



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-FIRST PLENARY SESSION

9 and 10 October 2000

Lettermore Suite, Galway Bay Hotel, Galway

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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Monday, 9 October 2000

The sitting was opened in public at 9.35 am in the Lettermore Suite, Galway Bay Hotel, Galway, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

1. MICHAEL AND NICHOLA COLVIN

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): The meeting is now in public session. It is my sad duty to note with great personal regret, and on behalf of all of you, the tragic death of our colleague Michael Colvin and his dear wife Nichola some weeks after our last meeting in February. Over the years we have lost a number of colleagues whom we all miss personally. It reflects the growing relationship, personal and otherwise, between the members of this Body that we feel such a great personal sense of loss. On this occasion, the tragic deaths of Michael and Nichola greatly affected us all and was a major shock, coming so soon after his involvement at our last meeting, his vigorous and consistent participation as Chairman of Committee B and the very personal relationships he developed with his colleagues on that committee and with us all in this Body.

It is fair to say that those of us on the Irish side would not normally meet an authentic, truly traditional Tory MP like Michael Colvin. Such a person would not be part of our normal social experience. It is also perhaps true that Michael would not normally have met TDs of the range that are represented in this Body. That said, it is even more true that from the moment we got to know each other, perhaps because of the different inheritance and traditions, a great personal relationship and understanding emerged and a truly personal commitment and friendship evolved between Michael and the rest of us.

I especially recall his commitment to his committee and the fact that he, and his colleagues on the committee, were pushing impetuously to get more of their reports before the Body. There is no doubting his commitment to the Body, nor to the people he served.

There is also no doubting his commitment to the values in which he believed, which might not be reflected in the values we all share. They were the values of country life and the environment. There is also no doubting his service to his nation, which he clearly and consistently demonstrated in the Army and many other areas of activity. Nor is there any doubt that were he with us this morning he would have had his sketch book with him, as he had in Adare and on many other occasions, to recall for special effect and to commit to memory the location and character of the places he visited here.

It is a very sad occasion for each of us and this is heightened by the fact that Michael is the latest in a long list of personal friends the Body has lost over the years. He was a truly authentic voice of his people and an authentic squire of the kind we would not normally meet. He made us more conscious of the range of values of the British

people and of the traditional values of British politics. I hope he helped us to understand that together we could build a new and special future for all our people.

I am sure members will understand if I say in our language, *ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal*, on the right hand of the Lord may the noble souls of Michael and Nichola be forever.

The Plenary stood in silence for one minute.

2. PRELIMINARY PROCEEDINGS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): As is now standard procedure at any gathering, I remind Members to turn off pagers, beepers and mobile telephones while you are in the room. It does not apply to me because I do not carry them.

The proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

In accordance with Rule 2(a), the following associate members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of this session: **Mr Paul Bradford TD, Mr Seán Doherty TD, Helen Jackson MP, and Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP.**

The only constant in political life is change. It happens here also. In accordance with that constant flux, I inform Members that Mr Charles Flanagan TD has been asked by his party to take on another role in the Dáil. After today he is to be replaced by Mr Brian Hayes TD. Brian will take over Charles's duties as Chairman of Committee A and in that capacity as a member of the Steering Committee.

At the conclusion of item 4, that is, the questions for oral answer to be submitted to the Taoiseach when he arrives early this afternoon, there will be the usual group photograph. That will be at 4 pm.

The next task is a pleasant one. Observers from the devolved institutions and the islands have been invited. After we met them informally, and very effectively, in London the Steering Committee decided they should be allowed to speak during debate under the provisions of Rule 2(c). With your endorsement, they will be allowed to contribute to our debates today and subsequently. Perhaps they might identify themselves as I call them. From Scotland, from the Parliament, we have **Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP**, Deputy Presiding Officer, **Ms Cathy Craigie MSP, Margaret Ewing MSP** (a familiar name to those of us with experience in the European Parliament), **Mr David McLetchie MSP** and **Mr Ian Smith MSP**. From the National Assembly for Wales, we have **Mr John Griffiths AM, Dr David Lloyd AM** and **Ms Jenny Randerson AM**. From Northern Ireland, we have **Ms Carmel Hanna MLA** and **Mr Séan Neeson MLA**. From the Isle of Man, we have Mr Speaker, **the Hon. David Cannan**. From Guernsey, we have **Deputy Roger C Berry**. I do not think I have left out anybody. We have, incidentally, received apologies from the States of

Deliberation of Jersey, which has been unable to send a representative to us on this occasion.

3. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We can move on to the formal business. I formally move the adoption of the proposed programme of business, as amended, which has been circulated to the Body.

Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business for the current Session, as amended, be approved.-(The Chairman.)

4. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am conscious of the fact that there has always been a lively interest in participating in all the Body's debates. To try to accommodate that within the time available to us, it would be extremely helpful if those wishing to speak in the debates, and particularly this first debate on the political motion, would submit their names as soon as possible. A number of you have done so and if there are others who have not given your names to the Clerks, would you do so as soon as possible because we want to try to accommodate every speaker. If you indicate as soon as possible that you wish to speak, we will include your name. As already stated, this includes our guests, the parliamentary observers to whom I referred earlier, who are welcome to contribute provided they signal their intention to do so in good time.

The Steering Committee has decided that we should, for that reason, impose a time limit on speeches of four minutes, with ten minutes for the opening and closing speeches. If, as we proceed, we find that we have more time, we could perhaps extend the time allowed, but experience shows that four minutes is the maximum which we should allow. Is that agreed? Agreed.

I welcome the Chairman of Committee A, Mr Brian Hayes TD, to move this motion and formally open the debate.

Mr Brian Hayes (Dublin South-West): I move:

That the Body, conscious of the difficulties being faced by the two Governments and the parties in their efforts to achieve the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, welcomes the progress made so far, and urges both Governments and all parties to redouble their efforts to overcome the present problems.

It is with great pleasure that I formally move this motion on behalf of the Steering Committee. I am indebted to the tireless work and effort of my party's former Northern Ireland spokesperson, Deputy Charles Flanagan, on this Body and for his work in that area of policy over recent years. I wish to recognise his contribution at the outset.

It is high time that those of us who want the Good Friday Agreement to succeed were heard. In recent times many prophets of doom, allied to those who are fundamentally opposed to the Agreement, have actively pursued a campaign aimed at destabilising the new political structures that have taken root in Northern Ireland.

We have heard little about the genuine successes, of which there have been many, of the Good Friday Agreement to date. I refer to the new Executive, which is operating under very difficult circumstances; the new North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council, which are attempting to bring about a new co-operation both here in Ireland and between Britain and Ireland; the new constitutional framework, agreed by everyone, which sets off the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future; and the most tangible success story of all, namely, the dramatic de-escalation of violence on the streets of Northern Ireland. These are all hugely beneficial arguments in favour of the agreement.

We have seen many successes in terms of the relationship between both Parliaments and these must continue. There is not just a responsibility on the Northern Ireland parties to implement the will of the people; there is an equal responsibility on us, as representatives of our respective Parliaments, to ensure the success of the Agreement. In this regard, it is crucial that in the difficult days ahead the British and Irish Governments continue to work as one entity in persuading and helping all of the Northern Ireland parties to overcome the difficulties they face.

The success of the Anglo-Irish process, from the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the Good Friday Agreement, has been seen in the new relationship between British and Irish Governments of all persuasions since 1986. Working together, both Governments can overcome the current difficulties. What are those difficulties? In my opinion, the difficulties we face at present revolve around policing, the lack of progress on decommissioning and the need to demilitarise many parts of society in Northern Ireland. These are all important issues.

At present, everyone is conscious that policing issues have taken centre stage in the political arena in Northern Ireland. In a deeply divided community, it is a major failure of politics to allow a situation to develop where policing and the police service are perceived as belonging to one side of the political divide. The Patten Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland proposes a new beginning. It is clearly in the interests of all people in Northern Ireland that the new police service being proposed should command the trust, allegiance and active support of Unionists, Nationalists and Republicans.

In the interests of effective policing, it is imperative that the heavy burden is shared by the entire community. Leaving aside some of the emotional issues surrounding the proposed changes that are elements of the Patten Commission's report and which warrant close consideration -I refer in particular to the proposals regarding closer co-operation between the Garda and the new police service in Northern Ireland and co-operation between the various police services on the islands -I believe

that effective policing on the island of Ireland should encourage us actively to pursue joint training modules for both police services. We should also pursue an extensive programme of secondment between the two police services.

A policy of shared training modules and a major secondment programme between the police services in Ireland and those in Scotland, England and Wales should be a significant element in the new approach to policing in Ireland and in Britain. An opening up of appointments at senior officer level in all police services on both our islands to candidates from other services should also be a welcome development. Arrangements should also be put in place so that individual members of the various police forces can transfer from one service to another while maintaining their career entitlements.

Crime does not recognise borders. In fact, borders and the lack of effective liaison between neighbouring police services can facilitate criminal activity. For example, we have seen the benefit of the formal protocols that exist between the Kent police force and its counterparts in France and much could be gained by looking at best practice among neighbouring police forces in other EU states.

At a practical level, the number of deaths and serious injuries caused by accidents on the Dublin-Belfast road could be dramatically reduced by more effective cross-Border policing co-operation on speeding and dangerous driving. The Chief Constable of the RUC, Ronnie Flanagan, recently outlined his support for operating a scheme of hot pursuit along the Border. In the context of the Schengen Agreement and that of more effective co-operation between the Garda and the new police service of Northern Ireland, I believe this proposal is worth pursuing further.

Previously, the conflict in Northern Ireland and the political atmosphere between Ireland and Britain have hampered what should have been a natural evolution in police co-operation between the two jurisdictions. The Belfast Agreement has established the framework for a new political dispensation. In the new political climate that now prevails, a dynamic programme of co-operation between the various police services in Ireland and Britain can contribute significantly to the fight against crime.

My party believes that the Patten proposals provide a genuine opportunity for a new start to policing in Northern Ireland. It is not as much an exercise in political compromise, but rather a practical blueprint in effectively policing what is an extremely divided society. While there are differences between the Patten Report and the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill that is shortly to go before the House of Lords, I believe these differences can be overcome in a way that will allow young Unionists, Nationalists and Republicans to be persuaded to join the new force. However, there are also very important East-West issues that must be discussed in this context.

While there has been progress on the decommissioning issue, much more needs to be done by all paramilitary organisations in order to promote confidence in the current process and to satisfy the commitments on decommissioning which are an

integral part of the Good Friday Agreement. This summer, the IRA promised further confidence-building measures. It is now time that the full scope of these measures was explored with the International Decommissioning Body. The decommissioning issue has not gone away. It currently represents an immediate threat to the ability of pro-Agreement Unionists to deliver on their commitments under the Good Friday Agreement. The success of this process is based upon everyone accepting compromises.

I welcome the recent statement by the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr Mandelson, on the issue of demilitarisation. This is another matter of confidence-building. It is now five years since the first IRA ceasefire and the commitments entered into in the Good Friday Agreement in relation to reducing the security presence in all parts of the province. More progress is required on this issue and I encourage the British Government to continue in its current vein. We have all embarked on a process where the twin objectives of peace and reconciliation can be secured between Britain and Ireland. Despite the difficult days that lie ahead and the persistent minority that is implacably opposed to change, it falls on our two Parliaments as the constitutional guarantors of the Agreement to become unapologetic advocates of the cause of peace and reconciliation on these islands.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I propose to alternate speakers from both sides in the following order: Kevin McNamara, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, Peter Temple-Morris, Conor Lenihan, Lempit Öpik, Andrew Boylan and Cecilia Keaveney. If others wish to speak, they indicate that by raising their hand and we will include them on the list.

Mr Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*): I congratulate Deputy Hayes on a very comprehensive survey of the scene and I welcome him to the Body. He set a high standard which he will find difficult to maintain at future meetings. We are in some ways like a Greek chorus. We are commenting on events over which not many of us have any control. We may influence them and comment on them and, therefore, my observations are more pessimistic than those of Deputy Hayes.

Long before the Antrim by-election the slippery slope was there within the parties. It has been suggested that the successful candidate was "the evil of two lessers" because there was little to distinguish between the two Unionist candidates in their attitudes to the Good Friday Agreement. The overall result has shown a degree of disunity, which we were always aware existed within the Unionist Party, but it has brought it starkly to the fore.

All the important gains that had been made in the establishment of various institutions under the Agreement still depend very much on the ability of the parties negotiating, in particular, the police and decommissioning issues as to whether there will be success. I welcome, in particular, Mr Trimble's speech last Saturday when he took on his opponents effectively and vigorously for the first time. It is a pity in some ways it did not happen six months or a year earlier but it was a vigorous defence of his position and attitudes and he must be congratulated on that. He is still raising the

questions relating to Patten and the organisation of the police force and that will be the key to the whole situation.

If Séamus Mallon is not able to recommend to members of the Nationalist community that they should join the new police force then much of what has been achieved will be lost. Séamus is a very honourable and objective man on this issue and he reads the Nationalist situation well. His attitude will be fundamental. Nationalists are not convinced because of concessions that the Secretary of State has made to Unionist opinion on the powers of the police authority.

On the question of the police, Séamus is in a difficult position still and as concessions are made to the Unionists over the name, the powers of the police authority, the flag and other issues, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Nationalists to recommend to their community that they should join. Unless they are able to do that, the key point within the Agreement will go.

Unless you have confidence in those who are responsible for the enforcement of law and order all the other institutions weaken and take on the basis of the old Stormont arrangements. Policing is the key and Patten was a compromise. Now Nationalists are being asked to compromise on a compromise on a compromise and it might well be that Unionists are asking them to make one compromise too many.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (*Cavan-Monaghan*): I would like to record my support for the motion and I acknowledge that progress towards the full implementation of the Agreement has been made since the last meeting of this Body. The Executive was re-established following the unilateral suspension by the British Government and it has been functioning successfully. For the first time ever, Unionists, Nationalists and Republicans have been working together in an Executive for the benefit of all the people they represent.

The fledgling all-Ireland bodies have been working also and they carry the promise of further and strengthened co-operation and co-ordination between all the people of this island and their representative institutions. These developments are hugely positive for all the people who share this island, Unionists as well as Nationalists and Republicans. I want to refute a notion - in a small way it came into the last contribution from Kevin but it is important and it is more often acutely represented by other speakers - that the establishment of equality and justice for those who were long denied it somehow diminishes others.

An end to sectarian discrimination against Nationalists also benefits Unionists because the denial of the rights of any person or group diminishes our society and everyone in it. It is not a question of Nationalists' rights as against Unionist rights. The progress that we are trying to make in terms of human rights and civil liberties will benefit all. I believe that a fixation with this zero-sum game, this notion that any gain for Nationalists will inevitably be a loss for Unionists, lies at the root of the current crisis within Unionism.

Republicans have been at the leading edge of the peace process and we have had to persuade our activists and communities of the benefits of the Good Friday Agreement. For us there is no question but that fundamental change is essential. The question for us, however, is, does it go far enough and is the pace fast enough? We understand the difficulties of Unionists and David Trimble, in particular, but in voting for the Agreement the majority of the Unionist people accepted the need for fundamental change.

David Trimble has sadly failed to lead that change - and I emphasise lead that change - and to mobilise the large pro-Agreement constituency within the Unionist community as a whole as against the opinion of the Ulster Unionist Council. We in Sinn Féin acknowledge the distance that David Trimble has come but if he does not begin to set the pace for change himself - and as First Minister it is his prerogative, his responsibility and he will have our support in pressing, in setting the pace for change himself - if he fails to do that in co-operation with the other pro-Agreement parties his opponents and the opponents of the Good Friday Agreement will always be able to hold him back.

The issue of policing is absolutely crucial and I emphasise again the establishment of a proper civil policing service in the Six Counties is not a concession to Nationalists and Republicans but is a vital necessity for every citizen. The establishment for the first time of an acceptable police service will be of immense benefit to all sections of society in the North of Ireland. The question of policing is bigger than any one political party or leader.

The Patten proposals did not go far enough for Sinn Féin but we give them a fair wind and have endeavoured to support, recommend and promote them within the community we represent. We had, in turn, a right to expect that the British Government's legislation would be faithful to Chris Patten's recommendations, but the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill falls far short of what was required and, as it stands, is clearly not acceptable to the vast majority of Nationalist opinion as is articulated time and again by both SDLP and Sinn Féin representatives. I urge the British Government and encourage all opinion here to recognise the fundamentality of addressing the policing issue and ensuring that the British Government fully implements Chris Patten's recommendations.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I respect the way that Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin has addressed the Body. It was modest and moderate and he stressed that we had to be positive. I echo that. We must look at this positively and recognise the considerable achievements that have taken place under the Belfast Agreement. If anyone doubts the necessity of doing this and carrying it on, they only have to have watched or listened to the news this morning and see what intransigence has led to with regard to the Middle East peace process to realise the clear dangers that face us if we get this wrong.

With respect to Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin when he modestly criticised David Trimble, sometimes a number of us have been frustrated at the lack of a more vigorous

leadership as far as we are concerned. However, when one takes a look at those whom David Trimble has led so far and whom he has led into and kept in the process, one has to give him a chance. Following Kevin McNamara, the speech David Trimble made last Saturday was for the first time the type of vigorous approach that is needed in the face of a party that so often turns against him.

With regard to the Unionists, I wish to make some fundamental points because they are presenting in the ranks of the party the greatest danger to this process. As far as David Trimble's speech went, he emphasised the alternative, and the Unionists have to realise that what has happened under the Agreement is overwhelmingly to their advantage. It is enormous and it cannot be emphasised enough that the principle of partition has been accepted using the historic term. The Republicans are now operating within a UK system of government and it is a quite remarkable concession on their part. The principle of consent is enshrined and, perhaps last but not least and of great symbolic significance, the Irish Constitution has been appropriately amended and what was seen by Unionists as a threat is no longer there. It is quite clear that all the main players in this, not least the two sovereign Governments, want now to get on with Northern Ireland as Northern Ireland is in a state of evolution wherever it evolves to.

I wish to mention briefly a few other important matters. With regard to the decommissioning question, we all wish for it. I do not believe it is going to be forthcoming in a manner or to the extent that many of us would like. We should develop the concept of arms beyond use and this is something at present that we have not heard quite enough about. I would like to see Mr Ahtisaari and Mr Ramaphosa more frequently on the soil of Northern Ireland to emphasise this and to increase its scope. The main thing here overwhelmingly is that the peace has held. The first peace, the first ceasefire, was held by the Republicans for 16 months with minimal progress. There was then a disturbance and violence that we all resent. As soon as the general election was behind us, we then picked up on the road to the Belfast Agreement and beyond.

Finally with regard to policing, having served on the Standing Committee on the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill I would say that the Government has leaned over backwards to keep the balance. I say this not in its defence as that is not necessary. I am quite convinced, speaking personally, that the spirit of Patten is upheld when it comes to this particular Bill. It is now before the Lords and, doubtless, further concessions will be made, as appropriate. However, in essence, to keep both sides on board, I agree that Séamus Mallon and others must recommend that their young men, young Catholics, join that force. Looking at the Bill as it stands, let alone as it will be when it is completed, Catholics can quite safely go into that force and it is their duty to do so.

Mr Conor Lenihan (*Dublin South-West*): I will be very brief. It is symptomatic of the success of this Body that a great many of the British and the Irish speakers have said what I would like to have said.

I think it was Ian Paisley who said the road to hell was paved with small compromises, and it appears that small compromises on policing are having the effect of bringing the Agreement down a path which most of us would have regarded when we started out on this road as something of a nightmare. It would truly be a disastrous nightmare for this Agreement if neither of the Nationalist parties in the North, be it the SDLP or Sinn Féin, or the Irish Government could recommend that Nationalists join the new police force for Northern Ireland. That is the ultimate nightmare for an Agreement of this type predicated as it was on consent, agreement, consensus and looking to the other side. If we go down that path and Sinn Féin and the SDLP are unable to recommend that Nationalists should join the newly established police force in the North of Ireland, this Agreement will have truly failed. That is how important the policing issue is.

Without a police force, there can be no civic society. We often like to think and suggest that it is politicians who make civic society but, at the end of the day, it is predicated on a concept of law and order that has been well developed and honed on both sides of the Irish Sea. Without that basic skeleton of order, as expressed through a police force that is working and is acceptable to the community, there can be no peace. I hope the British Government recognises the sensitivity of this issue for Nationalists and realises that further watering down, compromise and politicisation of the issue within the process of policing will lead to the exact opposite effect to that which is required.

What is required now is that we consolidate the gains made by bringing in to the centre of the peace process parties previously associated with paramilitarism. If those paramilitary voices and a significant number of people within their ranks realise that the exact opposite has happened and that they cannot recommend that any of their communities join the police force, I can see a quick and malign slide to the type of dissident groups we saw were responsible for events such as Omagh. That is the vista that faces us, that is how important policing is and I hope that is appreciated on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Mr Lembit Öpik (*Montgomeryshire*) : Overall the peace process is in pretty good shape. There is less violence, although there is still some. Attitudinally, people in Northern Ireland feel that peace is working on a day-to-day basis, although, as we know, there are still some serious difficulties, for example, the fact that some paramilitaries still regard themselves as the police service in some areas.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Perhaps you could bring the microphone closer to you.

Mr Öpik: It is not often I am accused of being too quiet.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Neither was Kevin McNamara, but there is always a first time.

Mr Öpik: Attitudinally, peace is being made to work. My concern, like that of everyone else, is that the paramilitaries are still setting themselves up as the unofficial police service in many communities. As Conor Lenihan said, it makes it vital that the reforms to the police service are made to work.

On the positive side, it appears that the Bill as it stands represents an opportunity to have a world-leading police force. It goes beyond just bringing it up to the standard in the rest of Europe. If it is done correctly, others may regard the work of the police service as a model for the future. There is one area of outstanding concern for me, namely, the mechanics of achieving a 50-50 split in terms of Catholic and non-Catholic recruitment to the police service. I will not enter into the details of this matter now, but I am very interested in discussing after this session my concerns and what action we might take in respect of this matter. However, I wish to stress one point. The issue that Lord Smith will be raising and moving forward in the House of Lords is not intended to bring the Bill down because the Bill is too important. It is more a question of whether this is the best way to achieve the goal we all want to see. Members will just have to take it on good faith that this is the intention.

I am concerned that there may be others who will seek to hijack the debate about recruitment for their own ends. That would not be the intention of the Liberal Democrats. Come what may, the Police Bill, in whatever form it takes, must be passed before the next Queen's speech. The ultimate disaster in the Houses of Parliament at Westminster would be if we were somehow side-tracked from that objective.

In terms of next steps, the first priority for Westminster is to ensure the passage of the Bill. The second priority must be to support those who still see the Good Friday Agreement as the best step forward. I will not repeat what has been said but it is clear that David Trimble is under pressure. I differ with others in respect of this matter in my belief that if David Trimble has failed then so has Gerry Adams. However, I believe neither of them have failed because they face an extremely difficult debate to bring their organisations forward. To that extent, I respect both of those individuals and many others, including Seán Neeson who is present at this meeting. We must recognise that in the real political world David Trimble and Gerry Adams can only take their organisations so far before fractures emerge. This has already happened with Mr. Trimble's party but I hope he can bring it back together again.

Just as we are expected to act in good faith in Westminster and Dublin, we must also recognise that there is an element of good faith required to make this process work in Northern Ireland. It is easy to condemn the actions of individuals in Northern Ireland but this makes it more difficult for them to operate in their sphere of influence. I appeal to everyone here to, on occasion, sit back and think about what we would do in certain circumstances. We must make it easy for those people to make the difficult and occasionally courageous decisions that have taken us this far.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan): : I welcome the opportunity to make a number of brief comments. I represent the Cavan-Monaghan constituency which is situated on the Border and I can state that substantial progress has been made as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. The re-opening of Aghalane bridge provided a major boost to Counties Cavan and Fermanagh last summer in terms of increased business and tourism activity and interaction. The removal of British Army posts, which were eyesores and sources of intimidation, is a welcome development. Unfortunately, progress has not been made in all Border areas.

On Friday last, along with my party's spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, Deputy Hayes, I was invited to south Armagh to meet various people but farmers in particular. I was invited to visit because of my background in farming. I was shocked and annoyed by the cynical intimidation visited upon these small farmers. That is not acceptable 18 months after the appearance of the Good Friday Agreement. Farmers who own small holdings of 30 to 40 acres are being obliged to seek, like their counterparts in the South, alternative employment. It is not possible to farm on a part-time basis in south Armagh because the individuals to whom I spoke informed me that when they returned from their off-farm employment their cattle had been driven off their land by the British Army. I was shown clear evidence of this activity which is occurring 18 months after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

The incidence of bovine disease in the area to which I refer is higher than anywhere else in the Six Counties or in the Republic. In addition, the level of compensation on offer is less than anywhere else in Northern Ireland. The promise that a North-South agricultural office to be opened in the city of Armagh has not been fulfilled. I spoke to a number of farmers and local residents - decent, hard-working people - and I was informed that there is no difficulty vis-à-vis the interaction of the Protestant and Catholic communities. However, this source of intimidation is clearly evident. There are six military posts in the area and there is no evidence of their being dismantled. In fact, there is clear evidence that they are being extended or reinforced. That is not acceptable. The people to whom I spoke believe that no one is interested in their problems. I regret to say that it was my first visit to that part of Northern Ireland. The countryside there is beautiful. When I drove into the area I thought I would have seen sheep on the hillside. However, they are not allowed to keep sheep on their farms. How many people here are aware of those problems? That is not in the best interests of progress and the Good Friday Agreement. The progress I see in my area is not evident for those people. A sub-committee of this body should visit the area, as Deputy Hayes and I did. They could meet the people concerned and listen to their problems. That would be a worthwhile exercise. We would then see the benefits of the Good Friday Agreement spreading through the six northern counties as well as the six Border counties. Everybody is willing to work at this.

I do not want to go overboard, but I was told that at a funeral last week helicopters were flying low over the graveyard when the burial was taking place. Surely that is not acceptable. I regret having to bring this to the attention of this body, but it is my duty. I am talking about reasonable people who only want fair play, but that is not evident.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Mr Peter Brooke also has close family ties in that area.

Mr Peter Brooke (*Cities of London and Westminster*): For the reasons the Co-Chairman has given, it is always a pleasure to follow Deputy Boylan. I share the views already expressed by the motion and I welcome the way Deputy Hayes moved it. I welcome him to the Chair of Committee A and I thank Deputy Flanagan for the way in which he has chaired it. I remarked before the Agreement was reached that we were on a long road and would come to dangerous corners but that there was a responsibility to get past them. To mix metaphors, I never knew who would play the card that would get us around those corners, but it was always important that whoever responded should respond with a card of suitable colour and effectiveness and as we know the Agreement was reached. I recently attended the British-Irish Conference in Oxford. Because of the troubles with Loyalists in Belfast at the time there was a general, if not total, absence of Unionists from the meeting. The working parties at the conference were interesting in that we were divided into four or five groups discussing the same agenda, so we did not discuss different subjects but we were discussing the same ones, which were brought together in the plenary session at the end.

The first issue was how the Unionists could be helped. It was significant that that was the first subject and that the Unionists were singled out for consideration. I was mildly surprised that Nationalists and Republicans in my group did not seem to recognise the importance of the Antrim by-election and its consequences - this was before the by-election. Those who support the Agreement clearly want to help everyone who has difficulties to overcome them, as clearly the Agreement cannot go forward unless those are overcome. At the same time one cannot turn a blind eye to the pressure points. The Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee on which I sit (and I pay the warmest tribute to my colleague Harry Barnes, who has been on the Committee with me throughout this Parliament) decided that it was going to deal with controversial rather than blander subjects. We tackled the position of the RUC, the prison service, electoral malpractice, fair employment and fuel smuggling. The range of opinion on the Committee spans from Peter Robinson and Andrew Hunter, a member of my party, to Ken Livingstone - until the mayoralty of London called him away. We have had a fairly wide spectrum on the Committee. The Committee has issued 13 reports in the course of which it divided only twice. The other 12 reports were unanimous. That is as opposed to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee of the House of Commons that is capable of dividing 50 times on a single report.

We have had difficulty choosing subjects this year in that - and this is relevant in terms of some of our new attenders at this meeting - devolution changes the agenda of the subjects we can examine and, therefore, the past year has been slightly different. However, we have found our way through this with the assistance of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In the coming year we are going to deal with what I call "the disappeared", and by that I do not mean the deceased, but those who have been sent into exile by paramilitaries on both sides in about equal numbers. We are also going to tackle the issue of parades and the Parades Commission. There is an

obligation on all members of this Body to find ways in which those who have difficulties with the Agreement can be helped round the corners which face them.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Steering Committee has been considering the progress we are making and it would not be unreasonable if we broke for coffee for 15 minutes at 11 am.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East): We can talk about this issue at a certain level. Thankfully within the room we now have people like Séan Neeson and Carmel Hanna who are involved in the thick of events. I would like to see a further expansion of the representation involved in the Body and full participation in the Body by relevant people. The situation can only be moved on and a real evaluation of the situation on the ground can only be achieved through discussion.

