



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

SEVENTEENTH PLENARY SESSION

22 and 23 September 1998

Royal York Hotel, York

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

Tuesday 22 September 1998

The sitting was opened in public at 10.10 am at the Royal York Hotel, York, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

The Chairman welcomed Members to the 17th Plenary Session. He also welcomed observers from Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey, who would be taking part in the discussion relating to the future of the Body on Wednesday morning. He reminded Members that there was no parliamentary privilege for the proceedings of the Body.

1. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The Chairman announced that, pursuant to Rule 2(a), **Mr John Austin MP, Mr Matt Brennan TD, Jean Corston MP, Mr Séan Doherty TD, Lord Glentoran, Mr John Grogan MP, Helen Jackson MP, Mr David Tredinnick MP and Mr Robert Walter MP**, being Associate Members, had accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for all of the Session.

2. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business for the current Session be approved. - (**Mr Michael Mates**).

3. TIME LIMIT ON SPEECHES

The Chairman asked those who wished to speak in the debate on recent political developments to give their names to the Clerks in advance to help the Chair to balance British, Irish and other viewpoints. That did not mean, however, that those who did not give their names would not be allowed to speak. If all Members of the Body wished to speak, there would be a limit of two minutes for everyone. He proposed a maximum speaking time of four minutes, and ten minutes for those moving a Motion or concluding a debate.

Ordered, That in respect of the debate on Recent Political Developments, members opening and closing the debate shall speak for not more than ten minutes each and other members shall speak for not more than four minutes each.-(**The Chairman.**)

The sitting was suspended at 10.15 am.

The sitting was resumed at 10.35 am with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

4. ADDRESS BY THE RT HON DR MO MOWLAM MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Chairman introduced the Secretary of State, praised her dedication to bringing about a settlement, and invited her to address the Body.

Dr Mo Mowlam, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stressed that the Good Friday Agreement had been the result of a long process over many years and thanked the many distinguished members of the Body for their own part in making a settlement possible.

When she had last addressed the Plenary, in December 1997, there had been a different environment because of the uncertainty as to the future of the peace process. There had been a lot of progress and there was more work to do. She was certain that the two Governments working together had been the main engine which had pushed forward the process. During the hours leading up to the Agreement itself the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach had come to symbolise the close working relationship between the two Governments. She praised the commitment of the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach and emphasised the importance of their close relationship in building trust. She also praised the courage of the political leaders across the spectrum for their willingness to change long-held positions in order to move the peace process forward. However, the people themselves had been the driving force during the last year. The referendums had shown how strong the desire was to complete the peace process. This consent of the people both north and south of the Border marked a significant change in the situation from that which had existed in 1974. Finally, she acknowledged the hard work of the Civil Service in both jurisdictions in making rapid progress on implementing the Belfast Agreement.

She outlined the wide range of work which was going on to ensure that by 31 October all the different aspects of the Agreement would exist in shadow form, and asked the Body to pause and reflect on the amount which had already been achieved.

A tremendous amount of work had been done in the last six months. No-one had got everything that they wanted from the Good Friday Agreement: but everyone had got something. It was important that the different aspects of the Agreement should be taken forward in parallel, so that people would retain faith in the process. The hardest thing would be to rebuild the culture of confidence which had been damaged by events such as the bombing at Omagh; that would be a gradual process. Recent positive developments included Gerry Adams's comment that violence was a thing of the past, Martin McGuinness's appointment as Sinn Féinn's representative to meet the International Commission on Decommissioning, and the first meeting between Gerry Adams and David Trimble. The process of normalisation continued: there were now no troops on the streets of Belfast; from that day there would be none on the streets of South Derry; and two British Army battalions were being withdrawn from Northern Ireland. The LVF, the INLA and the so-called "Real IRA" had declared cease-fires. Time was needed to assess the validity of those cease-fires in both word and deed.

The development of further inter-parliamentary links was envisaged under the Agreement. Those would be links both between the Dáil and the Northern Ireland Assembly and between devolved institutions in Britain and Ireland. The Plenary

would be debating those issues later. In that context she welcomed the visitors from Guernsey, the Isle of Man, and Jersey. What was needed was stronger relationships among all the islands. Voices from the Scottish and Welsh assemblies would need to be heard in due course. Her personal view was that the Nordic Council model was one from which lessons could be learnt.

The Plenary would shortly be debating European and international involvement in the peace process. Individuals from overseas had made a huge contribution. Senator George Mitchell had done an incredible job behind the scenes, and had saved her from disaster more times than she liked to think. Harri Holkeri and John de Chastelain had given years of their lives to help the process. Individuals from a variety of countries were now assisting with policing, prisons and decommissioning. Nor had Bill and Hillary Clinton been fair-weather friends; when things had got tough they had been there to help, prepared to stay up at night and move the process forward. The European Regional Commissioner, Monika Wulf-Mathies, had done a splendid job, not only in securing Peace and Reconciliation money from Europe, but in encouraging the development of 26 district partnerships in Northern Ireland. Community representatives had learned to work together on those bodies to reach local decisions on the delivery of European funds. Those and similar groups had helped to build up relationships on the ground.

Political and financial support from across the world had helped the peace process to gel. The many visitors from both home and abroad had also supported the people of Northern Ireland and given them the confidence to move forward. The strength of organizations such as the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body had been crucial over the years. The co-operation of civil servants from the North and South had also enhanced the peace process and provided a good basis on which to take forward the institutions set up by the Good Friday Agreement.

Omagh was the worst of many tragedies which people present in the room had shared. What continued to drive her forward was the people. The people were determined not to be defeated. She had been to Omagh four times after the bombing, and once the initial shock had begun to pass she had detected a palpable determination not to allow the future to be destroyed. There would be more hurdles but they would be overcome. She highlighted the words of David Trimble at the second meeting of the Assembly, when he had said that he wanted "a pluralist Parliament for a pluralist future". Seamus Mallon had highlighted the "path to peace". On that path she wanted to walk shoulder to shoulder with all the other participants.

The Chairman thanked the Secretary of State for her address.

4. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

North-South institutions under the Belfast Agreement

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would report progress on the North-South institutions as provided for in the Belfast Agreement, with particular reference to the North-South Ministerial Council; and if she could assure the Body that such a Council would have meaningful powers.

Dr Mowlam hoped and believed that things would go according to the timetable. The political leaders wanted to have the Good Friday agreement up and running by 31 October. It was true that unhelpful comments had been made by all sides about the timetable but it was not constructive to dwell on them. All sides had also made positive comments about the same subjects.

Mr Charles Flanagan asked whether the Secretary of State agreed with Mr David Trimble that the North-South Ministerial Council should meet before the formation of the shadow Executive.

Dr Mowlam said that the Good Friday Agreement was open to a number of interpretations-and that caused many difficulties. There was much validity in an interpretation which said that the Executive should be in place before the Ministerial Council met. She did not much mind what happened first, so long as everything was in place by 31 October. That had to be the focus; and it was not helpful to come down on one side or the other.

Senator Helen Keogh said that she had been going to ask specifically about the options for the timing of meetings of the various bodies to be established under the Good Friday Agreement but thought that the Secretary of State had already given all the answers she could.

Progress towards establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would make a statement on the progress being made towards the establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly.

Dr Mowlam recalled that at the December Plenary people had told her that she would not be able to find an accommodation acceptable to all sides. Nevertheless, this had been achieved. At present, all sides felt that they had done enough and were waiting for others to move first. It was not an easy situation to resolve because people were likely to become more entrenched in their ideas if too much pressure was applied. She hoped that ideas for solutions would flourish in the Body's meetings.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) added the name of the Secretary of State to those who had made a great contribution to the progress being made in Northern Ireland. He asked how the committee system was developing and how those not satisfied with the agreement were participating.

Dr Mowlam could not be sure how much progress was being made and did not know how those who were not happy with the Agreement would respond to the

committee system. Those involved with setting up the committees had not had a great deal of time for effective work, but she was sure that progress would now be made.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) said that the formation of the Executive by the First Minister and others was vital. Mr Trimble was in an exposed position on decommissioning of arms and he would need to be helped if Sinn Féin was to be a part of the executive; and he wondered what assistance the Secretary of State could offer.

Dr Mowlam said that decommissioning had to happen. It was not a precondition for the formation of the Executive, but there had to be progress on all fronts. If there was no progress on an issue which mattered greatly to one particular group it could damage the prospects for the whole Agreement. However, it would not help for her to make statements about what others should do. Everyone involved in the process had to reach those agreements.

