



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

25 and 26 March 2002

Grosvenor Suite, The Berkeley Court, Dublin

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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1. Monday 25 March 2002

The sitting was opened in public at 9.30 a.m. in the Grosvenor Suite, The Berkeley Court, Dublin, with Mr. Michael O'Kennedy TD in the Chair.

The Co-Chairman, Deputy O'Kennedy, welcomed Members to the session.

1. PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I call everyone to order to enable us begin our first formal session of the Twenty-Fourth Plenary Conference of the Body.

First, we must report with great regret the passing of two active former Members of the Body. The first is Jim Tunney, former co-chairman and founding Member of the Body. Many Members will remember him from those early days. He died on Wednesday, 15 January. Members will miss him and acknowledge the contribution he made, along with others who happily are still with us, in launching the understanding and friendship which has become an important part of this Body. The death also occurred of Colm Hilliard, another former Member of the Body. He died suddenly on 11 January. I ask Members to reflect with respect and recognition on our two colleagues. They will be remembered with respect and affection.

I hope Members who had the opportunity to wander around the environs felt at home. Within 100 yards of where we sit Members will encounter familiar names such as Wellington Road, Waterloo Road, Elgin Road, Northumberland Road, Bath Avenue, Shelbourne Road and, as I mentioned last night, Lansdowne Road. The historic links we are promoting and enhancing surround us in this location. Should any Members wish to take an occasional break from the proceedings they will find themselves in reasonably familiar and friendly territory.

I have a number of formal announcements to make. Members will be aware that the proceedings of this Body are not covered by the absolute privilege which we shelter under in parliamentary proceedings. Also, because we do not like to be interrupted by outside intrusions, and I am vigorously resisting the intrusion of mobile phones into my life and work, any phones Members might have should be turned off. Any beepers or other devices which might intrude on our proceedings should also be turned off. That is not to suggest they cannot be used outside but not in this chamber. That will give everybody the courtesy of an uninterrupted hearing.

I do not hear the rustle of newspapers at this point but as an acknowledgment of the interest Members have in what each Member wishes to say, I urge Members to put away their newspapers. Hopefully, you will be able to read tomorrow what was said today. In the meantime, Members should refrain from reading newspapers and listen to the contributions. It would be appreciated as a gesture of courtesy and respect.

2. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS AND OTHERS ATTENDING THE PLENARY

I formally welcome the people who have become new Members of the Body since the last plenary meeting. They are, from Scotland, Mr. Murray Tosh MSP, who replaced Patricia Ferguson MSP, and Ms Shona Robison MSP, who will propose a motion this afternoon of some interest to both Scotland and Ireland. I welcome Mr. David Melding AM, from Wales, who has replaced William Graham, and Ms Eleanor Burnham AM, a new member. Before now, there were only four Welsh Members but now we have the full complement. A new associate Member from Wales is Mr. Glyn Davies AM. Dr. Joe Hendron MLA has replaced Carmel Hanna and is the new Member from the Northern Ireland Assembly.

In accordance with rule 2A, I wish to inform the Body that the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the steering committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for all of this session: Senator Enda Bonner, Senator Francis O'Brien, Senator Shane Ross, Ms Gillian Merron MP and Mr. Chris Ruane MP. At the conclusion of item 3 on the agenda this afternoon, the motion referring to the joint bid to host the European Cup, there will be a group photograph at the front of the hotel at 3.30 p.m. We are anxious to ensure that nobody is absent. I remember one meeting in Killarney when a few Members were missing from the group photograph, probably because they were off sight seeing. Members might remind their colleagues who are not here at present to be outside the hotel at 3.30 p.m. for the family photograph.

I wish to report on some correspondence we have received which will be of interest and concern to the Body. In Bournemouth we had an interesting debate on Sellafeld and we resolved to send a copy of the transcript of the debate to both Governments and the devolved parliaments. Within the past week we received three responses. The first is from the Right Honorable Patricia Hewitt MP, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the second is from the Right Honorable Rhodri Morgan AM, First Minister of the Welsh Assembly and the third is from Mr. R. C. Berry, vice-president of the State of Guernsey civil defence committee. Copies of the correspondence are available at the document table.

While it is usual that responses from the Government be reported upon and debated at the plenary meetings, given that these responses only arrived in the last few days and that there will probably be some further responses, it is proposed that the debate be deferred until the next meeting of the Body in England in November. In the meantime, the correspondence will be referred to Committee D. I hope that is agreeable to the Members. It would not be reasonable to expect Members to have a debate in response to correspondence when the correspondence has probably only been seen for the first time this morning. It will be on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Body in Manchester.

We have also received an acknowledgment from the Irish secretariat to the British-Irish Council in response to queries that were raised by some Members in relation to the possible overlap between some of the activities, studies and researches we are conducting and which they might also be conducting, co-ordination between our researches and studies and the common purpose which will inform the activities of

both the BIC and this Body. The Council acknowledges our interest in having co-ordination in our activities. As soon as we have further correspondence and an opportunity to develop further our relationship with the BIC, we will report to the committee. So far we have the acknowledgment, which is a reasonable and significant response.

3. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS: MOTION

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We now come to the first item on our agenda, which is the adoption of the proposed programme of business. I ask Mr. Winnick to move the motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I move:

That the proposed programme of business, as amended, be agreed to.

Question put and agreed to.

4. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: MOTION

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We now move to our main political discussion this morning. As most, if not all members know, it would be helpful if those who wish to speak on this or any political motion during our proceedings gave their names to the clerks. We will then be able to call members in sequence and guarantee, as much as is reasonably possible, an opportunity for everyone who wishes to speak. We propose to limit the contribution of speakers to four minutes. However, if everything is working with a certain degree of efficiency, it might be possible to adopt some flexibility. The opening and closing speeches may take longer. The debate will conclude at 12.55 p.m. At 12.40 p.m. I will call Mr. Michael Mates to wind up the debate. We will then put the question to the committee.

I express my appreciation of the man who will open the debate this morning because it has been foisted on him at short notice. There is a practice and a tradition that not only do we alternate between the various jurisdictions represented here, but we also alternate between the various parties. Deputy Crawford must step into the breach this morning because one of his political colleagues is not available. Deputy Crawford has kindly and generously responded to our invitation to propose the political motion. Members have a copy of that motion. I call Deputy Crawford to move the motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I remind members that if they wish to speak during the debate, they should signify that to the two clerks in the usual way. We would like to have a list of speakers.

Deputy Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan): I move:

- That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement and for its implementation in full; welcomes the progress that has been made in recent months in respect of the core issues of the stability of the institutions, policing, security normalisation and decommissioning; urges all parties to redouble their efforts to secure further progress; recognises the importance of the legislation currently before Westminster arising from the Criminal Justice Review; looks forward to a sustained period of political stability in which the institutions of the Agreement can operate fully to the benefit of all the people of these islands; and urges all the parties to continue their efforts, in partnership, to implement all aspects of the Agreement.

I was asked at short notice to speak on this motion. I feel embarrassed to sit beside Deputy Currie who has many more years of experience of the Northern Ireland political scene. If I had known he was here when I agreed to speak, I would have passed the baby to him.

I have a strong commitment to the peace process as I live on the Border. The proposal is not too different from the one we had at our last plenary session. However, it is extremely important that we discuss the main issues in the proposal, particularly the stability of the institutions. The Northern Ireland situation depends on the stability of the institutions. They are extremely important because they give people the opportunity to become involved in politics for the first time. It is a major step forward that the British-Irish Council and the North South bodies are working. It shows how we can live and work together on the island. I have said on numerous occasions that before I got involved in politics in Dáil Éireann I was involved in farming politics. There was no difficulty dealing with our farming friends north and south of the Border. Many companies straddle the Border, such as co-operatives and private businesses. However, politics has been more difficult. All the historical and religious issues have been raised. There is no doubt that the stability of the institutions, which were formed as a result of the Good Friday Agreement, is vital.

It is interesting to see that those who rejected the Good Friday Agreement are involved in the institutions. They talk to business people and to those involved in education and health. They will freely admit that the Ministers have settled in extremely well and are working satisfactorily. It will be interesting to see how these people will react as we move towards the next Assembly elections.

The policing situation is also encouraging. While I understand that new recruits have not yet been put in place, the applications clearly show that people from both sides of the religious and political divide have applied. There are also a few applications from the South. That is encouraging. The SDLP was the first party to commit itself to the police board. Others have since joined it. I implore Sinn Féin to get fully involved

in democracy, not only in the parts it wants or likes. If it wants to be fully involved in the police force, it must do so from within. It must not condemn what is being done from the outside. It has been given the seats and the opportunity. It is part of the Good Friday Agreement. It is vital that everyone avails of the opportunity to make it work. Some people have questions about the police force in Northern Ireland. It is not a secret that questions are also being asked about the police force in this jurisdiction. However, it is extremely important that Sinn Féin avails of the opportunity to work from within the democratic system and stops condemning it from the outside.

Security normalisation is one of the other four issues that are up for discussion. As one who lives close to the Border and has been involved over the years with various organisations, both North and South, I can say that the change that has taken place is dramatic. Anyone who says otherwise is not admitting the facts of the situation. Since the Good Friday Agreement, one can drive from one end of Northern Ireland to the other without obstruction, which is a major change. There are difficult pockets, however, as we have seen in recent times concerning schools and other issues in Northern Ireland. We must urge people to deal with them in a proper fashion. In the main, however, the security situation has improved dramatically. It shows what could happen if the last issue - decommissioning - was to be finalised. While the movement that took place shortly before our last meeting was very welcome, it is unfortunate that decommissioning - and I mean decommissioning by all sides - has to be dragged out all the time. Many people are still being forced out of their homes and there are other security issues, also. It would be incorrect to say that we have returned to a normal situation in all areas in Northern Ireland. I certainly hope that decommissioning can be brought to fruition. The forthcoming general election here may be an opportunity for the IRA to boost its own organisation, Sinn Féin, for electoral purposes. If such decommissioning takes place, so be it, but we also want to see decommissioning by the hard-line Protestant side, as well. That is equally important because some of things that have happened in those areas over the last 12 months do not appear normal to anyone looking in from the outside. It is an absolute nightmare for people living in those situations.

A number of positive things have occurred over the past year. As someone who is dealing directly with farming I cannot avoid mentioning the foot and mouth issue. At the time of the outbreak I called for an all-island approach to fighting the disease - in other words, controlling animal diseases as an island area. Our Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Deputy Joe Walsh, and his opposite number in Northern Ireland, Bríd Rodgers, have had ongoing discussions on that subject. Nine groups are now examining how this issue can be moved forward and dealt with in a positive way. This is a good example of how democratic politics work. It may take some time but both Governments can work closely together on this matter. There are other areas of cross-Border co-operation, such as the development of the Ulster canal which is currently under discussion and covers quite a few counties, North and South. A number of school projects have been funded by cross-Border institutions and they have worked well. So many other good things have happened, also. The important thing is that cross-Border bodies should work by

discussing and dealing with concrete issues. I have cited the agricultural example because that is the sector I know best.

Things have moved forward dramatically over the past five years. Many people deserve credit for that, whether they represent our own Government, the British Government or, above all, the people who are actually working the agreement in Northern Ireland. I would urge those who still cannot meet the final issues in the Good Friday Agreement to look at how far we have come. It would be unthinkable not to finalise those issues. All the prisoners have been released and many of the issues that were the main planks of the agreement have already been dealt with. Policing must be fair and must be seen to be fair, and every effort must be made to ensure that the cross-Border bodies work. We can move into a new era and, hopefully, with the new assembly elections coming up there will be more realism concerning how valuable this structure can be. I hope our discussions will be fruitful.

Co-Chairman: Thank you very much, Deputy Crawford, for that broad and comprehensive review of the issues involved in the motion.

Mr. Barnes, MP: The motion before us quite correctly welcomes the progress that has been made in recent months on the Good Friday Agreement. It mentions, for instance, decommissioning or the first steps of what may more correctly be termed as putting some arms beyond use. We all know that when progress is being made in Northern Ireland there is probably a crisis just around the corner that will need to be dealt with. When a crisis arises, however, a solution is worked out in order to further developments.

I wish to concentrate on the problem of paramilitary intimidation, especially as it relates to exiles. Last year, the paramilitaries ordered at least 683 people to leave their homes and communities in Northern Ireland. These figures have been drawn up by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders from referrals to them by the housing executive, the probation board, social services, voluntary organisations, the clergy, and families. Probably because its name tends to indicate that the association is an offenders' organisation, the figures exclude various numbers who might otherwise approach the NIACRO. Most of these people are by no means offenders.

The Maranatha community, a Christian group including Protestants and Catholics, estimates there are some 3,000 families, in total, who are in exile. Some are in internal exile in Northern Ireland while others are living in Britain. Some of them may, first of all, have travelled through the Republic of Ireland in order to find shelter. Furthermore, the Police Service of Northern Ireland recorded 331 terrorist shootings and beatings last year - twice as many by loyalist paramilitary elements as by republican ones, but they are still serious as far as both areas are concerned.

Three different types of people are forced into exile. There are those who are seen as anti-social because they are involved in drugs and other activities, whom paramilitaries clear out of particular areas and use as a justification for their action.

That action is not justified, of course, because they have no grounds for being police, jury and executioner. Sometimes the paramilitary organisations are the competitive anti-social element. They might clear drug pushers out because they are implicated in that activity and somebody is mucking up their pitch in a particular area.

There is another group, that is, people who have broken the rules of the paramilitary organisations - for instance, informers like Seán O'Callaghan and Martin McGartland. There are also those who have rubbed up against the paramilitaries almost accidentally. There is the case of Joseph McCloskey from Derry who got into an argument in a bar there. His family is excluded and is in hiding in Britain. I met him when he was over and when we were having a debate on paramilitary intimidation in the House of Commons. I, therefore, welcome Bertie Ahern's recent call for paramilitaries to publicly declare that exiles can return and that they will not be harassed by paramilitary organisations.