I spoke at the last session of the Body and introduced myself as being from Donegal which has about 70 miles of border with Northern Ireland, 120 miles of border with the Atlantic and only six miles of border with the rest of the Republic of Ireland. That is the reason for my interest in seeing the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Whatever my frustrations at issues such as the choice of candidate and the result of the Antrim by-election, or the threat to the peace process which still remains, the sense of frustration must be even greater within the Executive. Any of us working as local authority members on cross-Border groups can see the real and significant change that has taken place. Coming from my background we have met the most unlikely Ministers and found them extremely good. While they do not always hold on to their posts, and have started to rotate posts, I would like to see them take responsibility for their role. On the last occasion I spoke of the need for a ferry across the Foyle and that will be a reality in the summer.

We in the north-west have similar problems with access, job creation and lack of tourism. We have an east-west divide on an island basis and no other basis. That is being addressed economically in the Republic of Ireland through the national development plan but the Assembly is not being given sufficient funds to help it address the real issues such as roads, railways and air services. We will get nowhere until all politics is local.

The cross-Border bodies are working. I agree with Brian Hayes on the justice issue. We in Donegal see no border when people come across to carry out robberies and get away. I would like to see the pursuit elements of the Schengen Agreement being implemented. I would also like to see the full implementation of the Patten Report. We have a long way to go but we are going in the right direction. I congratulate the Assembly members who are present and wish them every success in continuing their work. Those who are trying to destroy the process should outline their alternative. I do not believe there is such an alternative. My constituency calls on all people to redouble their efforts to overcome the present difficulties. On a purely selfish basis,

our future is intrinsically linked to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement that I wish to see fully implemented.

Ms Maria Fyfe (*Glasgow, Maryhill*): I am not proposing an amendment to the resolution but, as I said at our last Plenary, simply calling on everyone to redouble their efforts does not make the case. It is more a matter of examining more carefully exactly what each of us can do to try to be effective. We all have different roles to play. For example, Caoimhín Ó Caoláin has drawn attention to David Trimble. I think David Trimble is being remarkably courageous and faces a degree of hostility which none of us experience in our political parties. A political correspondent who attends the conferences of all the parties in these islands said he has never seen anything like it and that it is quite extraordinary. We have to recognise that there is a degree of hostility within the Unionist community that does not stop short of openly attacking its own party leader in public and in front of the media.

We have to implement the Patten Report fully and get the message across that the report represents a balanced and fair solution. Some Members of the House of Commons will claim that even changing the name of the RUC or considering a change of badge is totally unacceptable and a deep insult to those who served in the force. Coming from where I do I am not best placed to argue with the Unionist community but there are other members present who are better placed to take on these arguments with their own colleagues. If they can change their minds then all of us in our own institutions can more forcefully argue the case for the Good Friday Agreement. The media always pays attention to those who are negative or who always create difficulties. At the same time it pays very little attention to those who are going to argue for the benefits which have already been gained from the Good Friday Agreement and the benefits which have yet to be gained, both locally and cross-Border, and throughout the islands. We must focus our efforts in publicising the benefits of the Agreement and getting that message across somewhat better than we have been.

Mr Seán Neeson MLA (*East Antrim*): I am delighted to be here for the first time. I hope and think it will not be the last time. The gathering, with fellow observers from Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and Guernsey, is a recognition of the regionalisation of government and of peoples within the British Isles, which I welcome as one who is very supportive of the concept of Europe of the regions.

I am pleased to say the Assembly and the Good Friday Agreement are working. On a practical basis the committees that have been established to shadow the various departments are working very effectively. I go so far as saying that all those participating on those committees are working. The DUP, despite their public protestations, are effectively working the committees. When Peter Robinson was Minister he was very effective and I very much regret the DUP has adopted its hocus-pocus stance towards the ministerial positions. However, the Assembly is carrying out the work for which it was elected and is being very effective.

I will give one very practical example of how it is working successfully. Recently I was a member of a cross-party delegation visiting North America with Reg Empey as the Unionist Minister, Pat Doherty, the Sinn Féin chairman of the Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Investment of which I am vice-chairperson, Alistair McDonald, SDLP and David McCarthy of the UUP. The DUP person who was supposed to accompany us on the visit pulled out because he said "the minister of home affairs had other plans for him": in other words, his wife said they had to go on holiday for the week! That visit to North America put forward a very powerful message that the Assembly is working and showed the opportunities, particularly the economic opportunities, which can be achieved if we continue to work as an Assembly. I am delighted to say that at the end of the visit, 1,000 new jobs were announced for north Belfast at the interface between the Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican side. That is what can be achieved through parties working together.

Certainly, problems lie ahead. As far as the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill is concerned, I believe a compromise can be achieved. I have reservations about the use of quotas and join with Sinn Féin and the SDLP in expressing great concerns about the limited powers of the police board. However, with the Bill going through the House of Lords, we will have an opportunity to bring about compromises and amendments that are acceptable to both Unionists and Nationalists.

On decommissioning, I would have liked Mr Ahtisaari and Mr Ramaphosa to have returned to Ireland before now and I certainly hope that a further inspection will be carried out in the near future. The irony of the current situation is that it is not Republican violence but Loyalist violence that is very much to the fore. Ironically the continuing Loyalist feud is what is causing disillusionment among large sections of the Unionist community, and this must be addressed.

If the Assembly falls - and I do not think it will - the one important principle that has been accepted, apart from that of consent, is that of power sharing. It is now recognised that this is the way forward for Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thank Mr Neeson for that reassuring and encouraging message.

Mr Dominic Grieve (*Beaconsfield*): I have no difficulty in welcoming the text of the proposed motion. As an MP for an English constituency it is inevitable that one is on the sideline and sometimes relegated to the role of Greek chorus, as Kevin McNamara described it, when looking at the issues which confront the peace process in Northern Ireland. However, I want to contribute one or two thoughts. First, we must bear in mind that the peace process in Northern Ireland has not followed some set, predictable pattern. In many respects its progress is heavily out of kilter in some areas whilst in others it has gone much further. On decommissioning, for example, we cannot escape the conclusion that we have made very little progress and that the lack of progress seems, from my experience of going to Northern Ireland and speaking to people especially within the Unionist community, to have created a climate of deep uncertainty over an Agreement which

many Unionists believed at the outset was very difficult for them to accept. Decommissioning was clearly something that was held out to them as being of supreme importance in providing the reassurance that they had taken the right decision in endorsing the Agreement. The fact that in practical terms it has not happened is a poison at the heart of the Agreement which has got to be addressed.

With that in mind I wish to turn to that which has been concerning me over the past few months in the House of Commons, namely, the passage of the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill in which I, Lembit Öpik and some others have had a part to play. It is quite clear that the principles of the Patten Report need to be implemented. However, it has struck me as slightly odd that we have a situation where the Patten Report has become a mantra. I have sat through hours of committee work and the first thing that struck me was how much was agreed between the parties and was never discussed. At one stage the Government was threatening to impose a guillotine because it thought we were going to take weeks over it, but in fact we raced through most of the agenda. When we came to the stumbling blocks, and applying my lawyer's mind rather than my politician's mind, it often struck me that the arguments we were having were of the most nit-picking nature. One cannot take a text prepared by a group of well-meaning politicians and academics and translate it into a legal framework whilst preserving every dot on every "i" and the cross on every "t" of the text. Many of the things people were worrying about seemed simply not to be there at all.

When it comes to the symbols involved, I got the impression during the course of the passage of the Bill in the Standing Committee of the House of Commons that there is ample room for compromise and that the compromises started to break down when people once again became extraordinarily legalistic about what exactly they wanted. I found the process of the Bill in the Commons quite heartening. If I found anything disheartening it was that on occasion individuals were looking gift horses in the mouth and failing to grasp what was being offered to them. I hope that when it returns from the House of Lords it will be in a form that is acceptable. I am very mindful of the fact that this is a critical issue for the Nationalist community; that formed part of my learning curve while I served on the Standing Committee. It should also be recognised that with the overall peace process sometimes facing difficulties because of time constraints and lack of progress, flexibility must be provided. Dogmatic adherence to minutiae is what prevents the peace process progressing. I hope we can move along the road and maintain momentum.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan): It is good to hear Seán Neeson, a voice from the Northern Ireland situation. It is important that we listen carefully to those who are at the coalface and can tell us more clearly what exactly is happening in regard to the Agreement and how it is working. As a Deputy who lives along the Border - we have more than 100 miles of border with Northern Ireland - I am aware that involvement with Northern Ireland personnel at every level is extremely important. I worked in farming organisations at national and European level for many years and we had a very good relationship with the various farm organisations

in Northern Ireland. It came as something of a shock to discover that political relationships and involvement were not quite as easy.

In recent weeks, Dr Seán Farren, Minister for Further Education, cut a sod for a cross-Border project in Monaghan and Bríd Rodgers, Minister for Agriculture, launched a joint food industry promotion. They are only two of many examples of what can happen if the Northern Ireland Assembly continues to operate. Cross-Border visits and co-operation can only lead to the development of clear understanding. Deputy Boylan stated that where such understanding is lacking, that should be dealt with through proper structures.

The most worrying aspect of recent times is that there was only a 43% turn-out in the recent by-election which failed to elect the Unionist "No" candidate. Some 57% of the electorate did not vote because they did not feel any candidate adequately represented their aspirations. We cannot underestimate the damage that that election may have caused to the overall stability of the peace process. We still have major problems in the hard-line Unionist areas mentioned previously, a fact that many people find frightening.

I am heartened today to hear some people recognising that David Trimble is an important cog in the wheel. I would not have been one of his greatest admirers when he first took up his position but, in recent times, he has proved that he is made of stern stuff. I was worried recently by the apparent development of a line of thought among some very senior people that Mr Trimble was a disposable asset. The alternatives to Mr Trimble seem quite frightening although they might, like him, grow into the job.

There has been a great deal of talk about the need for proper policing in the North and I concur with the comments made. We must find a compromise that will ensure that the police force in Northern Ireland will operate to everyone's benefit. We must not forget that decommissioning comprises part of that overall package. The fact that so many guns still lie in certain people's hands is extremely worrying. Last night on my way to this meeting, I received a telephone call from a person who told me of a young girl who was held at gunpoint at a cash dispensing machine and told to hand over whatever money she had in her account. That could have been blatant robbery or it could have been a means of fundraising for certain people; but it is a difficult situation for the police to investigate. I spoke to a policeman in Clones who said there was no point in their setting up a speed check on the road from Clones to Newtownbutler because once the offenders crossed the Border, they could not be followed. I would like to see the development of greater co-operation in this area.

Mr Brendan McGahon (*Louth*): John O'Donoghue could catch them.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (*Belfast South*): I am very pleased to be present. I strongly support this motion and congratulate Brian Hayes on a very comprehensive opening. I did not expect to have an opportunity to speak today and am very grateful to be able to do so.

The Assembly is up and running. The Executive is preparing a programme for government; the committees are working well and, for the first time, in 20 years, we are beginning to make decisions for ourselves. Important matters such as health, education and the environment are now up for real debate and discussion.

We have relative peace on our streets but do not quite have the political stability we need. It was never going to be easy but the Good Friday Agreement is the best opportunity for political stability we will have for at least another generation. The SDLP does not have any guns but we must press hard for decommissioning from those groups who still hold arms.

On the policing issue, it is important to be aware that the SDLP knows what our constituency will accept. The Patten Report was a compromise because the parties to the Agreement could not reach agreement. We, in the SDLP, have accepted that compromise and fully supported the report from day one. However, we did not write the report and if young, moderate Nationalists do not feel able to join a new police service, it will be a failure. The SDLP wants to see the recommendations of the report implemented in full. We must also encourage the pro-Agreement Unionist parties to convince its electorate that we need a completely new beginning in policing in order that we can all leave that part of our past behind.

I passionately want to see peace in the North. I am referred to as a moderate Nationalist because I am a member of the SDLP; but let me say that the SDLP is a very radical party in its fight and desire for peace. The Patten Report must be implemented in full. I want the Good Friday Agreement to continue to work, which I believe it will. However, we must not allow each new obstacle to control the possibility for peace for all of us.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Carmel.

The sitting was suspended at 11 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.25 am with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

4. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS (continued)

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The debate will be wound up at the appropriate time, approximately 12.45 pm, by Michael Mates. The four minute rule continues for other speakers. Ten more speakers are offering and I hope it will be possible for all to speak. The first is Harry Barnes and he will be followed by Austin Currie.

Mr Harry Barnes (*Derbyshire North East*): I should like to begin by thanking Peter Brooke for his kind comments. I do not do this merely as a matter of form but because the work of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, as with all committees, depends very much on the work of the chair. The work done by Peter has been considerable. We must also remember that the peace process was started by a form of words devised by Peter that helped to get Sinn Féin, and later IRA, involvement in that process.

As regards points raised by Conor Lenihan and Kevin McNamara on the Patten Report, Mr Lenihan expressed concern about watering down the report and Mr McNamara spoke about compromise on top of compromise. I would argue that the Belfast Agreement and what is happening in Northern Ireland has a great deal to do with the politics of compromise. The agreement is clearly a compromise between different interests. It is the creation of an artificial centre as far as Northern Ireland politics are concerned. It is sacrosanct: the basic element that must be present all the time in developments. The Patten Report came out of the Belfast Agreement. It contained the arrangements to set it up but it is not part of the agreement. It is an area that can be subject to compromise in order to get a satisfactory position.

As regards the police force in Northern Ireland, for example the issue of the name, I have compromised as circumstances have changed. At the time of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee report I saw nothing wrong with retaining the name of the RUC. It was a case of "what is in a name" and there was an attachment to it in the Unionist camp and a feeling of "why cannot it continue to be used". As matters developed I moved to a position where I argued to hold on to the hybrid position in which the new name and the RUC could be used together. As that went, a position has emerged in which it is said the RUC is referred to in the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill as almost the title deeds of that legislation. I am keen to see if it means something so that it may be used on ceremonial and other occasions but, from my position, I am into the politics of compromise because I am looking for compromises that help to get solutions. The Belfast Agreement is the key element in connection with that.

It is not on for those on the Unionist, Nationalist and Republican side to claim they get nothing but the other side gets everything. Any Nationalist, Republican or Unionist politician can be given a list of what has been achieved on both sides. I will not repeat it but it contains significant elements on both sides. What we need in order to have it firmly established and work in the way we all want is the element contained in the Belfast Agreement that calls for decommissioning, it might be that arms be put beyond use, to be fully and genuinely embedded in it. It would be very helpful, from the IRA side, if exiles who were excluded from Northern Ireland were allowed to return. That seems especially appropriate in circumstances where the British Government is not to pursue extradition provisions seeking the return of Provos. In those circumstances Provos should not operate their own exclusion provisions.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West): I make no apology for speaking on one subject only. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of policing. It is central and crucial. If we do not have a police service that is acceptable to and has membership from both communities, the Good Friday Agreement will eventually fail. I have the greatest admiration for the courage of David Trimble and I hope he survives but his political future is secondary, as is that of Séamus Mallon, Gerry Adams, Peter Mandelson and Bertie Ahern, to having a successful solution to this problem.

In optimum circumstances it would still be a very difficult task. Ulster Nationalists have never been part of the law and order establishment or policing consensus. In political terms they have always been on the other side. This was the case long before partition. I was trying to decide on a date where attitudes might have been different - perhaps the Battle of Kinsale - but in recent centuries that has been the position. The situation was highlighted with partition. It was not our State, our parliament, our courts or our police force. To change that centuries-old attitude to policing from negative to positive will not be easy nor will it happen overnight. In some parts of the North, particularly in Belfast, the police force is still known as "the Peelers", despite the fact that Sir Robert Peel was Chief Secretary for Ireland in the 1810s. Change will not happen easily and it will require optimum conditions to give it a chance.

There was reference to Catholics joining the police service. Being a Catholic and joining the new police service is not sufficient. We require young Nationalists and Republicans from areas of Northern Ireland such as west Belfast, east Tyrone and south Armagh, areas where Nationalism is felt strongly, to join the new service and in circumstances where they feel no less Nationalist or Republican, and from the other side of the fence no less Unionist, for so doing. That is crucial. We should be looking at the new police service from the point of view of getting these people to join and working from there to get the conditions in which the SDLP and Sinn Féin can tell their followers to join the new police service with a chance that their advice will be heeded, otherwise we will be in serious trouble.

I look forward to a situation where the Northern Ireland Executive will be in charge of policing. It is unacceptable that those who make the laws and decide policy should not have the power to enforce and implement them. An administration that does not have responsibility for enforcing its laws and regulations is a political eunuch. I look forward to the day when that will happen. However, that is down the road and in order to achieve it we must start off with a position where it is possible for young Nationalists, Republicans and Unionists to join the new police service and not feel less Nationalist or Unionist for so doing.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Before calling the next speaker, we are pleased that Sir Nicholas Fenn, former British Ambassador to Ireland, is with us. He has a very active role within the British-Irish association and has demonstrated, and continues to do so, his commitment to good British-Irish relations. We are very pleased to see him.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Several speakers have referred to difficulties in developing the peace process but if they are to be overcome a solution must be in the context of the Good Friday Agreement. That agreement was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of people on the island of Ireland and it was also supported by a majority of both communities in Northern Ireland.

One of the biggest difficulties is the division of opinion within the Unionist community, the division between the UUP and the DUP and the divisions within the

UUP itself. These divisions and difficulties were manifest during the recent South Antrim by-election and also at the Ulster Unionist Party Council meeting at the weekend. Part of the problem is that there are people within the Unionist community who are absolutely opposed to the Good Friday Agreement. It is important for us, therefore, to give as much support and encouragement as possible to those Unionists who support the Agreement, but that support and encouragement for David Trimble must not involve the abandonment or dilution of any of the principles of the Good Friday Agreement.

More visible progress on decommissioning would be of great benefit, but maybe there would be more progress in that respect if there was more progress in demilitarisation, especially in Border areas. During a recent visit to Crossmaglen with Committee A I was appalled to see the continuing oppressive military presence which causes deep offence to local people and is a visible sign of war rather than peace.

On policing, the Unionist community wants more compromise on the Patten proposals, but any agreement which emerges must ensure the police is truly representative of both communities in Northern Ireland, otherwise we will all be back at square one and Patten will have been a complete waste of time.

I understand Bertie Ahern is to meet Tony Blair tomorrow. Both Governments must work together to develop the peace process. The eventual solution lies not just with the leaders of both Governments, but political leaders in Northern Ireland and in the need for true leadership, which involves straight talking and having the courage to tell some members of one's own party when they have got it wrong. David Trimble's speech on Saturday was a courageous attempt to do so and if he continues to do so, the peace process will have a better chance of surviving and developing and, I hope, see the emergence of a new Ireland where people of differing political and religious traditions will live together in peace and harmony. That is what the Good Friday Agreement is all about and why it is deserving of our support.

Mr McGahon: Coming from a Border town, Dundalk, which has been unfairly dubbed "El Paso" by the media, naturally I and the people of my town have more than a passing interest in the success of the Agreement, but despite the Agreement my town has continued to figure in the news media for all kinds of reasons. The wrong type of people have moved in from Northern Ireland and given Dundalk a very bad image.

Not enough cognisance has been taken of the South Antrim by-election result: a very significant rejection of David Trimble. We should have taken greater cognisance of that result caused by the fact that David Trimble and the two Governments have failed to deliver on decommissioning. There are six private armies in the North of Ireland, each of which has the potential to engulf the whole of Ireland in a civil war. The honourable Unionist folk of the North of Ireland voted for the initial peace process on the premise that decommissioning would take place. It has not. In other

words, the two Governments have not delivered. Until that stumbling block is overcome no peace agreement has a hope in Hell of success in the North of Ireland.

Laudable though his efforts have been, the dogs in the streets are barking the departure of Mr Trimble. The bookmakers will not even take offers. His departure is inevitable and it will happen because, as Deputy Ó Caoláin said, he has not delivered on decommissioning.

Mr Michael Mates (*East Hampshire*): That is not what he said.

Mr McGahon: No, it is a variation. What he said was that David Trimble had failed. The reason he has failed is that he has not delivered on decommissioning, which he was led to believe by Sinn Féin-IRA would happen. What this means is that they have let David Trimble down and endangered the peace process.

Unionists are also sore about the Patten Report. Surely, both sides can compromise to some extent. The man who holds the key is Séamus Mallon. I endorse the words of Peter Temple-Morris, who has become a legend in this grouping for his fairness and work in the pursuit of peace in the North, that he was very happy that the Patten Report was fair. Séamus Mallon should give it a chance and ask Catholics to join. There would be no shortage of job seekers east of the Bann. It deserves a chance because the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

The threat to the peace process has swung from the IRA to the Unionist groupings. The feuding between the Unionist terror gangs holds the ingredients for real trouble in the North. Unless it is quelled it will inevitably turn to look for sectarian targets. That in itself could draw the IRA back into what this time could be a larger scale conflict.

Mr John McFall (*Dumbarton*): I expected a point of order from Deputy Ó Caoláin arising out of the last speech. I am delighted to support the motion, particularly the part that states that we have to redouble our efforts. We have to do this in both a formal and informal sense. I depart from Mr Kevin McNamara in thinking that we are part of a Greek chorus with little influence. We have a lot of influence and teeth, which we should use in the next few weeks.

The Good Friday Agreement has been described as the only show in town. I agree entirely with this. We are here largely because of the Agreement, which crosses a divide and is something precious to which we have to hang on. We have to be evangelists for it.

Mention has been made of David Trimble who is in a fractious, divided party. Only last week I was talking to some senior members of the Ulster Unionist Party who said openly to me, "We'll get him in the next couple of weeks. Maybe we'll not get him with a leadership challenge, but we'll get him with some policies which he can't support." If we wish to keep the momentum going, it is important that we support David Trimble and that support is manifest. That is both urgent and very important.

The Good Friday Agreement has spawned new relationships. Deputy Cecilia Keaveney mentioned the North-South bodies, which are working very well. Individuals such as Peter Robinson and others who come from the DUP sit down and ensure it is working well. That is a tremendous leap. There are also the East-West bodies. I was delighted today to see representatives from Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and, in particular, Seán Neeson and Carmel Hanna from the Assembly. I would like to see more from the Assembly here. Perhaps Seán Neeson will take back that message.

We are dealing with a Unionist community which is anxious and depressed and at community level is disengaged. Mention has been made of the Loyalist feuds. Many of the feuds have arisen because there is no community infrastructure in these Loyalist communities. While we are talking about the supposedly big things we have let the bread and butter politics go. It is the bread and butter politics that will save this issue. There is a need to ensure that we look towards these communities. Let us take two issues, one of which is education. In any deprived Loyalist community one will see the lack of ambition, the lack of outcome regarding certification at examinations. We have a grammar schools system in Northern Ireland that means that many of the population view themselves as second class citizens. I would like to see debates taking place in Northern Ireland because those are the real issues.

If we continue with this paucity of provisions we will reap that whirlwind. We need to get into those communities and to build up that community infrastructure. In the next few weeks we are going to face real hard choices. Peter Brooke said there are dangerous corners ahead. I pay tribute to Peter Brooke and others who helped lay the ground in the past. There are always dangerous corners in Northern Ireland and we kid ourselves if we do not think that is the reality. We must give support to Mr Trimble in the next few weeks and we must use all our efforts to ensure that Patten does pass its hurdles in the House of Lords and in the House of Commons. If we do that we have a measure of support and confidence we can take forward.

Nelson Mandela helped us some months ago in Northern Ireland. A number of Northern Ireland politicians went to South Africa where Nelson Mandela went between the two parties to support them. It was an ironic situation. What Mandela said there was that his experience in negotiations was that until he changed himself he could not possibly change others. We have changed sufficiently now and our duty is to ensure that we all change ourselves so that the Good Friday Agreement is implemented in full and we go on towards a better island of Ireland.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (*Cavan-Monaghan*): It is important always to recognise the great achievements of the past five years -the establishment of the Assembly, the Executive and, above all, the ceasefire. It is important, no matter what happens, that the Assembly and the Executive should be kept in place. I would not like to see them suspended again. The longer the Executive goes on and the longer it is dealing with the day-to-day issues that affect the people in Northern Ireland, the better chance there is of resolving the outstanding differences. Certainly, I would like to see more progress on decommissioning and I would like to see Mr Ahtisaari and Mr

Ramaphosa back again with a view to seeing what can be done. Mr Dominic Grieve referred to the fact that policing is a critical issue for the Nationalists. That is absolutely true and has been the case for a long time. The nearest area of the North to me is south Armagh. The overwhelming majority of the people there want normal policing, which they have not had in the past 30 years. They have had no policing as such.

I would like to see Patten implemented. Patten was part of the Good Friday Agreement. It came about as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. Proper policing is fundamental to the success of the Agreement. It would be most unfortunate if there was not a police force that the Nationalists could accept. It is fundamental that the police force should be acceptable to Nationalists and that they would feel free to join it. It would be very unfortunate if that did not happen.

What is important to all of us who are elected whether to the Westminster or Dublin Parliaments or to the Assembly is that the directive to us came from the referendum. I understand the feelings about the South Antrim by-election but the directive was the referendum specifically on the Good Friday Agreement where the overwhelming majority of the people North and South directed that they wanted the Good Friday Agreement implemented. There is an obligation on the two sovereign Parliaments and on the Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly to see that the Good Friday Agreement is implemented. I believe that all parties who support the Agreement should look at how they might be able to address the concerns of the other party, not to compromise on the Good Friday Agreement but how they implement it with a sensitivity to the parties on the other side of the divide.

Lord Smith of Clifton: I am pleased to be attending this Body for the first time. In supporting the motion before us, and agreeing that the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill is the immediate priority and one with which I shall be deeply involved when it progresses in the Lords over the next few weeks, we should look a little further ahead and at other elements in the Good Friday Agreement. I wish to refer particularly to how the concept of a Council of the Isles might be further progressed. It has had little general attention so far in political circles. What is needed, in my view, is the application of political imagination as to how it can be developed substantially. There is, in my view, a need for more than a Nordic union that has important cultural aspects and I accept this is a very important aspect of the development of the Council of the Isles. It needs to have added to it economic and commercial channels as well as those of social affairs.

Mr Brian Hayes referred to the future of policing in these islands. I would have thought that in such a social affairs dimension those could be developed. These would help the Council of the Isles to become something real and effective - not just a pale under-powered political institution that it may well be unless we attend to it. It must have a strong political impact and one that will reflect the growing regional and sub-regional interests and sentiments that is of increasing importance in all parts of these islands which comprise the whole of the western European archipelago.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): Today we appear to be looking back when we should be looking forward. If anybody had told me, when I first came to this Body about eight years ago, the progress that would be made between that time and the end of the century I would have said it was an impossible dream. We have made progress but we cannot continue without the assistance of the people of Northern Ireland. When I refer to the people of Northern Ireland I mean the inclusive community in Northern Ireland. It does not matter whether one lives on the Shankill or the Falls, in south Armagh or in north Antrim; the problems are basically the same. There is the problem of communities that have been divided for so long that there is still mistrust. Until we deal with that mistrust we will not make any major progress.

The Assembly is operating and the Executive is making progress. People in Northern Ireland, for the first time in many years, see that they can determine their own destiny with regard to the Assembly. The guns have been silenced and that is a major achievement. We all look back with a certain pride that these guns have been silenced. People talk about decommissioning. Decommissioning is a frame of mind and will always be a frame of mind. Until somebody's mind is decommissioned there is no point in decommissioning the guns. Guns are available anywhere one wants to acquire them, so while the decommissioning issue is used as a bone of contention on many occasions by Unionists, and especially by Mr Paisley and company, it is only being used as a smokescreen with regard to the Northern Ireland situation.

The support of the two Governments for the peace process is without question but we have now reached the hard part of the task, and Patten is the hard part that has to be accepted by Unionists. I am not saying that some changes cannot be made with regard to Patten, but the bones of Patten as they were agreed have to be the bones of future policing in Northern Ireland, and people can say that it is not acceptable. I remember having a major debate with Séamus Mallon at this Body about five or six years ago during which I asked him openly why Nationalists would not join the RUC. I well remember the lecture I got from him. He said it was because there was mistrust, and I agree with him in that. The communities from which those people come would not have the confidence to join the RUC as it then stood. We have to be able to say that Northern Ireland will have a new police force that will be acceptable across the community.