Mr William O'Brien (Normanton) asked the Secretary of State how the education programme that she had spoken about during her visit to the United States would work, and how it would help those involved in the process.

Dr Mowlam said that for thirty years the people of Northern Ireland had not been able to take the decisions that had the greatest impact on their lives. A number of programmes had been established to explain how the current system of government worked and to assist people in working with the Civil Service. Boston College had offered to provide residential programmes to help the process. The content had not yet been finalised as it was intended to seek the views of those who would participate.

The Border economy

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new initiatives were being taken to develop the Border economy, North and South, following the peace agreements.

Dr Mowlam said that the Department for Economic Development had developed good relations with government departments in the South over a number of years. She was currently spending much of her time trying to bring more investment to Northern Ireland, but she was anxious not to usurp the role of the North-South bodies.

Mr Dinny McGinley (Donegal South-West) said that unemployment in the Border counties was very high: in his area it was in the region of 20 per cent. The Irish Government had set up an initiative in Donegal. He asked whether a similar initiative would be established on the other side of the Border.

Dr Mowlam said that a number of initiatives were already in place. Whether any new initiatives would be forthcoming would depend on the views of those in the

area. In October David Trimble and Seamus Mallon would lead a tour of eleven cities in the United States to try to encourage investment. That would show the progress that had been made in bringing the community together.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) asked about the possibility of easing restrictions on the border between Fermanagh and Cavan, particularly on the Aghalane Bridge.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) asked whether there would be investment in cross- border

roads, in particular the Dublin to Derry road. He also asked about the prospects for Objective I status for Northern Ireland.

Dr Mowlam agreed with Mr Boylan about the crucial nature of cross-border economic development. Progress was being made in reducing the military presence on the Border but such progress had to be commensurate with the level of threat. Where security problems existed, a more cautious approach had to be adopted.

In reply to Mr Crawford's supplementary question, she did not believe that the A5 Derry-Dublin road formed part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's financial initiative for the Province. The availability of Objective I funding had been of great help at local level; and she would work with the Irish Government to see whether the funding could be retained. On another note, she urged delegates to think of what would be needed if Peace and Reconciliation Funding were lost.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) questioned the Secretary of State's comment that the military presence was related to the level of threat. He considered her comments to be merely a stock answer. In the Border area of South Armagh hopes for demilitarisation had not been realised, and the British military presence was seen locally as a threat to progress.

Dr Mowlam said she was doing her best to respond flexibly to a changing security situation. However, eight bombs had been stopped from crossing the Border in South Armagh, and because of the potential danger she did not intend to respond in a way that could put lives at risk.

Anti-terrorist measures

Mrs Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations she had received on the creation of anti-terrorist measures. She expressed her unease at the use of the law on corroboration and asked what details could be given of the review of its operation.

Dr Mowlam replied that there had been a major response by both Governments to the Omagh bomb. She stressed the degree of co-operation between them on bringing in legislation which worked effectively on both sides of the Border. There was a need to be tough in proportion to the threat which existed. The best way to

beat terrorism lay in talks, but those few individuals who wished to destroy the peace process had to be stopped. The use of a statement by a senior police officer to secure a conviction was subject to safeguards: the legislation came within the scope of the European Convention on Human Rights; the judicial process would be followed; and there would be a six-monthly review of whether the legislation was still necessary. The legislation had not been a knee-jerk response to Omagh but was necessary to stop fringe groups from destroying the peace process.

Mrs Fyfe thanked Dr Mowlam for that comprehensive answer, but sought reassurance on how the review would be carried out.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) said there was worry in Nationalist circles in Northern Ireland as to how the new laws would be operated by the RUC.

Dr Mowlam said she hoped the new laws would never be used, but if they were, they would apply to a very limited number of people. An annual report would be laid before both Houses of Parliament, and the operation of the legislation would be subject to independent review, details of which had yet to be worked out.

Mr Ellis hoped that the terms of reference of the review would be circulated to all members of the Body.

Dr Mowlam said that that would be done.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) said that judges north and south of the Border, and English judges, should liaise to achieve greater consistency of sentences.

Dr Mowlam said that this was a very interesting point, which she was sure the Assembly would consider.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) asked whether Dr Mowlam could clarify her comment that conviction of membership of a proscribed organisation could be secured if the word of a senior police officer were corroborated from two or three other sources. Was it not the case that only one source would be sufficient?

Dr Mowlam replied that that was a matter on which judges would decide, not Ministers.

Cross-Border economic and social development

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she agreed with the comments of the Taoiseach, at the Body's 16th Plenary Session in Ballyconnell, that economic progress was needed in the Border counties, North and South, to overcome the disadvantage of their historical situation and to reverse the negative impact of the Border and the security situation on realising the region's full potential; what programmes of additional investment, if any, to facilitate cross-Border economic and social development were under way or being considered; and if she would make a statement.

Dr Mowlam said that there was already considerable cross-Border cooperation. It would be up to the North-South Council to decide whether one of the implementing bodies should relate to that issue.

Mr Smith urged the two Governments to tackle the grave problems arising from lack of infrastructure development and inward investment in the Border counties, and in particular west of the Bann.

Dr Mowlam said the British Government was doing everything it could to secure inward investment across Northern Ireland as a whole. She was well aware of the demand for investment west of the Bann. Policies aimed at tackling deprivation and social need would help to address that problem. She undertook to compare the British Government's policies in that regard with those of the Republic to see what lessons could be learnt.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) asked Dr Mowlam to give sympathetic consideration to the proposal from farming communities for an increased milk quota for Border areas.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth) said that the establishment of a more uniform veterinary regime north and south of the Border for the control of animal diseases would bring great benefits.

Dr Mowlam said that she had taken note of those comments. Much cross-Border cooperation already took place, but there was scope for even more.

Recovery of the bodies of those murdered by terrorists

The Chairman called on Mr Barnes to ask question 6.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West), on a point of order, asked whether he could put question 15, which dealt with the same topic as question 6.

The Chairman said that he would call Mr Currie to ask a supplementary.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress had been made in efforts to persuade the Provisional IRA to identify the whereabouts of the bodies of a dozen people who had been abducted and murdered but whose remains had never been returned to their families for decent burial.

Dr Mowlam said that the two Governments did not ignore the pain those families had suffered. They encouraged the groups concerned to come forward with information. Progress was beginning to be made, and the issue was high up on her agenda.

Mr Barnes said that an expression of sorrow was needed from the Provisional IRA both for the original murders and for their long-standing failure to supply information on the whereabouts of the bodies.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) said that for the families involved the grieving process and the process of coming to terms with disappearance of their loved ones had been terribly delayed. He noted that in 1994 the Provisional IRA had made a commitment to address the issue but nothing had happened.

Dr Mowlam stressed that she never forgot the pain of the families involved. The Government was doing what it could to show that it understood. Victims' units and hot-lines for counselling went hand in hand with the programme of release of prisoners.

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East) asked whether the Secretary of State would agree that there was no conceivable reason for delay in finding the bodies. It was an outrage that no progress was being made.

Dr Mowlam agreed with Mr Mates.

Liaison between the RUC and the Gardaí

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she would make a statement on liaison between the RUC and the Gardaí.

Dr Mowlam commended the work of both police forces. They had a strong record of co-operation and met regularly. Both forces made effective use of information technology to supplement these meetings. Like many institutions on the island of Ireland they were in transition, and she was always mindful of the pain which the security forces had had to suffer in the past.

Mr Home Robertson stressed that there were still people, weapons and know-how around which made for a difficult security situation. He asked whether she would invite the Gardaí to appoint a regular liaison officer for Belfast and institute a similar arrangement for an RUC officer to go to Dublin.

Dr Mowlam agreed that there was a need for continuing vigilance. However, both forces guarded their independence fiercely and it would not be helpful for her to try to tell them how to run their affairs. If liaison officers were needed she was sure that they would be appointed.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Tipperary North) quoted an Irish proverb, saying in Gaelic "you would be remembered and honoured if none of us this morning had said even one word". He thanked the Secretary of State for her frankness and willingness to share her views with the Body. He also paid tribute to Mr McNamara, who had been uniquely qualified to speak on behalf of the Body in his earlier tribute to the Secretary of State because he had some 30 years experience of Northern Ireland affairs. Dr Mowlam's contribution was at the pinnacle of the personal relationships

that had been established in Ireland in recent years, but the Body also had a real dynamic and an important part to play in supporting the work of the politicians. Statesmen of other nations had also played a part in giving the young people of Northern Ireland a future released from the inhibitions of the past.