An item which relates to this and which is possibly coming before the United Kingdom Parliament is whether the on the runs who have not been caught and convicted, such as the murderers at Enniskillen, should be given a clean sheet. This, seemingly, is part of the Weston Park deal to begin to get certain arms put beyond use. There are a number of complex positions which refers to this. David Trimble has argued that fugitives on the run should only return when they confess their guilt and have been convicted and that they could then be released under the Good Friday Agreement arrangements. It is clearly the case in Protestant and Catholic working class communities in Belfast and elsewhere that the issue is probably of greater concern than decommissioning is at the moment. It is just not seen as reasonable that people should not have a black mark against them and should merely be excused of actions that have taken place.

The British Government initially suggested linking this in with troops, police and the actions of people who had stepped over the mark in terms of procedures. That was strongly rejected by many people, that is, that they would not be put on the same basis as paramilitary organisations. Some of us have argued that there is a case for linking the exiles issue in with it. If paramilitaries are to be excused action being taken against them and are to be allowed to appear in Northern Ireland, should those who have been pushed out by the paramilitary organisations at least have some parity of treatment and be allowed to return? There is, however, the problem as to whether those who were involved in anti-social activity would be accepted back into particular communities. Maybe something along the lines of the South African truth and reconciliation provisions should be thought about. Is there any mechanism by which it can be accepted that untoward actions took place, that people accept their role in connection with it and that is recorded and recognised by society? Society could then excuse that provision in those set of circumstances but not without anything being said or any move being made. The on the runs issue is a great problem within British politics and there is likely to be a great deal of turmoil about it when measures are brought before the British Parliament.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you. We have a number of slots available for those who are interested in contributing. We are going to try to adhere as much as possible to the four minute slot but using reasonable discretion in everyone's interest. I call Deputy Currie.

Deputy Austin Currie (Dublin West): I am glad I am speaking after Mr. Harry Barnes because he said a couple of things I would have said so I will not repeat them. There are two matters to which I will refer. The recent remarks of David Trimble are abhorrent to all reasonable people on this island and, I hope, on the neighbouring island. I will not deal with those insensitive remarks which have received a lot of publicity but with another section of his speech which was far more important and dangerous, that is, his call for a referendum on the Border to coincide with the Assembly elections in 2003. I understand why David Trimble did this, that is, to maximise the Unionist vote. However, in terms of introducing an element of instability into the Northern political scene, it is difficult to think of any other proposal which would be as successful in that regard. Those of who know something about our history might cast our minds back to the Chapel Gate election of 1949 when the then Unionist leadership under Lord Brookeborough pulled a similar stunt.

There is no doubt that the idea of a referendum in the near future would be contrary to the best interests of the Good Friday Agreement. What we really want in Northern Ireland is a deepening of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. As is now happening, we want representatives of the two traditions in the North to work together to combat the political, social, economic, cultural and other problems which afflict Northern Ireland. That is the way forward. To introduce a matter of this nature at this stage would be to do a very serious disservice to the Good Friday Agreement. I hope that is the way things will proceed, that is, that the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement will be bedded down. It is part of the Agreement that at some time in the future there will be a Border referendum but in circumstances in which the institutions have had a substantial period of time to prove to the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic that they are working.

On previous occasions, I have quoted the late Cardinal Conway when he was asked on a radio programme in 1974 when the Sunningdale Agreement was in existence and we had a power sharing executive if a power sharing executive meant that Catholics and Nationalists in Northern Ireland would become satisfied with their lot as a result of equality and would therefore be prepared to continue with the State of Northern Ireland or if the advances made through Sunningdale would mean that Catholics, Nationalists and Republics would be encouraged to go on to a united Ireland. He said I am prepared to leave that matter to history. That was a very sensible response and that is the way in which I look at it. It is for some time in the future but first let us see the fruits of co-operation and partnership in the North and between North and South work.

I am sorry Deputy Ó Caoláin is not here. He is usually absent from the Dáil or elsewhere when I feel he should answer some questions. There is a very controversial issue regarding on-the-run legislation. It is galling for those with

murdered relatives who think they know who is responsible to realise that the perpetrators may walk free. That is one of the prices we have had to pay for the other advantages of the Good Friday Agreement. When people like me and others are prepared to accept these things we have the right to demand that other aspects be implemented, such as decommissioning, that everything possible will be done to find the bodies of the disappeared, that exiles should be allowed to return, that punishment beatings should end and that vigilantism, which is now occurring in this State as well as the North, ends. I, for one, demand these things.

We brought in the republican movement from the cold to ensure peace and stability on this island for the future. The movement has had a considerable time to deliver on certain things. If it demands it be treated as an ordinary political party we have a right to demand that it acts like one. We have heard recently that it accepts the Garda Síochána, the Army and the security forces in this State. I have no proof of that, nor have I proof that it has changed its long standing policy of non-acceptance of the Army and the police here. I hope that change has occurred but, if so, why have people like Deputy Ó Caoláin refused, when asked on radio to support unequivocally the gardaí in their efforts to find those responsible for the barbarities of Omagh and those giving the Garda information? They cannot on the one hand say they accept the police and the Army of this State while on the other hand, refuse to give the information that is required. Unfortunately, Deputy Ó Caoláin is not here this morning and I am not sure if the other representative of Sinn Féin is present. If they attend the deliberations of this body I hope they provide answers to these questions.

I and the great majority of democratic and constitutional politicians have pulled our punches regarding Sinn Féin on the basis that we did not want to be blamed for upsetting the party's progress into normal democratic politics. The time has now arrived when straight answers must be demanded to straight questions. That is my attitude and I believe it to be the right one.

Mr. Sean Neeson MLA: I welcome the opportunity to speak this morning. It is hard to believe that during Easter Week four years ago we were in the final throes of the negotiations taking place in Castle Buildings, which ultimately led to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. We all had sleepless nights during that week. What stands out in my memory is a meeting Séamus Close and I had with Sinn Féin officials. Their concerns related to how to protect the rights and interests of minority groups in the new Assembly. We outlined to them what was basically agreed and the headline in the following day's *Irish News* referred to what Sinn Féin demanded for government.

Ironically, the decisions on the functioning of the Assembly have led to many problems. I outlined them in Bournemouth. They include the polling system within the Assembly, based as it is on the consent of a majority of Unionists and Nationalists. I referred to the possibility of further problems, which will arise for as long as we sustain this kind of polling arrangement.

While considerable progress has been made and while Northern Ireland is a much better place, the idea of win-lose continues to apply. If Unionists win Nationalists lose and *vice versa*. The irony of this emerged a week or so ago when the decision was made on city status. As part of the Queen's jubilee celebrations it was decided that a new city would be created in each of the four regions of the United Kingdom, one for Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. I must declare an interest here because I proposed that Carrickfergus should apply for city status. In Northern Ireland a Unionist and a Nationalist town had to be nominated. We cannot progress as a society when the mentality of win-loose prevails. We must become much more mature in dealing with issues, even the simple ones such as city status.

The Assembly is bedding down very well. The public in Northern Ireland welcomes devolution. They believe the Assembly is working well and we are now even being accused of sleaze.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: You have made it.

Mr. Neeson: That is correct. The sleaze accusation referred to the office allowances awarded to Assembly Members. Those that gained most were the members of the DUP. Gregory Campbell of the DUP topped the list in terms of the cost of office allowance. Nevertheless, it is progress and we are all the better for it.

A couple of issues need to be addressed. I was deeply involved in the Weston Park talks when the question of an amnesty for those on the run was considered. It is cruel, cynical and callous. I raised the issue with the Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, and the Taoiseach Mr. Ahern, at Weston Park. In South Africa those guilty of crimes had to acknowledge their guilt. That is not happening here. These people, who have probably committed some of the most heinous and barbarous crimes in Northern Ireland, can anonymously drift back into society. That is wrong. It was not part of the Good Friday Agreement. The Governments must give serious consideration to what could be a very negative fall-out if they proceed along those lines.

Like Harry Barnes, I believe the access issue must be addressed. We are not just concerned with republicans but loyalists because numerous people from loyalist and republican areas have been unjustifiably forced out of their communities.

The events that took place in Castlereagh a week or so ago must be addressed. There is no doubt in anybody's mind - even the dogs in the street know it - that what happened at Castlereagh was an inside job. It definitely involved either the police or the army. We are concerned with creating a society where confidence in the institutions can be built up. Unfortunately, Sinn Féin Party members are not taking their positions on the policing board. This incident gives them the excuse not to do so. Whatever happens, I hope that John Chilcott is successful in getting to the bottom of what did happen here and that it will be made public so that people can have confidence in the institutions of law and order.

All in all, I welcome the fact that this proposal is before us this morning. I will certainly support it. I would hope that the stability that we have seen so far will continue. Albeit there are problems on the streets of North Belfast and other areas, Northern Ireland is a much better place today than it was this week four years ago.

Mr. Henry Bellingham MP: So far, every speaker has mentioned the point about Sinn Féin not taking their seats on the police board and I would entirely endorse what has been said by those speakers. It is absolutely vital that the motion states that the Body urges all parties to redouble their efforts in the peace process to secure further progress and this would be a very significant step forward. As Deputy Currie rightly points out, it is something which Sinn Féin owe to other democratic politicians. They claim to be democratic politicians now. They have gone into the whole democratic process. They must make this move and we certainly feel very strongly about it in Westminster.

Another point about Sinn Féin, which I would like to mention, is its level of resources. They are, without doubt, the richest party in western Europe in terms of funds per Member in that party. Obviously one reason they have so much money is because they are doing a great deal of fund-raising in the United States. Their fund-raising in the United States is carrying on unabated. Obviously they are raising less money than they did at the peak of their activities but there is still a great deal of fund-raising going on in the United States.

You may well say, "Good luck to them. If the law allows them to raise funds in America, why should they not do so." The law does allow them to raise money in America and overseas, but the UK law does not allow other political parties to raise money abroad. In fact, we have passed legislation preventing parties from raising money overseas but that does not apply to Northern Ireland. I would say that now the peace process has moved on and we are moving forward every month that goes by, surely the time has come to apply that legislation to parties in this country.

The original arguments that Sinn Féin used for raising money in America were, first, that it was for prisoners and their welfare, but those prisoners are now out of prison; and second, that they needed to gear up for the first Assembly elections and they needed the extra funds so that they could compete with other democratic parties. But we are now facing a situation in which they have such a vast weight of resources that they will be able to throw money at elections on both sides of the Border and it is in everyone's interest that we have a level playing field here. Therefore I would certainly urge that this Body uses any influence it has on the British Government so that the law is changed.

Another point I would like to make follows on from a recent visit to Washington of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, which was led by Michael Mates MP. Mr. Harry Barnes was also on the visit. We received substantial briefing from various officials in America on the activities of PIRA in America and, indeed, in other parts of that continent and South America. We were briefed on what happened in Columbia

and the relationship between IRA and FARC. That debacle of course is very much an ongoing situation.

We also heard about the recent Fort Lauderdale trial which involved a number of IRA operatives operating out of America and sending arms to the UK for onward transportation to the Republic of Ireland. I find it quite extraordinary that during the peace process, at a time running up to the first significant act of decommissioning, PIRA were actually buying arms in America and then posting those arms through to the UK. This shows an extraordinary set of priorities on their part. On the one hand they are promising decommissioning and on the other hand they are actually building up their arsenals. We are not just talking about ordinary arms. The first tranche of weapons were small arms. The second tranche was more sophisticated weaponry, involving sniper rifles and machine guns.

I certainly feel strongly that that organisation should become a proscribed body. It is not a proscribed body in America. The Body could do something to put pressure on both Governments to request the American Administration to add PIRA to the list of proscribed terrorist organisations in America. We are in a peace process. Surely the time has come for that to happen.

Mr. Lembit Öpik MP: I have always said the main benefit of this group is the opportunity for informal conversation and exchange. When you proposed the programme of business, Co-Chairman, I was going to propose an amendment saying that the spouses should be in this room and we should go off on the bus because it would have given us the space to have the conversations, but in the end I did not do that.

The big picture, as far as I am concerned, is going quite well. Although the issues that have been described already are clearly matters of concern, especially the underlying level of violence in the North of Ireland, I am quite confident that the peace process is going to work out. In that context, most of the present problems are tactical issues. These are important enough to potentially destabilise the overall strategy, but they are tactical issues nonetheless. I want to mention three of those.

First, it is clear to me the problems in North Belfast are largely related to the fact that the UDA has no real political access into the main peace process. Frankie Gallagher has set up an organisation called the Ulster Political Research Council, which, in my view, it is pretty clear, is intended to re-establish the linkage between the UDA and the political process. We should welcome that and support it. Personally I have tried to do what I can to raise the credibility of that group because, frankly, recent history tells us that once one has a political wing to a paramilitary organisation, the chances of serious engagement and a shift away from violence to political negotiation are massively improved. Using that approach the difficulties in North Belfast can probably be resolved.

Second, the Castlereagh break-in, as others have already said, pretty obviously involved inside help. We are not really going to get to normality as long as people

have grave doubts about what the bigger game is. I have little doubt that there is a bigger game plan going on, to which I am not privy but which nevertheless will be some form of power play between the various interest groups. The bit that worries me the most is the State's involvement in this potentially or representatives of the State being involved in this. In as much as we are able to do, we should be applying pressure on people who probably do know more about it to come clean on that.

Third, the issue of those on the run is clearly one of the most burning ones from the Westminster perspective. I am sure it can be resolved. Mr. Harry Barnes MP made some suggestions about how that could be done. One thing I am sure about is that whatever the settlement, we must recognise the need for justice for the victims and for friends and relatives of victims. That cannot be achieved simply by leaving various crimes unresolved. I do not know whether this can be done by a peace and reconciliation committee or by bringing these individuals to trial and then deciding what happens next, but there is room for debate on that. What is unacceptable is a blanket amnesty. Certainly that would be resisted, not only by Opposition parties in Westminster but also by a large proportion of the Government party.