In regard to what John McFall mentioned with regard to the economics, every side has its own deprived communities and those communities will have to be given help. We have to prove to them that democracy works and that there is more to be achieved by being a participant in the democratic process than by brandishing a rifle or making a bomb. We have a duty to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement is sold to both communities. I have to be critical of David Trimble in this regard. His first real attempt to sell the agreement was on Saturday. That was the first time he took on the dissidents within his own party and while they might be very vocal, they are a small minority within Unionism. Middle ground Unionists have supported the agreement. They voted for it but having voted for it, they felt they had done all that was required of them. What is now required of moderate Unionists, and of Nationalists, is to continue to sell the Good Friday Agreement, the Assembly and the

opportunities that now exist to build a new Northern Ireland of peace and harmony so that we will no longer have to read, as we did in today's *Irish News*, about school buses being stoned on their way from school. Until both communities trust each other, and until the education system is at the point where there is complete agreement that we all want to be fairly treated, that issue will have to be addressed. Our duty is to support what has been put in place with regard to the Good Friday Agreement and Patten. In doing that we will do more to contribute to peace in Northern Ireland than we have done for some time.

Ms Geraldine Smith (*Morecambe and Lunesdale*): I am delighted to be speaking in this constructive debate and in support of the motion before us. It is a shame that the Unionists declined to come to this Body because I would like to hear their views. The debate might have been a little more controversial and lively. I was heartened to hear the positive comments from Séan Neeson and Carmel Hanna direct from the Assembly and that politicians in Northern Ireland are beginning to speak about health, education and the issues that really matter to the people living on the Falls Road and the Shankill Road. They are the barriers we must break down to get people thinking about normal politics.

In my own constituency of Morecambe and Lunesdale we have the port of Heysham, and over the years I have dealt with issues of trade between Britain and Ireland and met various groups. It always amazed me that even at the height of the troubles, as long as we did not talk about the troubles and kept to economic issues, Sinn Féin councillors and Ulster Unionists could reach agreement on these areas. That needs to be extended and a positive approach is what is needed. There have been amazing achievements over the past five years. People have moved on. It is incredible that Sinn Féin and Unionists are sitting down together and talking about issues. There is a lot of hope and there is no going back because, as has already been said, what is the alternative? The alternative would be shootings, bombings and people living in fear. That is not the society I want for Northern Ireland and it is not what the people of the North or the South want. They want peace and they want to work together.

Some of the things that have happened are a shame. In my own constituency last week I talked to a ferry operator who said Peter Robinson had been a good minister when he was dealing with certain issues. He said that because of the rotation of DUP ministers, difficulties had arisen because of the lack of continuity. People should not play politics with economic issues because they are essential to Northern Ireland.

The police issue has got to be resolved. I am originally a Northern Irish Catholic. I understand the way people in Northern Ireland feel about the police and the major issue it is within the Nationalist community. As Austin Currie has already said, the police force must be representative of the whole community. It is essential that young Catholics as well as young Protestants join the police force and believe that it is their police force because until that happens, there will still be a way in for the paramilitaries. It is essential that progress is made on this issue but the problems can be overcome. Events have gone too far now. People want peace too much to be tempted back to the old ways. This is the 21st century and there is a good future for

Ireland, both North and South, and a peaceful way forward. It is a pleasure to support the motion before us and I hope that progress can be made.

Senator Paschal Mooney: What has just been said is probably an indication of the constant theme running through the debate this morning. If there is a similarity about the theme, it is important that this Body should repeat the message as often as it is necessary to do so.

The question of division, particularly in Unionist circles, was raised. I would subscribe to the overwhelming view that David Trimble, and, by extension, the Executive and the Assembly, should be supported. It is marvellous to see two Members of the Legislative Assembly here at long last. I hope it will not be long before two Unionist members attend this Body.

While not wishing to diminish the reality of what is generally acknowledged to be a confused and divided Unionist community, I suggest, as has already been indicated, that one reality overshadows all others, that is, the deep desire of ordinary folk in Northern Ireland for the maintenance of peace. I further suggest - and perhaps this is striking a political note - that those members of the Ulster Unionist Council who have been using their party structures to maintain pressure on the Trimble leadership do not accurately reflect the majority view among the wider Unionist community. That may seem somewhat revolutionary, but the reason I put forward this premise is that all of us here who are members of political parties can testify to that strange dichotomy between those engaged in the business of *Realpolitik* of elected representatives and those who are party activists who do not have to take responsibility for the actions of the decisions taken in the smoke-filled back rooms of the caucuses. All those present who are party politicians will recognise that trait. I have witnessed that in Ireland between those who might be loosely referred to as "national executives" and those who are engaged in the real world of politics.

While the perception seems to be that David Trimble is constantly under pressure, which he is from within his party structure, at long last he has found the strength to be a real leader, as his speech last weekend indicated. It is incumbent on the British Government, particularly, to reinforce David Trimble's leadership qualities. While we in the Republic have a role to play, in the context of the Unionists looking eastwards rather than southwards, it is vital the British Government and, particularly, Prime Minister Blair, reinforces David Trimble's position, particularly in light of his leadership speech. For the first time since he became leader, he made a real leader's speech last weekend. He has taken on the demons within his party and we must stand back and hope he succeeds.

In the context of policing, I sympathise with those Unionists who have a difficulty with the recommendations in the Patten Report, especially those on the question of badges and the retention of the name of the RUC. I was one of a group of Irish parliamentarians who met representatives of the police association and representatives of the widows of those fallen officers. They came to Dublin and were led by Lord Cranborne some months back. It was a mould-breaking visit, one that I

hope will be repeated. No society can operate a police force without consensus. I do not mean any disrespect to the memory of those officers who fell in the line of duty in saying that the question that must be answered by those Unionists who are agonising over the recommendations in the Patten Report on this issue is this: do they want a police force representative of the community as a whole rather than one that continues to be perceived to be representative of only those of the Unionist persuasion?

I strongly support the view of my friend and colleague, Cecilia Keaveney, that all politics are local. Infrastructural developments in the North-South context are vital. As she said, the National Development Plan in the Republic should be mirrored by a similar financial commitment by the British Government to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The north-west links to the rest of the island require an immediate and substantial investment. The three cross-Border groups carried out a detailed analysis of infrastructural needs. That report was presented to the joint Ministers, the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Noel Dempsey, TD and Lord Dubs, prior to the setting up of the Assembly. That was more than two years ago. It would be interesting and instructive to know what movement, if any, has been made on the northern side on the detail of that report.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I have pleasure in welcoming another member from the Northern Ireland Assembly, a Sinn Féin member, Mr Barry McElduff, MLA.

Senator Mary Henry: I welcome the two people from Northern Ireland and other people from Scotland, Wales, Jersey and the Isle of Man, but, like Geraldine Smith, I very much regret that the Unionists have not come to this Body. I know I am not the only member of the Body who has tried to encourage them to attend. Dr O'Hanlon said we have to address the concerns of the other party. Senator Mooney put it very well when he said there are concerns among Unionists that we have to address. Imagine if Unionist representatives were here this morning when we discussed police training, perhaps in conjunction with the different forces, and the possibility of hot pursuit of criminals across the Border.

Many well-meaning Unionists do not understand that we share their concerns on these issues. Unionists are not the only people who are worried about decommissioning, and I am not speaking about only the decommissioning of the IRA. Brendan McGahon talked about six private armies in Northern Ireland. That is a terrifying statistic, as one can be sure that if there are arms, they will leak into the general community and we will be the people who will be at the wrong end of them.

Taking up the point made by Dr O'Hanlon about addressing the concerns of the other party, it would be well worth our while trying to contact those people in Northern Ireland of the Unionist persuasion who are still in favour of the Agreement. Dr O'Hanlon was correct in saying that there was support in the referendum, but Brendan McGahon is right about the significance of the South Antrim by-election. I found it extremely disappointing. The person elected is not someone who I envisage will bring forward the interests of most of the people on this island.

I support what Cecilia Keaveney said about the North-South bodies, all politics being local, and that practical efforts should be made to enable people to realise what progress is being made on the ground. Being a doctor, I have been involved in health initiatives. The British Medical Association grouping from Northern Ireland and the Irish Medical Organisation had a joint meeting in the Slieve Russell Hotel recently - where we met last year. The only matter on which they could decide was how soon we could meet again because it is obvious we have so many common problems that we have to try to deal with together. By these sort of practical initiatives we can put meat on the words of redoubling our efforts to overcome the current problems. The current problems will be overcome by showing our concerns are very much the same as those of the Unionists regarding transport, health, decommissioning, the police or whatever. Those who want to support the Agreement should not be left out on a limb. I have not got anywhere with those who do not support it. I hope we send forth a message from this Body that we are very interested in practical solutions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am reminded by the Clerk that apparently some Members are not aware that telephones are available to the British and Irish delegations. That is not a cue for everyone to leave. When I used one of those telephones to call my secretary in the Commons I was surprised there was not a long queue, and that was not a plot by me to make sure I could monopolise the telephone. The telephones are available for your respective uses.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North): I direct this point at the representatives from Westminster as that they have a hand in this legislation. It cannot be overstated that the future policing of Northern Ireland will be very important for the success of the Agreement. From the contacts I have had with people in the Nationalist community from various parts of Northern Ireland, I have learned it will be the core issue in the immediate and future years. If representatives from Westminster can succeed in putting in place a framework to ensure a credible police force in Northern Ireland which Nationalists would feel they could join, we will be going a long way towards ensuring the Good Friday Agreement survives. However, it will be critical. We cannot have a watered down version of the Patten Report. There are Unionist sensitivities, but I am sure they can be met to some extent. This matter is critical and I cannot over-emphasise that point to the Body. It has been emphasised already that if we cannot get the policing right, from a Nationalist point of view, the Agreement will be put under pressure in terms of credibility.

The other issue from a Unionist standpoint is decommissioning. The people North and South of the Border who voted for the Agreement were under the impression that decommissioning was an essential and integral part of it and that there would be decommissioning within a two year framework. This is why we all voted for the Agreement. We thought there would be decommissioning. From a Nationalist and Loyalist point of view, unless the issue of decommissioning is resolved soon to the satisfaction of all sides, it could be another factor that will hinder the progress of the Agreement. It is simple; there cannot be any easy way in relation to decommissioning. Arms must be decommissioned. They must be taken out of operation and this must be seen to happen. This is most important.

The other issue is North-South co-operation: I have tabled a question to the Taoiseach on this matter. The whole island must be seen to have received an economic dividend to ensure support for the Agreement. I am glad that the North-South bodies are up and running efficiently. However, this must be more visible. I have not seen too many reports in the media about what is happening with regard to North-South bodies. It is most important that the bodies are seen to be effective on both sides of the Border.

I am involved in a North-South initiative. I have a hands-on role in this initiative but my view is that sufficient support is not available for it. It is a flagship project but a proper level of support on the ground is not evident. This initiative could be an example for other North-South projects.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

Mr Deenihan: I am delighted that the Co-Chairman, Mr O'Kennedy, is back. I thank him for acknowledging the fact that Kerry won the All-Ireland. Some of my colleagues said they were surprised to see me here. I would not be present if Galway had won. I would not enter enemy territory.

My English colleagues are undoubtedly all familiar with the United Kingdom. I come from a county called the Kingdom of Kerry. There are two kingdoms in the isles: the Kingdom of Kerry and the United Kingdom. The reason it is called the Kingdom of Kerry is not because we win All-Irelands but because 200 or 300 years ago a British or English official came to the county. He reported back to Westminster that the people of Kerry were so independent that it should be described as the Kingdom of Kerry. That is how the name came about. I thank the Co-Chairman, Mr O'Kennedy, for acknowledging our victory at the weekend.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I was just in time to acknowledge it. The Deputy displayed typical Kerry modesty. I suppose it is appropriate for me, given that I come from what is acknowledged all over Ireland as the premier county, to acknowledge the success of the Kingdom.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford): I wish to state my strong support for the motion and to deal with a couple of points. I will try not to repeat arguments already presented. One of the points that may have been missed this morning in relation to the recent by-election is that the Unionist candidates were both anti-Agreement. The fact that Mr Trimble's party selected through its democratic processes an anti-Agreement candidate is a measure of the difficulties facing him within his party.

The Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, and the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, will meet tomorrow in Downing Street in London. I understand they will consider some aspects of the Patten Report. I hope some positives will emerge from those discussions that will give some comfort to Mr Trimble at this stage in the affairs of Northern Ireland. He has been a significant player from the beginning of the process. He has shown a great deal of courage and he needs our help and support at this

junction. We look to the party leaders and the Prime Ministers tomorrow to bring something forward that will help matters.

A factor that those of us in the South could consider is the reform and modernisation of our police force. The Patten model could be appropriately applied to the system in the South. It would solidly establish the principle of accountability. If the Irish Government sought to reform our police force along similar lines, it would be an example of our goodwill. In terms of Patten as the model which will create a police force that is acceptable to both communities, as we all know, unless that point is reached difficulties will continue and real progress will be stymied.

Other speakers referred to the cross-Border bodies. It is obvious that the acceleration of the development of these bodies and their effectiveness is vital. If people are being brought together on the ground, something is being achieved that will filter through to the body politic. Where political leaders are being intransigent and indulging in antediluvian positions, the force of public opinion is important in terms of bringing about changes in attitudes among these people who are unwilling to change at present.

I am pleased that representatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament are present. As other speakers noted, it is regrettable that representatives of the Unionist community are not present. As a Body, we should stretch out our hands once again and invite them to attend. We are all on the same side in terms of bringing peace and equality to all the people of Northern Ireland in a way that is comparable to other democracies in the European Union.

Mr Michael Mates (*East Hampshire*): My first sad task is, on behalf of everybody here, to bid farewell to my fellow-Vice-Chairman, Charles Flanagan. He has been a constructive and active member of Committee A, on which a number of us serve, and the Steering Committee. I do not understand why he is moving from this pleasant and challenging task to being the Chief Whip of an Opposition party. It must be one of the most thankless tasks in politics, but that is a matter for him. We are very sorry to see him go but I extend a warm welcome to Brian Hayes who is taking his place. I congratulate him on his maiden address when he moved the motion so very well. I look forward to working with him in the months and years ahead.

It will not surprise the Chairmen or the Steering Committee to hear that I support the motion wholeheartedly. It was moved excellently by Brian Hayes who identified the three difficult points. We have been going around and around them with the 27 speakers who have taken a constructive part in the debate.

I was a little surprised that decommissioning was not mentioned once by the first ten speakers, with the exception of Peter Temple-Morris who mentioned it somewhat dismissively in passing because he thought there were better ways to get around that problem. It was significant that the first person to mention it as one of the crunch issues was the new addition to the Body from the Northern Ireland Assembly,

Seán Neeson. He said this would be one of the two major crunch points. I shall return to that later.

I am not surprised the policing issue is the main focus of this debate. Not only is it current because it is going through Westminster, but I acknowledge and agree that if we cannot solve that problem and make a new beginning with the police force in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement will not get far. People have said that once we get the Patten Commission proposals through Westminster and a start is made on implementing them it will then be up to the SDLP and other Nationalist leaders to commend to their communities that they join the police. What stopped many Catholics and Nationalists from joining the police in the past was not the fact that they did not have the endorsement of people such as John Hume and Séamus Mallon but the fact they were killed by the paramilitaries, their homes were bombed and they had to move house if they did. The commitment, therefore, was too much to bear for anyone from that community who wanted a career in the police force.

It is that mindset, as much as that of the political leaders, which must change. This will be a real difficulty because the paramilitaries have got a vested interest in maintaining hostility to the police because they think they are doing the job adequately, if not better. Although the guns are silent in terms of general terrorism and bombs are not going off every day, we all know the atmosphere of fear and violence engendered by the paramilitaries, particularly in the Nationalist community, is one of the brakes on getting a new start in a new all-inclusive police service. There is much work to be done and, as one or two speakers said, that involves a change of mindset.

Deputy Ó Caoláin first said in what I thought was a constructive speech that David Trimble was a failure. I do not hold any brief to speak for David Trimble or the Ulster Unionists but if he is a failure, then what we will get instead is something far worse. He has had a difficult time with what one could call the hard-line members of his party. Those who think it is just the Ulster Unionist Council that is the problem should bear in mind two things. First, it is a body elected by the grass-roots Unionists in the constituencies. Second, if it was only those few hard-liners who were holding a pistol to David Trimble's head, what was going on in the Antrim by-election when tens of thousands of moderate Unionists voted that this was enough because progress had not been made?

One speaker said that with David Burnside there were two anti-Agreement Unionists. David Burnside may have said he would not vote for the Good Friday Agreement now but he voted for it at the start. This is at the heart of the problem. Moderate Unionists have become disillusioned with the lack of progress and feel all the concessions have been made from their side. I sound like a Unionist apologist; however, if there were Unionist members here I suspect we would have heard it from them in more strident terms. A dimension people must remember is that if a moderate majority of Unionists vote enthusiastically, as they did, for the Good Friday Agreement and then find that all the difficulties are coming back to them and none,

as they perceive it, are being faced by the other side, then there is a serious problem.

To those who think David Trimble is either a failure or on his way out, I remind them about what happened to Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner. One can only lead one's troops as far as one can take them. Politics is the art of the possible. Both those moderate Unionist leaders fell in times past because they moved ahead of their troops. Both were replaced by a much more extreme and unpalatable alternative. Although I do not hold any brief for David Trimble, we want to be careful to ensure he gets all the support he needs because the alternative will be less attractive.

Our two members of the Northern Ireland Assembly assured us it is working at grass-roots level. I welcome and applaud that. However, we must remember that Sunningdale was working at that level and that power sharing was starting to work. People were working together within the committees set up under the Sunningdale Agreement, but it was scuppered because the moderate Unionists would not take what they were being asked to swallow. I would hate to see history repeat itself. We are moving to a critical moment when David Trimble might be forced to take his people out of the Assembly. I hope it will not happen. Seán Neeson said he does not believe it will happen. However, it could happen and into the void will pour the more extreme version of what they call Ulster Unionism, such as Loyalism, which will bring us back to square one. Those of us who want to see the Assembly in its fledgling way continue and prosper must do everything we can to allow the moderate Unionists to support their moderate leader in what he is doing.

As regards decommissioning, I was starting to despair that anyone would robustly support that part of the Good Friday Agreement until Deputy McGahon came riding to the rescue with his robust support of the necessity to face this problem, as I have heard from a Member of the Dáil before. It is not just a mantra but an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement that arms should be given up and put away. A move has not been made by those who hold those arms. Little has been said by those who represent the political wing of those paramilitaries to encourage it. The spirit seems to be that they will not do it anyway so we should not bother trying. That is what Peter Temple-Morris was trying to tell us.

People such as Martin McGuinness have unashamedly said that one gun or bullet will not be decommissioned and that remains the position. The challenge for us is to change that mindset so that position is changed. If a gesture were made in terms of handing in weapons, it would put the onus back on the moderate Unionists to swallow their bitter pills on policing, the Patten Report, the badge and the name. They perceive that they are being asked to swallow all the medicine while the paramilitaries get all the sugar. That is not the way to get the Agreement to prosper, but how do we do it?

The electors of Antrim have now said they believe they were misled when they were asked to vote in a referendum two years ago. Tony Blair went to Northern Ireland and said the arms would be handed in concurrently and that there must be parallel

movement. That was the promise made by a British Prime Minister to the people of Northern Ireland and they enthusiastically voted for it and believed in it. What have they seen? They have not seen any form of parallel movement and the arms decommissioning issue is still at the starting-gate while most of the Unionists have been invited to swallow pill after pill, such as the release of prisoners. That is what caused the upset in Antrim a few weeks ago. If we cannot persuade the paramilitaries to move from that starting gate, there will be more upsets. The next one is likely to be the demise of David Trimble and his replacement by a more extreme leader who will reflect that disillusion. I do not believe any of us can go away from here, after what has been a very constructive debate, saying that everything is all right and that we are moving along nicely, because we are not. We are very close to crisis. As I see it, the one thing that will move that logjam is some movement, however small, on the decommissioning side. If that does not happen, I fear we are in for a long winter and, perhaps, a long spring and summer next year. That is not to say we have not had an excellent debate: we have. However, I wish that point had been put as forcefully by many others as it was put by Deputy McGahon, because it seems the key towards us getting a real peace. Without any movement on that, the Unionists will never be comfortable with a real peace.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I will make a few observations before I put the motion formally. First, I want to acknowledge that those who have joined us for the first time have made a very significant contribution to this debate and have broadened our vision and understanding. That was reflected very clearly in the tone and theme of the very comprehensive debate we have had. If there was one common theme, it was the level of tolerance and understanding from different perspectives of the views and difficulties of the parties in Northern Ireland.

It is important for me to say as Co-Chairman, although it may be a personal view, that this Body, as it is constituted and now that it has been expanded, has only one aim, which is for us, as representatives of our Parliaments and peoples, to demonstrate that we want to encourage, support and help those who are interested in political development, political consensus and moving together in the interests of the people we represent, which is the fundamental role of every public representative. Our colleagues from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the islands have made a new and dynamic contribution.

I regret, although it is not for the first time, that our colleagues from any level of Unionism cannot be here, because they are the only element in the British and Irish democratic structure not represented. I think if they attended they would not have felt threatened by what has been said about our intentions.

I had expectations - not just hopes - that when we broadened the scope of this plenary meeting, after our discussions at an informal meeting in London at Steering Committee level, that might ease the path for all elected representatives to join us here. In the event, my expectations were not fulfilled. However, I hope it will be clear to those who observed that there is no real sense of antagonism towards this

Body. It might be an expression of something different and not a rejection of this Body or what we set out to do.

However, I join with all of you in hoping for, and looking forward to, the day when we can have a fully representative debate here with all strands of political opinion on all the islands, Britain and Ireland. We then would not have to report back or interpret, but would hear it directly. As Michael said, if they were here they might say it in a more forthright way, or even in what might sometimes appear to us to be too direct and blunt a way. However, the whole democratic process depends on that. I want to say, as Co-Chairman, that if and when they feel they can join at the level that has now opened up here, they will be warmly welcomed, without any threat or risk to their adhering to their political traditions or the principles which they hold so dearly and which we respect.

Due to the sensitivities and difficulties that we are conscious of in the Steering Committee, we made slight amendments to the original motion. For that reason, I was pleased to hear the general consensus and support for it.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body, conscious of the difficulties being faced by the two Governments and the parties in their efforts to achieve the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, welcomes the progress made so far, and urges both Governments and all parties to redouble their efforts to overcome the present problems.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I note with a great degree of satisfaction that the motion has been carried unanimously. Thank you. The next session starts at 2.30 pm. I suggest Members return at 2.25 pm. The Taoiseach will address us at 2.30 pm and he has agreed to take questions afterwards, as has been the pattern with any Minister or Head of Government. At 4 pm we will have the family photograph outside for the record and for history.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.30 pm, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair

5. STATEMENT BY AN TAOISEACH, MR BERTIE AHERN TD

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Colleagues, it is a great pleasure to welcome the Taoiseach who, once again, will address a plenary meeting of our Body. As on the last occasion, he will be available to answer questions on a range of issues that you have tabled. I wish to tell the Taoiseach how much we appreciate the fact that he has come to address us on a second occasion. We are all conscious of the demands on any Prime Minister's time, particularly having regard to the time he must devote now to the issue we discussed this morning. Tomorrow, the Taoiseach will be having

important discussions with his British counterpart, Mr Blair. We greatly appreciate the fact that he is here.

This is an historic event for us, not just because the Taoiseach has come back to address us a second time, which we greatly appreciate, but also because for the first time we warmly welcome representatives of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the islands, including the Isle of Man. From their contributions to the debate this morning on our broad political motion, I have no doubt that their contributions will be dynamic in the future and will further expedite the process that we are all concerned with -to create a parliamentary framework to support the work that both Governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland are implementing.

Taoiseach, it is a pleasure to have you here and I will now ask you to address the Body.

The Taoiseach: I wish to thank both Co-Chairmen and their colleagues, especially those who are attending for the first time. It is pleasing to us all that the Inter-Parliamentary Body has facilitated these new changes. I thank you for that because it was very much a matter for yourselves to work out how best we organised the new system. I thank you, Michael and David, and all the Members of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for making those changes possible. I have no doubt, as you said, they will be hugely beneficial to our future deliberations. I thank you for your kind remarks in welcoming me. I am delighted to be here again, in the lovely setting of the Galway Bay Hotel, and to have the opportunity to address the 21st plenary of the British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in this enlarged format.

Over recent years, we have seen many historic events in the development of relations on these islands. Today is another milestone. For the first time elected representatives from all the Parliaments and Assemblies from throughout these islands have come together in a spirit of co-operation and agreement to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern. The Good Friday Agreement encouraged elected institutions of members to develop links and contacts, building on the fruitful work of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. I am glad to see that members here have taken up that challenge. This meeting represents a further step in realising the vision of the Agreement that is so important to us.

We have entered a new phase in relations on these islands. Devolution and the Good Friday Agreement have altered the political landscape. The traditional Dublin-London axis that characterised relations for many years has given way to a more multilateral approach encompassing the recently-established political institutions. If we look back 20 years to 1980 when the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body started out - the agreements in 1980 and 1981 and it was first proposed in what were then described as Anglo-Irish studies - we can see immediately just how much progress has been achieved in terms of bringing peace and stability to Northern Ireland, developing closer North-South co-operation on the island of Ireland and fostering

enhanced east-west relations. We have travelled an immense distance and have accomplished what could hardly have been conceivable ten years ago.

After the trauma of almost 30 years of violence and the failures of the past, in the Good Friday Agreement we achieved a charter for a new beginning, a fresh start. The Agreement is about reconciliation, tolerance, mutual trust, and, above all, peace. These principles are fundamental to all that we have achieved together, and the achievements are remarkable.

Today I want to take stock and look to the future. In Northern Ireland, a democratic, accountable and inclusive Government has been established. Politicians are tackling the challenging issues which affect everyone's daily lives - health, the environment, education, infrastructural development, enterprise development and so on - the bread and butter issues of political life. The Executive is working. Decision-making is in the hands of local representatives and those representatives are working hard for the entire community. The basis for sound governance and accountability has been laid, ending the democratic deficit complained of for so long.

Two weeks ago, I had the pleasure of welcoming David Trimble, Séamus Mallon and the other Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive to Dublin Castle for the second plenary meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council. The message from the Council was extremely positive, and the engagement and interaction between Government Ministers from North and South represent a huge step forward for relations on this island. Through the Council and its many meetings in its different formats - most of the work is done in sectoral meetings, where individual Ministers, North and South, meet their opposite numbers - discussions are taking place on a wide range of issues where closer co-operation between North and South stands to benefit everyone.

A very solid initial agenda of work is emerging. The Council is focusing on the work of the six Implementation Bodies which administer agreed functions on a cross-Border or all-island basis; and on the six agreed priority areas for co-operation - agriculture, the environment, health, education, transport and tourism. Other issues can be added in the future, by agreement, and I hope they will. The checks and balances ensure everything is done on a basis that everybody can live and work with. All decisions of the Council are made by agreement. Every matter being considered by the Council is clearly in the interests of both parts of the island. The meetings have all been held in a positive, constructive spirit. The energy and enthusiasm are certainly there, and I feel confident - I believe we all can - that the tangible benefits which will accrue from these efforts will spur us on to explore even more avenues of co-operation in the years ahead.

At the second plenary, we discussed the real progress that has been made since the establishment of the six North-South Implementation Bodies. These bodies are responsible for co-ordinating an all-island or cross-Border approach to such issues as trade and business development, language promotion, waterways and EU funding. In

addition, work is well advanced on setting up a new all-island tourism company. It will be responsible for marketing the island of Ireland as a tourism destination.

Tourism has played a central role in our recent economic success, but its full potential has not been realised in the northern half of this island, on either side of the Border. There remains enormous scope for generating further employment. This initiative, for which we have high hopes, could raise the tourism sector on to a new plane. It is clear that all of us, North and South, stand to benefit from this kind of co-ordinated approach on such important practical matters.

I need hardly remind everyone here just how far we have come in terms of east-west relations. The Good Friday Agreement provided for the establishment of the British-Irish Council to act as a forum for the exchange of views and information on a range of matters of mutual interest. On the analogy of the North-South institutions, I see the Council as an institutional expression of the close links between the peoples of these islands. Together with the advent of devolution, it has provided the context for facilitating the development and enhancement of these links.

At its first meeting last December, the Council adopted a programme of work and, within that, a list of areas for early consideration. These areas included environmental matters, drugs, transport, social inclusion and the knowledge economy. These are important issues that have a relevance to the lives of everyone on these islands, and where we have much to learn from each other. At the next plenary, to be held in Dublin in a few weeks, we shall be focusing on combating the evils that are associated with drugs and their abuse. We have, I believe, established firm foundations on which to build for many years to come.

