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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

25 November 1981

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: POSSIBLE BILATERAL MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND DR. FITZGERALD

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 24 November about the Taoiseach's request for a bilateral during the European Council. The Prime Minister does not think that, given her pre-occupations as Chairman of the meeting, it will be possible to arrange a bilateral with Dr. FitzGerald. However, she naturally expects to be able to have a word with him during the informal discussions which will take place as the Council proceeds.

I spoke along these lines to the Irish Ambassador last night but you may like to convey the Prime Minister's regret more formally.

Copies of this letter to to Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Roderic Lyne, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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I don't think a bilateral is the place to discuss these problems. Regret not

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister

The simplest would be to say that as President it would not be easy for you to fix a bilateral in advance (you are not having any others) but that you hope to be able to have a private chat with the Taoiseach in the course of the meeting. Agree?

24 November 1981

Dear Michael,

I Ingl 24/XI

Anglo-Irish Relations: Possible Bilateral Meeting Between The Prime Minister and Dr Fitzgerald

You will have seen in Dublin telegram No 394 of 19 November an indication that the Taoiseach was likely to propose that the Prime Minister and he should have a bilateral meeting during the European Council on 26 - 27 November.

The Irish Embassy have now confirmed this proposal. They say that the Taoiseach has in mind only a short meeting to review developments since 6 November. They indicated that the Taoiseach is concerned that, if there were no meeting, it would be widely assumed in the Republic that this reflected a change in British policy following developments in Northern Ireland.

A short meeting would no doubt help to sustain the progress made in Anglo-Irish relations during the Prime Minister's meeting with Dr Fitzgerald on 6 November.

The Northern Ireland Office, who have been consulted at official level, see no objection to a meeting given that such bilateral meetings are a normal aspect of European Councils. However, the Prime Minister will clearly have little time available during the Council, and I imagine that for diary reasons alone it may not be possible to meet the Irish request. I should be grateful to know how we should reply to them.

A copy of this letter goes to Stephen Boys Smith at the Northern Ireland Office and to David Wright at the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever

Robert Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

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