I continue to believe that the Northern Ireland peace process could be something of a model for other parts of the world. If one compares the progress that has been made there with what has been going on in Israel, one can see the benefits of a political settlement and state involvement in pushing political settlement rather than trying to resolve matters through state violence. Nevertheless, I feel, as Sean Neeson does, that there are some institutionalised elements of sectarianism in the outcome. The Alliance Party were very courageous to redesignate in order to protect David Trimble's position but they should never have had to do that.

When we speak about the two sections of the community, we ignore the fact that a large proportion of people in Northern Ireland do not want to be identified with an overtly Nationalist republican or loyalist Unionist position. We will have succeeded when - instead of trying to balance the concerns of the two parts of the community - we do not define Northern Ireland as being two communities but just a large group of citizens who happen to be quite satisfied that they have access to the same rights as others and that they are not discriminated against on the basis of their religion or their choice to place their political persuasions apart from their religious convictions.

Deputy Conor Lenihan (*Dublin South-West*): First, I should inform Henry Bellingham that he can be reassured that Fianna Fáil and the other political parties in the Republic will be vigorously opposing Sinn Féin in the forthcoming election. We are not too concerned about overseas funding at present, but we are planning to introduce legislation to ban all funding of political parties in the Republic from foreign sources. That is a welcome development. It is not without irony that the Americans have such a ban in their own political system, but, as everyone knows, the US has been a fertile source of funds for Sinn Féin and other political parties, including Fianna Fáil, in the past. We will be introducing the relevant legislation in the near future. I would not necessarily be too concerned about the political threat Sinn Féin poses either here in the Republic or north of the Border. The longer this

process continues, the more stable the previously unstable and somewhat ambiguous paramilitary type parties will become. That is something to which we can look forward with great relish. Someday these people will begin to wear suits and we will all end up looking at one another's clothes.

Deputy Currie's point about their being one legal army in this State and on the island of Ireland is valid. Said point is not lost on anyone in the Republic. It is important to recognise the irony that there is only one police force which is legal and widely accepted on the island of Ireland. I refer here to the Garda Síochána. Unfortunately, the RUC, as it was previously known, does not have the kind of legitimacy enjoyed by the Garda. The process is about harmonising matters on the island of Ireland in order that we will have police forces which enjoy the full confidence of the citizenry. We all look forward to this being achieved in the future.

Unfortunately, the rhetorical baggage that goes with politics means that Mr. Trimble is obliged to make statements about Border polls to please his electorate and his political party at its annual conference. That remains an unfortunate facet of politics north of the Border. It is noticeable that none of the party conferences held in the Republic, either this year or last, are characterised by people rattling the sabre or waving the green flag. Such pastimes were indulged in for many years in the Republic and it is unfortunate that Mr. Trimble has seen fit to wave the flag and criticise this State as some form of mono-ethnic political-cultural structure. His description was far from accurate. Most people who are members of this body would accept that it is totally untrue. The Republic is not a mono-ethnic society, it is far from it. For example, the Residential Institutions Redress Act we recently passed to cater for the victims of brutality and, in some cases, sexual assault by priests is testimony to the fact that we are trying to escape from the kind of culture to which Mr. Trimble referred and which did exist in this State 20 or 30 years ago. We are now dealing with consequences of what happened in the past and we are trying to compensate people who were traumatised.

It is unfortunate that the Border poll notion has been introduced to the equation. As Deputy Currie correctly stated, we need to get the institutions into operation and see some evidence that reconciliation is happening around the activity and dynamic created by those institutions. Holding Border polls - much as we might like, from the point of view of curiosity, to see what would be the results - is utterly pointless when the marked dysfunctions one would identify in the political system and society of the North remain in evidence. Nothing has gone away; neither the sectarianism nor some of the paramilitary operations associated with the conflict. Lembit Öpik's view that we need to give careful consideration to the loyalist position and encourage the political development within loyalism. Loyalism and the deadly divisions that exist within the ranks of loyalist paramilitaries are the greatest threats to the peace process at present and not comments made by Mr. Trimble or any other party leader at his or her annual conference when trying to appeal to their more fervent supporters.

The only odd aspect about statements made in recent months was the argument by the Secretary of State, Dr. Reid, about a cold house for unionism. I do not wish to criticise, but the more one puts forward such an argument the more likely it is that Unionist spokespersons will state they want to reverse the events of 1918 to 1922. If addressed in such a manner, Unionists tend to come back looking for more than they have already obtained. It is important to remember that the Good Friday Agreement is meant to be the starting point of a new relationship between all of us. People should remember that and should stop trying to rewrite history. Efforts to rewrite history are happening on both sides. Some narrow-minded republicans have also been trying to rewrite the history of the past 30 years. Because of the Irish obsession with history, I am not in favour of Mr. Barnes's suggestion that we should have a truth commission. There has been too much truth and our society is far too small to require such a commission.

It is clear in respect of the Castlereagh incident that someone acted on insider knowledge to achieve a particular result. We do not know what they intend to achieve, but the raid underpins the need for proper policing and controls. I do not believe it will have major consequences going forward. In my opinion, we are well on the way to creating a stable political democracy on the island of Ireland. We do not know whether that will be a united Ireland or a structure more affiliated with the United Kingdom. However, both will probably come into play. It seems that the Republic is re-engaging in a much more meaningful way in its relationship with the United Kingdom than has been the case for many years. Members of the British royal family have recently visited these shores with little or no protest. We all remember a period in the 1950s, 1960s and possibly the 1970s when there were massive protests associated with visits by the royal family to Ireland. However, recent visits went off without a hitch. It is hoped that Her Majesty will visit us in the near future and will be reasonably well received. As an Irish republican, I must state that we do not want the Irish people to become too enthusiastic.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I refrain from making any observation on the Deputy's final comment. We will next have Andrew Mackay - I apologise for mispronouncing his name earlier - followed by Jean Corston and Senator Enda Bonner. There are about five other speakers after that and I suggest that we break for coffee at 11 a.m. We will then call Rosemary McKenna, Peter Brooke, Kevin McNamara, Lord Glentoran and anyone else who wishes to contribute.

The Rt. Hon. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): The Chairman is completely forgiven. Seymour Crawford got it absolutely right when he introduced this motion. There was a great deal of realism in what he had to say, particularly when he claimed it is such a pity that decommissioning is being dragged out of the paramilitaries - both the so-called loyalists and republicans. He went on to say that normality has not yet returned to Northern Ireland. The simple truth is that the process begun by the Belfast Agreement remains fragile and needs to be nurtured on an ongoing basis.

In the few comments I wish to make, I intend to dwell on the very real concern among many who have supported the Agreement since the outset about proposals

to grant an amnesty to terrorists on the run. Mr. Barnes rightly pointed out this will cause turmoil across the political divide in the Westminster Parliament but that is the least of our problems if this ill-thought out proposal goes ahead. David Trimble questioned the Prime Minister in the House a few weeks ago and he was absolutely right when he said this could bring the entire process down. For moderate Unionists and others who have supported the Agreement, to see this amnesty go through, which was not part of the Good Friday Agreement, would not just be damaging for them politically but, as Mr. Barnes pointed out, in both communities, particularly at grass roots level, the feelings about the amnesty are greater than about decommissioning or police reform or other issues.

We have heard again and again this action will bring down the Agreement and perhaps people, including even myself, have cried wolf too often but I stress that if the amnesty goes ahead it makes David Trimble's position and that of other moderate Unionists who support the Agreement untenable. Unlike Seán Neeson, I was not present at Weston Park, nor were most of us, and was not privy to the discussions but David Trimble believes there was no agreement on an amnesty and the only agreement was reached between the Prime Minister and Gerry Adams and his colleagues.

It would be very badly misunderstood if the amnesty went ahead, particularly when there has only been limited decommissioning and we eagerly and desperately await more. It would be wrong if the amnesty went ahead when one thinks of the position of the innocent families that have suffered so much because of what these people did. It is a bad signal to give an amnesty to people who have never served a prison sentence or perhaps, worse still, have broken out of prison. I cannot see how they can even be under licence because there is no licence to put those who have not served a sentence back in prison if they break the licence.

I hope a consistent message can come out of our plenary session, which seems to have been the case thus far, that we are not in favour of this amnesty and we see huge problems in it as it stands.

Mrs. Jean Corston MP: I am pleased to support the motion, which refers to the full operation of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. I refer to one of the underlying principles of the Agreement, to which reference is not often made, and that is human rights. One aspect of the Agreement that broke new ground was the way it emphasised the language of human rights and I am pleased to note the progress that is being made in Northern Ireland and in the Republic in taking human rights seriously and putting them on the political, social and cultural agenda.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has been established under Brice Dickson and a Human Rights Commission is being established in the Republic under Donal Barrington. Although, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission operates on a slender budget, it is breaking new ground in making people face up to the principle and concepts of human rights. We do not have a human rights commission in the UK, but we have what is probably a ground breaking institution,

which is a select committee of both Houses of Parliament. I have the privilege of chairing the joint committee on human rights and Kevin McNamara, who is chairman of Committee D, is also a member. We recently visited Belfast to talk to members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission and hope to visit Dublin later in the year.

We see ourselves as a parliamentary watchdog in that we examine whether legislation is human rights compliant and an advocate for human rights. Anyone who deals with this agenda must conclude there is no monopoly of human rights. When we were in Belfast it was said to us on various occasions that the commission favoured the nationalists or the loyalists but if the commission is being criticised uniformly it must be doing a reasonable job. Post-September 11 and in the Northern Ireland context generally, human rights is the territory onto which we should all move because if one is going to try to deal with bridging a religious, political, cultural and social divide, the consequences of multiculturalism and the establishment of peaceful communities built on mutual respect and tolerance, the continued emphasis on differences of religion, background and custom play into the hands of those who want to undermine the principles of democracy.

In this increasingly multicultural world human rights has to be the agenda we all follow and it is popular. Over the past few years people have written to me about a personal problem or a complaint and it is extraordinary how often they refer to their human rights. What they refer to as human rights may not fit within the human rights framework which has been established legally and politically but it is encouraging that people are even thinking in this way, and not thinking just in terms of a religious, political, class, educational or other divide. I hope in all our discussions about the future for these islands generally, which is reflected in the memberships and concerns of the Body, we do not lose sight of the fact that if we want a peaceful and democratic society the only principle on which it can be based is the respect of the human rights for all.

Senator Enda Bonner: I would like to briefly address the motion. I have come from the north west of Donegal through Northern Ireland and the great thing that has come out of the Good Friday Agreement is that a reasonable degree of normality has returned. Those of us who live in cross-Border areas can compare where we stand with where we were 30 years ago when people from my county regarded Derry as being as good a place to visit as our county town of Letterkenny. There was a monstrosity of an army checkpoint when one crossed the Border at Strabane for many years but there is a park there now. The symbols there reflect the two traditions in the country. People have mentioned certain aspects of this issue and I appreciate they come from afar but there are many things which are still not right in Northern Ireland. It may take another 30 to 40 years to get there.

There are issues concerning the nationalist side I want to raise. In our country, with the election looming, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have had to take steps to ensure the election of our candidates. We have had to play politics with Sinn Fein but I would not emphasise too much the things people here have mentioned in relation to

FARC's connection with Sinn Fein. Obviously the people caught out there were not on their holidays but at the same time much groundwork has been done here and I would not like to highlight that too much. I hope societies on both sides of the Border will eventually get together so well that those involved in such activities will become such a small minority that they will fall by the wayside.

I have praised Mr. Trimble on numerous occasions in the Seanad when he has made positive moves and the last time we were here I said he had moved forward from his triumphant march down the Garvaghy Road with Mr. Paisley to becoming a peacemaker. As with all good politicians he has the tendency is to shoot himself in the foot. I cannot see why he still maintains his stance over the remark he made, particularly as he was unanimously re-elected as party leader. There was no need for the remarks and I disagree entirely with him. Coming from so close to the Border and having so many friends in Northern Ireland and travelling so much there, I have seen an awful lot of change in our part of the country and in Northern Ireland. I see society on this side of the Border as having become very liberal compared to where we were 30 or 40 years ago. I regard the words he used as an insult.

He also called for a poll on the Border. One does not need one at the moment to know what the result would be - that is quite obvious. I do not know when the right time for a poll would be. Again, why has he used that opportunity? He has been under no pressure in his party recently.

There was talk of an amnesty for those on the run and I would have a difficulty with allowing those who have committed horrendous crimes being allowed to walk free. On the other hand it is part of the process. We have changed since the Irish Civil War, when people were imprisoned and released; many of those in prison nowadays have committed horrendous crimes and not alone that, many of them are involved in criminal activity. It is difficult for people to accept that some of these men can be released, particularly those who have not faced charges. However, they have no fewer rights than those already in prison when the Good Friday Agreement was implemented.

Regarding the police board, I discussed this with Barry McElduff of Sinn Fein and pointed out the changes we had offered in the GAA by removing the ban which stopped members of the security forces from playing Gaelic games. I asked how we were supposed to accept a society where nearly 50% of those now applying to join the police force are nationalists from societies where the GAA is the most prevalent sporting organisation. How can we expect those young people to apply to join the RUC if they are to be debarred from playing the national games? I believe in the normality of society and in different traditions in different areas having their own people in the police force. They seem to trust those people more than those from the other side of the political divide. Sinn Fein are playing political games with the police force and I ask it again to put members on the policing board. In the few months since it was formed that board has shown the tremendous grip it had and how serious and dedicated it was, particularly with reference to the unanimous

agreement on the police ombudsman's report and in finding a solution to the badge situation.

Those banished from Northern Ireland have also been mentioned. Another group of people has also been banished from the North - not people who have had to leave because of the police or security forces, but those banished by criminal activities in the different traditions. In time something will have to be done to enable those people to return to the place they come from. Of course there are criminals among them as well but they must be given a chance.