However, the question may be asked, can the new institutional arrangements be engines for real change? My answer is an emphatic yes. As the work of the North-South Council, the British-Irish Council and the new Implementation Bodies progresses and grows, in a way consistent with the wishes of the participants, there will be real, tangible benefits for everybody. The development of trade and tourism will mean more and better quality jobs. I believe the development of trade and tourism will probably grow faster than most areas. In addition, less duplication of effort, learning from each other and exchanging best practice and better use of scarce resources will make a real difference. There will be better programmes to combat educational under-achievement and to tackle educational special needs; better water quality; better strategies in the treatment of the high levels of cancer in both parts of this island and in the promotion of good health generally. These are only a few examples of the real benefits that we discussed at the last meeting.

Equally importantly, the new institutions are about bringing people together. For too long on this island, and on the islands, there has been a legacy of distrust, and at times we have viewed each other's intentions with a certain amount of suspicion, to put it at its mildest. By working together, to the same agreed agenda, we can end all that. We can overcome the legacy of the past and build a better future.

However, that work is not yet complete. Elements of the Agreement still need to be implemented and there is a long way to go before full partnership and reconciliation are achieved. Until we reach that goal there will be difficulties to overcome. Since the Good Friday Agreement was signed and wholeheartedly endorsed by the people, North and South, it has become apparent that confidence among the Unionist community in the benefits to them of the Agreement has been shaken. I believe that a majority of those who support the Union continue to favour the essence of the Agreement, but I acknowledge the need to engage with Unionist concerns, just as we do with those of Nationalists. At the core of what are being presented as arguments against the Agreement seems to be a stated belief that the Union is somehow less secure or that the sense of Britishness of the Unionist community is not understood by Nationalists, North or South, and is being undermined. I want today to allay that concern and to reassure Unionists that Nationalists remain fully committed to the principles of mutual respect and parity of esteem that underpin the Agreement. It is worth restating that all of the representatives of Nationalism and Republicanism, and above all, the people of the whole island, exercising their right to self-determination in the referendum held on 10 May 1998, have accepted fully the principle of consent. Northern Ireland will remain in the Union with Great Britain as long as a majority of the people of Northern Ireland want it to be and will become part of a united Ireland only if a majority in both jurisdictions so consent democratically. That is what is now agreed.

The Agreement is fully transparent, and thus is not, and cannot be used as, a Trojan horse. There is no will, no desire, no possibility of anyone forcing a majority of the people of Northern Ireland into a united Ireland against their will. For those of us who have laboured in the mainstream of politics in the South, this has been self-evident for many years.

Even in recent years, the nature of Irish society has changed radically. Our economy is one of the fastest growing in the world and that growth rests on fundamentally sound foundations. There has been a commensurate increase in our national self-confidence, which is shared by Irish people everywhere. That self-confidence has helped to reinforce and make Nationalists throughout Ireland receptive to the message which John Hume has proclaimed for 30 years and which was also acknowledged, let it be said, by people like Jack Lynch and Liam Cosgrave as far back as 1970. Nationalism has been redefined over the period since then. The seminal document in that process was the Report of the New Ireland Forum, published in May 1984, and endorsed by all the constitutional Nationalist parties at that time.

The forum report analysed the Unionist identity and attitudes, on the basis of the inputs made in public sessions by contributors who put forward the Unionist point of view. Among the three elements in that identity accepted by the forum was the Britishness of Unionists. The report stated, "Unionists generally regard themselves as being British, the inheritors of a specific communal loyalty to the British Crown". Later, the report said, "No one living in Ireland should feel less at home than another" and went on to note that this implied, *inter alia*, that Unionists' sense of Britishness be accommodated. The forum stated that the solution to the historic

problem required new structures that would accommodate together two sets of legitimate rights, "the right of Unionists to effective political, symbolic and administrative expression of their identity, their ethos and way of life" and, correspondingly, Nationalist rights.

Summing up the requirements for a new Ireland, the forum said:

The validity of both the Nationalist and Unionist identities in Ireland must be accepted; both of these identities must have equally satisfactory, secure and durable, political, administrative and symbolic expression and identity.

I and my Government stand by that principle, and it is reflected in the Good Friday Agreement. Each community's sense of their own identity is one of the building blocks of the Agreement, and was throughout all of the discussions.

Sinn Féin was not a member of that Forum, but its publication was an element in the process of internal analysis and the dialogue with the SDLP that led eventually to the ceasefires. Republicans were party to the more inclusive Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in the 1994-96 period and of course to the Good Friday Agreement, which recognises "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose ...", the wording which very closely reflects a formulation accepted by all in the final paper of the Drafting Committee of the more recent forum, in which many of the Members of the Body participated.

The Irish Government, far from seeking to remove all vestiges of Britishness from Northern Ireland, has been taking a range of actions in our jurisdiction to discharge the commitment we gave in the Agreement to demonstrate our respect for the different traditions in Ireland. Our support for the Messines Peace Park in Flanders, for projects promoted by such bodies as the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association and the Ulster Society, as well as our purchase and planned development of the Battle of the Boyne site, demonstrates our respect for those of British identity who share the island with those of us who embrace the vision set out in the new Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution.

Naturally, my Government continues to give close attention to the concerns of Northern Nationalists. Across a broad front, we are continuing to work in a balanced way to foster and sustain confidence on all sides and to overcome the obstacles. There are challenges and differences to be bridged but they are relatively few in number and are far from insurmountable. They have their importance, but when we consider the magnitude of the prize that is there to be won, that is, institutions of government and a policing service in Northern Ireland which for the first time can command the acceptance of all strands on this island, we must not fail - will not fail - to reach the agreements which will bring us this new dispensation and beginning. This, once again, calls for leadership. All of us have now to stretch that little bit further that will enable us to go forward.

If people retrench into the self-righteous blaming of "the other side", into a sterile stand-off, then Northern Ireland cannot attain the stability that we all - the two Governments and all of the pro-Agreement parties - want it to reach because there can never be long-term political stability in a situation where trust is not built between all communities in Northern Ireland. The Agreement provides us with the means to work together for the betterment of all of the people, to build trust, to climb out of the trenches, to recognise and acknowledge the pain which all of us on all sides have endured, and to put that past and that pain behind us. Inevitably, this will take time, but we should not allow ourselves to be too easily or too quickly discouraged. Any alternative should be carefully analysed and assessed, not only on its stated principles but also on its contribution to consolidating peace and partnership and to the building of a democratic society free of paramilitarism and sectarianism.

Last week on television, a wonderful programme on the poetry arising from the Troubles, inspiringly evoked the depth of that pain and the magnitude of that wave of hope which, taken at the flood, can bear us safely to a tranquil haven on the far side of revenge and despair.

Hard questions must be asked of those who seek to present the Agreement and its implementation as a betrayal. I, for one, have not heard any of the answers. Have they any alternative that comes remotely near to meeting the needs of the situation? How can they expect to secure long-term political stability and convince Nationalists and Republicans to accept the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the framework of the Good Friday Agreement, if they do not attempt to address their concerns and if they fail to make them partners in a new political dispensation? We know we must address the fears and concerns of everyone in Northern Ireland, but we believe that the Good Friday Agreement represents an honourable accommodation and that those fears and concerns can be addressed within the context of the Agreement.

As we strive to meet this challenge, we do so against the backdrop of enormous progress in achieving a stable peace. Although not a perfect peace, it is a far cry from the days when newspaper headlines seemed to report multiple atrocities on an almost daily basis. Today, thankfully, the headlines are more likely to be proclaiming the latest foreign investment venture to come to Northern Ireland.

We can never be, and we are not, complacent about any acts of violence or intimidation. Regrettably, these, even if at a much lower level than before, have continued to blight the lives of people on both Nationalist and Unionist sides of the community in Northern Ireland - in Larne and Portadown, the Falls Road and in Ballysillan. However, in recent weeks and months a whole community in Belfast has once again been torn apart by violence and strife. The pointlessness and futility of this dispute are obvious, but the damage it is doing to the community is immense. I want to offer my sympathy to that community and to salute the resilience of the ordinary men and women within it. There is no doubt that political leaders of Loyalism have, in recent years, deployed considerable political skills and abilities on

behalf of their communities to positive and dynamic effect. They have worked for their communities and had secured the prizes of peaceful coexistence with their neighbours and the beginnings of economic regeneration. However, the internal tensions that have surfaced are doing terrible damage to their cause and to the cause of all those who want lasting peace and security. It underlines the need for all communities in Northern Ireland to move away from the culture of paramilitarism and to assert civil society as paramount.

Neither are we complacent about the significant threat posed by a small number of so-called Republican dissidents. The recent inquests in Omagh have served to remind us of the cruel contempt for human life shown by these sterile ideologues and terrorists. We will not allow them to jeopardise the new political dispensation. They will not be allowed to defy the democratic will of the people. We are actively using the legislation enacted in the wake of Omagh and are applying considerable resources in an unrelenting effort to ensure that they have the minimum room for manoeuvre. The close co-operation and the excellent working relationship between the members of the Garda and their colleagues in the RUC, as well as their counterparts in police forces across Britain, will see to it that we face down this challenge.

John Hume has rightly argued, for many years, that the best way to ensure that the future is different from the past is by working together on the everyday issues of common concern. That is the work in which we are engaged now and we are determined to succeed. However, the work cannot all be left to politicians and civil servants alone. There must be a new beginning in relations between all of the people on this island and on these islands. We now have a new Civic Forum in Northern Ireland to help us. At the recent North-South summit in Dublin, we established a joint working group to consider the establishment of a North-South consultative forum, representative of civil society. In the context of East-West relations, we have the encounter organisation, but we may need to strengthen the civil strand of this axis.

As the experience and success of this Body demonstrates so clearly, parliamentarians have an absolutely key role to play and it will be important to have structures that accommodate its input. This Body has been working hard in search of the right architecture for such structures. As experience with the Agreement's institutions has shown, it is vital to get the architecture right. Today, with the associated representatives from all of the legislatures on these islands present, we are looking to the needs of the future. In time, I look forward to hearing your developed views on what you see as appropriate structures to meet these needs, while harnessing the best in the excellent record of this Body.

The close working relationships between successive Irish and British Governments and between our parliamentarians, together with the efforts of all pro-Agreement parties in Northern Ireland, brought us very far on the road to enduring peace, to stability and to full reconciliation in Ireland and in these islands. We are in the final furlong, within an ace of our destination. All of us involved must now make one last

heroic effort to bring home the implementation of an Agreement that goes with the grain of our shared history and accords with the wishes and hopes of all our peoples.

I thank the Chairman and Members for the enormous amount of work this Body has done. To anyone who does not believe in what we are doing I say, "just look back and consider the position from which we have moved since the establishment of this Body. Just look back at the figures and statistics from the past six or seven years. Look at all the enormously positive events that have taken place." If I am wrong in stating that there is not far to go or that we cannot achieve it, I would like to hear somebody articulate the reasons that this should be the case. To date, no one has done so. On that basis, we forge ahead confident that we are doing the right thing and that together, in co-operation, the right thing will see its way through to the end.

6. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I understand the Taoiseach will be remain until 3.50 pm in order to take the questions that have been tabled. To expedite the business I will merely call the question and the person in whose name it was tabled. The first question was tabled by Kevin McNamara MP. There is no need to formally repeat the question and it might expedite matters if the Taoiseach replied immediately.

Patten Commission

Mr Kevin McNamara asked the Taoiseach whether he will make a statement on the progress towards the implementation of the Patten Commission's recommendations on policing in Northern Ireland.

The Taoiseach: I wish to take Kevin's question in tandem with part of the question tabled by Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin. I will deal later with the second part of Deputy Ó Caoláin's question.

With regard to the implementation of the Patten Report, which is taking up so much of our time - I will provide a brief reply and if Members wish to ask supplementary questions I will attempt to answer them - the Good Friday Agreement provided the opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland, with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole. The Patten Report has comprehensively addressed a broad range of important and sensitive issues relating to policing. We welcome the report and we stated that the early and effective implementation of its recommendations would form an essential part of the implementation of the Agreement.

On 5 May last, the two Governments indicated the timetable planned for the implementation of the Patten Report, the passage of legislation - which is currently going through the House of Lords - the appointment of the new policing board next January and the first intake of new recruits to join the new service next April. The

Secretary of State published the Bill on 15 May and the implementation plan dealing with each of the recommendations in the report appeared on 6 June. The Policing Bill went through the House of Commons on 11 June and, while I know deliberations on it have not concluded, as originally published, it fell far short of the recommendations contained in the Patten Report.

The Bill was deficient in a number of areas to which I have referred on many occasions. We recognise the substantial improvements made to the Bill in the interim and we appreciate the efforts of the British Government in this regard. However, there are still important elements of the Patten Report that the Government and the Nationalist parties believe are not sufficiently catered for in the Bill as it currently stands. These can be broadly divided into the symbolic and more substantive areas. The symbolic areas to which I refer involve the name of the new police service and the issue of flags and emblems.

There are also difficulties with the implementation plan as currently drafted. The Secretary of State has informed us that the plan will be revised in accordance with the provisions in the Bill. Our fundamental position is that in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland, the police service should be able to function fully and freely in all areas and across all communities. That is the substantive reason behind the need to undergo this process. People from both communities want to be able to give unqualified support to the police service and we want policemen and policewomen to be made welcome in every home across Northern Ireland.

We are continuing to do our utmost to ensure that the issues we have put forward will be taken into account. It is my belief, having spent hours on end with representatives of Sinn Féin and the SDLP, Unionists and the British Government, that we can resolve this issue if the Patten Report is implemented in the way we have stated. The reality is that on one side we can have a police service which continues to encounter difficulties - there is no need to restate these as everyone is familiar with them - or we have a police service that will be actively promoted by Nationalists, Republicans, the SDLP, Sinn Féin and ourselves and asking and urging people to join its ranks. We will either have a new beginning or we will not.

We have moved a long way but there are some points in respect of which agreement must be reached. It would be an awful shame if we do not do that. On a time scale, we have only a short period left in which to do it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you. If anybody wishes to ask a further supplementary I may be able to allow one after Mr McNamara. Perhaps you would signal and I will see what can be done to accommodate you. That will be the procedure for each question.

Mr Kevin McNamara: I am most grateful to the Taoiseach for that full and comprehensive reply. I wish to ask the Taoiseach one short question. Given the present state of the Bill as it goes up to the Lords, does he think his Government

would be in a position, as the Bill now stands, to recommend acceptance to the Nationalist community and their joining the new police force?

The Taoiseach: The answer is "no", unless the changes I have mentioned are completed. There is no possibility that the SDLP or Sinn Féin would sign up to the Bill and anything I would say or do would be pointless. We have set out our position. There are about four areas left. I believe - needless to say that will be the substance of my meeting tomorrow - having resolved so much, we can resolve them. Having had 75 difficulties at the outset, five or six still remain but they are issues of enormous symbolic, substantive and timing difficulties. I do not see great difficulties with the timing issues. Frankly, I think they can be resolved quickly enough. Some of the symbolic and substantive issues I have mentioned need to be resolved in the next few weeks.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): As the Taoiseach mentioned, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin has tabled a question on that issue. I call him for a supplementary.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: *Go raibh maith agat.* Earlier this morning, members of the press were suggesting there was some confusion arising from reported remarks attributed to the Taoiseach. In light of that I would ask him to reassure this Body, and the Irish people, that the Government is actively pursuing the full implementation of Chris Patten's recommendations. I note from his response to Mr McNamara's question that he stated that the legislation currently before Westminster and going shortly before the House of Lords is deficient in a number of areas. He correctly indicated that important elements were still omitted. Does the Taoiseach accept that, if these matters are addressed and the Patten recommendations are adopted and implemented in full, Sinn Féin is ready and willing to urge young Republicans to join a new policing service in the North of Ireland, provided it puts behind us the sectarian and repressive legacy of the RUC, and that it is a genuinely new policing service, representative of and responsive to all sections of the people in the North of Ireland?

The Taoiseach: There are two parts to that question. I would be shocked if anyone who watched last night's programme did not have a clear view of where I stood. Some people continue to ask the same questions over and over again. My position is very clear. I did say last night and I will say it again - I think this is what I heard reported this morning - that I was urging everybody to stretch a little further. It is not a question of me stretching because I cannot conclude it. I can stretch until I crack but that would not resolve these issues. I need everybody to stretch to try to conclude it. I believe we can do that. As I said in the Dáil during the week, in reply to Deputy Currie, these are issues I believe we could conclude by stretching further.

On the second point, several times during the year people said even if the Irish Government pressed really hard and did all of this, that we might eventually get the SDLP on side but there was no sincerity in the position of Sinn Féin actually to join it. I went back to Deputy Ó Caoláin and his colleagues many times and we went through that question. In reply to his question, I am absolutely satisfied with the

commitments I have been given by SDLP. The Deputy asked about Sinn Féin. If the amendments that are necessary to make this a new beginning, a new police service of Northern Ireland, will the Deputy and his colleagues go to the highways and byways and urge young Republicans to join? I asked the Deputy a few years ago if that was something we could do on the other side of Patten. I am quite satisfied that he and his colleagues will do that.

Prisoners released on licence

Ms Mary Coughlan (*Donegal South-West*) asked the Taoiseach what level of monitoring is taking place by the two police forces, North and South, on prisoners released on licence; and if there is any evidence to indicate an increase in criminal activity as a consequence of these releases.

The Taoiseach: Regarding significant resources to monitor and fight criminal and subversive activity, if any person released on licence is found to have been involved in such activities the consequences for that person are very severe. It will be appreciated it is not the practice of the Garda Síochána or the Government to comment on specific operational matters. The Deputy will also appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on how the RUC carries out its duties, but I can assure her that there is a very high level of effective co-operation between the two police forces in the fight against criminal as well as subversive activity, regardless of who is responsible for that activity. While what I said relates to prisoner releases I can say in relation to prisoners released in this jurisdiction, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, that generally there is no evidence of any significant involvement by such persons in crime. I am glad that is the position.

Ms Coughlan: In thanking the Taoiseach for his reply to that question I am glad to hear what he has had to say. If the releases did not conform to the terms of the licensing regulations, I assume the Garda Síochána would deal with the matter, in particular where there are concerns. My colleague, Deputy McGahon, has raised concerns in another area. Regarding criminal activity, in the Border areas there has been some escalation in the number of young people being beaten up, even though it is not spoken about as much as perhaps the families would like it dealt with. I am pleased we have got those assurances that the matter would be dealt with and that he is happy that there has been conformity to the licensing regulations that have been outlined.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Question No. 3 from Dr Norman Godman MP has been withdrawn. Unfortunately, he cannot be present. We move on to Question No. 4 from Deputy Currie.

The Omagh bombing and the peace process

Mr Currie asked the Taoiseach whether, in view of the fact that the perpetrators of the Omagh bomb disaster still remain at large in spite of statements by the Garda Síochána and the RUC that those responsible are known to the police authorities,

and in view of the escalation in "Real IRA" activities, he will state the action that his Government is taking to stop efforts to destabilise the peace process; and what discussions he has had with the British Prime Minister on common action in relation to these matters.

The Taoiseach: The Garda Síochána continue to devote significant resources to the investigation into the Omagh atrocity that represents the largest joint investigation ever conducted by the Garda Síochána and the RUC. The Garda Síochána is determined that all those responsible will be brought before the courts. As members will be aware one person has already been charged in this jurisdiction in connection with the bombing. Every effort is being made by the Garda Síochána to secure further evidence that will enable further prosecutions to be made. I do not wish to dwell on the issues that are still before our courts that could in any way hinder the investigations. We are extremely concerned at the activities of dissident Republican groupings, including the so-called Real IRA. We are determined to take whatever steps are necessary to counter the illegal activities of such groupings that have not the slightest democratic mandate from the Irish people in any shape. The authorities are operating closely with the police forces in Britain and Northern Ireland in countering illegal activities, criminal activities, along with the paramilitary activities of some of these organisations. There are regular discussions between the British Government and ourselves on these matters and we continue to keep under review all the options available and will not hesitate to introduce any measures if we believe they are necessary. In our discussions and deliberations with the Garda these matters are constantly discussed. If any stage they ever seek additional powers we will not be slow in asking for those powers but that is not the position at this time.

Mr Currie: I thank the Taoiseach for that reply. Will he put himself in the position of the relatives, some of whom I spoke to over the past two days, listening to the horrific details of the inquest last week into the circumstances in which 31 of their loved ones died, knowing that the perpetrators are freely walking about? Add to this the knowledge that the police authorities, North and South, say they know who was responsible for these dreadful murders and add to that the fact that after the Omagh atrocity both Parliaments introduced legislation, which they described as draconian, yet no one has been made amenable. In those circumstances, is it any wonder the relatives are bemused and angry. The Taoiseach told us today that these people have defied the will of the Irish people as expressed in referenda, North and South, and continue to do so. The relatives, I, and I am sure many other people, wonder when these people will be brought to justice and made to pay for their murderous acts.

Senator Mooney: In light of the Taoiseach's comments and the supplementary question from my colleague, Deputy Currie, does the Taoiseach have a view on the threat of the BBC to name alleged perpetrators of the Omagh bombing in the context of the attempts by both Governments to bring the perpetrators to justice?

The Taoiseach: I understand the feelings of the people concerned. Deputy Currie and I have debated this matter across the floor of the Dáil Chamber during most weeks

of the year. The reality is that one cannot get convictions in a court until one can be satisfied that the evidence one has will stand up. We have lived with the alternative to that for a fair part of the past three decades. When substantive evidence exists, whether in the hands of the Garda, the RUC, or the police services in any of the jurisdictions represented by this Body, this matter can be dealt with. Intelligence the Garda Síochána may have as to the identities of the perpetrators of the bombing does not constitute sufficient evidence to secure a conviction, even under the new legislation. That is the reality.

With regard to the broader points raised by Senator Mooney, I have listened to the names of the people who were responsible for the Dublin and Monaghan bombings for 25 years. I have listened to their names so often that I almost think I know them, but none of those people has been brought before the courts for the same reason. The problem is one has to prove a case in a democracy. That is the position we are in. Bandyng around names on TV programmes will not help to convict those perpetrators. The legal people say it could well hinder them in their work.

Mr McGahon: I represent County Louth, which was named last week by the coroner as containing the main culprits responsible for this horrific attack on 31 people in Omagh. Given that the dogs in the street in Dundalk and in the international press know the identities of the main perpetrators, and given the revulsion of the country, North and South, and internationally about this crime, will the Taoiseach consider the reintroduction of internment in the South to lock up these animals?

The Taoiseach: I reiterate all our revulsion about this crime, particularly at this sensitive time of the inquest when the relatives are hearing details of the post-mortems and the coroner's report. This case can be dealt with only on the basis of the evidence that exists.

On the Deputy's point about interning the perpetrators, internment is still on our statute book but it is not on the statute book in the North. It is not something that is under consideration. Even if such a measure were used in a doomsday situation, it would not work unless it could be applied in both jurisdictions. It is an issue we examined when we dealt with the legislation, but it is not contemplated at this stage. While the existing legislation is draconian, the Deputy will recall that, in spite of the tragedies of Omagh, all the civil libertarian groups put forward their views strongly on that legislation. It gives extensive powers, not to mind all the other powers we have had on our statute book for 25 years. A person must be proved guilty and there must be sufficient evidence to convict him or her. We are in the business of rounding them up at present.

Development of the peace process

Mr Canavan asked the Taoiseach if he would make a statement on the development of the peace process.

The Taoiseach: With regard to the institutions, they have been an unqualified success. They have begun to make a difference. I will not go back over the points I made. The institutions are delivering to the people the benefits promised in the Agreement and by the Assembly and the Executive. There is the prospect of building partnership and co-operation between the representatives of both parts of the community. I have taken part in the valuable work of the Ministerial Council in which there are close and friendly relationships. I emphasise strongly that much of the work involves the building of an atmosphere of good relationships. They allow far more to happen than a strict list of what should be done by implementation bodies.

In other areas, such as human rights and equality reconciliation, we have made steady, if less than major, progress. We are in the process of appointing members to the human rights commission in the South. An early priority for that commission will be to bring forward work that is being talked about between the North and the South. My Government remains committed to delivering our promise to make the Agreement work and to examine issues of reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect.

We have expanded considerably the reconciliation fund. This year it will help about 100 groups who invest efforts in cross Border issues. I mentioned the Battle of the Boyne site. I am delighted so many groups come down on weekends to work in co-operation with others on that site.

I addressed the question of policing, the implementation of the Patten Report and the continuing threat from dissident groups. I have nothing further to add to those points. There are areas where a considerable contribution can be made in building and sustaining confidence. We have made genuine headway towards a resolution of the question of arms and I hope we will be able to make further progress on that. I am conscious some people remain sceptical about the Agreement but we have to continue to try to influence them.

I looked at statistics for the past decade and previous decades on the number of people killed, injured or maimed. They constitute only a small fraction now, but it is a fraction too much. Working together with the British Government and representatives of all sides of the community, we will continue to do all in our power to convince people that the Agreement represents not only a balanced and honourable accommodation but the only way forward.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Michael Mates tabled a question on the work of the British-Irish Council to date, which relates to the institutions. As we may not have time to reach it, I propose to call Dennis Canavan, Michael Mates, and Lembit Öpik and Maria Fyfe, who also wish to raise questions about related issues. Perhaps we could deal with their questions together. I call Michael Mates.

Mr Canavan: No, I am next.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): There speaks the independent voice of Scotland!

Mr Canavan: I thank the Taoiseach for the constructive role he and his Government have played in developing the peace process. I wish him well in that respect in the future, including in his talks tomorrow with my right honourable friend, Tony Blair. If it is the Taoiseach's intention tomorrow to discuss what initiatives can be taken to strengthen the position of David Trimble as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, I wish him well in that respect. However, the Taoiseach should not allow Mr Blair, Mr Mandelson or anybody else to talk him into abandonment or dilution of the principles of the Good Friday Agreement that was endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the people on the island of Ireland as well as by majorities of both communities in Northern Ireland.

Mr Mates: The Taoiseach dealt with the British-Irish Council in his remarks. However, he did not mention the thorny subject of decommissioning. This relates in a way to Denis Canavan's supplementary because this is one of David Trimble's problems. The Prime Minister, Mr Blair, in the summer of the referendum promised that there would be parallel progress in the achievement of the Good Friday Agreement. One of David Trimble's problems, and I am not a spokesman for him, is that there has not been parallel progress with decommissioning. In fact, it is still at the starting gate. If this hump could be overcome, would the Taoiseach see it as a real advance which would then make the difficult parts of the Patten Report an easier pill to swallow? The Unionists are being made to swallow these pills without any concession by the paramilitaries with regard to handing in arms, which I believe is bringing the process to a crisis.

The Taoiseach: With regard to trying to ensure that all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement are brought into force, that is our agenda. There are many other important areas that do not get much publicity. We spent a good deal of time on the criminal justice system in the last month or so and good work is being done in that regard. That is also the case with the overseas commissioner and rights commissioner and other aspects of building up mutual trust. In fairness, when one goes through all aspects of the agreement, whether it is equality issues, criminal justice issues or the human rights agenda, an enormous amount of work is taking place to make a new beginning. We will stick firmly to that.

With regard to the decommissioning elements, there are a number of issues still outstanding and they are not all to do with Patten. There is the ongoing issue of the CDMs and the return of the inspectors, Mr Ramaphosa and Mr Ahtisaari. The only way the decommissioning issue can be dealt with is in direct dialogue with the independent international decommissioning commissioner, Mr John de Chastelain, for further engagement. I have called time and again for that engagement. I hope it commences and soon. It is important. Once it commences there is an inevitability about how it moves. To be frank, it will not happen overnight but the Irish Government is committed to seeing that happen and to moving it on.

While I refer to stretch on one issue, I also refer to it with regard to other issues. All of them are in the round and there is not much more than the four or five issues I spoke about earlier. We have teased out the grounds of difference. To try to make

one exclusive or inclusive of the other is not the best way of going forward. They all have to be dealt with. If one says that one will only be done if the other is done, the grounds are impossible. All aspects must be done. That is a major difficulty for David Trimble and we are committed to doing all we can to assist him in these areas.

The positive aspects must also be spelt out and I did that in my speech. Mr Mates and I remember when he came regularly to Leinster House. He used to say that if Articles 2 and 3 were changed, the world would change and people would look at the matter differently. I believe the spirit of consent and the changes we have made should be seen as enormously positive. However, I do not believe we can fudge over issues that must be dealt with. The issue Mr Mates raised must be dealt with, like the others, by agreement and he can be sure we will continue to try to do that.

Mrs Fyfe: The last time this Body met, we were optimistic that the Good Friday Agreement was proceeding towards success. Since then events have occurred which have engendered more pessimism about where it is now. Recently, a leading Ulster Unionist told me he thought the Good Friday Agreement was dead in the water; "as dead as John Cleese's parrot" is how he put it. Obviously, all of us hope that that is not the case. However, it appears we are up against a major problem in that the Ulster Unionist community believes it is gaining nothing despite having made all the sacrifices.