The sitting was suspended at 12.10 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 12.30 pm with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

The Chairman called on the Body to pay tribute to the victims of Omagh and all victims of violence.

The Plenary stood in silence for one minute in memory of the victims of the Omagh bombing and of all victims of violence.

5. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Motion made and Question proposed:

That the Body welcomes the approval of the Belfast Agreement by majorities of 71 per cent in Northern Ireland and 94 per cent in the Republic in the two referendums, which thereby mandated the two Governments fully to implement the Agreement; is pleased that parties supporting the Agreement gained a majority of seats in the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly and strongly believes that the implementation of the Agreement will help to bring about a new era of peace, stability and co-operation; expresses its revulsion at the atrocity committed in Omagh; commends the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on their positive response in the immediate aftermath of the Omagh atrocity and notes the initiative, taken by both Governments, which was endorsed by large majorities in both Parliaments; and utterly repudiates and condemns any continuation of acts of violence from whatever source.-(**Mr Charles Flanagan.**)

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), moving the Motion, expressed his appreciation to the people of both parts of Ireland for the massive endorsement they had given to the Belfast Agreement in both the referendums, and also in electing pro-Agreement candidates for the Assembly. He wished the Assembly well.

The Belfast Agreement contained provisions which were unpalatable to the participants, so they would all have to be prepared to compromise. David Trimble and Seamus Mallon had emerged as beacons of peace and Seamus Mallon had rightly said that Unionism and Nationalism would have to underpin each other in the future. It was obvious therefore that Unionism and Nationalism would have to change radically if the Agreement was to succeed. The creation of a common aspiration was necessary, and he pointed to the example of the European Union, which he regarded as the world's greatest co-operative achievement of the century. An edifice of co-operation had to be constructed so that physical conflict between Unionists and Nationalists would be as unthinkable as a conflict between present-day France and Germany.

He reminded the Body that all participants to the Belfast Agreement had reaffirmed their commitment to decommissioning. Progress had been made in implementing other provisions of the Agreement, such as prisoner releases, and that progress had to be reflected by movement on decommissioning. He drew attention to the provisions of paragraph 4 of page 24 of the Agreement and emphasised that decommissioning could not simply be seen as the last piece of the jigsaw.

Following the Omagh bombing, the Real IRA had to be deprived of all social acceptability. Education had a part to play; and he called on Irish Members, in particular, to ensure that another generation was not seduced by the appeal of violence.

He drew attention to the progress which had been made by parties which until recently would not even share the same room; but he emphasised that it was now time for the representatives of Unionism and Nationalism to come together. Portadown represented, in microcosm, the whole dreadful problem in Northern Ireland. Hostility between the parties in Portadown had bred a grim undercurrent of naked sectarianism and the situation could only be resolved by the community leaders coming together and talking. In conclusion, he called for flexibility on all sides if the goal of permanent peace was to be realised.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) welcomed the Motion. President Clinton deserved praise for having kept his campaign promise to appoint a special representative in Northern Ireland. At the time this had been greeted with horror by the British Government, but Senator Mitchell had won the support of all sides in the way he had done his job. Also deserving praise was the large part of the Irish diaspora in the United States, led by Senator Edward Kennedy, which had steered clear of the men of violence and had supported peaceful methods of achieving change. The SDLP likewise had never flirted with the men of violence. It was a measure of the success of the Good Friday Agreement that Seamus Mallon, the chief negotiator on the Nationalist side, was now deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland.

Overwhelming majorities in the referendums North and South had ensured that the position and traditions of Unionists were safeguarded. That paved the way towards implementing the aspiration of Wolfe Tone that there should be "neither Protestant, Catholic nor Dissenter, but all united under the one name of Irishmen".

There had to be an understanding of the very difficult position of David Trimble and the pro-Assembly Unionists. He welcomed the covert movement by Sinn Féin to enable David Trimble to claim that progress was being made on issues such as decommissioning. Mr Trimble had shown courage in supporting the Agreement and working with Seamus Mallon. The idea of "no surrender, not an inch" had been abandoned. Dr Mowlam had been right to say that there would be further setbacks to the peace process. The Omagh atrocity had been terrible, but it had achieved on the Nationalist side what the murder of the Quinn boys had achieved on the Unionist side: a recognition that there was no alternative to the way forward set by the Agreement.

The Chairman appealed to Members to keep their speeches brief.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) welcomed the progress made since the last Plenary. The two referendums had given an overwhelming directive to both Governments to implement the Agreement. There could now be no scope for renegotiation. Decommissioning was a concern, especially to Unionists, but it had been blown out of proportion. It was a political, not a security issue, given how easy it was to replace weapons of war. He was glad to hear Dr Mowlam's comments on demilitarisation. There had also been positive moves by Sinn Féin. He congratulated David Trimble on his co-operation with Seamus Mallon, and supported Mr McNamara's comments on the honourable record of the SDLP in rejecting violence.

The Omagh bomb had been appalling, but the resolute joint action by the British Prime Minister and the Taoiseach had had a stabilising effect in making clear that those responsible would be pursued and that the agreements would not be derailed. He was encouraged by the setting up of the police commission and the review of the criminal justice system. He wished to see the police in Northern Ireland develop into an unarmed force, operating with the consent of the local community as the Garda Síochána did in the Republic. Finally, he commented that the Body had played a positive role in the peace process. He hoped that elected representatives of the two sovereign Parliaments would continue to meet in an appropriate forum, possibly linked to the British-Irish Council.

The sitting was suspended at 1.05 pm.

The sitting was resumed in public at 2.45 pm with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

5. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: resumed debate

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) stressed the importance of leadership in the peace process. He paid particular tribute to the role of President Clinton and also to John Hume and the leadership of Sinn Féin. The momentum of the process had to be continued and the Executive formed swiftly. David Trimble was in a difficult position and his difficulties had to be recognised by all sides. It also had to be remembered that decommissioning was not a straightforward issue and that, perhaps, a token decommissioning would be a sufficient signal of good intent to get the process under way. He welcomed the appointment of Martin McGuinness to liaise between Sinn Féin and the decommissioning body. He hoped that Sinn Féin would give the necessary impetus for the Executive to be established sooner rather than later and that its participation would be an antidote to the non-participation of other republican groups outside the peace process.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) stressed that all parties had committed themselves to the Agreement. The Executive needed to be in place for the all-Ireland Council to be established. Sinn Féin claimed its seats on the Executive as of right; and any attempts to resurrect decommissioning as a condition of participation were not tenable. Sinn Féin would fulfil all its undertakings and David

Trimble had to do his part also. He made clear the opposition of Sinn Féin to the recent anti-terrorist legislation, which he described as draconian. The effective response to Omagh would be the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. On the subject of prisoner release, he drew attention to five Republican prisoners who should be returned home. In conclusion, he supported the Motion as drafted.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) said that the Motion was a start on the road to peace. There were appalling disparities in sentences for terrorist activities between the Republic, Northern Ireland and Great Britain; and it was vital for judicial bodies to talk to one another to produce common sentencing policies. He compared the problem to policies on sentencing for drug offences, which also needed greater coordination. The Good Friday Agreement could lead to a wider road towards peace.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West) said that the strength of the Body and of the peace process lay in the presence of the sovereign Parliaments at the negotiating table. Three words summed up the challenge facing the peace process: implementation, implementation and implementation. He welcomed Sinn Féin's statement that the conflict was over and also welcomed the recent legislative response to events in Omagh. He agreed with Dr Mowlam that decommissioning should not be used as an obstacle to block progress. Martin McGuinness's presence on the decommissioning body was a great sign of Sinn Féin's commitment to the peace process. There had to be a full demilitarisation of the Six Counties. Token gestures would not be enough. He welcomed David Trimble's brave pledge that the Assembly would be a pluralist parliament for a pluralist people, no longer a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) said that the referendums in May had produced more convincing majorities than he had expected. He had some reservations about the Motion. In particular, he could not commend the legislation introduced in both countries some weeks earlier; he had voted against it at Westminster. The way to defeat terrorism was not through knee-jerk proposals to curb human rights. Internment in the early 1970s had aroused much sympathy for those who claimed to be engaging in an armed struggle and had acted as a recruiting sergeant for the IRA. He recognised that the current legislation fell short of internment. Nonetheless, the way to defeat terrorists was to ensure they had no support in their own communities. The people on the island of Ireland had voted overwhelmingly for peace. Omagh was a tragic setback, but it would not derail the peace process.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he supported the Motion in full. Vast numbers of people had turned out to vote for the proposals of the two Governments. He proposed that the Body should pass a vote of congratulations to its former member, Seamus Mallon, on his appointment as Deputy First Minister. Congratulations were also due to David Trimble, who had proved more courageous in advancing the peace process than had once seemed likely. He hoped that Mr Trimble's party would soon take up its seats on the Body.

