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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

10 December 1980

Dear Mr. Paisley,

Thank you for your letter of 9 December about reaction in Northern Ireland to my meeting on Monday with Mr. Haughey and the communiqué (a copy of which I enclose) issued after it. I should be sorry if there were to be any misapprehension in Northern Ireland about the outcome of that meeting, and would therefore be glad to meet you shortly as you suggest. My office will be in touch with you to arrange a time.

Perhaps in advance of our meeting I can say a word of reassurance. As I have repeatedly underlined since my return from my meeting with Mr. Haughey, Northern Ireland Unionists have nothing to fear from the further development of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic or from the programme of joint studies on which the two Governments are to embark. The major part of the programme of studies - dealing with citizenship rights, security matters, economic co-operation and measures to encourage mutual understanding - covers matters which self-evidently merit closer attention and further development.

As regards the other topic - which you single out in your letter - I cannot answer for what Mr. Haughey may have said about the studies of possible new institutional structures. But it is

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clear to me that such institutions, assuming that the two Governments reached agreement on them, would be intended solely to bring the United Kingdom and the Republic closer together in a friendly and fruitful relationship. Many other nations have found such institutions beneficial. Since it is part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland would, of course, be involved with any such new structures and would, I believe, benefit greatly from them.

In your letter you attribute special significance to the use of the word 'dissent' in the communique. You are wrong to do so. The fact that there are differences in Northern Ireland is hardly open to question. It is against that background that the communique recognises, as I am sure you do, the need for peace, reconciliation and stability in Northern Ireland. The development of relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic could have an important part to play in helping to meet that need.

Finally, let me stress that it remains a fundamental assumption of all Government thinking on these matters that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and will remain so unless its people and the Westminster Parliament decide otherwise. I could hardly have made that clearer than I have done in recent days both in the House of Commons and outside it.

Unless you see objection, I propose to make public the text of this letter at the same time as news of your appointment with me is released.

Yours sincerely,

Raymond Deane

The Reverend Ian Paisley, M.P.