It is in both Governments' interests to ensure the Good Friday Agreement works and delivers something that both communities can live with and which will ensure a peaceful outcome. That being the case, there are two alternatives - either continue to give in to Ulster Unionist intransigence or find a way of getting the message across that there have been gains that are to the benefit of the Ulster Unionist community and that there will be further gains. How do you see the situation in which we find ourselves this week?

The Taoiseach: An odd time I might get depressed with the situation. Then I look at the figures for how many people used to be killed, the number of bombs, actions and so forth. One then asks if it is realistic to end 30 or 75 or perhaps 800 years of strife and have everything perfect in a short period. The answer is that it would be too much. There are new beginnings in many areas even though sometimes the issues that appear to be negative for one community receive all the attention. I understand that.

I had the pleasure recently of meeting many community groups from the Unionist community, including business groups, groups involved in cultural exchange and some of the Unionist organisations. They will say: "We want these issues out of the way; there are enormous positive elements but we would like to see these things out of the way before we can really sell the positive points". I am aware that the policing issue is difficult for Unionists. Their interpretation of it is different from ours. They believe that a new police service that does not incorporate the RUC in some way is tantamount to saying that the efforts of the many excellent men and women of the

RUC down through the years are being cast aside. That is not the intention. The intention is to secure a new beginning.

They are happy with other issues such as inward investment because they are seeing positive developments on the ground. There still are fears. There are some Unionists who will give a negative message and say the agreement is dead in the water. I heard that almost every day during the discussions prior to the Good Friday Agreement, every day during the election campaign and every day since then. I have never heard the alternative other than them telling us that they will never deal with Nationalists or Republicans even though they believe Northern Ireland can work successfully. That lobby is not helpful to me, David Trimble or Tony Blair.

There are some outstanding issues. What Michael Mates and others have said is true but let us try to work our way through those. Violence and atrocities are at a low level, business and stability are returning, people are on the streets at night and normality is returning. It does not make sense to throw all those away because a few matters remain. Trying to box in the Patten Report in the way I want, trying to deal with decommissioning in its entirety and dealing with the other issues is not easy. However, they are essential parts of trying to get to where we need to go. Ingenuity and innovation of the necessary degree is possible to bring us the remaining part of the way.

People should not up the ante or say "not an inch, not another line" or "that issue is not on my agenda so, sorry, I can't help you there". If we had all said that, we would have gone home in September 1997 when we were trying to get George Mitchell into the last round of talks. We should think of how far we have come. Given all the issues that have been discussed over the past few years, it must be possible to find resolutions to the remaining issues. I will not sleep happily until those remaining matters are gone from my desk and I believe that will happen.

Mr Öpik: How instrumental does the Taoiseach consider Mr David Trimble's work has been in the search for progress towards a lasting peace? How significant has his contribution been?

The Taoiseach: It has been absolutely significant. I do not share the view that Mr Trimble could either voluntarily or otherwise move position and we could all continue on merrily. From my position, that is not a possible outcome. I am opposed in all forms to his departure. Even if he wanted to go, I would try to convince him to stay.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thank the Taoiseach. I should have earlier acknowledged the presence of Ambassador Roberts and Lady Roberts, the former Ambassador, Sir Nicholas Fenn, and the Mayor of Galway, Mr Martin Quinn. We really appreciate their presence at our gathering and we hope to see them later.

The Taoiseach talked about the historic events. My feeling is that Monday, 9 October will be recorded and remembered as another historic step because of the

particularly sensitive and sympathetic presentation given by the Taoiseach to the Body. It was not only for the Body but for those outside that are listening, particularly the parties to the Agreement, who may feel insecure, hesitant and distrustful. Any close reading of the Taoiseach's statement would give them grounds for reassurance and fundamental trust, which is so important, in the Taoiseach, the British Prime Minister and all parties.

The Body unanimously passed a motion this morning that reiterated our position. We want the Taoiseach and his colleague, the British Prime Minister, to know that they have our constant support for their continuing efforts. They have our continuing respect and commitment. Given the motion passed earlier, we understand the difficulties the Taoiseach is facing although we may not have to confront them every day as he, his counterpart and the parties in the North must do. We are also aware of the major steps he has made towards implementing the Good Friday Agreement.

We are conscious of the difficulties and the problems that must be faced in the future, but we wish to note - it may be for us to say it more than the Taoiseach, although he hinted at it earlier - that great progress has been made. We are deeply conscious of that and grateful for it. We urge the Taoiseach and all the parties engaged in the process to continue their commitment and redouble their efforts.

I ask the Taoiseach to accept our support. As the parliamentary representatives of the people of Britain and Ireland and the Assemblies, we can only, through our democratic mandate and obligation, continue to support his marvellous work. His range of awareness, sensitivity and, above all, tolerance will give a great sense of reassurance and confidence to all of us in the future. We are deeply indebted to the Taoiseach and I thank him.

The sitting was suspended at 4 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 4.20 pm.

7. SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG AND THE COLUMBA INITIATIVE, AND THE WARRINGTON PROJECT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We are on item 5 of the agenda. We come to the report of both Governments to the report of Committee D, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project. I call Mr McNamara, Chairman of the Committee, to move the motion.

Mr McNamara: I move:

That the Body takes note of the responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 74] on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project.

Of the two, the language one in many ways is the most encouraging in the sense that there is a recognition of the need for Gaelic-speaking areas in Ireland, the Gaeltacht in the South, the North and in Scotland to co-operate and exchange information, teaching methods, scholars and work. We welcome that and we welcome the attitude taken by the Scottish Office, the new Scottish Parliament and the Irish Government.

At the time the report was being finalised the Assembly was suspended. Since then we have had the establishment of the new language board between both parts of Ireland to encourage the Irish language. There has been a commitment of substantive resources to it, although no one is ever satisfied sufficiently with the amount. I hope representatives of our Welsh colleagues might come into the Celtic fringe. We hope that at some time in the future fraternal delegates from Brittany might come here as well. That was a warm and constructive reply from both Governments.

The Warrington Project was a little different. Ms Jean Corston will perhaps give us more information on this a little later. The British Government agreed to put money into the Warrington Project. It was an educational project started by Professor Buckland and his associates to try to bring Irish studies into the curriculum of British schools. However, the Department involved confused the Warrington Project with the Warrington Peace Initiative, which is a separate organisation that was established to deal specifically with some of the problems arising from the bombing in Warrington. To that extent, it was specific and focused on that area.

This led to misunderstandings and conflicts between the two which resulted in Professor Buckland and some of his colleagues withdrawing from the Warrington Project because they felt that marrying the two together was putting the wrong type of emphasis on what they were seeking to do in terms of curriculum teaching. To that extent, the result of what the Department did, which Ms Jean Corston will perhaps be able to explain in more detail later, caused problems. However, Professor Buckland and his colleagues are trying to get private finance in order to be able to maintain the work they were doing. The Committee was very impressed when we went around Warrington and saw what the Warrington schools were doing at primary and secondary level.

The Irish Government is, in one sense, only indirectly associated with the Warrington Project, as it is essentially within the United Kingdom jurisdiction. However, it has been very supportive and has in the past supplied funds. At the moment, we are hoping to have some more direct support from it. Unfortunately, Marian was not able to be here today to tell what progress has been made in that direction.

On the whole, useful efforts have been made. Some of the initiatives taken up by the Warrington Project, in terms of education, will have a long-term effect. They certainly seem to be having a beneficial effect where we have seen them in operation and we hope and believe they will continue to do so. We also hope

Professor Buckland and his associates will be able to get the necessary funds to continue their work.

Ms Jean Corston (*Bristol East*): While these plenary sessions are extremely useful and are obviously the focus of the activities of the British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, my opinion is that the most important work is done in the committees of the Body. It is also the committees that command the attendance and interest of Members.

One of the things that struck me in visiting schools and other public institutions in the Republic of Ireland, the North of Ireland and the UK was the marvellous example that is given to people of cross-party groups of Members from the Dáil and the Houses of Parliament visiting, asking questions and coming to a common view. That sets a marvellous example and was one of the things I have found particularly rewarding about my membership of this Body.

I think most of us found Sabhal Mòr Ostaig a very exciting project. Apart from anything else, it seems to have done marvellous work in regenerating the economy of Skye, in that people are now staying there. Employment is secure there and the number of children on the local primary school's roll has gone through the roof. As our chairman, Kevin McNamara, said they are doing very important work worldwide in consolidating the Gaelic language and helping with East-West co-operation.

The Warrington Project is also about East-West initiatives. Our committee probably scored a first in this Body, in that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Mr David Blunkett MP, was very interested in the descriptions of the Warrington Project and readily understood its application, in terms of citizenship education. When we were in Warrington, teachers in the schools said that the Monday after that bomb children came to school and asked "why?" which they found they could not answer. The credit goes to the people who realised they should find an answer to that question and should be able to explain why.

That should make us all think about the occasions when children and others have asked "why?" and none of us has had an answer. These people have tried to find an answer. They have done that in ways that can be understood by children of six years reading books about giants and getting into discussions of stereotyping and by 16-year-olds looking at newspaper reports of the Troubles and learning historical analysis, the evaluation of sources and distinguishing between facts, opinion, prejudice and bigotry. It is a very useful introduction to the study of history.

When we were in London in February for our tenth anniversary plenary, the committee went to the Department of Education and Employment and met the Secretary of State. I am not sure whether that was a first for a committee of our Body to meet a Minister specifically to discuss a report. However, I would recommend it as a very useful way of not only highlighting what this Body is capable of, but also of trying to ensure some action by Government.

As a result, David Blunkett agreed that the Department would fund the project to the extent of £150,000. Up to then, the Warrington Project had received £10,000 from the Irish Government and £40,000 from the UK Parliament. It had been getting by on what could only be described as a shoestring, in terms of Government support.

Kevin is right about the degree to which we have to distinguish between the Warrington Project, the Warrington Peace Centre and Ireland in Schools. The Warrington Project feels it is possible to fit into the notion of citizenship education, whereas Ireland in Schools tends to focus much more on the application of Irish studies as part of the National Curriculum and does not necessarily apply to just personal, social or health education or to citizenship. It is very important that we support and encourage all these initiatives, which is why officials in the Department of Education and Employment in the UK are now instructed to work with these projects and to encourage other local education authorities in the UK to look at the materials from Ireland in Schools and find ways of amalgamating them into the National Curriculum.

The peace process is not just there for people like us to monitor or for those in Downing Street, Leinster House or Stormont to implement. The peace process depends, ultimately, on the understanding and consent of everybody in all of these islands, and starting with children seems a very good thing.

We want, if possible, the three organisations to work together and we are very keen to support them. The Taoiseach said earlier that we were looking at dealing with 30, 75 or even 800 years of strife and asked if we can end it. That is probably the biggest question and responsibility for all of us. However, it seems to me that the work that is being done in Warrington poses two questions. First, why was it never done before? And second, how can we extend it to ensure children in schools in Ireland and the other parts of the British Isles understand that the peace process involves all of us and that citizenship is about the rule of law, tolerance, understanding and respect?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Could I have some indication of those who want to speak? Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, John McFall and David Lloyd. We will begin with Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, followed by John McFall. I hope I pronounced that correctly.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: It was certainly your best effort so far.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Shall we say nine out of ten?

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: I will certainly give you ten out of ten this time. My contribution will be very short. If Kevin, the chair of our committee, will allow me, I would like to pay tribute particularly to Jean Corston's efforts that led to a very successful meeting we had with the British Secretary for Education, Mr David Blunkett, earlier this year during the course of our last visit to Britain. Clearly, her influence and briefing secured a ready result from the Minister in the area of funding that we were specifically anxious to achieve. It was probably one of the most

satisfying meetings we have had as a committee in the course of my short years of involvement on this Body. I want to take the opportunity to commend her to the Body for her work in that regard.

Deputy Marian McGennis, who is absent today, would usually lead the Irish contribution in this regard. She has been a very active member of the committee and has had the opportunity of participating directly during a range of visits to which the report refers directly. In her absence, I did not want to see the situation arise whereby all the contributions would be coming from the British side. I am sure there are people around the table who would say, "Kevin McNamara started it off. How could it be?" In this situation, I only wanted to pay that tribute. I identified absolutely with the tenor of Kevin McNamara's report. An important range of areas of support will ensure a greater understanding and awareness of the reality of the situation in Ireland, of past relationships between these two islands and, most important, of the potential for the relationship between both islands in future. I agree wholeheartedly that the work of the committee is critical and crucial. I wish it continued success.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Before I call on Mr John McFall, I wish to state that I will call on Mr Conor Lenihan to wind up, so he will be the last speaker. There is nothing like giving you notice in advance.

Mr McFall: I congratulate Kevin McNamara, as chairman of the Committee, for the fine work he has been doing on these issues. A few years ago, in another capacity, I visited Sabhal Mòr to see for myself the good work that was taking place in the college. I had an opportunity to meet young people from Ireland, Australia, Spain, Wales, England and elsewhere. They were keen and interested to learn the Gaelic language. It is not just a marginal language in Scotland - although a small number of people are involved in speaking it - it has got very deep and historical roots. For example, in the 1880s, Michael Davitt walked through my constituency on the way to Skye to show solidarity with the dispossessed there and to ensure reform of the feudal system. We are just getting that now, 100 years later, which demonstrates that the genesis of the solutions to the problems that were highlighted in those days was there even then. We are now witnessing those solutions. Sabhal Mòr is a very vibrant college and reaches more than the community in Skye. It has done a lot for the culture of the area as well as for the economy. More than anything, it has done much for the community's self-confidence. That is why I am delighted to see it on the agenda. I look forward to greater co-operation between individuals in Scotland and our Celtic cousins in Wales and Ireland so that we can have a common agenda. Sabhal Mòr strikes out and shows us the way forward in that regard.

I also want to pay tribute to Jean Corston's work on the Warrington Project which is important if we want to get rid of bigotry and sectarianism which exist in other societies, also. In Scotland, in the past year, since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, it has come to the fore. We have discussed that issue but the only way we can be sure of exorcising it is by staring each other in the eyes and discussing and debating the issues. The Warrington Project does not have an equivalent in Scotland,

but the Scottish Parliament should examine that particular issue because we have a long way to go.

In a previous incumbency, I was very much involved in the Columba Initiative. I am aware that two years ago President Mary Robinson went to Sabhal Mòr to deliver a lecture there and to give life to that Initiative. This Body should be congratulated for its pioneering work on that Initiative. We look forward to having wider and deeper co-operation throughout the islands so that we will end up with societies - not just in the island of Ireland, but elsewhere - that have such tolerance and broad-mindedness. These are the very initiatives that will achieve it.

Dr David Lloyd AM (*South Wales West*): *Diolch Cadeirydd. Fel yr Aelod cyntaf o Gynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru i annerch y corff hwn, ac hynny yn ei famiaith, a allai groesawu yr adroddiad yma a'r gwaith gwerthfawr sydd wedi ei gyflawni.*

That was a brief welcome in Welsh, which is my first language, from a Member of the National Assembly for Wales. Simultaneous translation is automatically available in the Welsh National Assembly, as we have half a million native Welsh speakers. More important, ownership of the Welsh language lies with all three million inhabitants of Wales. Hence the language is a main-stream event, neither belonging to one group of people or one part of Wales. Everything is main-streamed. We have simultaneous translation and 30 per cent of our Assembly Members are Welsh-speaking. We have a network of Welsh-medium schools and one quarter of the children in Wales are fluent in the language. We also have a Welsh language television channel.

I welcome the very hard work that has been done on the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig project over many years, as well as the Columba initiative linking Ireland and Scotland, which is extremely worthwhile. As I am sure you are aware, of the six Celtic languages, the top three - Irish, Scots and Manx - are very closely linked. The bottom three are also very close together, i.e. Welsh, Cornish and Breton. Welsh shares about one third of its vocabulary with Cornish and Breton. I am not too sure how many words Welsh shares with Scots Gaelic, but the Scottish representatives will tell me afterwards how much of my introductory remarks they understood.

I welcome the work that is being done here. I invite anyone who is interested to come to Wales to see how things are happening there. Rather than just reinventing the wheel, we have Welsh language centres and a Welsh language television network. We also have all the paraphernalia to encourage the development of Gaelic everywhere.

Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP (*Glasgow, Maryhill*): The Scottish Parliament's delegation to this meeting welcomes the opportunity of being present and of taking part in the proceedings. We hope to play a very active part in the future deliberations of the Body. We welcome the Committee's report into the Gaelic College in Skye, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and into the Columba Initiative which was launched to foster closer

cultural and linguistic ties between the Gaelic-speaking communities of Scotland and the island of Ireland.

The Scottish Parliament does not have simultaneous translation, but a couple of months ago that did not stop us from having a debate, part of which was in Gaelic. As a non Gaelic-speaker, one of the more interesting points raised in that debate was by my colleague, Rhoda Grant, from Inverness. She pointed out that her first language is Gaelic, but her fluency is almost nil nowadays because at school she was encouraged to drop Gaelic and speak only English. As a result she now finds great difficulty in speaking and understanding her own language. We are keen to see that becoming a thing of the past. We want to see Gaelic as no longer an historical matter for the people of our country, but as a living language and part of our culture.

Irrespective of our politics across these islands we have one thing in common, which is our shared Celtic heritage. The Gaelic College on Skye and the Columba Initiative are two very good examples of that. The Gaelic College operates a very good broadcasting course where students are able to learn through Gaelic. They speak, think and broadcast in the language from a professional studio. Originally, a number of the students were from Ireland. They have now returned home to work in the broadcasting industry in their home country. In addition, I am advised that the current writer in residence at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is from Dublin, which goes to show that there are many ties between both countries there.

The Scottish Executive is delighted to be involved in these projects and recently invested £250,000 into the Gaelic College on Skye. I am sure that kind of support will continue and that the links we are able to foster using these initiatives with the other Parliaments gathered around these tables will continue in the future. We very much support the recommendations of the committee that the Governments should continue to support and further develop these ideas.

Ms Margaret Ewing MSP (Moray): Thank you, Co-Chairman. I think it is very important that in the Scottish Parliament we have developed use of the Gaelic language which I do not have, although my husband and mother-in-law have both gone to the college and are encouraging me to go next year if it can cope with three Ewings at one time. Beyond that, we want to see the security of our language and I am not convinced that we have secured the Gaelic language in Scotland.

It is anticipated that when the next census emerges - I am not quite sure how people can anticipate these figures in advance - there will be a decline in the number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland. Therefore, it is incumbent on us, at parliamentary level, to ensure our languages, whether Welsh, Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic or the Scots leid, which is my natural language, are all protected, encouraged and developed because if we do not protect our languages, we do not protect our history or anything else which goes along with the nations we hold so dear.

I thank all the people who have been involved in the projects mentioned so far. I am sure there are representatives from Northern Ireland, Wales and from Scotland

involved in this Inter-Parliamentary Body and that we can see further developments and share our common concerns, our common knowledge and the developments which we can achieve together. I look forward to further discussions on these matters.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): I felt envious when the Scottish and Welsh Assembly Members were speaking about their language rights. In relation to the Assembly in the North of Ireland, there has been some recognition of language, the Irish language in particular, largely as a result of its being negotiated into the Good Friday Agreement. We are all duty bound to take resolute action to promote and facilitate the Irish language in public life. To take up Dai's invitation, we should explore the experience of the Welsh Assembly in regard to the provision and recognition of language rights. I think we have moved a long way from the early days when it was said in one of the *Hansards* that there would be a meeting in Dublin in a tea shop. Effectively, they wanted to say there would be a meeting in Dublin with the Taoiseach.

Mr Lenihan: At the risk of being facetious I suppose all of this started with a meeting involving a teapot and also a Taoiseach. We cannot mention the name of the Taoiseach any more for reasons of political correctness but we all know about whom I am talking. I will confine my remarks to the Warrington Project because, as a member of the committee, this is the project in which I took the most interest. I did not travel to Columba or the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig project and, indeed, it is great to hear the various members from the Assemblies talking about this particular issue. It is important to encourage the pan-Celtic cultural links that need to be developed further, certainly in the language sphere.

As you know, Co-Chairman, the Warrington Project was very dear to the late Roger Stott, who very much championed it. It is very fitting that today we should sign-off on this report. It was very much to his credit that Roger, in his dying days, was keen that the Committee should pursue this project. Full marks and credit to Jean Corston who, if you like, finessed this by bringing us before David Blunkett for what was one of the most stimulating meetings I have had in relation to this Body. A very brilliant man signed off a very large sum of money to fund the Warrington project over three years. I regard that as tangible concrete progress achieved by a committee.

I will look to see if it ups the tempo for other committees that they can deliver the same amount of money as well as Jean Corston did. We all hope we can do that at home in our domestic parliaments. I congratulate Jean in that it really was a great achievement to ensure regular funding for that project. I know many people on this Body are professionals involved in the education system as college lectures, teachers and so on. This is where peace will be made, bound and harnessed, that is, if we could manage to get our education systems to change our mindsets and attitudes and perhaps forget about our history or look at it in a different way.

And the Question being put:

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 74] on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project.

6. THE RURAL ECONOMY AND CAP REFORM

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We should be finished by 5.30 pm We now move on to items 6 and 7 on the agenda. It has been suggested by the Steering Committee that, for the convenience of our meeting, we debate the two items together, that is, Documents Nos. 75 and 76. Is that agreed? Agreed. I call Bill O'Brien to move the motion and to speak.

Mr William O'Brien (Normanton): I move:

That the Body takes note of the responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Economics and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 75] on the Rural Economy.

The Chairman of the Committee cannot be here as he is in hospital. I accept the privilege of moving this report on behalf of Committee C. It was clear to the Committee from the outset, as confirmed to us by witnesses, that it is no longer possible to view the problems facing small farmers and the approaches to tackling those problems in isolation. There is a growing realisation today by all concerned parties that the future for small farmers and for the wider rural communities in which they live is closely intertwined. In conducting our inquiries and in framing our report, we have endeavoured to draw from the evidence which we heard on the main problems facing smaller farmers today and to suggest what policies are being, or might be, used to address those problems.

On many occasions during the course of our inquiry, we heard from farmers and their representatives in Northern Ireland the strongly expressed wish to have local politicians, who fully understand local issues and problems, take charge of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture. The Committee strongly agreed with that view and looks forward to the establishment as soon as possible of a devolved Northern Ireland Executive under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Against that background, we were delighted to note on 2 December 1999, when our inquiry was being brought to its conclusion, the establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and the devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

We especially welcome the appointment of Ms Bríd Rogers as Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development. She, her Department and the Assembly now take over from the Westminster Parliament much of the responsibilities for the area the committee had been investigating. We wish her well in her endeavours. Only fools would wish to reject this progress for farmers and the rural areas for political dogma.

In our report the Committee praised the Leader programmes in Ireland, both North and South, as almost textbook examples of how the EU programmes should work at

grassroots level, through local action and stimulating direct involvement. We are pleased, therefore, to hear of the endorsement given to the new Leader+ programme in the Irish Government's response. The new Leader+ will be more restrictive than its predecessor, placing a great deal of emphasis on transitional projects. Crucially, the Leader+ programme will help provide an opportunity for those involved to earn from a farming income.

Both Governments' responses made the point that what matters is total household income on the farm. In the case of many small farms, the prospects for increasing farm income or farm size is very limited. In such cases the way to revitalising a farm income unity will be to increase the income into the household and the total household income on the farm, whether by small farm expertise, such as diversifying into bed and breakfast operations, or by improving the employment prospects, usually for the farmer's wife. We considered this was the only way that many small farms could put additional income to their farming prospects.

I welcome the news that both Government are addressing this issue in their rural development programmes. In our report, we noted a concern that 20% of farmers were over the age of 60 years and that there is no person under 45 years of age living on the farm. The UK Government's response was to see such a situation as the main means by which social inducements take place in the farming industry. Of course, we do not wish to see one generation of non-viable farms simply replaced with another, but a system must be found whereby farmers are eased into retirement instead of finding themselves in advancing years still having to work as hard as ever while slipping back into poverty and debt.

Her Majesty's Government does not accept the Committee's emphasis on having policies designed to maintain an optimum number of farms. The Committee has advocated policies that distinguish between farms in different circumstances. It was clear to us that 20% of farms are economically viable and need little or no help. Some 30% of farms, the smallest, cannot be made reasonably viable and these farmers need to be helped by social welfare policies or diversification. Some 50% of farmers are struggling badly, but they can be helped to reach a viable proposition if there is a will to do so.

Our report was principally directed to this last group of farmers. I believe this was right and I must emphasise that unless Governments are willing to look at how many and what type of farms can and should be rescued, agriculture policy will continue to drift. Many will be ill directed and farmers on farms that could be saved will be lost.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I now call on Robert Jackson to speak to item 7.

Mr Robert Jackson (*Wantage*): It fell to my party to move the motion and introduce the report on the reform of the CAP. We had a brief discussion at the previous plenary meeting, but we were dissatisfied at the response of the British Government, so it was postponed until now. We now have a two page document as opposed to a two paragraph letter from Lord Dubs.

Our report was the result of extensive discussions in committee chaired by my predecessor, the late, lamented Michael Colvin. I have taken over from him, which is why I am introducing it. We had four meetings, one in London, one in Belfast, one in Brussels and one in Dublin and we had extensive contacts with Departments, farmers, producer and consumer organisations and economists. The basis for this report was that agriculture was a potentially good area for discussion by the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and for North-South co-operation in Ireland. Our experience in preparing the report has confirmed this.

The basic situation can be seen in the simple facts reported on page 11. Agriculture and food production constitute approximately 8% of GDP in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, whereas they constitute approximately 3% of GDP in Great Britain. It is transparent that there is a marked common interest in agriculture between the North and the South of Ireland and that interest is perhaps slightly less shared between the two parts of Ireland and Great Britain. The report points out that the inter-dependence in agriculture is extensive. In June 1998 a fire at a pig processing plant at Ballymoney took out 40% of Northern Ireland's pig processing capacity and greatly damaged the Republic's pig processing capability because one third of what was being done at Ballymoney involved pigs from the Republic.

The conclusion of our analysis of the CAP can be summed up as follows: first, it is important to note - the report does not bring this out strongly enough - that the CAP is not an optional extra in the EU. It is often discussed, especially in Britain, as if it were, but it must be understood that the CAP is nothing more or less than the agricultural products dimension of the Common Market, which is the fundamental bedrock of the European Community. When that is recognised, the criticism made in page 3, paragraph 8 of the report of the high proportion of the European budget spent on agriculture is slightly beside the point because it is committed to supporting a fundamental dimension of the Common Market, which is the agricultural common market. Having said that, the fact is there is no doubt that the Common Agricultural Policy in its classical form is proving to be unsustainably expensive. It is clearly expensive to contributors to the European budget and this point is noted strongly in Britain, which is one of the major contributors to the European budget. It is also expensive to consumers, including Irish consumers, who are paying prices for agricultural products that are supported by the CAP at a higher rate than would be available in open world markets.

Therefore, the CAP is, in its classical form, a very expensive policy and it is increasingly under threat. It is under threat from two directions. In the longer term perhaps the most weighty and serious pressure is coming from globalisation. In the Uruguay Round, the last world trade round which gave rise to the creation of the new WTO to replace GATT, it was agreed for the first time that agriculture would be part of the discussion and it was agreed that there would be limits on export subsidies. Clearly there will be further progress, if the protesters at Seattle and Prague will allow us, in the direction of more worldwide free trade and this will inevitably put up more pressure on systems that involve heavy subsidy to producers, including the CAP. That is one threat.

Another threat is a more immediate one, that is, the consequences of enlargement in Eastern and Central Europe which will bring into the European Union major potential agricultural producers whose agriculture is such that it would probably break the bank to extend to them the traditional system of the CAP, and adjustments will have to be made. The European Union has recognised this problem. There is a gradual evolution towards reform and it is important to note the prominent role in that process which is being played by people from Ireland, notably Mr Ray MacSharry, who was associated with the last big reform of the CAP in 1992 when he was the Agriculture Commissioner. The directions are pretty firmly set, going back to the MacSharry report. First there is a process of cuts in market support and in the level of intervention to sustain market prices. Second, to complement that, there is a shift to direct income support paid directly to producers accompanied by a strong emphasis on environmental policy and on rural development more widely, which of course was the subject of the report we just heard about from Committee C.

In this reform process there are clearly different views between the United Kingdom and Ireland. They reflect the basic facts quoted by me here, that in Ireland agriculture and food production constitute 8% of GDP and in Britain it is 1.3% of GDP, and also the fact, to which the British Government's response makes a strong allusion, that Britain is a very major net contributor to the European Union's budget whereas of course Ireland is a major net beneficiary. This inevitably means that we have a different perspective from that of politicians from the South.

Nevertheless there has been further progress towards reform of the CAP, notably in Berlin in March 1999, when there was something of a stand-off. There were price cuts that were actually more moderate than the Commission had proposed. To that extent, the agricultural lobby prevailed but at the same time a rather strict budgetary ceiling was fixed for the period 2000-2006 and to that extent the reformers had some effect. The Berlin agreements, however, left remaining to be decided in the future what should be done about the consequences of enlargement and what should be done about the implications of future world trade agreements.

