



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Multi-Party Negotiations, London, 26-28 January 1998

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Confidential**Multi-party Negotiations, London, 26-28 January 1998****Steering Note**

The three-day session in London is to be mainly devoted to Strand Two, although the Governments have indicated their intention to convene a Strand Three Liaison meeting, probably on Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning. There are indications that Senator Mitchell may seek to conclude the week's business by calling a meeting of the Plenary to announce his intention to convene a Plenary sub-group on 10/11 February to deal with cross-strand issues, including rights and safeguards. He may also be obliged to convene a meeting of the Plenary to consider any charge against the UDP arising from the UFF's acknowledged breach of its cease-fire.

Practical Arrangements

A programme giving full details of travel and other arrangements is attached. In brief, the Minister of State is due to arrive in London on Sunday evening, with the Minister arriving on Monday at about 3 pm. Both will be briefed on arrival by officials. The Ministers and the Government delegation will be staying at the Mayfair Hotel, which is within walking distance of Lancaster House where the negotiations will take place. The negotiations will begin at 10 am on Monday morning and provision has been made for a delegation meeting in Lancaster House at 9 am.

A number of social events have been arranged to coincide with the negotiations. These are listed in the programme. Prime Minister Blair is to visit Lancaster House on Tuesday evening when he is to meet the participants and host a reception. On Monday evening, there is a reception in the American Embassy, followed by dinner offered by the Finnish Ambassador. Ambassador Barrington is hosting dinner for the delegation on Tuesday evening.

Strand Two

The main focus of the week are the Strand Two negotiations. This is the first occasion on which the talks have moved outside Belfast (they are due to go to Dublin between 16-18 February); this in itself has raised expectations which it may prove difficult to realise. The two Governments were asked to produce two papers to aid discussion: one fleshing out their ideas on a North/South Council; the other listing areas of existing North/South cooperation, and areas which may be appropriate for cooperation in the future.

When officials met in the Liaison Group on Thursday to prepare these papers there was a stand-off. We put forward a paper which raised a series of issues to be addressed and set out, in a manner sensitive to unionist concerns, the position of the Governments in terms of the concepts set out in the Framework Document. The British tabled a counter-draft which, in response to broadly the same questions, set out alternatives or options based effectively (a) on (a weak interpretation of) the Framework Document and (b) on what the British understand to

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be the UUP position. Neither proposal proved acceptable to the other side. Indeed, when the SDLP leadership were briefed by us on the British proposal, they made it clear that they would prefer no paper at all.

The British initially threatened to table a unilateral paper, but we have left them in no doubt about the potentially disastrous impact of this for the entire talks process, signalling as it would to nationalists that the British Government had retreated from the Framework Document.

In an effort at compromise, both sides are currently looking at the possibility of agreeing a paper which would signal that, while their position on the North/South Council remains that set out in the Framework Document, the parties may have ideas of their own. The paper would then list a series of issues which might be addressed over the course of the three days, but without putting forward any specific new position of their own (i.e. over and above their continued attachment to the Framework Document). It is hoped that this paper can be agreed at official level over the weekend.

It is hoped that the other paper on Strand Two, dealing with areas of North/South cooperation, can be agreed without too much difficulty.

Strand Three

The Governments have made known their likely intention to convene a Strand Three Liaison meeting with the parties sometime during the week. The expectation is that we would convene a meeting on either Tuesday or Wednesday.

At the Liaison Group, the British side, clearly responding to unionist pressure, announced that they would not agree to table a Strand Two paper unless we agreed to the simultaneous tabling of papers on the Strand Three elements of the proposed British-Irish Agreement: that is, both the Intergovernmental Council and the proposed standing intergovernmental machinery to deal largely with non-devolved issues in Northern Ireland.

Work is currently underway on the preparation of such documents. The British have scaled down their original proposals to bring them in line with the kind of paper which is now being considered in relation to Strand Two. Work will continue over the weekend on the text of these papers and the timing of their tabling.

Possible charge against the UDP

Following the UFF's admission that it broke its ceasefire to carry out a number of random murders in response to the assassination of Billy Wright, it is possible that the issue will be raised in the negotiations. The normal practice would be for Senator Mitchell to call a meeting of the Plenary to facilitate this. However the UDP are likely to argue that it had persuaded the UFF to desist from these murders and should not, therefore, be subject to a formal indictment (i.e. that it had demonstrably dishonoured its commitment to the Mitchell

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Principles of democracy and non-violence). We will need to consult closely on Monday with the British on this.

Establishment of a Plenary Sub-Group

It is understood from Senator Mitchell's staff that the Senator wishes to move next week on his stated intention to establish a Plenary Sub-Group to deal with cross-strand issues. He is considering announcing his intention to establish the Group at close of business on Wednesday, perhaps at a meeting of the Plenary convened specially for the purpose. His intention, as of now, is that he will call a meeting of the Sub-Group to discuss Rights and Safeguards on Tuesday 10 (afternoon) and Wednesday 11 February. We would be strongly supportive of such a move, although the UUP have so far been reluctant to establish such a group.

Another related issue which may be raised during the week is the need to make provision in the Strand One timetable for the early discussion of policing and equality issues. These issues are of great importance to the nationalist community but have not been touched upon in any depth in the negotiations to date.

Anglo-Irish Division
24 January 1998

YE: E676

Draft Programme

Sunday 25th January

- 18.35 Minister of State and party depart Dublin airport on Aer Lingus flight EI 178
- 19.50 Minister of State and party arrive Heathrow and are greeted by Ambassador Barrington
Party departs for Mayfair Intercontinental Hotel, Stratton Street

Monday 26th January

- 8.45 Minister of State and party depart hotel for Lancaster House
- 9.00 Meeting with British Government and Chairmen
- 10.00 Talks convene
- 14.00 Ambassador Barrington and Second Secretary Gallagher depart for Northolt
- 15.00 approx Minister Andrews and party arrive RAF Northolt by government jet and are met by
Ambassador Barrington and Second Secretary Gallagher
Party departs for Lancaster House
- 17.00 Talks conclude
- 17.00 - 18.00 British Government seminars
- 18.30 - 20.00 Reception hosted by the US Ambassador for representatives of Talks delegations, Main
Lobby, US Embassy
- 20.00 Minister of State, Ambassador and others attend dinner at residence of Finnish
Ambassador, 8 Kensington Palace Gardens

Tuesday 27th January

- 8.45 Ministers and party depart hotel for Lancaster House
- 9.00 Possible delegation meeting and meetings with British Government and Chairmen
- 10.00 Talks convene
- 17.00 Talks conclude
- 17.00 - 18.30 PM Blair to meet participants
- 18.30 - 20.00 British reception Lancaster House
- Ambassador hosts dinner for Irish delegation at Embassy

Wednesday 28th January

- 8.45 Ministers and party depart hotel
- 9.00 Possible delegation meeting
- 10.00 Talks convene
- 15.00 Minister and party depart for RAF Northolt
- 16.00 Minister and party depart RAF Northolt for Copenhagen
- 17.00 Talks conclude
- Minister of State and party depart for Heathrow airport
- 19.45 Minister of State and party depart Heathrow for Dublin, Aer Lingus flight EI 177