He was slightly worried about Mr Temple-Morris's earlier comments. All aspects of the Agreement had to be implemented and there had to be some verifiable movement with regard to the handover of arms. On the part of the vast majority of peaceable God-fearing people in the island of Ireland there existed as never before a corporate will to work together. Finally, in speaking of civil liberties, it should not be forgotten that the terrorists who killed people with their bombs showed no respect for the civil liberties of their victims.

Senator Joe Costello seconded the proposal for a vote of thanks to Seamus Mallon for his work in the Body. He felt that the Motion could have been more specific in its expression of thanks. President Clinton's contribution had been immense, and all political parties had helped to establish the Agreement, not just the British and Irish Governments. The people of the North and South of Ireland and of Great Britain had also contributed and had shown their revulsion at the events at Omagh. There had been incredible progress over the last six months. The meeting between David Trimble and Gerry Adams would have been unthinkable six months earlier. Decommissioning should be seen not as a precondition for participation in the Executive, but in the light of the general demilitarisation of the North of Ireland, including the withdrawal of troops. It was also important for progress on the British-Irish Council to be in parallel with the establishment of the North-South bodies.

Mr David Tredinnick (Bosworth) said that he had been struck by Dr O'Hanlon's remarks on the symbolism of decommissioning. Terrorist weapons could not be audited, but the symbolism of some of those weapons being handed over would be of enormous value. He had served in Northern Ireland in the British Army, and some of his friends had been killed or injured. It would also assist the process of reconciliation if those who knew to said where those who had disappeared were buried, or at least gave some indication of their fate. The speed of change in Northern Ireland should not be underestimated. What was the best of the Agreement for some was the worst for others; but it had to be taken as a whole and could not be unstitched.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford) said that the peace process required not only courage but also generosity. All sides had to be aware of the problems of others. Vacuums were dangerous, and the process had to continue. Some issues still needed to be addressed, such as the situation in Portadown and punishment beatings. It was imperative for the Executive to be in place by the end of October. It was, however, only to be a shadow Executive and so changes could still be made. It was important to learn lessons from the experience of others, as Waterford had learned from York about the protection of the heritage.

Lord Glentoran said that there had been a satisfactory referendum and mostly satisfactory elections for the Assembly. Now the difficult stage had been entered upon. It was essential to make best use of the current momentum for peace as it was clear that that momentum could not be maintained indefinitely.

There were a number of concerns. The emergency legislation which had been passed during the recall of Parliament was not good. Parades still posed a significant problem and the Parades Commission needed to be kept under review. There was also the matter of the police review being carried out by Chris Patten. Most worrying was the need for the formation of the Executive by the end of October. It was vital for all those with political influence throughout Ireland to do what they could to ensure that the Executive was formed with David Trimble at its head and with the backing of the Protestant community. Without that backing there would be significant problems.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) expressed his delight at the result of the referendums which, in his view, had given greater authority to the new institutions than had ever before been given to institutions on the island of Ireland. He welcomed Sinn Féin's commitment on decommissioning and believed that Sinn Féin meant what it said. Both the appointment of Martin McGuinness and the condemnation of the Omagh bombing by Sinn Féin were significant. He agreed with other speakers on the need to assist David Trimble, but stressed that the full implementation of the Agreement, including setting up an Executive, was required. For their part, Republicans could help the process by making progress on decommissioning and especially by destroying stocks of Semtex. Finally, he expressed his anxiety over the situation in Portadown, where continued intimidation could erode support for democratic politicians.

Mr Robert Walter (Dorset North) said that, as a new Member of the House of Commons, he had not failed to notice that MPS from Northern Ireland spoke only on Northern Ireland business. He had visited Belfast in May with the House of Commons Health Committee and had been struck by the way in which community leaders had control of significant budgets. Despite their good intentions, such community leaders could not take the place of local politicians. For the moment, they were representatives of their communities-but they were not legitimate representatives. He hoped that progress on the Assembly would restore to the people of Northern Ireland the parliamentary services of their MPS.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North) felt that the Agreement provided a platform from which to go forward. Omagh had been a watershed in the fight against terrorism and there could be no hiding places for terrorists in future. There were still many obstacles to achieving a full peace and he warned against complacency. In that regard he saw a continuing role for the Body in ensuring that the spotlight was kept on problems relating to Northern Ireland.

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East) felt that the debate had been temperate and at times even bland. He fully supported Mr Flanagan's warning that intolerance remained just below the surface in parts of Northern Ireland, and concurred with Mr McNamara's view of the crucial role played by the SDLP in opposing violence throughout the troubles.

Turning to the anti-terrorist legislation which had recently been passed, he shared the doubts of many as to what had been done but people had expected action in the wake of Omagh and it had been necessary to respond to such widespread concern. He doubted whether any prosecutions would result from the legislation. He was astonished that Mr Temple-Morris had said earlier in the debate that a token decommissioning would suffice.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) corrected Mr Mates's interpretation of what he had said. He had intended to convey the view that David Trimble needed a gesture from the Republican side, and therefore wanted movement on decommissioning to begin.

Mr Mates replied that decommissioning had to be total. The appointment of Martin McGuinness as Sinn Féin's liaison person for decommissioning was hard to interpret. Only five months previously, Martin McGuinness had been quoted as saying "not one bullet".

He fully endorsed the words of Lord Glentoran. David Trimble had to be given help because he would soon be in great difficulty if no move was made by Sinn Féin on decommissioning. He regretted that Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin was not in the room to hear him speak. Dr Mowlam had said that the parties to the talks needed space: but one man's space could be another man's ring-fence. If Sinn Féin were given space it would prove difficult for other parties to keep their membership on board in taking forward the peace process

The return of the bodies of those murdered by the IRA was not in the Agreement, but there was no reason to hold back and increase the grief of the families. Why could not Sinn Féin let the location of the bodies be known? If there were difficulties, the reasons for those difficulties should be made known.

In conclusion, he warned that 31 October would be a very difficult time for David Trimble if nothing was done by Sinn Féin. If he failed to continue to command the respect of his supporters there was no-one else to step into his shoes. He was very glad to support the Motion, but hoped that Members would not go away complacent. There were very real difficulties ahead; and at present, the wheels on the vehicle of peace were not turning in harmony.

The Question was agreed to.

The text of the Resolution is as follows:

That the Body welcomes the approval of the Belfast Agreement by majorities of 71 per cent in Northern Ireland and 94 per cent in the Republic in the two referendums, which thereby mandated the two Governments fully to implement the Agreement; is pleased that parties supporting the Agreement gained a majority of seats in the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly and strongly believes that the implementation of the Agreement will help to bring about a new era of peace,

stability and co-operation; expresses its revulsion at the atrocity committed in Omagh; commends the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on their positive response in the immediate aftermath of the Omagh atrocity and notes the initiative, taken by both Governments, which was endorsed by large majorities in both Parliaments; and utterly repudiates and condemns any continuation of acts of violence from whatever source.

6. ROAD AND RAIL LINKS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

Motion made and Question proposed:

That the Body notes the report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs {Doc. 58} on matters relating to the Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations. - **(Mr Séamus Kirk)**.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth), moving the Motion, noted that the Good Friday Agreement involved the identification of matters where increased social and economic co-operation was possible. The Committee felt that its Report was particularly timely in that context. Seventy-seven years of divergent transport policy North and South had had a damaging impact on the flow of traffic on the island of Ireland. Much effort would be needed to develop cross-Border corridors, other than the established Belfast-Dublin route. The increase in cross-Border traffic which followed the establishment of peace highlighted the potential for growth in this area. The upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast rail link had already shown a staggering increase in passenger numbers. He drew attention to the recommendations in paragraphs 88 to 93 of the report, and urged the Assembly to accept the draft Resolution in paragraph 94.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he supported the report. Under the Good Friday Agreement, cross-Border relations would become much more important than in the past. There was a need to upgrade the Donegal to Derry road and the N2/A5. He understood that money available to the Northern Ireland Roads Authority had been curtailed. Perhaps money saved from security could be spent on upgrading roads.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the Report was excellent. The ceasefire had led to the re-opening of many Border roads, and all were now open except the main road from Dublin to Enniskillen. All the good roads in Ireland emanated from Dublin like the spokes of a wheel. There was a need for a major national primary road running east-west, perhaps from Dundalk to Sligo. That would open up both the Border region and the West to economic and social development. The Northern Ireland Office had claimed that it was not necessary to improve the Dundalk-Newry road; that and other decisions needed to be reconsidered.