In relation to demilitarisation, there must be give and take on both sides. Sinn Fein is using decommissioning again as a political crutch for the election. That is a possible reason for further decommissioning being announced. However while there has been some demilitarisation on the other side, there has not been enough. It is very easy to announce the closure of Ebrington Barracks in Derry, which affects very few people. The real serious demilitarisation has to be in these security towers. One came to prominence again last week with the helicopter crash. It is easy for us in Donegal and the northwest - I can see no signs of these towers or posts but in south Armagh people must live with this on a daily basis. These are the people who must be convinced and kept on board through the years, not those in Donegal, Louth and Monaghan - or even parts of Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry where normality has come back. I ask that whatever influence can be used to be employed to get the British Government to move quicker on demilitarisation.

The human rights issue was mentioned and I raise the break-in at Castlereagh in this context. It is quite obvious to everyone that it appears to have been an inside job and not the first inside job. Month after month, since I entered the Seanad five years ago, I have called on the Taoiseach for proper public inquiries into the deaths of Rosemary Nelson, Pat Finucane and Robert Hamill in particular, as I have associations with his family. My wife's cousin was murdered going to work in Castlederg, County Tyrone. His name was Patrick Shanahan. Neither side of his family had any involvement with political activities in Northern Ireland but Patrick Shanahan was closely involved with the GAA and Irish culture. He would occasionally give the finger to the RUC as a nationalist young lad in Castlederg but there can be no proof he was ever involved in any criminal activity, yet he was selected and murdered on the way to work. There was a special investigation in Castlederg of his death but we always believed his death was a result of information from the police force getting to people whose aim is to destabilise society. I ask that these issues be looked at as well. I know we have come on and had the Saville Inquiry into Derry and it may be very difficult for Unionists and possibly British politicians to accept but the world and its mother has seen the films. We believed for 30 years that while there may have been shots fired in Derry those people were killed that day. Evidence that came out last week - I will not mention any names - soured me in relation to the situation. However, we are moving forward and, if the current situation continues, normality will become the norm in Northern Ireland.

Sitting suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.

Co-Chairman, Mr. Winnick, in the Chair.

Ms McKenna MP: I think we must sometimes remind ourselves about the impact of all of this on ordinary people's lives. Sometimes we get bogged down in the detail and the devil is in the detail. However, we should look at the impact of the peace process on the lives of ordinary people in Northern Ireland. I was lucky enough to be able to do that a couple of weeks ago when I spent almost a week in Belfast visiting various organisations and families. I visited schools and family groups and spent a day with the Ulster Bank. I went around the area and met ordinary people. I stayed with a family and visited other families. Of course, it is obvious there are ghetto areas but support for the peace process was massive among the huge majority of people to whom I spoke. They want to live ordinary lives, the kind of lives people in other communities throughout the world live. We should remind ourselves constantly of this aspect. There are problems but we must tackle them and face them head on.

Visiting Belfast after many years I saw an open and vibrant city. The work the city council has done on the Waterfront development, for example, is amazing. One can visit the centre of the city and do all the things people around the world wish to do in their cities and communities, and we should constantly remind ourselves of that fact.

I was welcomed by all on my visit to the Stormont Assembly. It was fantastic to see politicians working together and developing a mutual respect for each other, which I found very encouraging. I would like to make a couple of simple suggestions. We should do all we can to encourage the unionists to join this Body. By listening to each other and hearing each other's views we will understand where we are all coming from. It is incumbent on all of us to persuade them to join this group and to participate and listen. It does us all good to hear everybody's views. Their voice is not here and it ought to be.

We must encourage more backbenchers from Westminster, the Scottish and Welsh Assemblies and the Dáil to visit the Northern Ireland Assembly. We need to support the politicians in that new institution and they need to know they have our support.

We must find a mechanism for this but it is not easy. When I visited the Northern Ireland Assembly I found it extremely difficult to have my visit funded. I stayed with friends but not everyone has that facility. It is very difficult to fund visits to Northern Ireland by Members of other Parliaments. We must think of a way to fund such visits. Our experience and support for the Members of the Legislative Assembly is invaluable.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick): We will hear nine speakers before Mr. Michael Mates replies. I am reluctant to stop anyone who has a great deal to say but I ask Members to limit their contributions to four minutes.

Mr. Mackinlay MP: The point which Rosemary McKenna made regarding the unionists joining the body is in the back of many members minds. Is the steering committee going to give us a report back on progress or initiatives it has taken? If so, where on our agenda can it be discussed? Some people want to know what initiatives can be taken and might want to suggest initiatives which could be taken? Can you help us on that, Chairman.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick): That is a point of order arising from what Rosemary said. From the very beginning we have been keen that the Body should include unionists and it is always disappointing that both Unionist parties have refused to come on board. They know, through various informal contacts which I will not go into at this stage including recent approaches which have been made to them, that we would like to see them on board. However, we are not willing to go and beg them. I do not believe that would be right or proper. The matter came up in the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement but at the end of it all the attitude of the Unionist parties remains the same. They look upon us as arising from the Anglo-Irish Agreement and we know their deep hostility to that. That agreement has gone by the board with the Good Friday Agreement. When we debate the report on the work of the Body there will be an opportunity for colleagues to raise what Rosemary has, rightly, mentioned. That is the position.

Right Honorable the Lord Brooke: On a point of order, Chairman, your predecessor gave me the impression that I was following Rosemary. I ask, out of curiosity, where I will be instead.

The Lord Dubs: One of life's losers.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick): This is almost like being in the House of Commons, especially when I am not being called. Alf Dubs will be followed by Brian O'Shea. Peter, you will be right after that. If we have amended the order by one I am sure you will put up with that. The order is Alf Dubs, Brian O'Shea and Peter Brooke.

The Lord Dubs: I will make four points. I am still disconcerted that from time to time voices at Westminster argue that the Good Friday Agreement has not succeeded. It is important that we use every opportunity, including the earlier speeches here, to rebut that and to point out that although there are things that are not satisfactory, a great deal of progress has been made. Jean Corston mentioned the Human Rights Commission, there is the Equality Commission and in many respects the changes in Northern Ireland stemming from the Good Friday Agreement put Northern Ireland ahead of practice in other parts of Britain and, I suggest, possibly ahead of some practice in the Republic.

One of the most outstanding differences - and this is well understood by people here - between the North and the South of Ireland is the lack of self-confidence which still exists in Northern Ireland. This is nowhere more so than among the unionist community. That is a real difficulty, exacerbated by their absence from proceedings such as this one.

I regret that the Gaelic language has been politicised in the North to the point where it is not as accepted as it would be if Sinn Féin had not politicised it. That party has done a disservice to those who want to see the language flourish in the North by making it a political statement rather than a cultural and linguistic statement.

My second point is about David Trimble's suggestion of a referendum and I have listened with interest to what has been said here. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State will go along with it and I think he has the power to decide whether there should be a referendum or not. I agree with the voices which have said here that it is very destabilising, even if David Trimble's motive may be simply to increase the turnout for the Ulster Unionist Party in the next Assembly elections. It is a destabilising suggestion and I am not sure, other than hoping John Reid will do the right thing, what else we can do about that.

People have referred to the next elections. Clearly, the possibility of Sinn Féin gains in the forthcoming elections here is a matter to be taken into account. I am particularly concerned about what may happen in Northern Ireland at the Assembly elections in a year's time. I am very much concerned for the position of the SDLP. It would be very disappointing and damaging if the SDLP were to lose its place as the leading party representing nationalist opinion, given how forthright it has been in the policies which have led directly to the Good Friday Agreement. I wish I knew there was something we could do to help in that situation and I very much hope David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party will not be damaged by the incursions of the DUP.

My last point is the question of the amnesty. I can see the enormous difficulties in the British Parliament in getting that through unless it is done by the Royal Prerogative and I can see political objections to it being done by the Royal Prerogative. We had a little discussion over coffee and one wonders whether, if the amnesty were to be granted under the Royal Prerogative, the beneficiaries would accept it. That may just be a light hearted comment and not a serious one. The more serious point is this: I have tried to get the information as to who the people are in terms of their status *vis-à-vis* the criminal justice system. If they are people who have already served over two years in jail and then escaped, they are covered by the existing prisoner release legislation and there should be no difficulty. The difficulty would concern people who have either been sentenced and not served their sentences or people who have not even been brought before the courts. I can see that is a very difficult one. I can only echo a comment made by someone who knows north Belfast well and who said to me last week that such an amnesty would have an enormously destabilising effect on the Good Friday Agreement. I cannot evaluate that comment but it was made with a great deal of force and I have heard it repeated by others who know about the situation in north Belfast. It is a pretty far reaching step to say the Good Friday Agreement would be threatened more by an amnesty than by any other measure that has been passed. I hope it is exaggerated concern but I am anxious as to how this will work out and I hope the British Government will come forward with more information to indicate the nature of the

beneficiaries. I hope many of them will be ones who are already covered by the existing prisoner release legislation.

Deputy Brian O'Shea (Waterford): Thank you, chairman. I do not want to go back over issues that were already dealt with, but would like to focus on what was suggested by Harry Barnes, that is the idea of a truth commission in relation to the OTRs. Deputy Conor Lenihan stated that we can have too much truth, but can that be so? We should reflect that a truth commission is concerned with conflict resolution. It is discouraging that in 2001, there was an increase of 67 in the number of punishment beatings in Northern Ireland with a total of 331. There were also increases in murders, and pipe bombings.

At a previous plenary session, I referred to my visit three years ago to the Irish School of Ecumenics, where they study conflict resolution as well. I met a student from California whom I asked to nominate one thing that she learned during her course, and she replied that it was that the elements of conflict are inside all of us and we must reconcile those inside ourselves before we are best ready to participate in conflict resolution. If we had a truth commission for the OTRs where people admitted what they had they had done and said that they were sorry in a meaningful way, the interaction with those who were injured and the relatives of those murdered would become part of a healing process based on genuine contrition. Is that not a way forward? We all know that on the ground the situation between the different groups in Northern Ireland is not improving and the question of the exiles is central. Organisations allowing people, who have left Northern Ireland, to return to their own communities is not necessarily an acceptable *quid pro quo* for the return of the OTRs, but there is merit in the truth commission. Some people see such a commission as cumbersome but there are other problems that may never be addressed properly without one.

Of course, Sinn Féin should participate in the board of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is clear that most of the punishment beatings are being carried out by loyalists, but while such activity continues, there will be no chance of developing a normal, civilised society in Northern Ireland. We cannot have too much truth, but it must be in the positive context of conflict resolution in which people admit that they did wrong and forgiving takes place. The end result of that will be the healing process.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick): I apologise to Peter Brooke for any difficulties caused by confusion over the batting list.

Rt. Hon. the Lord Brooke: Not at all, Chairman. I congratulate the steering committee and the co-chairman on drafting a motion that would be difficult for anybody to disagree with. There is one characteristic ambiguity in it and I have one *caveat*. The characteristic ambiguity is in the words "looks forward" and it is not clear whether this is genuine anticipation and expectation or an exercise in wish fulfilment. My *caveat* is that the Police Service of Northern Ireland was candid with Committee A when we visited them last month and I foresee significant operational

strains in that service over the next 15 months. We were also impressed with the Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman's progress in establishing her organisation.

I thank and congratulate Harry Barnes both for what he said today and for being the prime mover in the House of Commons select committee embarking on an inquiry into paramilitaries driving people into exile. I shall not repeat the detail of his remarks in his powerful contribution, but offer two footnotes on the select committee's report and I emphasise that I recognise that both sides of the community have paramilitaries involved in this. I also have no emotional capital tied up in the report. Although people may not have a copy, I draw to their attention page 58 in the section evidence, in which there is a histogram of punishment beatings and shootings. There were minimal shootings after the first ceasefire in 1994 but the number has steadily increased since the ceasefire in 1998, and it raises the question of whether the paramilitaries are pushing their luck to see how much they can get away with.

The second footnote relates to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which gave evidence to the select committee that there were no references to it in relation to any abuses in the context of exile. When one considers how many human rights issues have been raised during the Troubles, we will not reach normality until referring these matters to the human rights commission is standard practice. A former Secretary of State described such punishments and verdicts as internal community housekeeping or words to that effect. I do not agree with that and, while not wishing to be partisan, I separately regret that the British Government's response to the report should have fallen back on commending citizens' advice bureaux and its own policy on homelessness as that misses the essential point of the issue. I echo Sean Neeson in emphasising the Good Friday of four years ago and say that, in the Easter season, such a response from the Government might be regarded as washing one's hands. The issue of the on-the-runs has the potential to create an apocalyptic row, as a number of people said, especially in the context of paramilitaries' sending others into exile, which might be translated as being on the run. On the basis that it is an ill wind that brings no good to anyone, we should be grateful that the amnesty issue has the capacity to put a powerful searchlight on those exiled.

A good thing for myself that came out of the report was from Professor Kennedy, of Queen's University, who gave notable evidence. The remark, "That the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is that good men should do nothing." has always been attributed to that great Irishman, Edmund Burke, although I never found where he said it until Professor Kennedy drew my attention to other remarks by Burke which may have been translated over the years into the remark which is always quoted.

I pay the loudest possible tribute, and Harry Barnes referred to them in his remarks, to the members of the Maranatha community for what they do for the exiles out of the goodness of their hearts both in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They cannot solve the problem but their efforts to ameliorate the effects are beyond praise.

Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. McNamara MP: Thank you, chairman. I was particularly enamoured of Conor Lenihan's welcome to our Head of State visiting Dublin at some time. I was brought up to sing to in "The Mountains of Mourne,"

I've seen England's king from the top of a bus
And I've never know him, but he means to know us.
And tho' by the Saxon we once were oppressed,
Still I cheered. God forgive me, I cheered with the rest.

The Lord Dubs: Sing it.

Mr. McNamara MP: I am second only to Peter Brooke in my singing ability.

Now the yoke has gone and, happily, the idea of the British Sovereign, or Head of State, visiting Dublin is something to be welcomed.

