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**Telephone conversation between
the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.
and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair
Monday 6 April, 1998**

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- T How are these guys getting on up there Tony.
- PM I've spoken to David Trimble this morning and I've taken him through in detail our stuff. He, you know, he reacted pretty negatively although it wasn't a complete explosion.
- T Okay.
- PM Which I'm informed is what you need to look for, as it were. But the outstanding problems are, I mean the main one is the one that I've drawn attention to which is the fact that they want the initial implementation bodies at least to go through the formal mechanism of assembly approval.
- T Right.
- PM Now apparently according to Mo, you know, most of our people are looking at ways that we could get through that.
- T Yeah well I was in at that last night with some of our people to see if, you know, how we could do both, you know, how you could have it set up but also get it through the mechanisms in some way.
- PM Yeah, I can't believe there's not a way through it. I think
- T There must be
- PM I think that probably what, what, what, there needs to be something that as it were - you see there are two problems, one time - that you want to get these things up and running quite quickly
- T Yeah

- PM And secondly in case they're blocked.
- T Well that's really it. I mean the time factor, there must be a way that we can
- PM We can do that
- T That we can trigger it.
- PM What I don't know is whether, you know, it would be enough as it were for him to commit himself, that he would support us so that you know that you've got the Unionist vote there or at least from his party. I mean obviously he can't commit anyone else.
- T Yeah See I think people will say, I mean , I said to him yesterday morning where I could actually understand that he be credible on something like that, the fact that people have to vote it through first, they would say that's a tall order, it will never happen and you'll have, you know, you'll have Paisley doing everything to be unhelpful to him. He had a campaign launched this morning where he's saying he's going to vote no before he sees anything. em
- PM Yeah he must be getting worried.
- T Yeah
- PM It'd be pretty high??
- T Yeah I think so but he was out doing his ranting and raving. In some ways I suppose that'll make David a bit shaky but I just seen, just watching it back on the news there a while ago, if I was David I'd feel confident because it looked like, you know, just off the wall kind of stuff but It will probably
- PM I think he's prepared to accept that it goes in legislation now too.
- T Yeah em

- PM There is that. That is one point but I think we've just got to see what ways we can work our way through it. I also think it might help him if we made explicit what is implicit, namely, if the Assembly ceases to function then the North/South Council ceases to function too.
- T I don't really, I don't really have a problem with that. The only difficulty on that for me Tony to be honest is that if that happened too early on, now I don't want to be thinking negatively that it will happen too early on, but if it did happen too early on I've gone and changed my damn Constitution.
- PM No, I understand that.
- T But that's the only thing. But I mean I don't want to be thinking from a, I mean I want to think that it will work rather than the other way.
- PM On the other hand I mean in a sense
- T You'll also have changed your Constitution
- PM We will have changed ours
- T Yeah
- PM In a way, see, I mean even the Constitutional step is a big one for you. It nonetheless is actually where you are because I mean
- T It's what's happening
- PM You know no-one seriously speaking would get up and suggest as it were there's a sort of, you know, arms struggle between Britain and Ireland
- T No, no, no.
- PM But I think that it is

- T He's looking to meet me on, I think he wants to come down to Dublin. I'll certainly meet him probably tomorrow, but it's on the Constitution issue, he didn't say what was bugging him on that, did he? He didn't am
- PM Well I think they've got.... I don't think they think there's anything that they can't deal with.
- T Right
- PM My kind of worry now is time
- T Right
- PM Em, we need a way through this business em, you see what I say to him too is, well look if it's, if the policies have got to be agreed in the Council and the Council itself, you know, consists of people from the Assembly, am as well as the ? then in a sense the bolts and braces is there because if the Assembly isn't getting the people turning up to the Council or whatever then the Council's not functioning
- T Exactly.
- PM But, am I think it is a presentational point
- T Yeah, yeah. Well lets have a crack. I'm going to be talking to my people by phone now for the next while so em
- PM What I think though is probably the right thing is for George to just flag up when he gets to paragraph seven that there is this outstanding problem. That Trimble feels, well you know, I think his concern is that if people don't, if George doesn't make it clear there is a problem that he has with this, not he George but he Trimble
- T Sure, sure, sure.
- PM Then he could be taken to have accepted that.
- T Yeah

- PM Am and so I think George would do that. But I think that a paragraph on sort of, you know mutually assured destruction as it were is probably a good thing too. The only other thing well I mean there were various other points that he had, the other thing that I think is difficult for him and actually could be difficult for us if what he says is true, is in Paragraph Two when it says that participation in the Council is to be one of the essential responsibilities attaching to relevant posts in the two administrations. He says there well what happens if Paisley under this system gets Committee Chair and refuses to do this.
- T To operate it.
- PM Now my view is that the way out of that may be to say, to actually rephrase that sentence and say that, that if you don't participate in the Council then you don't as it were lose your Assembly post but that someone else who will participate is sent in your stead for the Council.
- T It should effectively remove them.
- PM Yeah. Now I think that actually would be a greater threat to Paisley than anything else and it would take care of the point, that Trimble's point is well you know how do I force him to go there without then removing him from his position in the Assembly and if I remove him and then you just martyr him.
- T Yeah well that's it, there's no point in doing that
- PM I think he's got a point there quite honestly.
- T Yeah you don't want to take him, you don't want to be seen to be attacking him in the Assembly but you want to get him out of the
- PM Out of the Council
- T Of the Council
- PM He's the real threat. And then you could make the Council work better in a sense
- T Okay

