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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

Handwritten initials and number: 393

C D Powell Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Handwritten initials: MF

28th March 1985

Dear Charles,

EC SUMMIT: ANGLO-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY BODY

The Prime Minister will be seeing Dr FitzGerald in the margins of the EC meeting in Brussels on 29 March. The Taoiseach may wish to take the opportunity to press both Governments to take the lead in establishing an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body.

Dr FitzGerald raised this when he saw the Foreign Secretary and Mr Hurd on 22 March. Mr Hurd reminded the Taoiseach that this was a matter for the two Parliaments. The Taoiseach strongly disagreed: it was for the two Governments to take the lead. The British Government had a large majority which should be used. He suggested that at his meeting with the Prime Minister in November 1983, the Prime Minister had agreed in principle that such a body should be established, and that it should be drawn from the Westminster and Dublin Parliaments, the European Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Dr FitzGerald's recollection is mistaken. The joint communique and related documents published after the November 1983 Summit (Cmnd 8094) did no more than refer back to the November 1981 Joint Studies Report and the communique which followed it. The Joint Studies White Paper (Cmnd 8414) recorded the narrow area of agreement reached on the body. This is as follows:

"It was agreed that it would be a natural and desirable development for the establishment of a new inter-governmental body to be complemented at an appropriate moment by the development of an inter-parliamentary body."

The Report summarised briefly the British view that this should be considered further in the light of experience and parliamentary opinion. The Irish then went on to set out

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their views on the objectives, composition and powers of a parliamentary body in much more detail.

The Summit communique issued on 6 November 1981, held to the position that it was a matter for the two Parliaments:

"The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach agreed that it would be for the Parliaments concerned to consider at an appropriate time whether there should be an Anglo-Irish body at parliamentary level comprising members to be drawn from the British and Irish Parliaments, the European Parliament and any elected Assembly that may be established for Northern Ireland."

We have been able to find no record of the Prime Minister giving any specific undertaking to the Taoiseach at any time about either the timing or form of a parliamentary body which modified the Government's ideas set out in the 1981 Joint Studies. Our position has consistently been that this is a matter for the two Parliaments to consider at the appropriate time.

The Prime Minister recently considered the Government's approach again with the Foreign Secretary and Mr Hurd in the context of a possible visit to Dublin by Mr Michael Mates MP, the Chairman of the All-Party Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Group. The Prime Minister decided that now was not the time to encourage Mr Mates to pay a visit to Dublin to encourage inter-parliamentary interest in the establishment of a Parliamentary Body.

If Dr FitzGerald were to raise this again on 29 March, the Prime Minister may wish to draw on the following:

We have consistently said that the establishment of an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Body should be a matter for the two Parliaments to consider at an appropriate time. This is what we agreed in the joint communique following the Anglo-Irish Summit in November 1981, and we repeated it in the November 1983 communique.

There should be no grounds, therefore, for any misunderstanding about our current view. We cannot ignore parliamentary opinion or out vote the opposition parties since we would need their support. We could not endorse a parliamentary body unless there was a broad measure of agreement among all the political parties about its composition and terms of reference: without that it would be still-born. We need a better climate before we can take this forward.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (FCO) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely
Neil Ward

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