However, I want to turn to some other points. There are issues on the horizon which are likely to cause trouble and we should be aware of them. They were, in a sense, partly raised by both David Trimble's comments upon the status of the Republic and by his willingness to bring a referendum into an Assembly election. I echo everything Deputy Currie and others have said about that but there is one particular thing which will make matters worse. In September we will start having figures from the census. The last census showed the degree to which there had been division in Northern Ireland into localities where people lived, the drifting of the Unionist population out of Belfast and onto the eastern seaboard and the growth of nationalism to become a majority west of the Bann and also in Belfast and elsewhere. The census is likely to show that the two principal cities of Northern Ireland will now be Nationalist dominated in one form or another. That will cause considerable problems for the Unionist community and that is why I mention it.

Part of the problem of North Belfast is not a question of who goes to what school or how they go or even the role of the UDA but is in fact the feeling of a community under siege. The problem is the spreading of Nationalist Catholic families into areas previously strongly loyalist, a feeling of being let down by political leaders and a feeling that the Government is not paying attention to people's aspirations, hopes and fears. While some people would argue that they are just feeling what was on the other foot 30 odd years ago, what was wrong then is equally wrong now when it applies to the Unionists. There is a real need for the reinforcement of the Unionist community and of its confidence. That is not something we can do but is a problem for the political parties. However, we should be aware that when people are frightened they resort to all sorts of strange stratagems and viciousness.

I do not believe, however, that this should be an excuse for giving in to every demand of the Ulster Unionists on the policy of "Saving Private Trimble". The result is that the more we save Private Trimble the more we undermine Private Durkan.

The more concessions given to the Ulster Unionists on such things as insignia in the law courts etc. the more that undermines the positions of Deputies Mallon, Durkan and others who went onto the police board in good faith on the basis of what they thought would be introduced by a British Government and on what was contained in a criminal justice review.

The whole question of symbols within that has now gone. The Government has refused to take on board the necessity of having balance between the communities in the law enforcement agencies. The role of the DPP has been left largely unchallenged. When we add to that the break-in in Castlereagh, which immediately brought to mind such issues as shoot to kill, Stalker, Stephens, Finucane, Nelson, the bombings in Dublin and Monaghan, the role of the security forces and their collusion with extremists and the possible implication of Governments in those events, it raises real problems about belief in the security forces and belief in the power of the Northern Ireland police service.

The only silver lining in that matter has been the courageous stand of the police ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, both on the question of Omagh and also through her quick-wittedness in not being dragged into what is likely to be the morass of Castlereagh. There she could have been paraded as somebody with a great reputation but in fact she would have no real power in regard to the FRU, MI5 and MI6. She was very wise to stay out of that. We must bear these things in mind because their satisfaction will be the underpinning of what has been achieved in the Belfast Agreement. There is real danger that the more the Government seeks to uphold David Trimble the more he is seen as a puppet of the British Government by the DUP and its supporters and the more damage that does to constitutional nationalism.

The real problem we will have on that will be in relation to how well, or otherwise, Sinn Féin does in the elections in the Republic. If Sinn Féin does well there that will be reflected in the results for the Assembly elections. If, however, the strength of reaction now appearing in Kerry over the question of vigilantes and Sinn Féin can be used to undermine Sinn Féin's situation in places like Dublin that will not only be a blow for democracy and the rule of law but will also be a tremendous help to the forces of constitutionalism in the North.

Mr. John Griffiths AM: Wales is very pleased to be part of this body which does so much to bring people together. There are many links between Wales and Ireland and since the Welsh Assembly has been up and running we have had an Irish Consulate opened in Cardiff. The Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, has addressed the Assembly and we are keen to play a full and developing role.

In that context I would like to pick up on what Mrs. Rosemary McKenna said about this body considering a mechanism for the devolved bodies in Scotland, Wales and the different parts of England to build links with the Northern Ireland Assembly and, hopefully, to play a greater part with the normalisation of politics there. Things have happened at committee, ministerial and backbencher level from the Assembly but

there has not really been any organisational structure to that. This body is the obvious body to take an over-arching role which would look at these matters and see how they could best be brought forward.

For example, when we look at the efforts to twin communities in the North and the South of Ireland we realise the difficulties involved in terms of history and other sensitive issues. We could have parallel processes where communities and voluntary organisations and local authorities in Wales, Scotland and across England might play a part as well as the devolved institutions themselves. There are many interesting possibilities but it needs some organisation and structure. It would be useful if this body examined that and tried to steer it. There is real political will in the Welsh Assembly to try and play a constructive part in helping normalise politics in Northern Ireland. We take an interest in what is happening. We tend to think that no news is good news because in the UK we only ever seem to hear about developments in Northern Ireland if something has gone radically wrong or something looks as if it might go drastically wrong.

We want to play a developing role but what is really necessary first are mechanisms, organisation and structure. We could start by looking at what is already developed and then strengthen and further develop that. This body should take a close look to see how it could be organised and structured.

The Lord Glentoran: I support the idea that the Unionist Party should be here. I have been trying to persuade various leaders of the Unionist Party that they should be here and will continue to do so. I have difficulty with the motion and thought of moving an amendment but it will be a relief to all that I do not intend to do so. Having listened to speakers all around the room there is little that has been said that I disagree with. However, I do disagree with the way that the motion appears, certainly at first reading, to be complacent and perhaps self-congratulatory. That is not the case, as we have heard all around the room. Certainly some things have happened that are good. Certainly we have a human rights commission but nobody is very happy with it as Mrs. Jean Corston said. The most important human right is the right to life, possibly followed by the right to live in your home. That is not anything like universal in Northern Ireland yet and there is not a lot the Human Rights Commission can do about it. We have a police ombudsman. Perhaps she made some tactless mistakes to start with and had a public row with the chief of police. That did not help very much. I am delighted she did not take part but withdrew from Castlereagh. I am fairly certain that Mr. Kevin McNamara knows more about that than he is admitting and his hand, as adviser, was probably in there. Congratulations to him, if it was.

As regards the Executive which was set up as a result of the Agreement, which we certainly support, it is extremely fragile as already stated by Mr. Andrew Mackay and others. The numbers are very fragile. I suspect at the moment that the pro-Agreement parties electorate are in a minority. If an election was held now it is unsure that the pro-Agreement parties would get back in control. Once again we are polarising to the extremes, to the DUP and Sinn Féin, which is also very dangerous.

As far as the police and policing is concerned, it is probably a worse situation than when we met in Bournemouth. As many speakers have pointed out, the number of shootings and beatings has gone up and, in fact, in the last year was the highest ever. The morale of the police force at the moment is low. Sinn Féin are not supporting it and the police are not free to police all over the province wherever they wish. The whole crime situation is continuing to get worse in the areas of organised crime, smuggling, drugs etc. and there is no evidence that it is getting better. As we have heard several times the people who are being disgraced and driven out of their homes by paramilitaries are increasing their numbers and nobody seems to be able to do much to prevent that. The point I am making is that there may be a veneer of nice looking things that have happened, such as cross-Border bodies meeting and working and commissions being set up and "working", but real life is not a great deal better than it was a year ago. I sincerely hope that with some stabilisation through the summer, we may find, next time we meet, that things have improved and have moved forward.

The points made by Mr. Kevin McNamara about the performance of Sinn Féin in the Republic will certainly be very significant to the Unionist movement. The Unionists are very restless, very unsure and very frightened at the moment. My Unionist friends are certainly telling me we have lost the war, it is all over, that there is a huge depressed "giveupsy" about the place. That is going to rebound. The point I am trying to make is that we cannot afford, at any stage, to think things are going well when they are not, to think that things are more or less OK when they are not. We have to well and truly understand what is going on, on the streets, in the communities, how much authority the police has, the extent to which people pay attention to the law, which is very little, and where we need to go from here.

Mr. Robert Walter, MP: I will be brief. I want to pick up on some points made by Mr. Henry Bellingham, MP and Mr. Conor Lenihan, TD. I think there is some scope for real legislative co-operation between the UK and Ireland on the financing of political parties. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, 2000, deals with that situation in Great Britain but unsatisfactorily in Northern Ireland. For the Opposition, I took this legislation through Committee Stage in the House. For the benefit of Irish colleagues I shall tell you briefly that now in the UK any donation over £5,000 is a matter of public record. There are strict reporting and accounting rules for political parties and similar rules for other organisations involved in the political process, including those groups who might be stacked up on either side of a referendum argument. The key to the legislation is that no foreign donations are permitted except in Northern Ireland. I was consistent in arguing against that exemption for Northern Ireland as was my colleague Mr. Andrew Mackay, Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary. The arguments were that these were traditional sources of funding for those political parties and that to remove them would undermine democracy. I suggest Sinn Féin had done enough to undermine democracy without having its funding withdrawn.

In the spirit of co-operation on Committee Stage I proposed some amendments that would have helped the situation and would recognise the nature of Sinn Féin as an

all-Ireland political party. On the basis that British subjects resident abroad, but eligible to be included on the electoral register, could donate to political parties and that citizens of the Irish Republic are also eligible to register to vote in UK elections, my suggestion was that donations from the Republic of Ireland should be permitted to all UK political parties if that was the wish of those making the donations. The objections were that it was not possible to control foreign donations coming into Ireland and it could, therefore, be unworkable with donations coming into the Republic being, essentially, untraceable.

Mr. Conor Lenihan is right. I welcome the moves to introduce similar legislation in the Irish Republic. We have some real scope here to revisit this issue, to accept the realities of cross-Border financing not only to Sinn Féin but to other political parties but to totally reject foreign financing from outside these islands. It cannot be in the interests of democracy in all of these islands to allow foreign money to distort the legitimate political process. I suggest that is an issue this Body could revisit if legislation is being introduced in Ireland to restrict political funding, to restrict foreign funding of political parties, and make recommendations to both Governments to work together in this area.

Mr. Chris Ruane, MP: Thank you for calling me. It is indeed my first appearance at this British-Irish Parliamentary Body and I feel privileged to be here. My grandfather Tom Ruane was involved in 1916 and, in fact, was imprisoned in Wales in Frongoch with Michael Collins, and in 1918 he was imprisoned in Lincoln Jail with De Valera. My family in Ireland have a strong tradition of active involvement in politics as do my Welsh family. When asked if I am Welsh or Irish I say I am "Wirish", I have got the best of both worlds. It is great to be here as a Welsh MP. We have strong representation here today from Wales, from parties including Dr. Dai Lloyd, Mr. Lembit Opik and Ms Eleanor Burnham from the Liberals, myself, Mr. John Griffiths, Dr. John Marek, Labour and Mr. David Melding for the Conservatives. We can bring a Welsh perspective to this. The Lord Dubs mentioned before the problem of language and how it is being politicised in Northern Ireland. The language in Wales was politicised 25 years ago. All parties in Wales now have a positive attitude towards the Welsh language. That is something we can bring as Welsh politicians.

Listening to the debate today we have focused on many of the problems, many potential failures and possible failures. We need to appreciate how far we have come, however, when we consider that the problems in Ireland go back 700 years. There is a historical, religious, economic and national aspect to those problems but this is the best chance we have ever had in that 700 year period of solving them. It is important to focus on the issues of decommissioning, Castlereagh, David Trimble's insults to the Republic, the referendum and on the run political prisoners but it will be a fine balance if we do not examine the successes we have had and future opportunities. We have had successes. Institutionalised inequality is being brought to an end. We have economic success in Northern Ireland. Belfast has the fastest growing house prices in the entire country. That is a success because people would not have lived there previously. I am sure the soldiers and the policemen on the

streets would say there have been successes also. They are no longer being shot at as they were in the past.

When we get upset about what politicians in Northern Ireland from whatever side say about various issues, be it Gerry Adams on decommissioning, David Trimble holding hands with Ian Paisley wearing his bowler hat, denigration of the Republic or the referendum, we should appreciate what they are saying and to whom they are speaking. That is the key. Politicians in Northern Ireland often play to different audiences, be it the UK Government, the Dublin Government, their own political parties, factions within those political parties or the Opposition. As elected representatives, we must be careful that we do not bring our own political agenda to the problems in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has enough problems as it is without us introducing our own political agenda. We must desist from brinkmanship and whipping up the situation. As Andrew Mackay said, we have to be careful about taking the people of Northern Ireland to the edge because over the edge is a broken peace process, another Palestine, with more murder, war and upset.

We also have to bring in the Ulster Unionists and the DUP. As Kevin McNamara said, it is the working class Protestants in Northern Ireland who have gained the least out of this process, and we have to take account of that. If we arrange visits to Northern Ireland, as suggested by Rosemary McKenna, we should not focus only on the political institutions. We should get out on the streets and say, as Welsh, Scottish, Guernsey or Isle of Man MPs, that we are there to listen to the people. As Lembit Öpik said, we might gain more if we were out there bonding with people rather than sitting around a table listening to each other's speeches. We would be more free to discuss issues and work on areas that unite us rather than divide us. We could dwell on the positive, not the negative, and success as opposed to failure.

Like other politicians in Westminster, I have approached John Reid to discuss the possibility of having all-party trips to Northern Ireland so that we can meet the people, calm their nerves, work with them and hopefully draw them fully into the peace process.

Deputy O'Kennedy, Co-Chairman, resumed in the Chair.

Co-Chairman, Deputy O'Kennedy: I thank David Winnick for taking over during my unfortunate absence. I am sorry I missed some of the debate but I will get a full report on it. I understand the next speaker will be Seamus Kirk followed by Michael Mates, who will conclude on behalf of the Steering Committee.

Deputy Seamus Kirk (Louth): Thank you, Chairman. I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution although coming in at this point in the debate, there is a danger of falling into the trap of repetition but I am sure the principal points have already been made.

Listening to the contributions of various speakers, one could detect a certain air of pessimism about what is happening on the ground in Northern Ireland and while

that is understandable in certain circumstances, the Body should remember that it will take time to address the anti-social problems, etc. Those problems will not just go away. If the paramilitaries have the degree of respect in communities that we are led to believe, that stranglehold will not be broken overnight.

