepting at least that the Framework Document describes the issues.

Taoiseach

At what point do they get into the process where they are actually involved in talks?

Major

That is a Catch 22 situation if we start talks with the Unionists. The Framework Document has put pressure on them to talk - not just to us but to each other (i.e. other parties in Northern Ireland). There is not going to be a clear way through - it is right that they begin to talk to each other.

Taoiseach

To change the subject completely could I ask you your view of Russia's attitude to the possible expansion of NATO?

Major

The Russians are genuinely worried. The Cold War has ended but they see NATO as preparing to expand. Russia fears it could be surrounded rapidly. It won't - because there is no interest in unsettling Russia.

Enlargement will happen slowly and country by country. It will not take place before the Russian elections. If we can draw Russia into the Partnership for Peace we can gently ease our way through (i.e. to achieve some NATO expansion) but they will need constant reassurance. I can understand that. They saw NATO for years as a potentially aggressive alliance and not, as we know it, as defensive. And it is worth considering - when did Russia ever start an aggressive war [the implication was never]?

Dorr expressed some doubts. He suggested that there is a dilemma here in that the reason the CEE countries want to join

NATO (security from a possible threat from the East) is the obverse of the reason why the Russians fear such an enlargement of NATO as potentially directed against them.

Major tended to discount this as a dilemma.

Taoiseach

Would there be the same worry on their part about enlargement of the European Union?

Major

I think there would.

Meyer and Lyne who had both served in Moscow in their diplomatic careers came in to suggest that the Russian attitude to the enlargement of the European Union would not be at all so strong.

Major

I am surrounded by Soviet experts! [He went on to make some humorously deprecating remarks about both as Soviet experts who had served in the Moscow Embassy].

Taoiseach asked if Major saw NATO merging into the CSCE?

Lyne joined Major in saying this was not likely, noting that the CSCE now extends well beyond Europe over to countries like Kazakhstan.

Lyne commented that the Russians are extremely sensitive in regard to the Baltic countries.

Major said that the Baltic countries could not be admitted to NATO for that reason.

Taoiseach

What about (admission to) the European Union?

Lyne

Perhaps in the medium term, say over fifteen years.

Meyer

He said he had a bet with the Prime Minister that Russia would never accept that a country with which it shared a border could be a member of NATO.

Major

Went on to refer to EU issues where he said he was very sceptical about some of the thinking being put forward.

How could Belgium or Italy or France for that matter accept EMU? When the Germans are face to face with losing the Deutsch Mark they will also have problems. These things are still seen in an abstract way but when they are looking down the barrel of ECU ...! Germany is emotionally committed to enlargement to the East. There are high expectations in the Visegrad countries of Central and Eastern Europe that this enlargement can take place after the IGC. That is quite unrealistic. Their economies are not ready for it even in their own interests.

The first snake you meet along that road is the CAP. They have great capacity to put new demands on it - they have many small farms and so on.

Taoiseach

Is that true? I met some Poles and Hungarians recently and spoke about this with them. They spoke of the farms in Central and Eastern Europe as very small; and they do have a short growing season. They also said that if the Russian economy recovers it will be an ample market for them.

When I met Prime Minister Kok of the Netherlands this morning I found him surprisingly unambitious about the IGC.

Major

I think there is a growing consensus about that. A lot of member States were shocked at the opposition which they found to the Maastricht Treaty. I have the impression that the IGC will be modest.

Taoiseach

I think we should try to focus it on one or two things which are of real concern to the citizens. As I see it one of those would have to be drugs. There are possibly steps that could be taken in regard to a European coastguard and so on. Notwithstanding all the argument that Europe is being somewhat over-ambitious, we don't want to destroy what is good in it.

Major

I agree with you about drugs. There is a nasty little problem about Europol which will surface at Cannes.

Chirac will also want institutional discussion - institutional issues will abound. For example the voting system will be very difficult to solve because there are two sets of countries with differing motives. Also the powers of the European Parliament will be quite a significant issue in the IGC. It will be interesting to see how the French go on this. Mitterrand was very hostile to more powers for the Parliament in private.

We are also looking at another range of issues (he did not elaborate on this).

As the meeting was drawing to a close O h'Uiginn mentioned the question of a formal summit in Dublin later in the Summer.

Major

I would be happy in principle if diary dates can be found. We should also discuss European issues.

Lyne

It would be very difficult before Cannes European Council.

Major

What about September?

Lyne

You have the Majorca meeting then. September is difficult.

There seemed to be every willingness on the Prime Minister's part to come to Dublin for a Summit about September if suitable dates could be worked out. The Taoiseach noted in passing that he would be going to Canada in that month. Nevertheless the idea of a possible September Summit in Dublin seemed to find favour with both sides if diaries can be made to fit.

As the lunch was breaking up the Taoiseach asked about the British Government's talks with the Loyalists?

Major said that these talks were going very well indeed.

The Taoiseach asked again that in the talks with Sinn Féin a clear line should not be drawn between the exploratory talks and substantial talks.

N. Dorr
Secretary DFA
11 May, 1995