Mrs Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) said that as a member of the Committee she could strongly endorse the report. She drew attention to paragraphs 87 and 91.

Good public transport was essential to people's well-being and to a healthy democratic society. She hoped the two Governments would respond to that recommendation.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he could also wholeheartedly support the report. There was a particular need to upgrade the A5 on the north side of the Border and the N55 on the south side. There was close co-ordination at local level between local authorities North and South, but such cooperation was less evident between the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland and the National Roads Authority in the South. They could learn from the good local practice. He endorsed the need for Northern Ireland and the Border region to retain Objective 1 status.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Tipperary North) said that he had been privileged to accompany the Committee on their fact finding visits in Ireland last June. The Committee had left Omagh with a very warm feeling of confidence in the healthy local co-operation within the District Council. That underlined how atrocious the terrorist intrusion upon that co-operation had been. The Assembly would wish to convey its best wishes to Omagh District Council in its work to rebuild its community.

Mr William O'Brien (Normanton) asked if there had been any discussion on the export of freight to continental Europe. That had great significance for the economy of the island of Ireland.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) associated himself with Mr O'Kennedy's remarks concerning Derry and Omagh. He assured Mr O'Brien that the question of exports to continental Europe had been raised, but the subject for discussion was specifically matters within the island of Ireland.

There was a lack of co-ordination between the two Governments. Transport plans were not discussed in any detailed way by Ministers or senior officials. Lord Dubs had said that he would be prepared to discuss strategic issues before the Executive took over responsibility. It was clear that partition had completely altered patterns of transport. Decisions had often been taken as if the other jurisdiction did not exist. There had been a great deal of consideration of Belfast to Dublin routes but there had been nothing similar for the West of Ireland, from Derry to Galway and Limerick. One other issue that had been raised with the Committee was that, because the island of Ireland was small, roads infrastructure should not be developed according to markets but in relation to the viability of communities. He hoped that the report would be sent to all those who had assisted the Committee in its work.

The Chairman said that the report would be made available to those people.

The Question was agreed to.

The text of the Resolution is as follows:

That the Body notes the report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc 58] on matters relating to the Road and Rail Links on the Island of Ireland, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

7. INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN UNION INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PEACE PROCESS

Motion made and Question proposed:

That the Body notes the report of the Committee on International and European Affairs [Doc. 59] on matters relating to International and European Union Involvement with the Peace Process, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations. - **(Mr Michael Colvin)**.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey), moving the Motion, said that the Committee had aimed to look at the past, present and future of international involvement and at its negative and positive effects. That had proved to be too ambitious. The Committee had done little about the past or the future, and it had decided that it would be unproductive to look at negative aspects of foreign aid, such as Noraid and Libyan arms. The Committee had decided to monitor the positive overseas contributions so that it could return to the subject in future when it felt there was a need.

It had been important to examine funding issues. The report concentrated on EU funding. The Committee noted that funds were not guaranteed after 1999 and it was important for both Governments to do their utmost to ensure that Objective I status was maintained.

It had been noted that the Council of Europe was equipped to monitor changes, but the Committee had concluded that the British and Irish Governments considered the peace process to be a domestic issue. There was some embarrassment within the two Governments that two long-established democracies had taken so long to reach that point. There was no doubt that President Clinton had had a great influence on the process and had given it momentum. He also agreed with an earlier speaker that it would be appropriate for a bridge between the North and the South to be named after Senator Mitchell.

The Committee had looked at the Nordic Council and had been impressed by the way it was structured and operated. If a similar model was to be used for the British-Irish Council there should be a parliamentary as well as a governmental strand. The Committee had also looked at the possibility of Ireland joining the Commonwealth. That would be a matter for the Irish Government, but it was noted that Commonwealth was no longer a British institution-as the recent accession of Mozambique showed.

In conclusion, he emphasised the importance of funding and said that there had to be regular reviews of the division of funds between Northern Ireland and the Border counties.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire) said that the Committee had learnt that the Commonwealth had not been involved with the peace process because it had not been asked. The Commonwealth did perform a role in such disputes, but the reason for its non-involvement could be that Ireland was not a member. The Committee had been told that the question of an application for Ireland to join was a matter for the Irish Government, but that such an application was likely to be well received.

The Nordic Council had no impact on the sovereignty of its member States and it had some similarities with the Body. Those were issues which should be taken into account when the form of the British-Irish Council was being decided.

Finance was a matter of great importance to which much more attention should be paid in the future. All the Committees of the Body needed to examine where the resources for bread-and-butter issues in Northern Ireland came from. Currently it received no special funding for development from the British Government.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) asked where the Body would be in five years' time. The devolution of power to bodies such as the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly would not remove the common interest which all would share in obtaining funding for Objective I areas. He drew attention to his own constituency, near Liverpool, which was just as much in need of such funds as the islands which currently received it. Parliamentary input would still be needed from ordinary backbenchers, and the possibility that European funds might be withdrawn would give a further dimension to the need for continuing unity of purpose.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) stressed the need for even distribution of the funds from the International Fund for Ireland [IFI]. Unionists should become involved in those discussions to ensure that their communities could be strengthened with the additional funding that might be available to them. The Committee should encourage the continuation of EU funding to cement the peace process. Funds which were currently devoted to the Northern counties should be redeployed in some measure to the Border counties. The criteria for allocating money should not be based primarily on population statistics.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) highlighted the international contribution made by Europe and by the Irish diaspora largely based in America. He suggested that the future would see much greater competition for EU money, and he agreed with paragraph 24 of the report, which did not expect that Ireland would receive any more special EU support as a result of the peace process. That was a penalty of success.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) acknowledged the contribution of EU and international funds to the economic development of the island of Ireland. He stressed the need to count twelve Border counties and their common interests rather than distinguishing between the six north of the Border and the six to the south.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) complimented the Chairman on the report. Dr Mowlam had that day sounded a warning bell of withdrawal of EU funds. If investment levels were to decline any progress made could soon be reversed. The donor countries to the IFI needed to be encouraged to contribute for another ten to twenty years, and it would be for the Body to act as guardian of the progress made so far. He suggested that the next Plenary Session might be attended by representatives of the new Assembly.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) registered his appreciation of the financial aid which helped the economic regeneration of the deprived Border areas. He felt that paragraph 52 of the report underplayed the trouble that would ensue if Objective I status was removed from those areas. Such a step would continue the economic imbalance within Ireland and inflict further deprivation on the areas that had suffered most. The consequences would be dire; and he suggested that the text of the report might be amended to reflect the gravity of the situation.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) referred to Mr Barnes's points on the Commonwealth and suggested that the Body should remain open to discussions with Commonwealth representatives. No-one should underestimate the Body's contribution to the peace process. The occasionally bland nature of the debate would, he hoped, be an indication of the way in which day to day matters were returning to the politics of Northern Ireland.

Mr Crawford had referred to Protestant suspicions of the IFI and its relationship to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It was well known however that such senior Unionist figures as John Taylor had made applications for IFI funding. It was to the IFI's credit that the criteria for community projects had primarily required a strong cross-community element in project bids. Other speakers had referred to the division of funding between counties north and south of the Border and he drew attention to conclusion number 4 of the report, which called for a regular review of such concerns. Mr Temple-Morris had referred to the role of the Irish diaspora, and it was important to remember that much of the US funding was raised as a means of providing Irish-Americans with an alternative to funding violence in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, he stressed that the new political institutions in Northern Ireland would only be successful if they were able to deal with social and economic problems. The continuation of EU funding was therefore essential, and if it was withdrawn the shortfall would have to be made up internally.

The Question was agreed to.

The text of the Resolution is as follows:

That the Body notes the report of the Committee on International and European Affairs [Doc. 59] on matters relating to International and European Union Involvement with the Peace Process, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

The sitting was adjourned at 5.20 pm till to-morrow.