One could put different interpretations on the remarks made by the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party about the state of affairs in the Republic. Were they designed to deflect attention away from problems in his own party or a personally held view that nothing has changed in the Republic? The truth probably lies somewhere between the two, which is disappointing because nobody could disagree with the observation that significant change has taken place in the Republic in the past 25 years. That process of change is continuing.

There is no doubt that the political convulsions involved in changing long established mindsets in the North will continue for a period. The fragmentation of the Unionist party generally has a certain destabilising effect on the contribution from that side of the community to the whole peace process. Even if we are somewhat concerned about the air of pessimism surrounding the process of institutional change, it is important that we continue to progress it in an unrelenting way because the harmonisation of regulations can be immediately affected.

I will give two examples in that regard. Recently, our Department of the Environment and Local Government introduced a new penalty points system for drivers in the Republic. There is a database requirement for that system, the putting in place of which is progressing, but a significant percentage of Northern drivers who drive in my constituency of Louth and along the Border area on a regular basis are involved in accidents on our roads. That is one practical example of where we can harmonise our efforts to minimise the accident rate on our roads North and South. Clearly changes will be needed and we should accelerate those changes.

Twelve months ago, at the plenary in Killarney, we talked about the issue of foot and mouth disease and the rapid rate at which the disease spread in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and the Republic. Putting in place an all-Ireland animal health regime was also discussed. There would be practical mutual benefits to people North and South in those circumstances. Those are the sort of issues we can progress at a political and institutional level and which will instil the confidence that is sorely needed.

I am aware of the time constraints but I want to make a number of other points.

Co-Chairman, Deputy O'Kennedy: We are not so pressed for time.

Deputy Kirk: At least two other speakers referred to the possibility of the introduction of a truth and reconciliation commission, presumably along the lines of the South African model. That idea has been in the political arena for some time, although it does not appear to have caught the imagination, but having regard to the need for reconciliation in the longer term it requires some examination.

There was an item on the news today about an aeroplane crash which occurred outside Birmingham in 1953, some 49 years ago. The pilot in charge of the flight is now deceased but a tribunal of inquiry into that crash commenced today. During his lifetime the pilot, and subsequently his family, was very dissatisfied with decisions taken at that time which resulted in him losing his job, although I do not know all the circumstances. A burning sense of injustice exists in somebody's heart in relation to that incident. That is minor in the context of what we are talking about achieving, the desired level of reconciliation in the North. There is an argument for at least examining the potential benefits of the establishment of a truth and reconciliation arrangement in the North where the respective sides can come together. It obviously will take place over a protracted period. The process of reconciliation will have to be addressed if there is to be lasting and long-term peace.

A number of references were made to political donations. I was interested to hear the observations of British Members on this issue. It has been a major issue on our agenda. Election agents have been designated as the people with responsibility for ensuring that no candidate overspends in the upcoming general election. It was interesting to hear about the contribution thresholds which apply in the UK. Our thresholds are lower. The degree of accountability is such that one would have to arm oneself with at least two accountants to ensure one does not overspend in the election. It is reasonable to anticipate that we will have some difficulty with the system, unintentional difficulty on the part of individual candidates, unless a degree of discretion and common sense is brought to bear on the considerations of the ethics in public office commission when it examines the returns which each candidate is obliged to make.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Mates MP: I am aware, as always, that I am the only person standing between Members and their pre-lunch drinks so I will try to be brief. Over the years, it has been considered my job to tone down the debate, as it were, and pour a little oil here and there. However, halfway through the debate I was wondering if I needed to ginger it up by throwing in a little controversy, such is the change that has come over this political debate in the last ten or 12 years.

There has been a large measure of agreement. On the one hand there is a degree of optimism that all is well and on the other, a cold douche of reality from Lord Glentoran about the situation where he lives. By and large, however, people are happy with most of what was said in the motion. It might have been sensible to add at the end of it, although I do not know how it would look in print, that there is a still a long way to go. That is the sense of what most people said this morning.

It is not possible to do justice to the 20 speeches in the few minutes I have before Members leave for lunch. From the opening contribution of Deputy Crawford, a tone was struck about how far we have come but how far there is to go, particularly when he mentioned the issue of foot and mouth and animal health. That was echoed by Deputy Kirk. Perhaps the Body would forgive a personal reminiscence but in the

early 1970s I was lying in a ditch in south Armagh, about three quarters of a mile from the Border at about 2 o'clock on a February morning, wondering why I was doing that for a living. I was a soldier before I entered Parliament. There seemed to be nobody else in the world when suddenly I heard a noise. The adrenalin started to flow. The noise grew louder and I pressed myself further into the ditch, trying to make myself inconspicuous. The noise became a roar and the roar became a thunder and about 100 heifers came by, all on their way south to get their ears tagged in order to attract another European bonus before they were marched back into the North.

Deputies Crawford and Kirk are right about disease and animals. The animals do not know about the Border or about Nationalists and Unionists. People in Ireland live on an island, just as the British do in Great Britain. Common arrangements to protect animal health, human health and many other matters which have nothing to do with the Union or nationalism can be nothing other than a good idea. I hope these joint Bodies are addressing this and will achieve progress in these areas, particularly the ones that are less controversial. That will mean the people living both North and South will see the fruits of Good Friday. The only fruit that can be seen at present is that, by and large, people have stopped killing each other. It is the other side of progress that people, particularly those in the North, will be seeking as a sign that the Good Friday Agreement has material benefits for them.

Deputy Crawford also mentioned, as did several others, that the problem of decommissioning has been a roadblock. The first act of decommissioning took place in October and it was welcome but it was a relatively small act. There has been none since or if there has been, it has not been reported. The cynic in me would say that once the Irish election campaign begins there will be an act of decommissioning which will be reported because Sinn Féin and the IRA will see it as being in their favour. I would further say it is unlikely there will be any more acts before the Assembly elections next May. We must make the point that this is not good enough and that, in order to keep the process rolling, there must be continued advances on this issue. Meanwhile, as Mr. Bellingham said, it is now public record that they are taking steps to increase their arsenal. If they are simply burying old arms and purchasing new arms, it is not decommissioning in the sense that any reasonable person would understand it.

Much has been said about truth and reconciliation. While the idea is good, I doubt that it is a practical proposition at present. Most of the people who perpetrated most of the acts of violence on both sides of the political divide, particularly those on the run, are not sorry for what they did and will not promise not to do it again. Given the chance and the political circumstances, many of them would be only too ready to return to the life they lived for all those years. Every day something would be uncovered on one side and there would be pressure from the other side to respond to it. The sectarian arguments, that still exist, would rise up again into the public domain. That would be unhelpful to the calming process which everybody has been trying to secure.

One of the Members mentioned organised crime and the involvement of paramilitaries. My select committee is looking into the financing of terrorism at present. We have learned much about organised crime and how the paramilitaries are getting involved in the smuggling of cigarettes and oil and in protection schemes. I hope our report on this will be sobering with regard to the size of the threat that exists. Although they are not setting out to bomb and murder as much as they did previously, they are still involved in the type of organised crime that undermines society regardless of whether it has sectarian problems.

Of the suggestions which were made, Mr. Griffiths AM referred to a point which I hope the Steering Committee will consider. Now that the composition of this Body has been widened, and we see the benefit this morning in the speeches of the new Members, we need to find a way to make it more active in getting the members of the various assemblies on the islands to interact between these plenary conferences. I hope the Steering Committee will take up this issue and think of a way, possibly through the committee structure, to ensure this happens. The greater the understanding and familiarity, the more sense that will be spoken.

Mr. Walter mentioned the important point, which has not received the publicity it deserves, of the financing of political parties. I have heard from Irish colleagues that Sinn Féin has got a lot of money to run its campaigns, print its leaflets and to ride around in chauffeur driven cars, while the Deputies whom I have known of old are tramping the streets on foot and wearing out their shoe leather. I have no doubt there is a little bit of technicolor added to that, but it is a serious point. Sinn Féin is the only party on these islands which will be allowed to raise funds overseas once the law is passed. That will make it the richest party in Europe. That does not make a level playing field from which to fight elections. The British Government has been remiss in excluding Northern Ireland from the good legislation passed. I hope it will revisit that. It will be encouraged to revisit that if the Irish Government can make the strongest representations, having made its own legal changes, so that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.

We have made progress, but there is still a long way to go. Anyone who thinks the bitterness and the divide, which was hidden by 30 years of trouble and is now surfacing among the communities because the fear of death has gone, does not exist, has got it wrong. We have a long way to go to heal those scars and it will take many years.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): That was an excellent debate in which all the views were spoken with clarity and conviction. One would expect that from such a body. Those who are not with us this morning would have benefited in one way or another from attending the debate. I regret the fact that Sinn Féin is not represented here this morning, although it was represented at our plenary meetings. It would have been a salutary experience for it to hear the views expressed by everyone who spoke this morning. I also regret that our Unionist colleagues are not here. If they were here, they would not find any sense of threat, hostility or takeover. It is

understandable that they would be concerned, if their genuine belief is that there is an intention within this jurisdiction to embrace them against their will.

Practical co-operation can only be of benefit to all concerned. As regards an island regime under the Belfast agreement for disease and animal control, could it be suggested that that compromises long held political traditions or convictions or that we are on the slippery slope to a united Ireland? I note with satisfaction that such a term was not used this morning. I have not heard anyone from this jurisdiction use that term. However, I have heard them say that we should come together by agreement on matters of common interest and reach conclusions on such matters. It can hardly be a threat to anyone if we talk about disease control or road traffic problems and road safety. I cannot imagine there is anything remotely politically risky about discussions and reaching conclusions on such matters. It was the intention of the Good Friday Agreement that we would all find reasons for common cause.

I regret that our Unionist colleagues have not seen fit to join us here today. Some things which were said recently by Lord Laird have no basis in any position taken by me or my colleagues on the steering committee. Views attributed to him - by way of confirmation of David Trimble's view of this mono-ethnic confessional state - suggested that he knew from his recent experience that we had closed the door on him coming to address this gathering. That was not the case. He would have found that there was a wish to have all views, including those we might not find palatable, expressed here. As Co-Chairman, I did not signal any intention to exclude anyone from this gathering. We want to see all those views represented.

I am gratified to note that after a relatively short while as members of this body our colleagues from the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the islands have played a positive and significant role in many of the debates and suggestions made this morning. It is right that should happen. We are all becoming more interdependent in a world where major decisions are taken. That has been a positive development in all our discussions.

It has been a positive debate. As I come to the end of my term as co-chairman, I am gratified that we have found and reaffirmed our commitment to all the elements of co-operation, advancement and common cause in the interests of all our citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I am happy to record that the motion has been unanimously adopted by the body. The agreement and the conclusion of the body will be sent to both Governments and to interested parties for their information and response.

That concludes our first session. When we resume at 2.30 p.m., we will have a debate on the joint bid between the Celtic nations, the Scots and the Irish, to host the European Cup.

Sitting suspended at 12.50 p.m. and resumed at 2.37 p.m.

Session resumed at 2.37 p.m.

5. JOINT BID TO HOST THE EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS, 2008: MOTION

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We have a quorum so I wish to move on to the next item on our agenda, which is item 3 - motion on the joint bid to host the European football championships, 2008. The motion has a particular significance for our Celtic representatives and I am sure those of you who do not share that very special blood bonding will support the motion in one form or another. I will now call upon Ms Shauna Robison, a Member of the Scottish Parliament, to formally move the motion, and open the debate.

Ms Robison, MSP: I move:

That the Body welcomes the joint Scottish-Irish bid for the European Championships, 2008; recognises that Euro 2008 provides a great Opportunity for both Scottish and Irish tourism; and, looks forward to Euro 2008 further enhancing relations between both nations.

I want to say how pleased I am to attend my first meeting of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. I am told that from now on I should refer to it as the body, so I will do so. It has been a very interesting morning and I pay tribute to you, Co-Chairman, for providing the very good hospitality. While it is always difficult in the postprandial session, when one has consumed a three-course lunch, to concentrate on what one is doing, I will do my best.

I am very pleased that this motion has been selected for debate because the European Championships, 2008, provide a very good co-operation opportunity both for Scotland and Ireland. I should make it clear from the start that I am not a football expert, although my husband is a self-confessed Dundee United supporter.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Oh dear!

Ms Robison: This is also the case for the Minister for Sport in the Scottish Executive, who supports the same football club. For those who follow the Scottish premier league - and I can hear from the groans that there are a number in this room - they will know that being a Dundee United supporter is a cause for concern at the moment. One can only live in hope, however, that the club will start to do better. Dundee is the venue for one of our new proposed stadiums which would be a shared ground between the city's two clubs. I certainly hope that proposal comes to fruition.

Football is an important way of life, so to speak, for both Scotland and Ireland. I do not think one needs to be too good at something for it to be a way of life. I have

great faith that Berti Vogts' ability to turn our fortunes around will be seen in the near future, although I am not quite sure if Berti Vogts knows what a big job he is taking in hand. A big challenge lies ahead of him.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I do not want to intervene but when you mentioned Berti, people here might be confused about which Berti you are talking.

Ms Robison: Berti Vogts, not Bertie's Bowl. They are two different Berties.

Our footballing traditions make it very appropriate that we have agreed to submit a joint bid for the European championships. Our joint reputation for friendly fans - they come no more friendly than the tartan army - and our strong footballing tradition will stand us in good stead against our competitors for this very prestigious sporting event.

This sporting event is the third largest in the world with an estimated television audience of a staggering seven billion people. It will be a great opportunity to provide a very much needed boost to our respective tourism industries which have had a hard time of late, particularly since the tragedy of 11 September. It is estimated that the tournament will attract around 400,000 overseas visitors to Scotland and Ireland and an extra £450 million will be spent on travel, accommodation and related leisure expenditure during the tournaments. That will be a real boost to both our economies. Thousands of new jobs are expected to be created in the preparations for the tournament, during the tournament itself and, hopefully, in its aftermath.

