



## **FIRST INSTITUTIONAL MEETING**

### **BELFAST**

**MONDAY, 17 DECEMBER 2001**

## **JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

1. The first meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in Institutional Format was held in Belfast on Monday 17 December 2001.
2. The Northern Ireland Administration was represented by the Rt. Hon. David Trimble, MP, MLA, First Minister and Mr Mark Durkan, MLA, Deputy First Minister who co-chaired the meeting. The Irish Government was represented by Mr Brian Cowen, TD, Minister for Foreign Affairs.
3. The first meeting in this format offered a useful opportunity to take stock of the functioning of the Council in its first two years of operation.

### **Transport Sectoral Arrangements**

4. The Council noted the current position in this Sector. While it recognised that it had not been possible to hold more than one meeting in this format to date, it agreed that officials from both Administrations and the Joint Secretariat should explore the possibility of the next Sectoral meeting on Transport concentrating on road safety issues.

### **Irish Lights**

5. The Council noted the work undertaken and the complexities that have arisen in terms of pursuing a transfer of the existing functions of the Commissioners of Irish Lights to the Lights Agency. It agreed that officials should review the matter further and offer advice to the next meeting of the Council in Institutional Format.

## **North/South Co-operation outside the Current Programme of Work of the NSMC**

6. A paper setting out the current areas of co-operation between Departments and Agencies in both Administrations was noted. The Council agreed that officials from both Administrations and the Joint Secretariat should consider areas of co-operation further and offer advice to the next meeting of the Council in Institutional Format.

## **Cross Sectoral Issues**

7. The Council acknowledged progress to date in relation to issues of a cross-sectoral nature affecting the six North/South Bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd, which were established under the Agreement. These included areas such as accountability, reporting and financial arrangements, including pension schemes and audits and freedom of information.

## **Budgetary Provisions for North/South Bodies**

8. At the Plenary on 30 November 2001, the Council adopted an initial opinion on the budgetary provisions for the six North/South Bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd, for 2002, with indicative projections for 2003 and 2004. The total budget for the North South Bodies in 2002 will amount to £Stg54.37m/euro92.07m while the budget for Tourism Ireland Ltd will amount to £Stg26.78m/euro45.33m. At today's meeting Ministers recommended the budgetary provisions for 2002 and the contributions from the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, for the North/South Bodies, including Tourism Ireland Ltd.

## **European Union Issues**

9. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement provides that the Council is to consider the European dimension of relevant matters, including implementation of EU policies and programmes and proposals under consideration in the EU framework. Ministers had a preliminary and helpful exchange of views on how arrangements giving effect to this might be developed, noting the respective roles of the NI administration and the Council in the development of EU issues. The Council agreed that further work should be undertaken to consider the most effective way of pursuing its role under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in regard to the EU dimension. It agreed to establish a Working Group for this purpose, which would report back to the next meeting of the Council in Institutional Format.

## **Consultative Forum**

10. Ministers noted the work undertaken by a Working Group of officials from both Administrations set up following the Plenary meeting of NSMC in Dublin on 26 September 2000 to undertake a study which would give effect to the provision in paragraph 19 of Strand 2 of the Agreement. The Council agreed that the Independent Consultative Forum should be based on a formal interaction between structures representative of civil society in Northern Ireland and the South.
11. It also agreed that the Working Group should consult with the Northern Ireland Civic Forum and the Social Partners participating in the Central Review Mechanism of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness with a view to bringing forward detailed proposals for consideration at the next meeting of the Council in Plenary format in May.

## **Publication of First Annual Report of the North/South Ministerial Council**

12. After the Council meeting, Ministers launched the first Annual Report of the North/South Ministerial Council. The Report contains a commentary on the operation of the Council and the North/South Bodies during their first year of existence and underlines, in tangible terms, the potential across many sectors of co-operation for the benefit of all the people throughout the island.

## **Date of Next Meeting**

- 13 The Council agreed that its next meeting in Institutional Format will be in the South in April 2002.

## **Joint Secretariat**

**17 December 2001**