Wednesday 23 September 1998

The sitting was opened in public at 9.10 am at the Royal York Hotel, York, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

8. THE FUTURE OF THE BODY

Motion made and Question proposed:

That the Body takes note of the paper entitled *The future of the Body* [Doc. 60]. - **(Mr Michael O'Kennedy)**.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Tipperary North), moving the Motion, said that the Report could be described in European terms as "an angel paper", in other words a paper for which no one claimed paternity. It was meant merely as a thought-provoking analysis, and did not reflect the views of any particular individual. It addressed the need for change to which the Secretary of State had referred the previous day. In recent years British-Irish relations had come a long way from some of the grim and harsh realities of the past. The Body had been very successful in enabling politicians from both the Oireachtas and Westminster to meet together formally and informally and it had contributed powerfully to mutual understanding. It had exercised a very constructive influence on both Parliaments and both Governments. He felt sure that inter-parliamentary co-operation between the two sovereign Parliaments would continue to play an important role in the development of relationships within those islands.

The Good Friday Agreement had been carefully negotiated as an interlocking package: it was not an *à la carte* menu. The Secretary of State had rightly emphasised the need to ensure that parallel progress was made on all the commitments contained in the Agreement. It was important that the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies, when constituted, should contribute to the debate on future arrangements.

He expected the issue of the future of the Body to engage it over several Plenary Sessions. The Belfast Agreement stated that the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas would consider developing a joint parliamentary forum under Strand 2. Under Strand 3, which dealt with the establishment of the British-Irish Council, the

Agreement stated that elected institutions would be encouraged to develop inter-parliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Change was necessary if the Body was to reflect the new political realities. Change also presented an opportunity to ensure that, as the representatives of the two sovereign Parliaments, the Body would continue to be part of the effort towards building a better society in all communities.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) saw the Body as a parliamentary extension of the political decisions made by governments. He was concerned, however, that two separate proposals were being confused. The first, the Council of the Isles, was a natural consequence of devolution in the UK, and it was expected that the sovereign State of Ireland would be invited to participate in the Council as it saw fit. The second proposal, that of building on the Body under Strand 3, was misconceived. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body represented two sovereign Parliaments and he did not see any way of merging its function with those of devolved parliaments and assemblies which were not sovereign. The proposal for a Council of the Isles had been put into the Belfast Agreement at the request of Unionist parties. He suspected that during the negotiations which led to the Agreement, the two Governments began to fear that there might be a plethora of institutions and hoped to put a brake on the process by suggesting the merging of the Body with the Council of the Isles. He warned against being merged into a process of which the Body did not form part, and he stressed that the phraseology used in the Agreement was not binding on the Body. The involvement of the Channel Islands in institutions such as the Body was long overdue, as indeed devolution for Scotland and Wales was overdue. In conclusion, he said that two distinct matters had wrongly been brought together under Strand 3 and they should have been kept apart.

Senator Paschal Mooney concentrated his comments on squaring the circle of representation in a reconstituted Body. He suggested that an unfair balance would be created if there was a large representation from the constituent parts of the United Kingdom and a relatively small Irish representation. The Body had been constituted to represent two sovereign Parliaments; and this principle should not be undermined. Although he welcomed devolution he felt that the paper was more than kind to the Scots and the Welsh and that their representation should be more modest.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) stressed that the Body had been set up to represent the views of two Parliaments. Playing the numbers game of calculating permutations of representatives should not be allowed to hide that point. The five parliamentary bodies would soon be in place and all their views would need to be taken into account. For the other islands, the Nordic Council might be a good pattern to follow.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) made a distinction between the two parliamentary assemblies at present represented in the Body, which were sovereign, and the three new assemblies which would not have sovereign powers. The Body should be maintained as currently constituted with the addition of a Council of the Isles. That

situation should continue for at least five to ten years until everyone had had a chance to see how the new assemblies were developing.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North) sympathized with what Mr Temple-Morris and Senator Mooney had said, but said that the Body had to take account of political reality. It had been designed to break down barriers and suspicions between the British and the Irish. Members had discovered very quickly that they could have sensible discussions on all relevant matters. However, the Northern Ireland Assembly would take over many tasks which were now the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government, and its committees would examine the same areas as the Body's committees. He believed that the Assembly would look with suspicion on the Body. It was clear that there would be a diminution of the role of the Body, which was to be welcomed, as it meant that the peace process was working.

There would still be a role for both Parliaments. The Secretary of State had mentioned the Nordic Council, which consisted of five sovereign Parliaments and three subordinate assemblies. The Body would benefit from an examination of how the Nordic Council operated. There was also the model of the Council of Europe, which had fifty members, and also had observers who could participate in its proceedings. Most of its work was also done through its committees. The emergence of political groupings such as those in the Council of Europe would be welcome.

There was a need for caution, since parliamentarians did not know what relationships the devolved institutions within the United Kingdom would wish to maintain bilaterally with Dublin, Belfast or other bodies. Those institutions should be brought into the discussion-and the result might be something very different from the Council of the Isles as currently envisaged. The Body should not begin by saying that its form and function were immutable. It should look at what had been achieved, and it could help both Governments by looking at best practice in all relevant institutions.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) said that there did not appear to be complete understanding within the Body about how much sovereignty would lie with the Scottish Parliament. Only defence, foreign affairs, UK Treasury matters and social security were entirely excluded, so there would be many areas of common interest between the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas. The argument that had been used about sovereignty was rather old-fashioned, as sovereignty was becoming more divisible and moving nearer to the people, which was to be welcomed.

It should be remembered that the Body was only a talking shop and that it had no executive powers. It did not matter if there was not absolute parity between the Oireachtas and Westminster. As there was no need to construct yet another parliamentary edifice, the Body should form the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council.

Mr Robert Walter (Dorset North) said that he took issue with Mr Home Robertson over the future role of the British-Irish Council, which would be dealing very much with regional interests rather than with relations between the two sovereign Parliaments. He believed that the Body should continue as a forum within which the common interests of the United Kingdom and Ireland could be discussed.

Mr Michael Mates (Hampshire East) said that the Body should adopt the slogan "wait and see". It was not yet clear how the current constitutional changes in the United Kingdom would turn out. It could safely be said, however, that the new assemblies would not be concerned with relations between Westminster and Dublin. Tinkering with the role of the Body at present would be a mistake. The focus of debates within the Body might well change over the coming years as the issue of political change in Northern Ireland, which had rightly occupied most of the Body's attention hitherto, came to assume less importance. The Body would have greater scope to look at the bread-and-butter issues which concerned the British and Irish peoples. There was a greater need for co-operation between Britain and Ireland than between any other two sovereign nations within Europe. He hoped that in due course Unionist representatives from Northern Ireland would join the Body. He did not mean to be dismissive of Scotland and Wales, or the smaller islands, but their concerns were not central to the Body.

Lord Merlyn-Rees said that he welcomed the presence of observers from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, but he suspected that their traditions and attitudes were different from those developed in the Body over the past eight years. He was not clear about the thinking behind the proposal for a Council of the Isles, but thought it was essential that the Body in something like its present form should continue in order to promote relations between the two sovereign Parliaments.

Senator Helen Keogh said that there was a need to reflect on the purpose of the Body. The Northern Ireland Assembly was still at an embryonic stage, and the Body itself was not yet complete, because the Unionists were absent. It was far too early to be considering major structural changes or an extension of the remit of the Body. Those issues should certainly be discussed from time to time, but new structures were not needed at present.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) noted the large number of British contributions to the debate, which reflected the recent interest in devolution within the United Kingdom. It was important to return to first principles when discussing the Body's future. The relationship between the British and Irish Governments and Parliaments, both within the Body and outside it, had underpinned the peace process. The Belfast Agreement did not mark the end of all problems associated with Northern Ireland and the Body still had work to do in addressing difficulties as yet unforeseen. Finally, he emphasized the importance of North-South relations on the island of Ireland and wished to see them reflected in institutional terms.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) noted that an analogy had been drawn with the Nordic Council. Committee B had made a study of the Nordic Council, which had been set

up in 1952 and comprised both an executive and parliamentary membership. Any discussion on the future of the Body would be academic unless the objectives of the British-Irish Council were known. He cautioned against the "wait and see" approach. It was possible that both Governments would proceed on their own in establishing a British-Irish Council without a parliamentary tier. If that were to happen, the Body would be left with no alternative but to form a parliamentary counterpart to the governmental Council. There was therefore an urgent need for the Body to put forward its own views on the structure and objectives of the British-Irish Council. One way of doing this would be to set up a working group to examine the matter in some detail in order to ensure that the two Governments proceeded with the British-Irish Council in a way which the Body would approve of.

The Chairman agreed that the Steering Committee would consider this proposal as a matter of urgency.