To sum up the present situation, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is an ongoing process. I believe it is an inevitable process. The report offers a good snapshot of the current position. The agricultural reform will proceed more or less in the directions that were pointed to by MacSharry and will happen as fast as the agricultural industry can afford to have that process unfold.

All this has important implications for the institutional and political system of agricultural policy in Northern Ireland, in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom. I want to make two points about impressions from our visits. First, in London, one of the questions we wanted to press was about the representation of the agricultural interests of Northern Ireland and, indeed, other parts of the United Kingdom in agricultural negotiations in Brussels, where of course there is a UK Minister who is responsible for negotiations. The Committee dealt with this point in paragraph 52 of the report, where we stated that we believe that the policy-making

process does not at present take sufficient account of the interests of Northern Ireland agriculture. We suggested that ways should be found of strengthening the representation of the new Executive in Northern Ireland - we made a side reference to Wales and Scotland also - in the process of negotiation in Brussels. We also recommended that the Northern Ireland Executive might think of establishing an office in Brussels. That was one of our conclusions.

The Body will find that the UK Government has responded reasonably positively to that. The Government notes the Committee's belief that the policy making process does not take sufficient account. It says that the Committee will recognise that major decisions on the CAP are taken by a Council of Ministers that represents member states rather than individual regions. That does not mean that the Northern Ireland Executive cannot establish other forms of representation and participation in policy formulation within the UK and in Brussels, where appropriate, and in agreement with the UK Government. The Government is ready to help to devise and fully co-operate in such arrangements on the same basis as those in place for the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales. Therefore, there is a bit of a signal there that there is a willingness to listen to this.

Another point, which we highlighted in paragraph 51 of the report, is that when one looks at these figures, the 8% of GDP in Northern Ireland as opposed to the 1.3% of GDP in the UK, we do have to recognise that the Northern Ireland interest in agricultural reform may produce a different balance from that in the UK as a whole, which is why we strongly supported the principle of regional envelopes within national envelopes. That is an important point to continue to press.

That was the impression from London. As far as Dublin is concerned, what struck me personally was how uninvolved the officials, particularly in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, seem to be with Northern Ireland agricultural interests. As you might expect, they seem to be mainly concerned about the interests of agriculture in the South and there is a clear indication that there is a need to build more co-operation between people in the North and people in the South to build on the undoubted areas of common interest. That was the subject of paragraph 54 of the Committee's report, where we made a series of recommendations about greater co-operation across the Border. The Committee indicated six areas where we thought something could be done. The Body will see, if it looks at the response of the Irish Government to the report, that it picks up that point, refers to the North-South Implementation Bodies and gives a helpful list of three which have been set up which do have an impact on the sort of issues which the committee was canvassing in its report at paragraph 54.

I hope you will agree, Co-Chairman, that this report has been a worthwhile exercise for the Committee and for the Body, that it has reached a number of constructive conclusions and that it is very much a case of ongoing work that will require us to return to it in the future as the situation continues to evolve.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Robert. Having been Minister for Agriculture and Food for five years, from 1987 to 1992, and being interested in what you point out in terms of the liaison with Northern Ireland farmers and the representation and influence they should have at Brussels negotiations on a range of issues, I want to make one observation on some interesting points you mentioned. During that period when I was Minister for Agriculture and Food, as far as I recall, agriculture in this economy represented over 20% of GDP. Therefore, there has been a dramatic change since then.

Another significant change will be evident shortly. Ireland was a net beneficiary for a number of years and took great advantage of all the policies. The indications are that the Republic will become a net contributor in the near future. Therefore, we are faced with a dynamic and changing scene at this stage.

There are two further speakers offering. Given that time is running short and that I am obliged to call on Deputies Brendan Smith and Austin Currie to conclude, I ask the two remaining speakers, Lembit Öpik MP and Deputy Rory O'Hanlon, to be as brief as is reasonably possible.

Mr Öpik: Roy Jenkins once described a ghastly wine he was offered as a "very honest wine". I believe that, in part, the report on the future of small farms is a very honest report.

I am particularly concerned about two aspects of the Minister's reply. First, reading the paragraph about the optimum number of farms would imply that the Government is willing to allow, almost by default, the thinning out of the number of people who live in the countryside. This is a serious matter because, in effect, that is an invisible strategy that states that the countryside will be depopulated. This problem applies as much to Wales as it does to the island of Ireland. Perhaps the Committee may wish to take action about this matter.

Second, it has become clear to me that an early retirement scheme is essential if one is to remove the backlog. People are being forced to remain on their farms and continue working mainly as a result of the effect of negative equity on the circumstances in which they are operating. The Government is hesitant about dealing with this matter. I do not accept that it would be poor value for money if the £29 million were used to help the potentially small number of applicants, that is because there are more creative ways of doing this. If it were impossible, other countries would not already have done it. My judgment, therefore, is that there is work to be done by the Government in that regard and anything Committee C can do to assist in forcing it to do so would be most welcome.

Dr O'Hanlon: These are two good reports and they make a valuable contribution to the debate on agriculture and rural development. I compliment Bríd Rogers, the new Minister in Northern Ireland. Not only does she look after her brief in Northern Ireland but she is also very supportive of matters relating to cross-Border rural development and has been involved in a number of activities in that regard.

In paragraph 52 of his report, Robert referred to representation in Brussels and the importance of agriculture in Northern Ireland compared to Britain. It has often been stated at these plenary sessions that the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is more representative of the farmers than his British counterpart, for the reasons Robert outlined in terms of the importance of agriculture and the smaller size of the farms. In the context of the North-South bodies, this matter might be addressed further particularly with regard to how we ensure that farmers in Northern Ireland will be better represented in Brussels than they are at present by the British Minister.

Our real aim in respect of rural development is to maintain vibrant communities in rural areas of Ireland, even though the number of farmers has decreased considerably during the past 25 years. We must ensure that we maintain communities, that people are able to live in rural areas and that they have a standard of living commensurate with that of their colleagues in urban areas. It is encouraging to see the number of developments coming on stream, particularly the new Leader+ programme. There is one interesting fact about this programme when compared to its predecessor, namely, that, because the European Union is not providing the same level of funding or the same range of activities to be supported by Leader, the Irish Government has intervened and increased the fund in order to ensure that there will be no shortfall in the level of activity previously supported by Leader in the past.

The Border region has benefited from the INTERREG and peace and reconciliation programmes and I would like to see a major programme of rural development on both sides of the Border. I am somewhat concerned about one aspect of the reply from the British Government, namely, the question of support for a special milk quota for the Border region. It is recognised that the 12 Border counties - six in the North and six in the South - suffered economically during the 30 years of the Troubles. In fact, prior to recent events there had been practically no overseas investment in the southern Border counties since the late 1970s.

Agriculture remains the major industry in the Border region and it would have been beneficial if, as part of European Union support, there had been an increase in the milk quota. The report contains a reference to that and the Committee obviously supported it. However, it appears that the British Government is shelving the issue. I am disappointed by this development.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Senator Mooney has signalled that he wishes to make a point.

Senator Mooney: Deputy O'Hanlon has made the point I wished to make so I will not delay the proceedings.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I call on Deputy Brendan Smith to conclude our deliberations on the rural economy and Deputy Currie to conclude those relating to the CAP.

Mr Brendan Smith (*Cavan-Monaghan*): In view of the time constraints, I will be brief. Our Vice-Chairman has already outlined in detail the main points raised in the report. Since the two Governments made their responses, there have been positive political developments in Northern Ireland with the re-establishment of the Executive and the Assembly. One clear message we received on our visit to County Derry from members of both political traditions was that the farming community and farm organisations believe they were not well served by British Agriculture Ministers. They wanted a Minister who would take a hands-on approach in relation to the problems affecting agriculture in Northern Ireland.

Like Deputy O'Hanlon I am glad Bríd Rogers, a very competent and able person, was appointed to the position of Minister for Agriculture in Northern Ireland. In recent months she has met the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Deputy Walsh, on a number of occasions. Detailed work programmes are being drawn up in respect of the common interests of everyone involved in agriculture on this island. The Food Safety Promotion Board and the Special EU Programmes Body are two of the implementation bodies covered in the Good Friday Agreement and they are now part of the North-South Ministerial Council.

The response of both Governments indicates that the survival of small farms will be dependent on off-farm income in the future. As a result, in rural areas increased non-agricultural economic activity will be required in addition to improvements to infrastructure in order to attract prospective employers. Some of the British Government's responses are most disappointing. I wish to pay particular attention to the demographic crisis. A number of farmers in County Derry indicated that they were envious of the fact that their counterparts in the South can avail themselves of the farm retirement scheme and the farm installation aid scheme. The early retirement scheme, which was introduced by Deputy O'Kennedy during his term as Minister for Agriculture, has been beneficial in trying to increase and consolidate farm sizes and encouraging young people to take over their parents' farms.

The British Government response states that the fact the majority of farmers are over the age of 45 is a reflection of the fact that in general they do not inherit their holdings and become farmers in their own right until they are halfway or more through their working lives. It then proceeds to criticise the concept of an early retirement scheme. Surely it follows logically from the reality that farmers do not inherit their holdings until they are middle aged or older is the corollary that there should be a scheme or incentive to ensure that farms are handed over to people at a younger age. I am disappointed that the British Government did not give a positive response in respect of the early retirement scheme. Likewise, it did not provide a positive response to the installation aid scheme for young farmers - this scheme was also introduced by Deputy O'Kennedy - that has played an important role in helping these people to put in place necessary and additional farming facilities.

My constituency colleague, Deputy O'Hanlon quite rightly highlighted the issue of the milk quota. Unfortunately, the British Government is not supportive of the idea to which Deputy O'Hanlon referred. This idea emanated from the owners of dairy co-

operatives on both sides of the Border who suggested that, as a political dividend and to try to bolster the rural economy and help small quota holders, a particular pool of milk would be set aside and allocated to farmers with a small milk quota. That proposal has the support of the Irish Government but it needs to be sent to Brussels with the full backing of both Governments. Unfortunately, the proposal will go nowhere if it does not have the full support of both Governments.

The report is worthwhile but I am disappointed by the response of the British Government on certain issues. Perhaps we could contact the British Department or Bríd Rodgers again, particularly in regard to the early farm retirement and farm installation aid schemes. Those were two major bones of contention that were highlighted by farmers in County Derry. When we visited counties Donegal and Derry 12 months ago a total air of despondency and a lack of confidence pervaded the farming community.

There have been improvements in farm income in the South in the meantime but that has not been the case in the North. There is a need to introduce a number of measures to instill confidence in farming, which is necessary, particularly to encourage young people in the North to enter the industry. There is a severe difficulty in encouraging young people to take up farming in the South but it is much worse in the North.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Your committee meets tomorrow morning, Deputy. Some of the points you made are worth pursuing further at the committee. I call Deputy Austin Currie.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West): The original response to Committee B from Alf Dubs last November was unsatisfactory. This reply from Adam Ingram was more satisfactory. However, it is dated 20 March. We would have preferred a reply from the current Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Bríd Rodgers, but Dr O'Hanlon has referred to her position.

I do not know the extent of her presence at decision-making meetings in Brussels. If she has been present, it would be interesting to hear about her experience, the role she was allowed to play, the amount of independence she had in putting forward the differing agricultural problems, the extent to which she has co-operated with the Ministers of Agriculture in Edinburgh and Cardiff and the extent of her co-operation with the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in the Republic. I am glad to have been informed by Seán Neeson that already the Northern Ireland Assembly has established an office in Brussels, which is welcome.

As a member of Committee B I look forward to meeting Bríd Rodgers in the near future to hear her views on these matters. I do not believe a Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, irrespective of party affiliation, will be content not to have an independent role in pushing the interests of Northern Ireland farmers. Our Chairman, Robert Jackson, drew our attention to a paragraph in the letter from Adam Ingram that he thought was a signal. I hope it is a green signal. He

stated: "Arrangements on the same basis as those in place for the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales will be put in place for Northern Ireland."

We do not know what those arrangements are but should the same arrangements be made for Northern Ireland as for Scotland and Wales, and given the admitted similarities between the agriculture industry North and South and the benefits to be gained from North-South co-operation at EU level and in other spheres, they need to be further explored with the British Government and Bríd Rodgers. There may also be a role for Edinburgh and Wales in finding out what is the position of their Ministers of Agriculture when they go to Brussels. I look forward to replies to those questions.

And the Question being put:

***Resolved*, That the Body takes note of the responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 75] on the Future for Small Farms in the Rural Economy.**

***Resolved*, That the Body takes note of the further Observations of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture to the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs on matters relating to Common Agricultural Policy Reform [Doc. No. 76].-(Mr. Robert Jackson.)**

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I remind Members that Committees B and C will meet at 8.45 am tomorrow and Committees A and D meet at 9.20 am.

The sitting was adjourned at 5.40 pm till tomorrow. Tuesday, 10 October 2000

Tuesday, 10 October 2000

The sitting was opened in public at 10.10 am in the Lettermore Suite, Galway Bay Hotel, Galway, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick) The meeting is now in public session. I remind Members of what my Co-Chair said yesterday: please remove all newspapers, pagers and mobile phones as if they never existed. This morning we intend to spend 20 minutes to half an hour on reports from the committees and then will follow the main debate on the future of the Body. We are not going to have a strict time limit on the main debate but since virtually everyone in the Body will wish to speak, Members should keep their remarks as brief as possible and not go over four minutes so that everyone who wants to contribute on our future work and the structure of the organisation will be able to do so.

1. BUSINESS REPORTS FROM COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Mr Charles Flanagan (*Laois-Offaly*): For the benefit of new delegates and observers, Committee A, the Political Committee, does not produce written business reports, unlike the other committees. The reason is obvious in that our deliberations are ongoing and a written report would, more often than not, be obsolete by the time we would report. We present a brief oral report of our discussions at the plenary session.

As part of our deliberations on demilitarisation, normalisation and related issues we visited Crossmaglen in south Armagh to hear about the situation there from elected representatives, to get the local point of view and to see at first hand some of the Army installations there. We met local political representatives from the SDLP and Sinn Féin, following which we travelled to Belfast to discuss these and other issues with the Chief Constable of the RUC. The committee briefed the Chief Constable on our visit to south Armagh and we had a frank exchange of views with him. We questioned him on many security-related issues. He said that as far as he was concerned significant threats to peace still existed, that in the world in which he existed dramatic changes had occurred and that the Committee would have seen the significant changes in Belfast. The RUC full-time reserve had not recruited for two years and was now 500 below establishment; officers in Belfast could now go out on night patrol in central city areas in highly visible fluorescent jackets.

However, in considering further normalisation measures he had to take into account both the activity and capability of paramilitary groups. Their activity had been greatly reduced but their capability had not at all. While the level of military activity by the security forces had been reduced, he spoke considerably of the threats. He regarded a statement in the early summer by Mr Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin about violence being "over and done with" as being of great significance and had influenced his assessment of the threat in no small way. A similar statement from the IRA would have been of great help and significance in allowing him to further reassess the situation. He was of the view that normalisation must always be seen in that light. In eight of the 12 RUC divisions there were now no soldiers and there had been fewer Army patrols and flights, even in south Armagh, though this had not been detected on the ground in the early summer.

South Armagh is a uniquely difficult area to police. The hilltop posts were an attempt to be less obtrusive and without them there would have to be a lot more people active on the ground. The Chief Constable said he hoped to be able to make further progress towards normalisation and he did so in the course of the summer. This included south Armagh. He said the measures already taken should not be dismissed and he was aware of the political dimension and the possible effects of further normalisation. Reductions in military presence were not without risk, as we accept, and the Chief Constable accepted that risks were necessary for peace. He felt - and we agreed - that south Armagh was always going to be the most difficult and slowest area to return to normality, but progress has been reported over the summer. We hope that continues.

Our next engagement is a meeting with the Parades Commission, which will take place shortly. We will also be meeting representatives of the Garvagh Road Residents Association, Mr Brian Curran and Mr Richard Monteith. The committee has also planned a visit to Derry, which we hope will take place before Christmas, where it will receive security briefings and meet with local political leaders.

That is our report and I will be handing over to Deputy Hayes. This is my last opportunity of addressing the Body and I would like to thank both Co-Chairs and all Members for their friendship and collegiality over the past few years. I acknowledge the great work done by everyone here in the drive towards a more harmonious relationship between our islands, in which we have succeeded to great effect. Long may the work of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body continue. I note there are also interesting times ahead with the enlargement of the Body to take in representatives from the other Assemblies. I take this opportunity to wish everyone well and to thank you all.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I thank Deputy Flanagan both for the report and his concluding remarks. I echo entirely what Michael O'Kennedy said last night; we are deeply grateful for all the work and contributions he has made to this Body. Before Deputy Flanagan leaves to discipline his troops and to make their lives a misery it should be stated formally how grateful we are for his constructive work for the Body, particularly with Committee A. Are there any questions? If not, I would normally go to Committee B, but Robert Jackson is not here, so I am calling on the Vice-Chairman of Committee C, Bill O'Brien, to make his report.

Mr O'Brien: I apologise for Deputy Kirk, who is absent owing to ill health. Committee C monitors economic and social affairs of the island of Ireland. Following our report yesterday on the future of small farms in the rural economy, which we considered a significant publication, we are now looking at tourism in Ireland. During recent months the Committee travelled to Cavan and Leitrim on 17 and 18 July as part of an inquiry into tourism in Ireland. The Members present included Deputies Brendan Smith, Andrew Boylan, Brian O'Shea and Cecilia Keaveney as well as Jeff Ennis MP, Joe Benton MP, Maria Fyfe MP and myself.

During the course of our visit we met John Martin and Joe Gillespie of Waterways Ireland and Alan Hill of the Shannon-Erne Waterways promotions as well as Pauline Daly of Bord Fáilte Éireann. Mr Martin outlined the state of the waterways network in Ireland. He explained that after a long period of neglect the tourist potential of the network was discovered in recent years and that a substantial investment had been made by the OPW since the 1980s to revitalise it. Ireland has more than 1,000 kilometres of inland waterways, covering between 2,000 and 3,000 square kilometres of the surface of the island. Management of the waterways network was transferred to Waterways Ireland, one of the six Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. Waterways Ireland has a full staff complement of 400 people and an annual budget of more than £14 million, half for running costs and half to be spent on capital works. Investment in technology is particularly

important. The most important work being undertaken is to restore the Royal Canal and this project is 70% complete.

A £47 million development fund for inland waterways was provided under the national development plan. However, it should be noted that construction costs are rising at approximately 10% per annum and the funding available should be rising by an equivalent amount to maintain the level of investment envisaged.

The most important project under construction is the possible restoration of the Ulster Canal. This has been estimated at a cost of up to £100 million but the continuing rise in construction costs could push up that total of expenditure to considerably in excess of £100 million. While there has been success in obtaining money from the European Union that covered much of the cost of the restoration of the Shannon-Erne waterways, in future all funding for such projects will come from the central Exchequer.

Mr Martin told the committee that the tourist potential of the waterways was threefold. The three types of tourist who visit the waterways are boaters, anglers and walkers. They come for several key reasons, the quality of the environment, the open spaces, the pubs and the absence of strict licensing on the use of boats.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am sorry to intervene and the speaker will forgive me I am sure. Basically we are trying to get an indication of what the committee intends to do. We appreciate what the speaker is saying.

Mr O'Brien: This morning we agreed to meet early next year to continue the study of and research into the possibilities of highlighting issues involving tourism in Ireland so that we can then present further reports to the Body advising on the advantages and benefits of tourism throughout the island of Ireland. There is a great deal that we can research for the benefit of the Body and that report will be published in due course.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you. I am sure your inquiry provides tremendous scope given what you said about what you and your colleagues will do. I call Kevin McNamara of Committee D to give his report on what the Committee decided for its future business.

Mr McNamara: The Committee is halfway through the preparation of its report on the cultural and social significance of parades in Ireland. We have had extensive meetings in Belfast and Derry and before Christmas we hope to talk to the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Kilkeel and the Orange Order in Donegal with the possibility of visits to Liverpool and Glasgow to see how these various parades are being transported and the significance that has, in particular, for Unionists in Liverpool and Glasgow.

We discussed a brief range of what we might examine next. Our brief also covers the environment. We are examining sustainable tourism and how one maintains areas

that have interest for tourists but are subject to extremely heavy demand, such as the Giant's Causeway and the Lake District. Many people seek peace and quiet and what has to be offered and that can result in the destruction of those places. We need to see how that would be dealt with in the various jurisdictions.

That would have the advantage of bringing in the devolved governments and their departments to examine it because we are finding, in the nature of the definition of the work done by the Committee, we must be careful not to trespass upon the new prerogatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly and cross-Border bodies. It is not our job to second guess that but, on the other hand, as we are a Body for the whole of these islands, we have an interest in what they are doing. We are trying to tread carefully over some matters. We examined other matters.

I would like to put on record the appreciation of the committee of the work done by Dr Lucy Moulard, who recently married and will shortly take up a post as Assistant Registrar at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. She has given tremendous support and help to the Committee. Her quietness tends to hide a steely character and an ability to get things done and keep Committee Members in order. We will miss her very much and we wait to see what treats the House of Lords Secretariat have for us in future. On behalf of the Committee, and the Body, we hope that she will enjoy great happiness in her married life and new work at the University of East Anglia.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I call on the Chairman of Committee B, Robert Jackson.

Mr Jackson: We have concluded our investigation of the CAP that we reported on yesterday but there are some issues which we must follow up. Some interesting questions have arisen which may be raised in the context of the discussion on the future of the Body about how we follow up on such reports.

We have already embarked on the study we undertook after the CAP study was completed, which was transport links between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Britain. We had a meeting in London and earlier we fixed the dates for meetings in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and we expect to complete this work before the summer plenary.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That concludes the item regarding Committees.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

2. FUTURE OF THE BODY

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We now move to the debate on the future of the Body and the proposed amendments to the rules. I want to bring the Body up to date in regard to the developments, the evolution within the structures of the Body and the proposals before the Body from the Steering Committee. In two previous

documents, Nos. 60 and 66, we considered the matter of the future of the Body in considerable detail. The purpose of this discussion paper from the Steering Committee is simply to identify the main areas that require future consideration. It will be appreciated that there has been some considerable evolution in the role and structure of the Body in recent times. The issues we are generally highlighting are the Body's relationship with the new institutions, which is clearly of considerable importance; the structures of the Body as a consequence of those relationships; the work and arrangements for continuing our work programme at plenary and committee levels; practical matters such as the size of the Body, to which I will return; the composition of the Body; and the funding of the Body which is of ever increasing importance for the Governments and ourselves. Another issue is the format of the plenary and committee meetings. It touches on all aspects of the practical issues that we must address at this evolutionary stage.

Any reform of the Body - I mean a review having regard to the position in which we find ourselves - must take full account of the views of existing members. However, as I mentioned last night, the only constant in this issue is change. There will be new members and potential new members who will be full members of the Body and we should take account of their views. For that reason we are at an interesting and critical juncture, not of any huge problems, but in terms of the decisions we take and the scope we allow ourselves in taking on board those changes.

In the amendments we are proposing that the Body should empower the Steering Committee to take the reform process forward in an ordered and structured way, taking account of the extraordinary complexity of the many interrelated issues. Members will be aware that the Steering Committee meets on a fairly regular basis. We will again be meeting in late November or early December. For that reason we are proposing to bring forward rule changes which would empower the Steering Committee to drive the process forward in a considered way, always recognising that these are to give flexibility to the Steering Committee pending the development and outcome of some of the proposed changes to the Body and its associated institutions, and the possible evolution of a North-South tier, a parliamentary tier, etc. We want to be able to look at and take account of these changes and make the necessary adjustments. Any decision, of course, would have to be referred back to the plenary Body.

I also wish to mention the proposed amendments to the Rules, as both issues are interrelated. We are proposing a series of changes to Rule 1. The cumulative effect of the changes would be to allow the Steering Committee to make temporary changes to the rules in order to accommodate the devolved parliamentary institutions, including those of the islands, within the overall structures. Clearly, any permanent rule changes would have to be subject to confirmation by the following plenary meeting. The reason is the way we make our rules. For example, currently, and for good reason, changes to the rules have to be approved by the plenary Body before they take effect. This means we cannot admit new members without a formal rule change. It also means that if the North-South parliamentary tier gets underway, something over which we do not have immediate control, the capacity of the Irish

side to service the North-South parliamentary tier and provide full representation on the Body would not only be stretched but would not prove possible. We do not know what may evolve between now and the next election, but in case that happens it might be necessary, for example, for the Irish side to reduce the level of representation on the Body for a temporary period in which event, because we have always had equal representation at the Body, we would ask our British friends to agree to a temporary reduction in their numbers on the Body. I stress that this would be purely on a temporary basis that would subsequently have to be referred for confirmation to the plenary session. The Steering Committee will meet in mid-November or early December and if there were developments over the next month or two, we would have an opportunity to make appropriate suggestions by way of rule change.

The intention of the proposed change is to allow the Steering Committee the flexibility to make arrangements in advance of the next plenary should these issues arise. For example, the observers here today could come as full members once the precise details of representation have been negotiated. This would be subject to ratification by the plenary Body. It is, therefore, a temporary measure that would have to be replaced in due course by a detailed amendment to the rules to reflect the new situation.

I assure colleagues that there is no *uisce faoi thalamh* intention, no deep conspiratorial intention behind this on the part of the Steering Committee. It can probably be noted that during the lifetime of this and previous Steering Committees the one priority has been the development and strengthening of the Body, with no other purpose.

On behalf of the Steering Committee I formally propose that we discuss both issues together, namely the future of the Body and the amendment to the Rules. Gerry Bermingham has an amendment to this proposal and I call on him to propose it.

The motion of which notice was given by the Steering Committee in Doc. 78 was as follows:

That Rule 1, page 8, after paragraph (d), be amended by inserting new paragraphs (e) and (f), as follows:

"(e) In pursuit of the objectives of paragraph 11 of Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement, the Steering Committee may, at its absolute discretion:

(i) increase or decrease the numbers of Members and Associate Members allowed for under Rules 1(a) and 1(b) above;

(ii) co-opt to the Body so many Members from the High Court of Tynwald, the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the States of Deliberation of Jersey, and the States of Guernsey as it considers appropriate; and

(iii) promulgate such consequential amendments to the Rules of the Body as it considers necessary in pursuit of those objectives.

(f) Any amendment to the Rules of the Body made under paragraph (e) above shall take effect from a date or dates to be determined by the Steering Committee; but such amendment shall be subject to ratification by the Body at the next Plenary session following its promulgation and, if not so ratified, shall lapse."

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South): I move amendment No. 1:

In line 2, leave out from "the Steering Committee may" to the end of line 4.

In line 5, leave out "(ii)" and insert "(i)".

In line 9, leave out "(iii)" and insert "(ii)".

In line 11, leave out "above shall take effect from a date or dates to be determined by the Steering Committee; but such amendment".

In line 14, leave out from "promulgation" to end.

I have listened to the case for the prosecution and I am not convinced. My amendment seeks to achieve the same objects through a much simpler and speedier process. Having teased out the idea that someone wanted to tinker with the number of permanent Members, that is the size of the Irish and English delegations, I took that out of the proposals. The people who should accept or reject the final proposals are the Members of the Body. If we pass the motion in its present format unamended, it is possible for the Steering Committee - I do not suggest it has this in mind - to reduce the Body to the Steering Committee that could then automatically rubber-stamp whatever it wanted to do. That should not be allowed to happen but that is how the present amendment is worded. I deleted that and stated it should propose the new terms and bring it back to the full Body, as currently constituted, for ratification at the next plenary session. My amendment is not earth-shattering, just logical.

I have never understood "absolute discretion". Either you have discretion or you do not. There is no such thing as an absolute discretion. I thought that was unnecessary verbiage. My amendment is simple and logical. It will achieve speedily exactly what we all want, the expansion of the Body. If subsequently it becomes necessary to redraft the size of the main delegations that can be discussed by the full Body and either agreed or not by it. That is why I moved my amendment.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you.

Mr Mates: The effect of the amendment is that we cannot touch the main membership between Westminster and the Oireachtas. The Chairman explained why it might be necessary to do that on a temporary basis.

Mr Bermingham: You cannot change it until the whole Body agrees to do so, that is to say we will do it in the next plenary session. Say, for the sake of argument, the size should be reduced to 18 Members for each parliament and that was put to the Body, the case was argued, the reasons given and we all understood and accepted it, that would go through in March next year or whenever the next plenary session is held. To do it before it is agreed and discussed by the Body seems to be undemocratic because it allows a small group to dominate the construction of the whole Body in a "temporary" fashion. I have seen too many temporary solutions become final realities without the right of democratic opposition.