- PM I mean I think that's something that we can, you've just got a point there that we can probably deal with.
- T Okay
- PM He had other points on various, I mean he didn't like paragraph five too much in the way that it was phrased and things but I think that the main thing is the Seven.
- T The Seven, okay. Just on the other side of it Tony, I fairly long enough meeting with Sinn Fein last night and I met, SDLP, SDLP was okay, I think we dealt with most of the issues. Just to flag, I think Mo was probably on to them and they're quite happy that she, you know herself and I think even more so Paul Murphy is working on some of them em on the equality agenda and the, something's to do with the Irish language. But I told them to put in what they were after, I mean I don't think, I don't want to be annoying you about it, I think Paul Murphy apparently has been quite helpful in trying to knock it together.
- PM And are they are basically okay are they?
- T They are yeah and they said last night, which will be interesting, that they intend staying into the line and that while they will have to do a bit of selling of it, em mm on the other side of the line they wouldn't only be selling it to their own SF activists but they will also be actively be working on the others aswell which would be helpful. And that was the ... I mean their minds certainly - the detail they were going through yesterday and they stayed along with my people afterwards, the detail they don't sound as if they are going to run away - at this stage anyway.
- PM Good, well I think we have narrowed it down to two basic points actually, there's the cross community thing in Strand One and there's this point about the implementation bodies, but I can't believe we can't find a way through.
- T I think the day will come, I don't want to give you a wrong thing, I think they will be looking for strengthening up on a number of these issues but I think your people can do a fair bit of that and I think they are prepared to do it so at this stage it shouldn't come back onto your desk, anyway you have enough on it

- PM Yeah
- T Well listen we'll keep trying and I'll talk to my people Tony I mean I am game to keep trying all these things as best we can to get solutions to them, they certainly seem like things we have to find a solution to anyway.
- PM Yeah, I mean, em, yeah
- T Do you have to go back to him again now or has he put it back to George with our people.
- PM He will put it back to George and I'll speak to George myself.
- T Yeah, well what I'll do is I
- PM I think you should probably put something in paragraph Seven that flags this up.
- T Yeah
- PM I mean not a new form of words or anything but just sort of says - note there is a problem here, you know, em
- T Why can't he say that when he is going through it or
- PM I think he can say it when he goes through it but I think if he puts in brackets you know note there is a problem here that it just prevents Trimble diving off the deep end em
- T If he does that you can very well get the others saying we still haven't signed off on prisoners and policing, it doesn't want to start flagging a whole lot of
- PM No, no I mean I am sure that is true but I think it would be, well let me discuss with George what he thinks
- T Okay we'll see what he thinks best, yeah

- PM I just, what I am worried about all the way through with
- T Something that goes off the
- PM Its ??? saying there is a lot that needs change here before I can accept it sort of stuff and you know I am off
- T Okay
- PM Now I don't think he is in that position actually I may say, I don't think he is in that position, as far as I can especially Paisley sort of trumpeting about today I'd keep him where he is
- T Keep him in the right position
- PM And I don't know what you think about you and me going over, I mean I think its probably you know sometime but not quite yet
- T No I don't think we should do it yet I think lets wait I mean there is a fair bit of drafting of kind of issues and back and forward that they are going to have to do I think for a while before we can go near them, but sure lets just keep that under review
- PM Right
- T We can, we'll see how they, I think they'll tomorrow what will happen when this goes out tonight they'll have a whole lot of toing and froing all day tomorrow between themselves because they will be whole lot of things, they don't like this line they don't like that line they don't like the other line on maybe not that many major issues but on a whole lot of issues and I think its going to take all our drafters tomorrow going through all that cause I think that is the sense of what they were all saying to me on the phone yesterday em not things that should effect you and I and then we will just have to see where we are by tomorrow night or early Wednesday morning
- PM Right
- T And then hopefully then we can start trying to push them to the line

PM Well lets keep our fingers crossed

T It will be worth the effort anyway

PM Yeah well okay Bertie well lets just keep in touch

T Okay Tony

PM I'll speak to George this afternoon

T Yeah well I'll be certainly around until seven or eight tonight I am going to be in the office I am going to be doing a bit of briefing with some of the Opposition Leaders so that they know what the hell is going on

PM Sure, sure and again deepest condolences

T Thanks very much Tony

PM Okay Bertie

T God Bless,

PM Bye

T Bye