Mrs Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) agreed with the proposals put forward by Mr Colvin. The Body would be right to object if the two Governments went ahead with Strand 3 proposals without proper consultation, especially in view of the new assemblies in Scotland and Wales. Mr Home Robertson's point about the priorities of the new assemblies was valid: no one knew at this stage what level of representation members in those assemblies might want. From the proposals in the paper it was suggested that one in fourteen of the members of the Scottish Parliament might become members of an inter-parliamentary body. That seemed rather optimistic. It was also important to remember that there would be continuing representation of Scottish and Welsh interests at Westminster and that some mechanism might be needed to represent English interests.

Senator Joe Costello suggested that the common thread of the discussion was that everyone was in the dark about Strand 3 and proposals for a British-Irish Council. The Body had been set up to give some impetus to a difficult and static political situation. Following the Good Friday Agreement, East-West structures would play an important part in reassuring Unionists and leading to acceptance of North-South structures. A new "commonwealth" was being created but the Body still had an important role to play, not least because no one yet knew what the two Governments had in mind for East-West relations. Strand 3 needed a parliamentary tier.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South West) compared the dilemma about the future of the Body to the dilemma surrounding decommissioning. The situation was very fluid. He welcomed Mr Colvin's practical proposal of a working group but he had been taken aback by Mr Home Robertson's comments about a lack of understanding of the Scottish dimension. The Department of Foreign Affairs in Ireland had already appointed Consuls-General in Wales and Scotland and the Irish Government would develop bilateral relations with the new assemblies. The Body would have a role in addressing many issues which would arise bilaterally between Westminster and the Oireachtas. He concluded by expressing his wish for a permanent secretariat for the Body and guaranteed funding.

Mr Seán Doherty (Longford-Roscommon) said that the work of the Body before the Good Friday Agreement must not be lost. There was still much to be done and the Body should continue to act as a supervisor of governments and as a forum to eliminate suspicions. A wider relationship with other assemblies was also desirable. The Body had to ensure that it did not diminish its role in the light of the changes in Northern Ireland. It would be unwise to move too quickly to change the form of the Body without being aware of all the consequences. It was essential to maintain links between Dublin and London within the new structures.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the Body had been established because of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the issues with which it was concerned related to the island of Ireland and to Britain. The problems of Northern Ireland were not over and conflicts and protests continued. Those matters could not be left entirely to the Northern Ireland Assembly. There needed to be some overview of and encouragement for the work of the Assembly. It would be sensible to ask members of the Northern Ireland Assembly to join the Body. There might subsequently be further developments, but the Body could still make a useful contribution.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth) said that one point on which all the contributors agreed was the significant success of the Body in its current form in aiding understanding between British and Irish parliamentarians. Despite changes in its membership, harmonious working had been maintained. That applied equally to the work of the Committees, which was an integral part of building an understanding of the problems in Northern Ireland. A final solution of those problems would be some time in coming. There was clearly going to be a settling-in period for the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. It would take time before it became clear whether they wished to participate in the Body. The suggestion of a working group on the issue should be followed through.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) welcomed the statement in the Good Friday Agreement on links between Ireland and the United Kingdom. It was important for the Body to tell the two Governments how it believed that matter should be addressed. A working group would be welcome; the Body could not afford to let the Governments decide by themselves what the form of the new Assembly should be. He hoped that the Northern Ireland Assembly would rapidly move forward from its initial agenda of security and constitutional issues to the real political issues such as health, transport, agriculture and education. The Body should be careful not to encroach upon or diminish the role of the new Assembly.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly) said that he supported Mr Colvin's proposal for a working party. The Body's future was not in its own hands, but would be determined by progress on Strand 3. "Wait and see" was not an option: it would lead to the Body being at best sidelined, and at worst by-passed completely.

Lord Blease warmly complimented the Steering Committee on its positive document. It would be wise to proceed cautiously at present. He supported the

establishment of a working group and thought that the Body should revisit that issue in twelve months' time.

The Chairman said that the Body had conducted a heart-searching examination of its past work and future role. One thing which had emerged clearly from the debate was that even those Members who argued for the continuation of the Body in its existing form were not challenging the proposals in the Agreement for a British-Irish Council. The Body was not in the business of preserving itself for its own sake. However, events were moving rapidly and no-one knew what the next twelve months would bring. The Body should hesitate to do anything that would undermine its own work. It could claim without complacency to have been very successful in contributing to far better British-Irish relations on a parliamentary level and to bringing the two Governments much closer together than they had been in 1990. There was a need for continuing links between the two sovereign Parliaments.

Mr Colvin's suggestion, which had been taken up by other Members, was that a working group should be set up to consider those issues. There was a danger that the Body might leave those matters solely to the decision of the two Governments. The Body should put its own proposals forward. He therefore proposed that the Steering Committee should meet in the near future to discuss whether to recommend setting up a working group.

Senator Paschal Mooney asked whether, given the fast pace of events, the Steering Committee would consider convening an emergency meeting of the plenary before March 1999 to establish the working group.

The Chairman said that he would not rule that out, but he felt that emergency meetings of the Body should only be held if absolutely necessary.

The Question was agreed to.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

That the Body takes note of the paper entitled *The Future of the Body* [Doc. 60].

The Chairman invited the observers from Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey to make brief contributions, pursuant to Rule 2(c).

Conseiller Laurie Morgan (Guernsey) said that it was a privilege to be asked to join the Body for its Plenary meeting. He emphasised the position of Guernsey as a Crown dependency with full self-government, except that international relations and defence remained the responsibility of the British Government. Guernsey was governed by a legislative assembly; there were no political parties, and in the absence of a cabinet system administration was conducted by committees. The Crown had ultimate responsibility for good government and to that end the Home Secretary ensured that legislative measures were scrutinised. Britain's accession to the EU had given Guernsey a special relationship with the Community and Protocol 3. The success of devolution within the UK would involve new constitutional

relations with central government of a kind which Guernsey had enjoyed for hundreds of years. Harmonious relations required trust and understanding and Guernsey welcomed the chance to play a role in the British-Irish Council.

The Hon. Noel Cringle, Speaker of Tynwald (Isle of Man) thanked the Body for the opportunity to attend the meeting as an observer. The parliamentary linkage between the members of the Body had, in his view, brought great benefits to the people of both islands. He noted three comments which the Secretary of State had made in her speech the previous day. Those were: symbolism and the need to produce tangible benefits; courage; and the need to carry the mood of the people.

He warned against the dangers of isolation. No island, be it large or small, could develop in isolation from its neighbours. He hoped that the Isle of Man could provide an open door and be a good neighbour in helping to settle disputes. The Isle of Man faced similar problems to those of its neighbours in the areas of trade, transport and the environment, and he looked forward to being able to play a part in a parliamentary assembly where such issues could be discussed.

Senator Pierre Horsfall (Jersey) extended his warm thanks to the Body for inviting him as an observer to the Plenary. The Channel Islands would learn much from devolution processes taking place in the United Kingdom. The Islands also had much to contribute, not least because Jersey had strong links with the City of London to which it acted as a conduit for some £130 billion of international money. Because of the financial services industry, it also had financial links with Dublin. Best practice could often be identified in smaller communities; and the islands also shared common concerns with the regions of the mainland. For example, they were troubled by the sale of landing slots at Heathrow and Gatwick. On environmental matters, Jersey was to the forefront in waste treatment and technology.

The British-Irish Council could not immediately replace the Body, and might never do so. Although economic and social issues could be examined by the Council it would not be possible for it to discuss political matters as effectively as the Body did. Jersey did not expect to be involved in these political discussions but wanted to take its place in discussions of social and economic matters.

He drew attention to the answer to question 22 tabled by Senator Joe Costello, which said that the British-Irish Council would meet "in the next few weeks". If that happened there should only be one item on the Council's agenda - its remit. When, and only when, that was decided could the Body have a clear idea of how to proceed. Whatever happened he hoped that the Council would rotate the venue of its meetings so that the Channel Islands could return the hospitality which they had received at the Plenary in York.

The Chairman thanked the visiting representatives.

The sitting continued in private.

The sitting continued in public.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and Question proposed:

That the Body do now adjourn. **-(Mr Kevin McNamara).**

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North), moving the Motion, thanked the secretariat and staff. He congratulated the organisers of the evening at Castle Howard and thanked the hotel staff who had done their best under difficult managerial circumstances. He hoped that next time the Plenary was held in the United Kingdom the hospitality would be consistently of the standard that Members experienced in Ireland.