Mr Temple-Morris: I appreciate the Steering Committee's amendment was put forward with the best of intentions by very honourable men and I am sure there was no ulterior motive. However, it is arbitrary and goes against our democratic instincts, as Gerry Bermingham said. There may be a need to act quickly but there is no sign that it will need to be so fast that an emergency plenary meeting cannot be arranged. We have had various emergencies in the past. On one occasion we set up a plenary meeting that did not take place because the matter was resolved. The proposed amendment allows for an alteration in the membership in any way the Steering Committee wants, whatever co-options it wants, a promulgation of the consequential amendments and, vitally as Gerry Bermingham has said, they will take effect from a date or dates to be determined by it without even a humble mention of seeking approval. It is the new Members of the Body who will report for ratification and no doubt everyone will come to attention and be delighted with the outcome. I do not believe this Body was set up with that in mind. We took a lot of trouble over the Rules, particularly with the care that had to be taken with British-Irish parliamentary relations. This goes against the spirit of that.

I ask the Steering Committee to reconsider. As matters stand, I would find it difficult to support the amendment but easy to support Gerry Bermingham's should he wish to press it. It is an uneasy situation. We have been shot-gunned into it by Strand 3 of the Belfast Agreement where it was basically an urging by Unionists, for understandable reasons, that we have the Council of the Isles rather than this Body covering Strand 3. That urging was acceded to and we now have an amalgamation of two different entities with two different functions outstanding. This is the complexity frequently referred to in the paperwork and the delicacy of the matter. There is a very definite and good role - our colleagues from the devolved institutions are here and I am delighted at that - for the Council of the Isles. It is necessary. It has the same agenda in part as ourselves particularly with Committees B, C and D but it does not touch, and this is the sombre element, the all important Committee A, the general political debates, the visits of Prime Ministers and so on.

It would be all very well and we could amalgamate easily but here is the conundrum: we have not done our task as a British-Irish sovereign parliamentary relationship. We have not yet delivered the peace. That is what we are about. It is not just a question of Governments or us delivering it. We have performed a valuable, constructive role but if anything goes wrong - the Taoiseach acknowledged the difficulties yesterday and the fact that it could go wrong - this Body in its British-Irish dimension performs

a very valuable safety net function. It is as simple as that. If things go wrong with the Governments we are here. We all know that things have gone wrong in the past though frequently it is all elegantly brushed over. There might be differences in emphasis here and there, and rightly so. We have a vital task to perform which has not yet been fulfilled and it is one that could become more vital before we reach the halcyon end of this.

It is too early, whatever we do, to do away with the chief functions of this Body let alone dilute it so far that it loses its sovereign bilateral credibility. That is important. If we end up in a numbers game that does not have the same credibility in our respective sovereign parliaments as the 25-a-side does. The last thing we want is a disparity of numbers between Britain and Ireland, though there are some who do - then we will lose sovereign credibility to deal with our functions. It is too early to dilute this Body. Bearing in mind that the Taoiseach and Governments have asked us for initiatives and if we do not have any someone else will, whatever comes out of this there must be a credible British-Irish dimension that can deal with sovereign matters, if necessary separately or as a committee of a Council of the Isles or whatever it might be. If colleagues from Belfast come in they are a special case because their contribution would be extremely valuable. I put that on the record.

The last thing we want is to create divisions in this council between Scotland, Wales, where I am from, or wherever. I am sure colleagues from those countries realise what I am saying. We are in the middle of a vital job and there is only part of our function that is common to us. That is a difficulty the Steering Committee will have to cover but not under the proposed change of rules that is before us.

Mr Brooke: This will come as a surprise to Gerry Bermingham because he and I tend to be on the opposite side on every issue discussed in the House of Commons, whether partisan or personal. I speak to indicate there is all-party support for the proposal he is putting forward. I can say something that neither he nor Peter Temple-Morris could say out of loyalty to their Government. Those of us on the Opposition benches in the House of Commons who have had to listen to the Government's proposals for the reform of the House of Lords have developed a healthy scepticism for the manner in which sovereign bodies can bring forward proposals without any clear idea of where we are going to end up. I support Gerry's amendment. I favour also the Steering Committee being responsible for the general architecture and structuring of whatever the future of this Body will be.

I am looking at the page entitled, "Reform of the Body - A Further Note" submitted to us. The final two lines of the final paragraph refer to the extraordinary complexity of the many issues raised and their interrelated nature [see appendix 1, for example]. I am in favour, therefore, of the Steering Committee taking responsibility for bringing forward proposals to deal with this extraordinary complexity. I am also in favour of them doing so in an ordered and orderly way. This is not just because of my scepticism about the reform of the House of Lords, but because the final paragraph of "Reform of the Body - A Further Note" has a mysterious "1" at the beginning of the paragraph which, as far as I can see, relates to nothing at all.

The third line includes the interesting sentence, "empower the Steering Committee to undertake this reform process". Neither of these two observations seem to be in line with an orderly and ordered process. Therefore, I am in favour of what Sam Rayburn once memorably said in his observation, that is, that the three wisest words in the English language are "wait a minute", for the Steering Committee to proceed in a rather more measured way than they are in this proposal. Therefore, I support Gerry Bermingham's amendment.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: This is an issue to which I did not contribute earlier. I have listened with great care and read the various documents that have been presented. With respect, there is a false debate this morning around the issue of the Steering Committee's proposal to amend the rules and Gerry Bermingham's amendment. Gerry has indicated a similar intent but he is seeking a speedier delivery. This issue needs to be addressed because we are in a cul-de-sac in terms of this discussion. We need to inform Members better of all that is actually swirling around this particular debate. We need to have proper information. Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement in relation to the British-Irish Council reads, "The elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop inter-parliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body." The word "perhaps" is very important. I would like to know whether there is a directive from the two Governments mandating every one of us to be here as members of this Body in relation to the delivery of Strand Three. I am not aware there is. It is important for us to evaluate what exactly this Body represents and where these proposed changes will lead us.

It will seem strange to some that a member of Sinn Féin would take the view that what we have here are 25 members of two sovereign parliaments. The basis of equality is critical in terms of the overall importance and symbolism of the engagement of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body over its years of conduct of business. That is very important. I am concerned about some of the comments from the Irish Chair this morning when he equated reform and review. With respect, Michael, they are not the same. While I do not contribute to a conspiratorial view, I take the view that a rush of blood would lead to a degree of incompetence that would result in a much diluted forum of engagement between the representatives of the two parliaments on these islands. A reduction in the Irish and possible reduction in the British delegation would have serious consequences. For the Body as a whole to apportion responsibility to the Steering Committee at this juncture effectively to take decisions in that regard is irresponsible. This is the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

I recognise, fully endorse and wish to see in place the engagement expected and recommended in Strand Three. It is a very enriching opportunity to hear the contributions of elected colleagues from the Welsh, Scottish and North of Ireland assemblies, and also the islands, which I welcome. However, we need to ask ourselves do we go through the very painful process of trying to remould this Body. All these elected parliaments must have an opportunity of engagement and we must question whether it is appropriate or desirable to remould this Body in such a way as

is prescribed by the Steering Committee's proposal. I do not think we have had a proper discussion on this issue. I read the various documentation and in my view there is a sense that we must now move towards dealing with Article 11 of Strand Three which only says, "perhaps building..." My view is that we should hasten slowly, *festina lente*, and measure it up. I have no doubt there will be critical imbalances, that the image, actuality and reality of the new Body will be such that the current equilibrium will have changed utterly.

Mr McNamara: A terrible beauty is born.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: A terrible beauty and one, perhaps, that should happen anyway. My view is that it certainly should. I think this Body has a role to play. I have been impressed by the opportunity it offers. I have attended and participated in all the plenaries and I believe it has a very important role to play in the future. There are a number of points in Gerry's amendment that would allow for an interim position. I am interested in reaction before I formally move a further amendment. Looking at Gerry Bermingham's amendment and using that text as a basis from which to work, paragraph (e) reads, "in pursuit of the objectives of paragraph 11 of Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement". Instead of "the Steering Committee may" we should be saying "the Body may". In paragraph (e)(i), I suggest that we delete the words "to the Body" so that the paragraph reads, "the Steering Committee may co-opt so many Members" from the various parliamentary assemblies.

We should be clear and prescriptive at this juncture before making a decision to move forward into full membership of all the different assemblies in view of the consequences of that in terms of numerical representation from both parliaments and the subsequent equilibrium of representation between both islands.

In paragraph (e)(ii), the words "promulgate such consequential amendments to the Rules of the Body as it considers necessary in pursuit of those objectives" are unnecessary in that situation and in paragraph (f) I would change "Any amendment to the rules of the Body made under paragraph (e)" to "consequential on paragraph (e)". That would anchor and arrest the situation within the control of the Body. If the Body decides, so be it. Those are changes that open a real and substantive debate while what I have described already is a false one.

Mr McNamara: I am one of the guilty men. We are making a mountain out of a molehill. Peter and Caoimhghín are reading into the intentions of the Steering Committee something that was never there in all the discussions. In our original amendment we had "subject to ratification or amendment by the Body". The provision, "amendment by the Body", was deliberately inserted by me as an amendment in the Steering Committee to do precisely what Peter, Caoimhghín and Gerry wanted, that is, to assert the superiority and sovereignty of the Body in the approval and alteration of the regulations.

It may well be, from Gerry's amendment, that we have been less than perfect in putting forward that idea. However, as I saw the Steering Committee at the meetings I attended there was no intention to present a *fait accompli* to the Body or to specify either this or nothing. Nor were we seeking to have a degree of knowledge, insight or understanding superior to that of any individual member of the Body or of the Body as a whole. We were trying to prepare a scene and suggest regulations which might be helpful to the Body as a whole in order to meet what seemed in the past to have been the desire of the Body that the Steering Committee should consider, in the light of the Good Friday Agreement, the proposals in Strand Three and the ideas put forward and reinforced, for example, by the Taoiseach yesterday, that there should be a principal role for this Body maintaining the proper formation, institutions and role of this Body but seeking to take on board also that of the devolved assemblies and of the islands.

I am happy to accept Gerry Bermingham's amendment if that tidies the matter up. He is, after all, one trained in the law and in a knowledge of words and precision which some of the rest of us may lack. If that makes it easier to understand the intention of the Steering Committee I have no objection to it. The essential thing is that any proposal from the Steering Committee be subject to ratification and amendment by the Body. One would hope, in the wisdom that sometimes resides in the Steering Committee, that any suggestions we bring forward will be agreed by acclamation although somehow in parliamentary assemblies that does not always happen. There must therefore be room for amendment and alteration in order to achieve the best consensus possible. Gerry's amendment seeks to do that and I have no objection to it.

I would like to have had that conspiratorial power which Peter and Gerry seem to have suggested we have. To see Peter Brooke and Gerry Bermingham agreeing together reminds me of the advice that when both Front Benches in parliament agree backbenchers need to count the silver. When both backbenchers in this Body agree the Steering Committee must count the silver.

Mr Currie: I wish to raise a point of order or seek clarification. Does the view expressed by Kevin accepting Gerry's amendment represent the view of the Steering Committee? If so it would short circuit our discussions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That is a point of clarification rather than a point of order. In Dáil Éireann by uttering the mantra "On a point of order, Ceann Comhairle" a Member may raise matters which are not points of order. We should hear one or two more contributions before coming to a conclusion.

Mr Currie: The number of contributors would be reduced if we knew the answer to my question.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a real point of order, if we are to terminate the debate we should first hear the Speaker of the House of Keys, who might make a unique contribution and has a legitimate interest in this matter.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That *is* a point of order. The Steering Committee has not had an opportunity to consider the views expressed. I have heard Kevin's response and other members of the Steering Committee are located in other parts of the hall. The debate should continue for the moment.

Mr Mates: On a point of clarification and in order to save time, this member of the Steering Committee is content with Mr Bermingham's amendment.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): On that basis I propose that the sitting suspend for ten minutes while the Steering Committee holds an informal discussion.

The sitting was suspended at 11.10 am

The sitting resumed at 11.30 am

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Steering Committee has had an opportunity for a brief consultation on an informal basis taking account of the contributions to the debate so far. We have concluded that the approach we should follow, which I recommend to you, is that we will accept Gerry Bermingham's amendment. Being the sensitive fellows we are, and vigorously conscious of the democratic procedures, we know from where the winds of change are coming. For the purposes of our procedure this morning, the debate will continue on the future of the Body and when we have concluded that at the appropriate time under No. 3 on the agenda, amendments to rules, we will withdraw our amendment and accept Gerry Bermingham's. We can vote at that stage.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On a point of information, I submitted an amendment wording in line with the contribution I made earlier. I would like to be advised of the Steering Committee's deliberations on that proposition.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We received a written amendment from Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin as we were going into informal session. The Steering Committee is not unsympathetic to the views advanced by him this morning but we have not been able to consider properly the full implications of the amendment. Accordingly, I suggest that he leave it before us as a matter of record.

Rule 17 states that, with the exception of amendments to the proposed programme of business under Rule 11, amendments must normally be tabled, at the latest, before the end of the daily sitting preceding that at which they are proposed to be considered. There is a good practical reason for that, otherwise we would have to give an immediate response to everything presented to us. We will not be able to accept the amendment for that reason but will leave it for consideration.

With regard to our decision, we do not want to have a debate on the Rules or amendments to them. If someone wants to illustrate his or her views on the future of the Body by referring to amendments that might be required, that is fine but we do not want a debate on procedures or rules now.

Mrs Fyfe: Thank you. Gerry Bermingham did not do anything to win my support this morning when he referred to the side of the Body to which I belong as the English side and I am minded to propose that anyone who does so in future should be expelled from the Body.

Mr Mates: Hear, hear.

Mrs Fyfe: Both Gerry Bermingham and the Steering Committee agreed about co-opting people onto the Body from the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and other bodies but we still do not know what numbers each of those bodies believes is appropriate. We ought to seek that information quickly. So, I am simply proposing that we set a reasonable date by which to acquire this information and discuss how to formulate the Body on a permanent basis. That is essential especially when we consider that this Body is discussing matters that are the responsibility of the devolved assemblies.

It is fine to say that there are people like me who are Members from the British side and from a Scottish constituency but we must recognise there are devolved assemblies that are up and running and take responsibility for business of their own. The sooner we have their views on board the better.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We have indicative suggestions, but nothing formal, from the institutions concerned on the numbers they have in mind but it would be premature to say they are the numbers. They are reflecting on the matter.

Mrs Fyfe: I propose we set a date by which the Body will have that information.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That is reasonable and we will take it on board.

Mr Boylan: God bless Gerry Bermingham; he has saved the day. I was puzzled and somewhat disappointed by the discussion this morning because yesterday we spoke in glowing terms of the work of this Body. The Taoiseach was fulsome in his praise of the Body. He welcomed with open arms the representatives of the Scottish and Welsh assemblies and those from the Isle of Man. This morning we outlined the work of the various committees. I am a member of Committee C that visited small farms in Donegal and Derry at the behest of this Body and saw at first hand the terrible problems and difficulties experienced there. We decided to embark on a programme of tourism promotion North and South, real work that would be beneficial to the people. Now there is a proposal before us to reduce the size of the Body. I would not like to be dropped from this team. Maybe I am not that important but I like the work and the other Members I am involved with on the committees whom I know personally.

What is the hidden agenda? Why was this suddenly proposed? It has put a damper on the work. There is work to be done and what we are doing is positive. We have got to know each other. I have met people in Northern Ireland I would never have met otherwise. The purpose of this committee is to promote goodwill and better

understanding. That is the way forward and that work should continue. I have said before, and I am confident of it, the war is over but there is work to be done. People do not want to go back; they have had enough of it. Of course there are problems and difficulties and it will not be easy to iron them out. People have set views and come from backgrounds that are difficult to change. I outlined yesterday some of the difficulties that still exist. There are other areas of difficulty that we should not be afraid to visit and bring to this Body in order to make real progress. I would like to see this Body strengthened, not weakened.

Mr Canavan: I am pleased that the Steering Committee was persuaded to accept Gerry Bermingham's amendment because I have considerable sympathy for it. The Good Friday Agreement envisaged the British-Irish Council primarily as an intergovernmental body. However, the agreement also states that the elected institutions of the members should be encouraged to develop inter-parliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

The document before us refers to the many permutations and combinations which now present themselves because of the existence of the various parliaments and assemblies, namely, the Irish Parliament, the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the parliaments in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. That is a total of eight parliaments or assemblies, which means that in terms of bilateral relations alone, there is a possibility of 28 inter-parliamentary bodies. There is nothing to stop any of the parliaments trying to initiate bilateral relations with any or all of the other parliaments, but there is obvious merit in having an all-embracing Body incorporating representatives from all of the parliaments along the lines of Gerry's amendment.

Document No. 66 stated that the Body should seek to remain the premier parliamentary dimension of British-Irish relations for the next few years. Frankly, that is a very elitist statement, and I am not so sure that it is the best way to proceed. The Body has served a very useful purpose, but one of its weaknesses or democratic deficits is its failure to persuade the Ulster Unionists to participate and, as a result, there is an important dimension missing from all our debates. It might be easier to persuade the Ulster Unionists to participate if a new organisation were set up, especially if we recall that it was David Trimble himself, during the negotiations, who first raised the possibility of a Council of the Isles. It may be that some Ulster Unionists would feel more at home in a broader forum which includes representatives from other parliaments, including, perhaps especially, the Scottish Parliament - the links between Scotland and Northern Ireland are long and strong due to geographical proximity and transmigration in both directions over many centuries. If there is any part of the United Kingdom which resembles Northern Ireland more than any other part, it is probably Scotland, and maybe the sharing of their experiences in a parliamentary forum could help to build a more inclusive society in Northern Ireland where people will respect each other's different religions and different political traditions.

This will be my last meeting as a member of this British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, because I intend giving up my seat in the House of Commons at the end of this month in order to represent my constituents full-time in the Scottish Parliament. People sometimes ask me whether I will miss the House of Commons. I will, like a hole in the head, perhaps, but I will miss this Inter-Parliamentary Body that is the only Westminster-related committee from which the whips have not removed me. I have had the privilege of being a member of this Body almost since its inception nearly a decade ago. I would like to place on record my appreciation of the friendship and comradeship that I have experienced over the years. In looking to the future, I hope that the Scottish Parliament will be able to play a full role in developing even better relations between us in making a contribution to the development of the peace process for the benefit of all of us, especially our friends and close neighbours in Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am sure I reflect the views of all of your colleagues here when I say that we understand why you have made the decision you have. We regret very much that it means you will not be with us in the future on this Body. I too have the same mixed feelings as I face a similar decision very soon. I am not sure I will miss the hurly burly of one place, but I will miss the challenges and responsibility of being part of this Body. On behalf of all of us, I wish you the best of luck.

Mr Speaker Cannan SHK (*Isle of Man*): Let me first say that the Isle of Man appreciates very much being invited to send a parliamentary observer to this meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. It ill-behoves me to comment on the deliberations of the Steering Committee, but I would like to put the case for the Isle of Man. As members will know, the Isle of Man is in the centre of the Irish Sea, equidistant from England and the island of Ireland, and the Manx Parliament is wholly self-governing. It has no subsidy from Westminster or from Europe. It relies entirely upon its own good government and good management of the economy. By being equidistant, there are strong cultural, social, commercial and family links with both communities in Ireland and, indeed, a substantial proportion of the population of the Isle of Man is either Irish or of Irish descent. It follows that the Isle of Man is seen by many Irish people to be wholly neutral in the problems of their island. The Isle of Man would be honoured if it were to be invited to join this Inter-Parliamentary Body and to be able to make some contribution. I hope that application, if I could term it that, will receive the favourable response of the Steering Committee and the whole of this Body.

Thank you for inviting me. I very much enjoyed what I heard today and yesterday. I believe that my understanding of the problems and the need for communication with the whole of Ireland is so much more enhanced by being here. I hope to be able to remain and make my small contribution.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I think I should read out the entire list of speakers because we do have to finish within the next 30 minutes. The speakers are Patricia Ferguson, Paschal Mooney, Lembit Öpik, Conor Lenihan, Andrew Mackinlay,

David Lloyd and Gerry Bermingham, who will speak to the motion as distinct from the rules. I cannot do anything about the noise.

Ms Ferguson: You will excuse me if I am drowned out by the noise. It is not like us Scots to be shrinking violets but it might just be too much for us at some point.

As I said yesterday, we are delighted to be here representing the Scottish Parliament at this weekend's deliberations. We very much enjoyed the experience. We feel we have learned a lot and hope we have contributed something to the discussions this weekend. We also feel we would have much to offer your future discussions and deliberations, not least those with direct consequence to the peace process. That is why we believe today's discussion is a very important one.

Many of the issues on which we have heard reports from the various committees of this Body are, certainly in the case of the Scottish Parliament, issues that are wholly devolved to our Parliament and not issues where Westminster has any control over them from a Scottish dimension. It is also interesting to us to note that the committees are going to Scotland to look at those issues and to inquire into how those issues are dealt with there. For us, that is a very welcome development, but something that we, rightly, would like to be involved in.

We are obviously a very new Parliament and are still finding our feet. However, we have been around for 18 months and feel that the time has come when we can play a full and—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am sorry to have to interrupt you, but I understand that is a private helicopter. I find it, as you must, very difficult. It is not an official helicopter. That it is used in this facility now is a bit inconvenient, to say the least. We are going to convey to the proprietor our wish that it would get out of there as quickly as possible.

Ms Ferguson: I second that.

Mr Bermingham: On a point of order, Chairperson, could we have the same rule of procedures with regard to personal helicopters of Members as we do for mobile phones and pagers?

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: On a further point, given the very well-focused reports we heard yesterday, would it be possible that the same missive might be sent to the British Government in relation to the helicopter activity in south Armagh?

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Let us continue now, without further interruption because of the time constraint.

Ms Ferguson: I am not sure how much of my earlier contribution members heard - probably enough. The point I was trying to make was that, as a Scottish Parliament, we have control over many of the issues that the committees of this Body are now discussing. Issues with regard to agriculture, tourism, transport, housing, health,

education etc., are all matters that are completely devolved to the Scottish Parliament and over which Westminster, in a Scottish context, has absolutely no say. From our point of view, it is very welcome that the committees of this Body should come to Scotland to discuss those issues. We think they are important. One of the very interesting points from our perspective has been that we have, in informal discussions with many of the Members here this weekend, realised that we share many of the problems. The old saying is that a problem shared is a problem halved. I am quite sure that if we can focus those discussions we will be able to make progress in those areas which are themselves important to the peace process and to the outcome that we want at the other end of what it is hoped will be a very meaningful and successful peace process. From our point of view it is very important that we are involved in those discussions when you are having them. For that reason we would want to take our full place in this Body as quickly as possible.

Our hesitation about Gerry Bermingham's amendments come from a slight difficulty of interpretation because we are not sure what it means for us. Does it mean that the Steering Committee will have the power to co-opt us in the way that we have been this weekend, where we can participate but not vote in your proceedings, with a view to a future plenary of this Body meeting to decide what our involvement is? That would certainly be my reading of it. Obviously that means for us a further delay that we are not very keen to have. If that is the case, we would hope that process is speeded up and expedited as soon as possible. Also, it is very important that we have some mechanism for feeding into the deliberations of this Body, and particularly of the Steering Committee while it comes to its final conclusion about the future of the Body.

We are grateful that we are being allowed to participate in the sense that we are at present, but we look forward to playing our full role within the Body because we think we have a lot to offer.

Senator Mooney: Taking up Patricia's theme, our committee, Committee B, will be going to Edinburgh next month to discuss transport links as part of our ongoing deliberations of a report which it is hoped will come before the plenary session next year. It was instructive for members of our Committee when we met representatives of the Department of the Environment and Transport in London that, when it came to discussing our brief which related to upgrading and improving transport links between the island of Ireland and the first points of entry in Great Britain in Wales and in Scotland, the officials from Westminster could talk only in terms of their work within the borders, in terms of how far they went to the Welsh border and how far they went to the Scottish border. We were all somewhat surprised, but it was an indication of the reality of devolution. When it came to the question of whether we should be discussing what we thought were integrated road policy plans, they said it was a matter for the Welsh Assembly or for the Scottish Parliament. It brought home to us the reality of devolution very starkly. For those of us who have been observing rather than having a total commitment to the way forward, it certainly reinforced and confirmed the view that it is important and essential for this Body to incorporate representatives from the new devolved assemblies and parliaments.

However, let me say - and I want to try to be consistent as well as brief - that I have also consistently maintained the view, whenever we discussed this - and it is a matter of record in York where it was last discussed - that I feel very strongly from the point of view of the sovereignty of the two parliaments that the membership is not in any way diluted. I do not wish this to be conveyed as an elitist view. It is not. I just feel that ultimately major decisions of policy are taken in Westminster and Dublin, notwithstanding the very important and relevant contribution Patricia has made about the powers of the devolved assemblies and parliaments. Also, from an Irish perspective - and here I am being somewhat parochial - I would very much resist a reduction in the membership. I would take up Andrew Boylan's view here that we have all found this to be a very instructive and informative and educational experience. It is something that we cherish. In a way it probably embodies the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and the aspirations of politicians on both sides of the Irish Sea that we really are part of a family of nations. I do not want to sound too sentimental about it because it is hard politics as well, but it is vital that the link that has been established on a personal, on a social as well as at a political level, is maintained and strengthened. Equally, I believe it important that there should not be a dilution of the representation of the sovereign parliaments simply because, in the world of realpolitik, the two Governments might not take us as seriously as they have done up to now. I do not wish in any way to give the impression that expanding our membership would not be an enriching and enhancing experience. I am just saying that in the world of realpolitik, the fact that there is significant representation from the two sovereign parliaments makes both Governments sit up and take notice much more so than if membership were to be diluted simply in order to be more effective. This is an argument that is going on in the wider debate on enlargement of the European Union and on membership and structures, so we are not unusual in that regard.

I am a little concerned about what happens to reports coming from the plenary sessions. Some wonderful reports have been produced. Even yesterday and this morning we heard very detailed presentations on reports of committees. We have heard the testimony of individual members and Andrew Mackinlay gave one example of where they have worked really hard, have been effective and produced reports. These reports are passed on to individual Governments but what happens to them after that? I suggest the Steering Committee look at the possibility of follow-up on reports, be it a watchdog committee or an overseeing committee, to ensure that the recommendations in the reports, where there is a need to implement them in their specifics rather than in the generalities, are implemented. That would enhance the status as well as the role of this Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We are running short of time. While I do not like to impose constraints I ask Members to adhere to the strict timetable. I call Mr Lembit Öpik to be followed by Deputy Conor Lenihan.

Mr Öpik: The reform of the Body, so far as I know, lest it requires further consideration, does not talk about the objectives of the Body. It has been said at many plenary sessions here that we need to know where we are going before we

create structures. We are not going to find the objectives by changing the structures. In some ways it is a success. We have achieved the original goal. When that happens people tend to take it for granted and grumble about the details. For example, the European Union was originally set up to stop war and starvation in Europe. It achieved both of those objectives and now people are scratching around and sometimes dangerously messing with the structures without being absolutely clear what the objective is. The same goes for this Body.

The Inter-Parliamentary Body has achieved the original objective which was to create dialogue at a time when there was not dialogue between Dublin and Westminster. In fact, there were great strains and great tensions at the beginning. That has been achieved. We need to know where we going next. My judgment is that it is perfectly legitimate to continue as a Body of dialogue but we also need to be clear, as we attempt to attract other bodies to join us, that this dialogue has achieved results. I think it is reasonable to argue that it has achieved results. Many of us in this room can point directly to advances we have made on one political action or another as a result of the contacts one has made here. Let us be up front about that. If that is the objective of the group let us be up front about it and, even more important, let us develop the group on that basis. Mr Dennis Canavan was a little sceptical about the point of this being a premier Inter-Parliamentary Body. If we define it very clearly this should be the first point of contact for dialogue. That would be a reasonable aspiration.

We all accept it is necessary to expand to involve the devolved institutions, the Isle of Man and so on, but there are some consequences that we cannot debate now - I have not the time to go through in detail - about which we have to be careful. As Senator Mooney said, we must remember that it is still part of the peace process. The fundamental purpose in setting up this organisation was to establish a relationship between Westminster and Dublin. I hope that is not regarded as a diminution of the involvement of the other bodies. We need to recognise we are still in a transition phase. Once peace has been soundly established in the North of Ireland then, perhaps, the relationships can change further but let us be careful not to take our eye off the original objective.

When we look at the numbers we have to be careful. If, for example, we gave each representative body ten each, that would give the South of Ireland ten and the UK 40, although they would be coming from different parts of the UK, Wales and so forth. We need to make sure we do not start to change the balance as we evolve. At the same time we have got to ensure we do not patronise or act in a disrespectful fashion towards the devolved institutions.

