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Prime Minister

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND NORTHERN IRELAND

You asked to be kept closely in touch with this matter.

2. We have established our view that the European Parliament has no business enquiring into the internal political affairs of Member States. We must hold firmly to that position. It is, however, clear that there is going to be a report. The European Democratic Group (EDG) attempted to persuade the Bureau of the European Parliament to stop it, but were voted down. The Political Affairs Committee of the Parliament appointed Neils Haagerup (an influential moderate Danish Liberal MEP) to prepare a report as the basis for future discussion. He has started work. Thanks to the work of the EDG and the firm reaction here to what was proposed, the Bureau and the Committee have both re-emphasised that the report should not trespass on constitutional matters. Haagerup himself has handled things in a helpful low-key way, ruling out public hearings and deferring plans to visit Dublin. Although Haagerup will have to take account of the views of his Committee, he is the most sympathetic rapporteur we could hope for and is open to influence. Since we cannot avoid a report altogether, it is worth trying to secure one which focuses primarily on economic and social matters which are the legitimate concern of the Community and as little as possible on political matters: and favourable or anodyne comment which strays across that border would be less awkward than critical comment.

3. Even in the interests of securing the more favourable report, I am not prepared to give the Committee any special facility of assistance which could compromise our basic position. They will get no more and no less than they would have received as individual MEPs who showed an interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland. The most effective direct influence we could have on Haagerup would be through an informal meeting. He is likely to respond well

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to such informal notice and on past form will be completely discreet about it. He knows Nick Scott and has discussed Northern Ireland issues with him in the past, and may well suggest a meeting next time he is in London. If he does so I propose to allow it to go ahead; it would not be right to refuse him a meeting simply because he had been appointed rappporteur when in view of his influence in the Parliament and his long-standing interest in Northern Ireland such a meeting would not have been refused before. Nick Scott would take the opportunity inter alia to direct his attention to the social and economic problems of Northern Ireland, which are within the Parliament's competence, and would emphasise that a reference in a report to these matters does not raise the same difficulty about interference as does discussion of political affairs.

4. Beyond that we will continue to maintain close contact with the EDG at Ministerial and official level and I will use any opportunities which come my way to explain our policies to moderate MEPS and other influential Europeans. As part of our general briefing effort we will ensure that UKREP has up-to-date written material for use as appropriate.

5. I will report further once we have a clearer idea how the report will turn out. At the moment we understand that Haagerup proposes to draft it over the summer in time for preliminary discussion by the Committee in September with a view to a plenary debate in the Parliament by January 1984. He is very alert to the implications of a UK General Election and has indicated that he would see that there were no developments during an election campaign.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to Francis Pym and Sir Robert Armstrong.

J.P.

4 May 1983

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24 MAY 1983



COMMUNICATIONS

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File



10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

9 May 1983

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 4 May on this matter.

While Mrs. Thatcher agrees in general with the approach proposed by Mr. Prior, she is opposed to the idea of a meeting between the Parliament's rapporteur and Mr. Nicholas Scott. She considers that such a meeting would compromise our basic position and be likely to lead to yet more requests for assistance.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

John Lyon, Esq.,  
Northern Ireland Office.

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