The Chairman said that the next Plenary would be held in the West of Ireland on 28-30 March 1999.

The Session concluded at 11.45 am.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Association football

Senator Paschal Mooney (Sligo Leitrim): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if, in the new atmosphere of good will between both parts of Ireland generated by the people's decision enthusiastically to support the Good Friday Agreement, she will encourage any initiative to bring together the Football Association of Ireland (FA) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) to discuss the formation of a one-island representative team initially for non-competitive fixtures, with the long-term aspiration the merging of both Associations.

Dr Mowlam: The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) work co-operatively, but are entirely separate entities. Their future status is a matter for them to decide and it would not be appropriate for me to intervene.

Overseas funding

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what her priorities are for spending money subscribed from overseas sources to help with the Peace Process in Northern Ireland.

Dr Mowlam: Spending priorities for EU structural funds and the peace and reconciliation programme are as agreed with the European Commission following consultations with a wide range of local organisations. The Single Programme for 1994-1999 addresses economic growth, internal and external cohesion; the Peace and Reconciliation Programme addresses twin goals of reconciliation and social inclusion.

Demilitarisation of South Armagh

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when progress will be made towards the demilitarisation of South Armagh, and in particular when relief will be given to the people of Bessbrook, which is the main base for British Army airborne operations, and is one of the busiest heliports in the world.

Dr Mowlam: The Government and the security forces understand that security issues in South Armagh and the Bessbrook area in particular, such as checkpoints, observation posts and helicopter activity have been and continue to be contentious. We have said very clearly that we want to see a return to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland. However, the speed at which that will be possible will depend on the level of violence and the extent of threat of terrorist attack.

Departmental Committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Lord Blease: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if, in view of the fact that it is anticipated that the Departmental Committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be in operation in February 1999, she can indicate what assistance the Northern Ireland Office will be able to give the Committees to promote economic and social development, employment, health services, rented and privately-owned housing, child-care provision, facilities for disabled people, and education and training.

Dr Mowlam: After the transfer of power to the Northern Ireland Assembly, which I hope will take place early next year, these matters will be the responsibility of Northern Ireland Ministers answerable to the Assembly. It will be for those Ministers to decide, subject to the agreement of the Assembly, on the allocation of resources to these and other programmes. [The role of Departmental Committees of the Assembly is set out in the Belfast Agreement: it is clear that they will have an important role in the development and resources and allocation].

Development of the Peace Process

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make a statement about the development of the Peace Process.

Dr Mowlam: The Omagh bombing was a clear and desperate attempt to derail the peace process, but the reactions of ordinary people throughout these islands demonstrated the very widespread support which exists for an exclusively peaceful and non violent way forward. The full implementation of the Belfast Agreement offers the best hope of political stability and lasting peace. The two Governments are taking all the steps within their power to implement every aspect of that Agreement and we continue to encourage all those with roles to play to do likewise.

Recovery of the bodies of those murdered by terrorists

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what representations she has made to the leadership of the Republican movement concerning the disclosures of the burial places of the "disappeared", what response, if any, she has received, whether she is satisfied with the progress made on the issue; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam: I refer the Deputy for Dublin West to the reply I gave to the Honourable member for Derbyshire North East. I am aware of recent newspaper reports claiming that senior sources within the IRA have confirmed that they recently made a decision to identify the graves of the dozen people they abducted, so that their remains could be returned to their families. The Government hopes these reports are accurate and that at last progress on this can be made.

Border counties free trade area

Mrs Mary Coughlan (Donegal South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if, arising from the Good Friday Agreement, she believes that the promotion of industrial development in the Border Counties, North and South, could be enhanced through the provision of a Free Trade Area; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam: Under World Trade Organisation rules it would not be possible to establish a free trade area in the Border Counties. Significant cross-border co-operation already exists in relation to trade and other matters. The North/South Ministerial Council will work to identify and agree areas for future cross-border co-operation.

Republic of Ireland students in Britain

Mr Tony Killeen (Clare): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what information her Department has regarding the fees payable by students from the Republic of Ireland attending University and third-level courses in Britain in that academic year 1998-99, and what grant aid, if any, is available to them.

Dr Mowlam: From 1998/99 new entrants from the Republic of Ireland will be expected to contribute up to £1,000 a year, subject to means-testing, towards tuition fees. Such students will not be eligible for grant-aid.

Cross-border inward investment

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether, given the importance of advancing the economic dividend in conjunction with the main Peace Process, joint cross-border emphasis needs to be given to attracting inward investment and joint proposals need to be formulated to that end; and what measures she has taken to date in order to create jobs in the region.

Dr Mowlam: I recognise fully the sentiments of the question. Attracting inward investment and boosting jobs is important north and south, particularly in the border region.

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland compete directly for mobile international investment and there is no reason to think that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. However, co-operation between IDB and IDA extends to senior personnel from the agencies meeting on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest.

DED and its agencies are currently involved in a range of cross-border projects covering the areas of trade, tourism, business development and training which, directly and indirectly, contribute to the creation of employment opportunities both North and South.

DED also operates a range of programmes which are designed to promote training, business development and tourism and create employment opportunities throughout Northern Ireland.

Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what is her proposed timetable for the implementation of the various outstanding elements of the Good Friday Agreement; whether she has had to alter the timetable originally envisaged; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam: The British Government does not have its own timetable for the implementation of the Agreement beyond that which is set out in the Agreement itself. It is the responsibility of all involved, including the British and Irish Governments and the shadow Northern Ireland administration, to see that this timetable is followed. There has already been a great deal of progress but there must be no let up in driving the process forward.

It is equally important that *all* aspects are taken forward together; that is what the two Governments and the transitional Northern Ireland administration must work towards. The Agreement was negotiated by the parties and endorsed by the people as an overall package and it is vital that it is implemented as such.

Gaelic Athletic Association

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if, following the discussion at the December Plenary meeting in London, she has had direct meetings with the Gaelic Athletic Association authorities regarding the abolition of its "Rule 21" and the removal of the military installation at Crossmaglen GAA grounds.

Dr Mowlam: I have not had any direct meetings with the Gaelic Athletic Association authorities, since the December Plenary, to discuss these issues.

British-Irish Council

Senator Joe Costello: To ask the Secretary for State for Northern Ireland, what is her Government's thinking on the timescale for the establishment of the British/Irish Council as proposed under Strand 3 of the Good Friday Agreement, and if she will outline the role envisaged for the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body within the structures of the proposed Council.

Dr Mowlam: The timescale for the establishment of the British-Irish Council, as with every aspect of the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, is governed by the timetable set out in the Agreement itself. This means that the British-Irish Council will be established immediately on the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement which was signed in Belfast on 10 April. This will coincide with the formal transfer of power to the Northern Ireland Assembly which we envisage taking place early in 1999.

Before that formal establishment, the British-Irish Council will meet in its transitional form. The first such meeting is likely to take place within the next few weeks.

The role of the elected institutions of the various member of the British-Irish Council, including the role of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, is a matter for the institutions themselves to decide rather than the respective Governments. For its part, the British Government recognises the practical benefits which can flow from interparliamentary links and would fully support the development of effective links between the British and Irish Parliaments and the devolved institutions. The precise nature of such links will clearly need to be agreed by the elected institutions, two of which are not due to have their first elections until next year.

Cross-border cooperation on inward trade delegations

Senator Paddy McGowan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will agree to establish a Body on a cross-border basis that can meet with trade delegations from Europe or any other part of the world.

Dr Mowlam: As I said in my earlier answer it is a matter for the representatives of the North-South Ministerial Council to identify and agree the areas for implementation and co-operation. There are already strong links between IDB and Enterprise Ireland, with close contact between officials from both agencies. Under current informal arrangements there is already the facility to meet delegations from Europe and the rest of the world on a joint basis and, where there is a sound business and commercial reason for joint trade activities, these will continue.

Operation of North/South implementation bodies

Senator Helen Keogh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps are being taken to ensure that the North/South implementation bodies, when operable, work effectively and efficiently in the interests of the two parts of the Island and are not hindered by excessive bureaucracy.

Dr Mowlam: The British Irish Agreement provides for the establishment of the North South Ministerial Council to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland. In the Council the representatives of the shadow Administration for Northern Ireland and the Irish Government will undertake a programme, in consultation with the British Government, with a view to agreeing the areas where co-operation and implementation for mutual benefit will take place.

The First and Deputy First Ministers are presently consulting the Northern Ireland parties on the implementation of North South arrangements.