My plea is that we talk about the structures, that we flex ourselves in the objective and then let us sell back to the prospective new membership. I would like to propose that we think about creating a portfolio of evidence of things we can reasonably claim were assisted or may not have happened had the dialogue not been set up. I am not afraid of that because we can point to a number of things of crucial

importance to the peace process. That is something we should be proud of and should help us focus on the structures that would help us best in the future.

Mr Lenihan: This is probably one of the most useful debates I have attended. I am inclined more towards Dennis Canavan's view of the Body. I do not think we should arrogate to ourselves the title or the role or see ourselves as the premier, or the first division or whatever. We have to be flexible but at the time recognise that the Body has made a contribution and deserves a strong element of continuity at a sovereign parliamentary level. That has to be maintained. I do not see the proposal for a Council of the Isles, which has a democratic character, as being incompatible with the continuation of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. I suggest a better way would be to create a new body called the Council of the Isles and for this Body to send a delegation to be represented on it which would incorporate all the subsidiary assemblies that have been created arising out of devolution in the UK and because of the peace process. Ultimately the referendum that created and endorsed the peace process was the creature of two sovereign parliaments. That should be maintained through the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body but this Body should then appoint or co-opt people from the British and Irish parliaments, as opposed to the devolved assemblies, to be represented on the Council of the Isles. That is the best and safest way to proceed, where one guarantees the bilateral British-Irish sovereign parliament relationship while protecting the role of this Body as a Body that wishes to make an input into a Council of the Isles.

Mr Mackinlay: I fully recognise the great work this Body has done in terms of Irish-British relations and also its genesis. Picking up from Mr Lembit Öpik, that is a matter of fact, a matter of history and probably it has got to be its primary role. That is not to say that things cannot flow from this. In my view the principles of good governance dictate that there should be a parliamentary dimension to these islands and very much modelled on the parliamentary assembly for the Benelux countries, which still functions, and the Nordic parliamentary assemblies. It is important that the core memberships or the delegations should be the same people. Even if one was to take something of what Deputy Conor Lenihan suggested, it is not beyond the wit of men and women to devise a shaving of our agendas so that things which are seen as primarily or exclusively relating to the great 1,000 year issue between Britain and Ireland could come towards the beginning of the agenda. It would not exclude people but it would be a sensible arrangement. We could evolve a way of having one common membership but literally a sensible arrangement of the agendas that means that people who do not have an interest or could not have an interest would not have to be present but if they were, by definition, they could contribute. Common sense could overcome what is seen as a problem.

I hope to address myself primarily to the question of the Isle of Man but to some extent my comments relate to the Channel Islands. I take a great interest in the United Kingdom's relationship with these bodies in Westminster. In fact the arrangements are deficient. That is why I think there is a need for this Inter-Parliamentary Body to embrace all the bodies. It is not a matter of semantics, it is an important point; the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not devolved

assemblies. We should get the terminology correct, particularly since everyone else around this table is fussy about terminology. They are not members of the European Union but have relationships with the EU. That raises the need for greater dialogue. They are not represented at Westminster nor do they seek it. That is the position of those three jurisdictions. In terms of the Isle of Man there is a special relationship that speakers have referred to but I want to amplify upon. I remember the last Assembly I attended. I was deeply disappointed one point was not in the notes and I hope it will be picked up this time. If one visits the historic museum in Cregneesh, one will see that great attention is given to the fact that Éamon de Valera rescued the Manx language in the 1950s. He sent over a team of Gaelic scholars to rescue it. That illustrates the great relationship between the communities.

Our communities are affected by common problems regarding the Irish Sea, such as the nuclear waste in it and the navigation of it. The Manx have an important fishing industry, an industry about which there is potential for conflict, but also potential for collaboration. The communities have common interests in agriculture, the shipping register, the financial sector to some extent, although ours is not on the same scale as Dublin's and there is healthy competition between the two, and post and telecommunications.

This is a wonderful opportunity we have, under other circumstances, to bring together a parliamentary dimension to increase good governance and accountability of our respective jurisdictions. The work of the Body will increase. Its primary role for many years will be to calm the continuing and fragile, and we hope burgeoning, relationships which might flow from the Good Friday Agreement. We should be positive and say it has brought us together to address what has been a deficit for some time in terms of all our islands.

Dr Lloyd: As a representative of the National Assembly for Wales, I wish to say that as an Assembly we are very grateful for the invitation to attend this Body and we would be honoured if invited to attend as full participating members.

Devolution has happened. That is forgotten sometimes in some corridors of power, but as Patricia said, issues such as health, economic development, education, agriculture, tourism and transport are devolved to Wales and Scotland. Taking up Senator Mooney's point, that is an essential issue in terms of where our committees will visit. Out of common courtesy, those members, whether in Cardiff or Edinburgh, should be involved as full and equal members.

There is scope within this Body for a wider perspective of views than a polarisation between the traditional British view and Irish view. There is scope for having the Scottish view, the Manx view and the Welsh view on a range of issues as regards Ireland. That may have a pleasing dilution of any polarising effect hitherto encountered.

The numbers issue between the representations from the two matriarchal sovereign Parliaments, is a separate issue from the full representation issue of the devolved

bodies, however we define them. I support the idea that there should be equal representation from the British sovereign side and the Irish sovereign side and within that mechanism there should be way of including the other Assemblies and Parliaments, be they devolved or non-devolved.

Mr Bermingham: Apparently, the procedure is that I will move my amendment, which will overtake the substantive motion and become the substantive motion.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That does not matter greatly, but you are required to move your amendment formally at the end of this debate.

Mr Bermingham: I do not mind which way we do it, as I was not going to speak on it, given that it is self-explanatory.

I wish to immediately put to rest Maria's mind and win her support once again by saying that I consider this Body to be extremely important. When I drove south from York where we last discussed the future of the Body, I began to think how do we move forward. It is nearly two years since we met in York and for those two years I have been thinking where do we go next. With the development of the sovereign Parliaments and Assemblies, the scope of this Body has grown, not diminished. Paragraph (i) of the amendment states "co-opt", but if I got my way those people would be co-opted for a very short time because they would become members. Paragraph (ii) refers to the Steering Committee drawing up the rules. These people should give us their picture of the future, tell us where we are going and why they think that is where we should go, to which the Body will say yea, nay or amend. It will be the sovereign Body of the two sovereign Parliaments who first gave birth to this Body who will give the direction whence we should go.

I say to my friend from the Dáil who so eloquently pointed out the danger of the word "perhaps" in the paragraph 11 of Strand Three, that we as a Body have a duty to show why in this context it should not be "perhaps" but should be "will be". I do not know the format for the expansion of this Body or the numbers involved and I do not propose to get into that game today. Let us see what the proposals are and then talk about them. There is so much expertise at this table today that it would be a shame to waste any of it. The proposals should be brought forward.

Paragraph (ii) of the amendment contains the real kick. It proposes that we get on with it and make our case, and we want to make our case. I may be wrong and, if I am, so be it, I am always prepared to admit that, but I do not understand why there needs to be another body of the isles, given that its birth, its seed, its acorn is in this room. Out of that acorn, a fairly strong tree has already grown. I want to see it mature and develop, so that, with all the expertise within the islands, we can pursue the future of the islands and the peace of the islands, which is our primary purpose. That is why I will formally move this motion shortly.

Deputy Roger C Berry (*Guernsey*): I thank the members, particularly Mr Mackinlay, for his explanation of the constitutional position of the Channel Islands. It is difficult to explain. It evolves out of the time when we conquered Britain in 1066.

Mr Mackinlay: It was England then.

Deputy Berry: I am sorry, yes, England. The other devolved Governments were basically our allies, and a good job we made of it.

I wish to thank the full group for the welcome we received. Whatever numbers are eventually decided upon, we very much welcome our inclusion. I speak on behalf of Jersey as well, the representatives of which are unable to be here due to a sitting of their States of Deliberation today. I am keeping a watching brief on their behalf. We very much welcome mention of our inclusion in the future. If that is the case, we intend to play a serious role in this forum and to contribute fully. We look forward to playing an interesting and jointly beneficial part in this group.

Mrs Fyfe: Before we conclude the discussion and vote on this amendment, it would be helpful if we knew if the Steering Committee took the same view of the meaning of the word "co-optation" as Mr Bermingham has, and, if that is the case, to confirm if we will seek the information in line with my motion, which Mr O'Kennedy, Co-Chairman, said was a good idea, but it has not yet been formally supported.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): My Co-Chairman will comment on that in his reply.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am not sure if I will satisfy the point Maria made, but I will come to that in a moment.

Although our political debates are ones in which there is a great deal of media interest and members are keen to speak, in many respects the future of our Body is even more important. We have not neglected the subject. We have been debating the future of the Body for the past two years and this is the third debate we have had at a plenary session. Nobody can say we are not trying to keep up with events or that we do not recognise the importance of how the Body should develop, following the Good Friday Agreement, in providing a parliamentary tier to the British-Irish Council.

The view that has been strongly expressed today, as on previous occasions, is that what has been built up over the past ten years should not be forsaken. The Body was established to have an ongoing dialogue between representatives of the two sovereign Parliaments. While Dennis Canavan argued for a new body, my understanding from today's debate is that the large majority accepts that what has been built up should be maintained and that it would be wrong to dilute the representation from the two sovereign Parliaments. Paschal Mooney made the important point, as did Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin in a forthright contribution, that we

represent the sovereign Parliaments and to that extent it is likely we are taken more seriously than otherwise by the two Governments.

While recognising the changes that must come and which, to a large extent, are reflected in our deliberations over the past two days, I am of the view that we should not dilute the representation of the two sovereign Parliaments. I agree that the question of numbers is sensitive and will require more consideration. However, looking back over what has occurred since 1990, can anybody argue that the Body has not been of great value? Will anybody argue that having an ongoing dialogue, for the first time since Ireland achieved independence, between parliamentarians of the two countries has not been of great importance? There is the social setting and the process of getting to know each other when we meet twice each year but there should also be recognition of the committee work that reflects the day-to-day activities in the subjects covered by the four committees. That, I believe, is as important in some respects as when we come together as a full Body.

That is the background for looking at the future of the Body. I referred to Dennis Canavan. I also echo the comments of the Co-Chairman, as I have been doing quite often over the past few days. I wish to express my thanks to Dennis - he was a founder member of the Body or at least joined it shortly after its foundation - for the way in which he has attended our proceedings, made thoughtful contributions and has generally been an active Member. I do not have to agree with Dennis on his final act but that is a party political matter. However, I express the thanks of the Body for what he has done in trying to promote British-Irish friendship.

It would have been a mistake on the part of the Body if it had taken a conservative viewpoint and said, "We are what we are and we will not take much notice of what is going on". Since the Good Friday Agreement we have tried to bring on board the elected members of devolved bodies. I accept Andrew Mackinlay's constitutional point that we should not refer to those in the Isle of Man or Jersey as devolved bodies. The Steering Committee was keen that, at this meeting, not only should there be observers from the devolved bodies but that they should be given every opportunity to contribute. I take the view that the Body should be the basis for the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council that, I understand, has not yet met. It is not a matter of our being behind; if anything, we are way ahead. We are anticipating a British-Irish Council and, hopefully, these changes will occur.

I remind the Body that the British-Irish Council will be a meeting of Ministers or executives. If there is to be a parliamentary tier, which I believe will be essential, it will consist of parliamentarians like ourselves who have no ministerial responsibilities. That is why we must try to marry the two. First, we should continue to maintain the fact that we are a Body representing the two sovereign Parliaments. In my view, it would greatly weaken this Body if we adopted any other attitude. Second, there is a need to bring on board, as quickly as possible and as full Members, members of devolved bodies such as the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is extremely important.

The numbers are being given active consideration. We will write to devolved institutions as quickly as possible about the actual numbers. There is a bit of a clash, which I do not want to go into, and I hope it will not cause as much controversy as the rule change. There is some to-ing and fro-ing but I am sure it will be cleared up soon. Patricia Ferguson was correct to say that not only should they be here as observers, they should be full Members and should be involved in the Steering Committee. What we do not want are first and second class Members. We are not going to have Members from the sovereign Parliaments being first class Members and those from the devolved bodies being second class Members. That is unacceptable. I would not wish to be associated with that. However, it will not arise because it is not the view of the Steering Committee.

If we have representatives from the devolved bodies, they must have equality in every possible way. The worst thing would be if they returned to their respective bodies and said: "Very nice meeting and social occasion; we were allowed to participate but we got the feeling that we were not really of the same rank as those from the UK and Irish Parliaments". That would be unacceptable. It is our wish to bring them on board in every way as full Members participating in all our activities.

We have had extremely good debates. The Body has been in existence for ten years and celebrated its tenth anniversary in London last February. In the next ten years it will evolve in many different directions because we will keep up with the changing political situation. The Co-Chairman made the point that changes arose not only from the Good Friday Agreement but also from the substantial changes that have taken place in the UK. They were far more radical changes than anything we have seen for a long time. That is all part and parcel of ensuring that this Body keeps up to date with what is happening, brings on board Members from the devolved bodies and gives them full equality in its deliberations and decision-making while, at the same time, in no way diluting its position that it represents the two sovereign Parliaments. If that were to be undermined, it would be a substantial weakening of the Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That concludes our debate on the future of the Body. I will formally put the question: "That the Body takes note of the discussion paper on the future of the Body - Document No. 77 - which is entitled 'The Future of the Body: A Further Consideration' ". Is the question agreed?"

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: The detail is critically important. While I appreciate the Co-Chairman's summation, he has indicated what are, in the absence of detail, apparently conflicting ambitions. That is important when making decisions. This could be compared to buying a pig in a poke. Without the detail, we do not know how this will present itself. I know the Body will proceed with the vote. I am only anxious to context the reason I wish to record my abstention.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That is a matter entirely within the Deputy's personal discretion. He will appreciate that the position of the Steering Committee and the Body at present is that we do not have all the details we would wish to have

at this point. For example, we do not have the detail in relation to that provision in Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement. If we had all that information and if all the parties to that Agreement were *ad idem*, there was consensus and it was before the Body as a matter of fact, we would have the detail the Deputy mentioned. However, in reality, we do not have that detail and for this reason I note the Deputy's observation. He is, obviously, free to abstain.

I am putting the question, "That the Body takes note of the discussion paper on the future of the Body, which is entitled "The Future of the Body, a Further Consideration." I note Deputy Ó Caoláin's abstention.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Discussion Paper on the Future of the Body [Doc. No. 77] entitled 'The Future of the Body - A Further Consideration'.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): In light of the indication on behalf of the Steering Committee, which I understand has been endorsed given the contributions made by the Body, I call Mr Bermingham formally to move his amendment.

Mr Bermingham: A good tale does not improve in the telling so I will just formally move the amendment.

Mr Lenihan: I second the amendment.

And the Question being put;

Rule 1 was amended by inserting new paragraphs (e) and (f), as follows:

"(e) In pursuit of the objectives of paragraph 11 of Strand Three of the Good Friday Agreement, the Steering Committee may:

(i) co-opt to the Body so many Members from the High Court of Tynwald, the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the States of Deliberation of Jersey, and the States of Guernsey as it considers appropriate; and

(ii) promulgate such consequential amendments to the Rules of the Body as it considers necessary in pursuit of those objectives.

(f) Any amendment to the Rules of the Body made under paragraph (e) above shall be subject to ratification or amendment by the Body at the next Plenary session following its promulgation."

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I accept the amendment on behalf of the Steering Committee of the Body. I call Mr Kevin McNamara to move the adjournment of the debate.

3. ADJOURNMENT

Mr McNamara: With regard to Dennis Canavan going, there will be only one by-election. However, I remember one occasion when I was with him when there was a possibility of four by-elections and we were stopped by the UDR on the Albert Bridge in Belfast. I was trying to remonstrate with the sergeant in charge and explain that these four rather tipsy middle-aged gentlemen were in fact English Members of the Parliament. I heard a voice from behind me—

Senator Mooney: English?

Mr McNamara: I represent an English constituency. The voice from behind said "If you don't take that bleeding rifle out of my neck, I'll land one on you." Dennis always had a way with words and we will miss that. We will miss him in the Assembly.

On behalf of the British delegation, all the guests and our Irish colleagues, I offer our congratulations and thanks to the Irish secretariat on the splendid arrangements they made in this lovely hotel. The John Cleese arrangements at York have now become part of folk memory. We have never, under any circumstances, suffered that when we visited Ireland. The hospitality we received has always been tremendous. Our visit last night was a great occasion. There was much good craic and good company.

I also thank the hotel staff. They have been very unobtrusive and efficient. They are very nice people and it is a lovely place to stay. I also offer our thanks to the Irish secretariat for finding this place. We will next meet in Killarney. We go from place to place in Ireland and let that be as good as the last place we have been. It is difficult to imagine that Killarney will be even better, but there has been a suggestion that Senator Haughey should arrive by jaunting car instead of in his helicopter. If it were not against the rules, I would propose a motion to that effect.

On behalf of all the guests, I express our thanks to all concerned for making this a most pleasant stay. Regarding the liveliness of the debate this morning on Mr Bermingham's amendment, while some may say that it was procedural and nit-picking, it went to the heart of the substance of what the Body is all about. We have to follow correct procedures as democrats. We can achieve things if we follow correct procedures.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Before putting the formal question, "That the Body do now adjourn," I wish to point out that for those who are departing from Shannon Airport, a coach will leave the hotel at 2.15 pm. I understand that flight EI 382 will leave Shannon Airport at 5.30 pm. Those concerned will not be under too much time pressure. For those departing from Galway, a coach will leave the hotel at 3.15 pm for flight EI 57, which departs from Galway at 4.25 pm.

I thank all the Members for their vigorous and positive contributions. The Members will note that for the first time our colleagues and partners from the devolved and

other assemblies were present. This was a deliberate decision on the part of the Steering Committee. Their contributions and presence were a dynamic element of our debates.

In making that proposal, which the Body supported, we saw that it would open an avenue. It is as broad an avenue as all our elected colleagues from the Northern Ireland Assembly would wish. The idea of having a type of Council of the Isles arrangement was in many ways to show a spirit of generosity and tolerance towards them. It was for the purpose of easing their path into this type of relationship that we proceeded with the idea.

I welcome the attendance of the elected representatives but I regret, even more, that although we made this suggestion to accommodate those whom we wished to attend, they are the only ones who are not represented. However, perhaps we must have patience, tolerance, understanding and generosity. This has been a feature of this Body at all stages so I am pleased to be able to report that we had a vigorous and positive debate.

The current intention is that we shall meet again in plenary session in the Killarney Park Hotel from 25 to 27 February 2001. However, if there are dramatic or significant developments in the meantime, the Steering Committee may feel obliged and required - or obligated, as the Americans would say - to reconvene before that date.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12.40 pm.

QUESTIONS RECEIVING A WRITTEN ANSWER

To ask the Taoiseach:

Economic development in the Border counties

6. Mr Crawford: if, in view of the fact that no major cross-border body has been given to Monaghan and there was no East/West road included in the National Development Plan even though the Belfast-Galway road passes through counties Armagh, Monaghan, Fermanagh and Cavan, he is satisfied that sufficient recognition is being given at national level to the damage done to the six Border counties, especially Monaghan, as a result of the thirty years of troubles; and if he will he make a statement.

10. Ms Keaveney: what action the Government plans to take either on its own or in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Executive to improve access and job creation statistics in those Border areas which, largely because of their location, have

remained economic black-spots over the past 30 years of the Troubles despite the success of the "Celtic Tiger".

The Taoiseach: Industrial development in particular areas of the country is a day to day matter for the Industrial Development Agencies.

The latest Quarterly National Household Survey which was published by the Central Statistics Office on 12th September, 2000, shows that there have been positive labour market developments in the Border areas as a whole with growth in employment and falls in unemployment in the twelve months to the second Quarter 2000. During this period the fall in the unemployment rate, at over 2 percentage points, was greater in the Border region than the fall in the unemployment rate of 1.4 percentage points for the State as a whole.

The key to reductions in unemployment rests with job creation. The need for more balanced regional development has been brought to the core of IDA Ireland's agenda since it has committed to seek to increase the Objective 1 Region's share of jobs in Greenfield Projects from 25%, at present, to 50%.

Enterprise Ireland is also committed to assisting industrial development in the Border Region. In addition to working with its core client base, the Agency, because of its involvement in all aspects of business development (finance, technology, human resources etc.), works closely with all development organisations in the region as well as the third level educational institutions, local development bodies and other industry proactively to facilitate an integrated approach to development.

The National Development Plan, recently announced, will help to underpin regional strategy since it will provide the infrastructure necessary for the attraction of overseas investment currently lacking outside the major urban areas. The plan envisages spending a higher amount per head of population in the largely rural Border, Midland and West regions.

The EU Commission has recognised the needs of the Border Region in that it forms part of the Objective 1 Region for development purposes which will benefit from a relatively higher level of permitted State Aid under the new EU Regional Aid Guidelines 2000-2006. This facilitates the Agencies in ensuring that an attractive financial package will be made available to any appropriate project which may choose to locate or expand in the regions.

The improvement of business support services, such as the new Derry-Dublin air service provided by Aer Arann, will be a major boost for the work programme of the industrial development agencies. It is expected that this service will lead to an increase in the flow of business to the Region.

These initiatives, coupled with the implementation of the Government's agenda on infrastructure contained in the National Development Plan, will act as key building blocks underpinning the future industrial development of the Border Region.

The work of the national enterprise support agencies is complemented by the activities of the Trade and Business Development Body, established pursuant to the Good Friday Agreement, which will focus on business development opportunities North and South. Moreover, the development of the border counties in the South will also be assisted through the commitments given in the draft EU Community Support Frameworks of both Ireland and Northern Ireland, which provided for a minimum of 400 million Euro to be spent on North-South cooperation over the next six years. The border counties will also be prioritised through the new generation of special EU initiatives which will come on stream in the near future, including INTERREG III and the PEACE II Programmes. Finally, the border region will continue to benefit from the ongoing and very valuable work being undertaken by the International Fund for Ireland.

British-Irish Council

7. Mr Mates: if he will make a statement on the meetings of the British-Irish Council to date; and what progress has been made.

The Taoiseach: The inaugural British-Irish Council Summit was held at Lancaster House in London on 17 December 1999. The summit, chaired by Prime Minister Blair, agreed a programme of work and a list of priority issues to be taken forward by lead administrations for early consideration by the Council. This list included Drugs (Ireland); the Environment (UK Government); Social Inclusion (Scotland and Wales); Transport (Northern Ireland); and the Knowledge Economy (Jersey).

I look forward to hosting the next summit in Dublin later this month, focusing on the issue of drugs.

On 2 October, the British Government hosted a Ministerial level meeting on the Environment, for which they have the lead role; they will report to the summit on progress in this area and on agreed plans for the future. My colleague Noel Dempsey T.D., Minister for the Environment and Local Government, attended that meeting on behalf of the Irish Government. Meetings have also taken place at senior official level relating to ongoing BIC work and to preparations for the summit.

Inward investment in the Border counties

8. Dr O'Hanlon: what proposals there are to attract further inward investment to the twelve Border counties.

The Taoiseach: I am informed by IDA Ireland, which has statutory responsibility for the attraction of inward investment, that 1999 marked a period of significant change and focus for IDA activities in the Border area. The Border area was formed by bringing together, for the first time, all the six Border counties in the merger of the Donegal, North West and North East regions.

This reorganisation and structure is now complete and became fully operational by the end of 1999 and included:

- The establishment of IDA's new Area Office in Cavan to supplement the existing offices in Dundalk, Letterkenny and Sligo;
- An increase in staff resources by one third in the area;
- Setting the target that 50% of all new jobs from greenfield investment locate in Objective One regions over the coming years;
- The roll-out of a planned property programme for the six Border counties, to provide a balanced mix between offices and advance factories;
- The selection of specific sectors targeted for each location, such as International Services and Electronics;
- An intensive and focused marketing programme integrating IDA's regional offices, headquarters and overseas offices for targeted locations.

These initiatives, coupled with the early adoption and implementation of the Government's agenda on infrastructure, contained in the National Development Plan, will act as key building blocks underpinning the future industrial development of the Border area.

While responsibility for attracting inward investment North and South are the separate responsibilities of the Industrial Development Board and IDA Ireland respectively, these organisations met on 15th May this year to discuss issues and challenges which are common to both organisations. The main focus of discussion was on the economy of the North West and it was agreed to establish a group, comprised of representatives from both IDA and IDB, to examine closer co-operation in the North West region.

Good Friday Agreement

9. Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin: if he will report on progress on the sections of the Good Friday Agreement entitled "Policing and Justice" and "Security" and the representations he has made to the British Government on the implementation in legislation of the recommendations of the Patten Report.

The Taoiseach: The Good Friday Agreement provided the opportunity "for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole". The Patten Report comprehensively addressed the broad range of important and sensitive issues related to policing. The Government welcomed the Report and said that the early and effective implementation of its recommendations would form an essential part of the implementation of the Agreement as a whole.

On 5 May last, the two Governments indicated the timetable planned for the implementation of the Patten Report, including the passage of legislation by

November 2000, with the appointment of the new Policing Board in January 2001 and the first process for recruits joining the new Police Service to start in April 2001.

The Secretary of State published the Police (Northern Ireland) Bill on 15 May and an Implementation Plan, dealing with each of the recommendations of the Report, followed on 6 June. The Bill completed its passage through the Commons on 11 July 2000. It was introduced in the Lords just before the Summer recess and will be taken at committee stage in the Lords this month.

In our view, the Policing Bill, as originally published, fell far short of the Patten Report and was deficient in a number of areas. We recognise the substantial improvements made to the Bill since then and we very much appreciate the efforts of the British Government in that regard. However, there are still important elements of the Patten Report which the Government and the Nationalist parties believe are not sufficiently reflected in the Bill as it currently stands. These areas can be broadly divided into symbolic issues - the name of the new Police Service, flag and emblem -and substantive issues. There are also difficulties with the Implementation Plan as it is currently drafted. The Plan will be revised in accordance with the provisions of the final Bill.

Our fundamental position is that it is in the interests of all in Northern Ireland that the police service be able to function fully and freely in all areas and across all communities. People from both communities want to be able to give unqualified support to the police service and want police men and women to be made welcome in every home. We are continuing to work with the parties and with the British Government to ensure that the Patten recommendations will be fully and effectively implemented.

Paramilitary beatings

11. Mr McGahon: if he is aware of the growing incidents of terrorist paramilitary beatings in Dundalk; and if he will comment on the failure of the Gardaí to prefer charges against the culprits.

The Taoiseach: While there have been a number of assaults in Dundalk which are alleged to have been so-called punishment beatings, no evidence has been uncovered to confirm this. Any such assaults which come to the attention of the Gardaí are actively investigated. In most incidents, the experience has been that the injured parties are not willing to make a formal complaint.

While the Gardaí are, of course, willing to pursue vigorously any complaints of assault made to them, they are clearly constrained where the victim refuses to co-operate with them.

Cross-Border projects

12. Mr Deenihan: what progress has been made by both Governments regarding the introduction of a grant scheme to support *bona fide* cross-Border projects to foster

greater cooperation and understanding between communities north and south of the Border.

The Taoiseach: As stated in the Good Friday Agreement, the participants to the Good Friday Agreement recognise and value the work being done by many organisations to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding between and within communities and traditions in Northern Ireland and between North and South. We see this work as having a vital role in consolidating peace and political agreement.

The Government strongly supports the joint pledge contained in the Agreement to "positively examine the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation". In this regard, we decided to increase the funding available for North-South and Anglo-Irish Co-operation in the 1999 Vote of the Department of Foreign Affairs to £2 million, an eight fold increase over the previous year. The increased allocation was maintained in 2000.

The increased fund has enabled us to make grants to over 100 organisations involved in a wide range of cross-community, educational, research and outreach activities. I am advised that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen, will shortly be announcing a further allocation of grants from this fund.

Milk quota

13. Mr Smith: what progress, if any, has been made to date in relation to the proposal to provide additional milk quota in the Border region under the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation; whether further consideration will be given to this proposal which is supported by dairy cooperatives both north and south of the Border and which could be of particular benefit to farmers with small quotas; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

The Taoiseach: The case for additional milk quota for the border regions has been discussed on a number of occasions between officials of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, the United Kingdom's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. The matter arose out of attempts to improve the economies of the border regions in the wider context of the peace process, the matter was raised at Ministerial level with the UK and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Mr Joe Walsh TD, has also met the Cross-Border Milk Quota Action Group. The success of such an initiative would be dependent not only on the circumstances prevailing at the time of its presentation but also on the wider context within the common organisation of the EU milk market and the CAP generally.

In this regard, you will be aware that as part of the Agenda 2000 agreement, additional milk quota was agreed for both parts of the island. That was a welcome development. The amount of quota allocated to the island of Ireland and its timing are very favourable when compared with the situation of most Member States. In

these circumstances it would be unrealistic to expect any further allocation to Ireland in the short to medium term.