The deadline for the official bid is 31 May. A great deal of work has already gone into the joint bid and more will have to be done before that deadline. I am confident that any potential difficulties, the obvious ones being the issue of the new stadium and a certain general election which is in the offing, can be overcome. I sense a political will in Scotland and Ireland to make this joint bid a success. Where there is political will, no matter what the practical barriers, they can always be overcome. I look forward to both our nations benefiting from this joint venture and forming an even closer relationship in the process of that joint venture.

Mr. Battle MP: It is a pleasure to speak on an issue about which I have a little knowledge. I am delighted this topic is in this slot. I support the motion and I say that as a Yorkshireman. I have to declare an interest as we get down to the really partisan business. I am the supporter of a winning team - Leeds United. It was winning at the beginning of the season when I saw the first match against Arsenal in a bar in Roscommon. We had a patchy period in the middle but we are still supplying three players to the Irish team and two players to the Scottish which is rather more than we have provided to the English. In that spirit, I support the motion.

I would like to make a more serious point as well as supporting this bid of the Scottish Football Association and the FAI to host the European nations football championship. If one looks at the list of competitors, one is Greece and Turkey which

is interesting because I, in a perverse moment, was tempted to ask if they will hold the matches in Cyprus, for example. I make the point half seriously because it is a way to bring together and reassess pasts and traditions. Bill Shankly, when asked whether football was a matter of life and death, said that it was more important. In some ways, I believe that to be true.

In 1994 in an essay entitled, *The Lie of the Land - Some Thoughts on the Map of Ireland*, Fintan O'Toole made the point that although Dublin and Edinburgh are of equal distance from the Rhine, Edinburgh, accordingly to a certain German map of Europe's new economically defined regions, is part of the core whereas Dublin is part of the outer periphery simply because Edinburgh is more accessible and richer and that in this sense, the new map of post-1992 Europe is one in which Dublin and Belfast are in the west along with Warsaw, Bucharest and Lisbon, while Edinburgh and London are in the east along with Stuttgart, Nice and Rome and where space is measured not in miles or kilometres but in marks or francs it is hard to get one's bearings. That was written in 1994. I think the terrain has shifted massively more recently as Ireland is now centred in the heart of European developments and movements such as the adoption of the euro. Politically and economically, Ireland has moved well in from the periphery. This is a period in which the relationship between Ireland and Scotland could be a very fruitful source of future development discussions. Both are doing well and in a different relationship to the centre.

There is a brilliant set of essays published by Cork university, *The Irish Review*, and the current edition is on Ireland and Scotland - colonial legacies and national identities. That issue is moving on to the agenda again. Roddy Doyle's advice to the citizens of the Republic in 1997, which I think is appropriate to everyone whether living in England, Wales, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, was that we should all take our passports to bed with us because we are not sure whether we are going to wake up in a different place. I think that is something of the 21st century agenda.

There is a bit more to football than the partisanship on the terraces. Coming out of Elland Road after a nil, nil draw I turned to a guy and asked him if he enjoyed the game. He said he had and that the best part of the game was the minute's silence for the television commentator at the beginning. I think we can get beyond that. As its best, sport has a capacity to affirm, to contain and to transcend local tribalisms, although at its worst, it reinforces them. It is not just investing in the value of the television franchises or in the tourism. It would be a symbolic cultural event if Scotland and Ireland manage to get together in the same way as I would like to see Belfast be the city of culture in Europe in 2008. Both those events would be a massive symbolic affirmation of what is going on on what used to be regarded as the periphery of Europe.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We will have to readjust our awareness of the geography of Europe from your opening words. It all depends which point you regard as what the Greeks used to call the omphalos ges, the navel of the earth. If you start from Edinburgh, then the rest is periphery and if you start from somewhere else, then Edinburgh is on the periphery. We would be on the periphery in any event.

I would like to make two points of clarification in respect of terminology. My co-chair asked me to mention that the 'Warsaw' to which you have referred is not the 'Walsall' he represents. As regards the terms of the motion, the bid has been submitted by the Scottish Football Association and the Football Association of Ireland. It is a joint bid on the part of both football associations. It has nothing to do with the Governments as such. I gather it does not include the Northern Ireland Football Association, although I am quite sure that if it wished to be involved in the bid, it would not necessarily be excluded. The football associations have taken this initiative. Anything we say here is by way of recognition, support or encouragement to the football associations.

Mr. David McLetchie MSP: I will be playing four-four-two in this contribution and I could do with a good striker up front who could get me a few decent points. I welcome the announcement that the Scottish Executive and the Irish Government would support the joint bid of their respective football associations to co-host the European Championships in 2008. It was a cause of particular satisfaction for us because one of my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament first suggested, in June 2002, that it might be an appropriate way ahead in terms of mounting a successful bid for this important football championship.

Inevitably, there have been some political differences of view as to whether or not a joint or solo bid should have been promoted. I wish to reinforce a point which Ms Robinson made. She speaks from the perspective of the SNP and pointed out that the Conservative Party members of the Parliament fully support the decision behind the bid and that irrespective of any changes in political complexions there may be between now and 2008, there is joint support in the Parliament for a joint bid and a willingness to acknowledge that this involves commitments on the part of the Governments to back it and that it will have our support.

Inevitably, much attention in these matters focuses on problem areas, especially the vexed issues of disputes about facilities, stadia and infrastructure. We in the Scottish Parliament are no strangers to controversy when it comes to debates about major public works and the financing of them. Inevitably, much comment in the Scottish press, and perhaps in Ireland, has focused on debates about facilities and stadia. I now consider myself to be fully conversant on issues to do with Stadium Ireland, the refurbishment of Lansdowne Road and the constitution of the GAA, all subjects on which I thought I would never gain any expertise. However, as Ms Robison outlined in her contribution, we in Scotland also have issues to resolve in terms of getting our stadia in place.

The important thing to recognise in all of this is that the Scottish-Irish bid is well ahead of the field in terms of the facilities that are already in place. We should reflect on this. It puts it into perspective that Portugal, which will host the championships in 2004, has still to advise on the stadia in which the games will be played. I have no doubt that if our bid is successful and accepted in December when UEFA makes a decision, we will be able to put the facilities in place, in both Scotland and Ireland, to ensure that there will be a first class championship.

The title of the motion refers to the joint bid to host the European Cup. However, we are concerned with the European Championships. Scotland will host the European Cup final this May. One of the reasons we are able to do so is because we have a national stadium that meets the requisite standards to host an event of size, scale and importance. Perhaps people in Ireland might reflect that if they wish to do likewise in terms of major international events the facilities must be in place.

The joint bid for the European Championships puts us in a very strong position *vis-à-vis* our competitors, most of which are themselves joint bids involving adjoining football associations. The last European Championships were jointly hosted by Holland and Belgium and this year's World Cup will be jointly hosted by Japan and South Korea. There is no reason to believe, therefore, that a joint bid has any less prospect of success than a solo one.

Whatever our game may be and regardless of whether or not we are soccer fans, we must recognise that as a sport, football has a global reach unlike no other. If we are successful with this bid and if Scotland and Ireland host these championships that will offer a tremendous opportunity, as the motion identifies, for the joint promotion of Ireland and Scotland as international tourism destinations. It will provide a great focus for our tourism board and the new tourism board of Ireland to jointly work to promote our countries as such.

It will also provide an opportunity to focus on other issues surrounding major events such as this, especially transportation issues. It might provide a catalyst for discussions about the costs of travel between our respective countries, whether by sea or air, and whether some reforms might appropriately be made to the high levels of them. This continues to be a major problem.

A successful bid will also offer encouragement to consider joint working and partnership bids in relation to other international sporting events. We must all recognise that England is a country with the resources to go it alone in terms of mounting bids for major events. However, if we in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or Ireland want to get a slice of that cake, then working jointly offers the best opportunity to bring these major events to our countries and to promote them on a world-wide basis to the benefit of our citizens.

Although as a Scot it grieves me that our team will not be in Japan or Korea this summer, I wish to put on record our best wishes to the Irish and the English teams in the World Cup. I hope the performances of the teams on the field and the conduct of their fans and supporters will be a credit to us all in the British Isles and that this will give a significant boost to the prospect of a successful bid by Scotland and Ireland for the 2008 European Championships.

Co-Chairman, (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you, David. You are right to mention that the title to item 3 is incorrect, although the motion itself is correctly worded. Item 3 refers to the joint bid to host the European Cup while the motion refers to the European Championships.

Mr. Dai Lloyd AM: I reiterate the welcome to this motion. I must declare an interest as a Swansea City supporter, which is not setting the lower regions of the Nationwide Third Division alight. I am pleased to support the motion, providing as it does recognition of the footballing success of Scotland and Ireland, especially in recent years.

I speak on the back of an especially bleak weekend in Wales, at least in rugby terms. Our football team hardly excels either, standing as it does at No. 101 in FIFA's world rankings. In international terms the Welsh rugby and football teams perform a valuable role because it is not all about success, it is about how one plays the game. If one's international team is riven by self doubt, distracted by division, riven by a lack of confidence and on a terrible run of results I suggest it play Wales and see all these problems disappear. England and its fine rugby team had a little element of self doubt, having suffered a defeat at the hands of France. On Saturday it took approximately three minutes to clear up.

We in Wales take our role in bolstering the performances of international teams seriously. We are always losing to emerging footballing nations, such as Moldavia and Belarus, who I welcome on to the world stage; we are always giving Liechtenstein and Malta a sporting chance and for generations we have always failed to qualify for the later stages of any major football tournament. However, this motion is about Ireland and Scotland moving ahead with confidence, ability and vision and we wish you well. We also wish Ireland well in this year's World Cup. Should either Scotland or Ireland suffer a dip in form or start losing and should that old self-doubt start creeping in prior to 2008, they should play Wales and we will put them right.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you for that support, understanding and reassurance. It will infect both our teams as they perform in these championships.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay MP: Almost uniquely, I find English Premier League football extremely boring. It attracts a disproportionate amount of time and energy of politicians and when they touch it, it all seems to end in tears. Therefore I approached this with some caution.

However, this is an important bid. It is bigger than football. The nature and scale of the football associations of Scotland and Ireland are not in the same category as the industry, not sport, which is the dominant feature in England. There is still a great deal of cultural pride and heritage involved in soccer in Scotland and Ireland and for that reason I am very interested in saying something positive about it.

Because of all the attraction which could flow from a successful bid to the benefit of Scotland and Ireland, I would also hope that the appropriate Ministers in the Scottish Executive and in the Republic of Ireland, to the extent that might be facilitating and assisting - they should not do more than that - the bid, will nevertheless try and persuade both the relevant football associations to give some deference, encourage and inclusion in the loop to the Irish Football Association.

The Irish Football Association is the football association which runs soccer in Northern Ireland. Clearly they do not have a stadium which could contribute in any way in terms of providing a venue for the competition but it is important that they should have some involvement. Perhaps there could be spin-offs with the B teams playing in Northern Ireland. This would be a very important occasion for Northern Ireland to benefit from what would be a very successful bid.

I have declared that I do not really have a great interest in soccer but recently I have been to games in Northern Ireland at Ards Football Club which is in their First Division. I wish there were Unionists here to talk about this but I will do it in a surrogate capacity. When a Unionist councillor, who is the chairman of Ards Football Club, had to get involved with ground sharing, he bravely took the Ards Football Club to Cliftonville. Anybody who knows about that would realise that Cliftonville is in the heart of the nationalist part of Belfast. The police authorities were horrified and some of his party were amazed but it proved extraordinarily successful. I do not think that Ards or Cliftonville have had recognition for this groundbreaking decision. It worked extraordinarily well. Much good has flowed from that in terms of training and involving young people from these quite distinct culturally different areas. The tragedy is that the big football teams which give friendlies, which are extremely important to Northern Ireland clubs' status, have not given friendlies to Ards Football Club in recognition. I mention it unashamedly here because it seemed to me that if any MPs here are interested in soccer and have some clout and leverage with some of these big clubs, they just might ensure that these two clubs in Northern Ireland, which have done a tremendous amount to build bridges, are given some recognition for their important work.

Deputy O'Shea: I am the Labour Party spokesperson on sport. My party fully supports this bid and would wish that it is successful. I will not introduce any political note here, except to say that there are sports issues out there in Ireland which will probably be resolved after the general election rather than before it, but no doubt they will be resolved.

One of my great concerns is the drink culture among our young people. Often that drink culture is promoted by sport in the sense that drink companies sponsor sport. When this bid is successful we should seek in organising the competition to lay down a positive agenda for youth. Unfortunately Irish society is becoming more violent and that is partly due to the drink culture of which I spoke. In organising this event, there also should be a strong focus on the social aspect. Every effort should be made to ensure that there is a line set down which will encourage young people, particularly young males, to deport themselves in the best possible way. If we succeed in doing that, there can be a lasting and continuing benefit to society.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you, Brian. Knowing that you are a active supporter of the Gaelic games, your message to all young people engaged in sport or following sport is particularly appropriate at this time.

Mr. Iain Smith MSP: I am not sure I am qualified to speak on a football motion at present because I am a St. Johnston support and anybody who knows the Scottish league will know we are not doing too well this season. However, things can only get better.

I welcome the support that the Body has shown to this bid through allowing this debate and hopefully supporting the motion. It is a good example of the devolved administration being able to work with the Irish Government in order to promote the interests of both Scotland and Ireland in this matter.

It is an important event. As Shona Robison stated in her introduction, the tourism spin-offs from Euro 2008 will be quite large for both Scotland and Ireland if we are successful in getting this bid. There will be 400,000 visitors for the games themselves but that is the only tip of the iceberg because the international television audience will be able to see Scotland and Ireland, at their best, promoting this event and hopefully this will result in many more hundreds of thousands of visitors in the years following 2008.

It is also important that it will bring new facilities to Scotland and Ireland. Scotland requires two new stadia in order to have six stadia of the standard required and Ireland requires at least one additional stadium. The important aspect of those stadia is that they should not be just about the football games and providing new stadia for several football clubs. There is the opportunity to use those to development community facilities at those locations to help develop the game at grassroots level which is important. We must use Euro 2008 to help develop the game in Scotland and in Ireland. Scotland desperately needs the game to be developed because our record of late has not been as good as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. We need the development at grassroots level to bring us back up to the standard we want.

In that regard it is important that the two stadia in Scotland are built not in Edinburgh or Glasgow but in Aberdeen and Dundee - two of the possible options. It is important that the benefit of Euro 2008 is spread across the whole of Scotland. I am particularly keen to see one of the stadia developed at Dundee because it is just across the River Tay from my constituency of North-East Fife, which would provide an excellent base for the countries playing in that particular group. St. Andrew's, in particular, would provide some excellent hotel facilities for those who wish to visit and for those teams. Indeed, it would be an excellent visit for this Body to come and visit in the future. That was my advertising plug for my constituency.

I am looking forward to the games and I hope we are successful in our bid. I also hope the support of this Body will be of assistance in that regard. The Chairman was correct in stating that it is a joint bid between the Football Association of Ireland and the Scottish Football Association. However, it does require the support of the respective Governments - the Scottish Executive and the Irish Government - and the formal support of the UK Government if it is to be successful. In my opinion the

support of the Body will help to keep the bid on track. I welcome that support and I look forward, in particular, to Scotland meeting Ireland in the final in 2008.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I must inform Members that they will each have only two minutes in which to contribute because we are almost out of time.

Mr. Harry Barnes (*North East Derbyshire*): I have only two points to make. The first is probably approaching its sell by date but I hope that the second is still relevant. Andrew Mackinlay made a number of points that are related to the first point I wish to make which revolves around the position of Northern Ireland. It would have been rather nice if the bid had been all-Ireland/Scottish in nature. New stadia have to be built in Scotland and Ireland in order to meet the requirements to host the 2008 championships and Northern Ireland requires a major sports stadium. The latter could have been tied in with the application. Given that the games are to be held in 2008, we will hopefully be well on the road to fully implementing the Belfast Agreement which could have drawn communities together. However, as Andrew suggested, there could be other ways to draw people into some of the activities.

The point I wish to make which is not past its sell by date is who is going to lead the Scottish/Irish bid to host the championships. When England made its bid to host the World Cup, it was led by Bobby Charlton and Tony Banks who were not, perhaps, a dynamic duo in terms of achieving things. Good consideration needs to be given to who will lead the Scottish/Irish bid, particularly from the football side of things, in order that it will be successful. I wish to put forward the name of a person I believe could do quite an incredible job in fronting the bid. He is a very articulate individual and has the right sort of attitude. I refer here to Niall Quinn, who has decided that the proceeds from his testimonial will be given to children's hospitals in the north-east of England and Dublin. In my opinion he is well capable of producing the goods. I have a ticket for his testimonial and I hope the Whips will give me time off to attend it.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): As a native of Tipperary who played against Niall Quinn's father many years ago, all I can say is that I believe Harry's suggestion is excellent.

Ms Cathie Craigie (*Cumbernauld and Kilsyth*): I thought the Chairman was going to eat into my time by telling us an old footballing story and I was going to request some injury time. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate and also the obvious enthusiasm that has been expressed by all the Members of the Body.

The joint bid for the 2008 European Football Championship provides a tremendous opportunity for both countries. As previous speakers stated, the championship is considered to be one of the most prestigious tournaments in the world and comes third only behind the Olympics and the World Cup. The SFA and the FAI, together with the Governments of Scotland and Ireland, have worked really hard in recent months to ensure that the joint bid could proceed. With regard to suggestions that Northern Ireland should be included, I believe the bid has progressed too far for that

to happen. As I understand it, final bids have to be put in by 31 May. I imagine that the Northern Ireland would feel the benefit of the spin-off from the games to be played in the Republic.

We have already identified the need to have people involved who have experience in football. The two people brought in to front the bid are Roy Keane and Alex Ferguson. I am sure Members will agree that these two individuals have wide experience in the game and will prove worthy ambassadors for Scotland and Ireland. We have an expert team of people involved in the steering group, namely, those who represent the sport, tourism and industry and transport. I am confident that the ongoing work being done to prepare our case is being done in a professional manner. As David McLetchie stated, a great deal still remains to be done - particularly in terms of the preparation of stadiums. There are a number of people standing on the sidelines who are criticising, but there are always critics and peddlers of doom and gloom. Unfortunately, these individuals sometimes get too much coverage in the newspapers. Hopefully we can overcome the criticisms and go forward to present the best possible case.

If one considers the other bids and if one is a betting man or woman, it would appear that the joint bid by Ireland and Scotland is worth placing money on. I do not believe we should underestimate the opportunity the championships would present in terms of showcasing our two countries. Reference was made to television coverage and the number of people who would see games.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I apologise, Cathie, but we have entered injury time. Will you conclude your contribution?

Ms Cathie Craigie (*Cumbernauld and Kilsyth*): It is obvious that there is a great deal one could say about this matter. I wish to make a plea to colleagues in Ireland. There are fewer Irish Members present than I would have liked, but I accept that there is an election in the offing. My plea would be to those seeking election in the next number of months to not use this bid as a political football because it will bring benefits to both our countries. I hope the bid will remain above politics and will have the support of all political parties as they go before the electorate.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I call Senator Enda Bonner. I was almost going to call him Packie Bonner, who earned his stripes with Glasgow Celtic and the Republic of Ireland. I do not know if they are related but let us hear from the Senator.

Senator Enda Bonner: I am delighted to contribute to this debate. While I, like most Members of the Oireachtas would probably be greater supporters of the GAA than of Association Football, I did attend the last two world campaigns in which the Irish team was involved. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the forthcoming tournament because the elections will be taking place.

The county I represent, with the exception of a three mile stretch bordering County Leitrim, is separated from the Republic by Northern Ireland. In the bad old days

when this country had a bad economy, the United Kingdom and America were the two countries to which people from Donegal travelled in search of work. In particular, they went to Scotland with which Donegal has a great traditional association. I am delighted, therefore, that the Scottish Football Association has chosen the FAI as its partner in this venture.

I must disclose that I have a vested interest in this matter because I am a season ticket holder with Glasgow Celtic. While I do not attend matches as often as in the past due to my involvement in politics, I was in Ibrox three weeks ago, I will be in Parkhead on Saturday week for the final game of the league season and I will be at the Scottish cup final.

All of the players from Donegal who went on to become Irish internationals learned their trade in Scottish football. Jim Brogan and Paddy Crerand are, even though they played for Scotland, almost fully-fledged Donegalmen because both sets of their parents came from the county. Patsy Gallacher, Johnny Bonnar, Charlie Gallagher, Packie Bonner - who is a cousin of mine - and the best goalkeeper in England, Shay Given of Newcastle United, all learned their trade at Glasgow Celtic. There has been a great association between my county and Scotland.

Hosting the championships would give us the opportunity to update Lansdowne Road. I do not believe we will have to wait until after the general election for confirmation about the second ground because I believe the GAA, at its congress next Sunday, will allow Association Football to be played at Croke Park in a limited way. This means that Croke Park and Parkhead in Glasgow will be two of the finest stadiums used in the championships. It was reported in a newspaper yesterday that the grant available to the SFA to run the championships could be cut back. That would be bad.

I am disappointed that Scotland will not be at the World Cup because the team has always provided great entertainment when it was in it. The team might not have got far but the players and the supporters performed with distinction for their country.

Mr. Jeff Ennis MP: Being born and bred in and representing a place like Barnsley I am delighted to contribute to this important debate because one of Barnsley's most famous sons is a guy called Mick McCarthy. I understand he is currently involved in distinctive Yorkshire football missionary work in Ireland. Mick was born in Worsborough, Barnsley, and I first had the privilege of seeing him play football as a 15 year old for Barnsley Boys and I have been interested in his entire football career, culminating in his appointment as the Irish coach. It gives me great pleasure to support the joint bid being put forward by the SFA and the FAI.

One point that needs to be made is that in recent years the European Championships has made a profit, without taking into account their effect on the tourism industry, etc.. We hosted the successful Euro 96 competition and it had a positive effect. Many people felt it was the most successful football competition to be held on British soil since 1966, when England won the World Cup. There is no

doubt hosting the competition on a joint basis is very much in vogue. Of the seven bids to host Euro 2008, five have been made on a joint basis. The joint bid being put forward by Scotland and Ireland is a unique opportunity for the two countries to attract tourists, which will have a significant effect on their economies. It will also supply a legacy for football development and I wish the bid well.

Ms Eleanor Burnham AM: I am delighted to say a few words in support of the bid. I have tenuous links to football. Unfortunately, our local football club, Wrexham, is an unmentionable. However, my husband was an Oxford soccer blue, trained by Docherty and played at Wembley. Given the difficulties with venues, we, in Wales, should offer our highly successful Cardiff Millennium Stadium to make this worthwhile bid work and perhaps make it a truly UK affair.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I fully support the motion and I am delighted it has come before the Body. I hope it will be highlighted by our respective media as there has been controversy in Ireland regarding the provision of facilities. I will take a cue from my colleague and friend, Deputy O'Shea, not to go down the political route. The lack of proper sporting facilities to international standard in Ireland has been a source of frustration and embarrassment to those of us who have a passion for sport. That ingredient of passion is not fully acknowledged by opponents of the Government's desire and that of many other sporting bodies to build a multi-sport national stadium. It is about passion and not just bricks and mortars, as has been pointed out in earlier contributions.

The FAI, IRFU and GAA have all welcomed the concept. Sadly it has become a political football, that has not been helped by the current controversy about the national aquatic centre, which is the first phase of the national stadium. The decision to embark on the construction of an 80,000 seater stadium was in response to the status Ireland enjoys in world football. Our soccer team has qualified for its third world cup since 1990. We are currently ranked eighteenth in the world. Our top premier league clubs are fully professional and over the past two seasons this has been reflected in results in European competitions, whereas prior to that we were whipping boys similar to Moldova, Belarus and so on.

Our rugby team, following a temporary aberration lasting a few seasons, is heading once again for joint leadership of the Six Nations, while our club sides have an unrivalled record in the European Cup.

The GAA is the dominant sporting organisation in Ireland. Its national league and summer All-Ireland Championships attract hundreds of thousands of supporters to games, which are played in every parish. It is said the GAA, that most Irish of organisations, has consolidated the Norman extinction of the old Irish chieftain system by not only embracing the county system but by identifying the county as being the key element in the same way UK Members identify individual clubs as the key element of support for football.

The GAA, due to its charter, does not permit the playing of some games on its properties. Baseball and American football have been played in Croke Park, while Joe Frazier fought there. The GAA has a highly developed range of facilities that are the envy of every other sporting body on the island, which were built using voluntary labour. The association engenders hostility from certain sections of society, yet it has taken courageous decision to bring its membership into the modern era. The ban on members of the British army and the Police Service of Northern Ireland playing its games has been abolished and its central council has indicated there is a real prospect of Croke Park being used as a stadium for the joint bid if the national stadium has not been built.

Ms Robison put the bid in context when she gave us the statistics surrounding it, including the potential for seven billion television viewers, £150 million UK pounds in tourism revenue and thousands of new jobs. Mr. Battle referred to it as a symbolic cultural event while Mr. McLetchie pointed out there are differing political views on the bid in Scotland. That is also the case in Ireland but, despite the controversy surrounding the stadium venture, there is unanimous support for the bid, even among those who do not care about football. He pointed out that problems relating to provision of facilities in Scotland were resolved.

It is important that the status of the Portuguese facilities should be highlighted in the report because there are people who are under the impression that if the stadia are not in place by the end of the year, all bets are off. However, Portugal is not the first country to be awarded a sporting event without having the requisite facilities in place. One can recall previous Olympic Games and Athens is currently experiencing difficulties in the provision of facilities. It has been a media spectator sport leading up to major international sporting events in recent years. This is nothing new and should not be highlighted.

Mr. Lloyd made a self-deprecating contribution. Like our Scottish friends, I always avidly follow Welsh soccer during qualification for tournaments and I can recall screaming the team on when it had an important match against Romania. It was the closest Wales came in recent times to qualifying and there was a great deal of disappointment in Ireland. However, Wales has a good manager and the nucleus of a good team, similar to Ireland, even though the next qualification is not all that easy. We did beat Italy in the World Cup so hope springs eternal. Andrew Mackinlay said he is not a great supporter of Premier League football but he should not tell them that down in the constituencies around Essex and Sussex. However, I take the point in that calling for the involvement of the IFA in the bid is something many of us would welcome. Again, it is important he outlines the difficulties encountered between Ards and Cliftonville.

Due to my own contacts with the FAI here it is a matter of great regret that the one major all-island sport played in both jurisdictions is not structurally an all-island sport. It is the only major sport that is not an all-island sport. As recently as last month the Irish Rugby Football Union debated whether in fact they should regionalise their national league, the All-Ireland League, but the answer was a

resounding no. That came from the Ulster delegates, who did not wish to regionalise though one would have thought they might want to. That gives the lie to any suggestion that there is an overt nationalist political involvement in the major sports here. If we do nothing else we should, in the context of Andrew's comments about the IFA and others, send out the message that it would be in the best interests of sport if there were to be some move, even at All-Ireland club competition level, towards having some interaction between North and South. The FAI remains ready, willing and able to undertake that particular direction.

I am glad Deputy O'Shea reiterated Labour's support for the bid and commented on the resolution post-election of the facilities involved. Iain Smith talked about the tourist benefits and the TV audience and I take the point - again, developing community facilities as part of stadium development should be highlighted. Harry Barnes talked about the all-island bid and I share your views of Niall Quinn. We are all extremely proud of Niall. Cathie Craigie mentioned the difficulties for Northern Ireland and injected a note of reality into the aspirations for Northern Ireland's involvement. Regarding Roy Keane and Alex Ferguson leading the bid, and the expert team representing all strands of society, this is an extremely professional bid. Senator Bonner referred to the contribution of Donegal footballers to the game and the strong links between Ireland and Scotland. That re-emphasises why this side of the Irish Sea is so supportive of involvement with our Celtic cousins in Scotland.

Regarding the Mick McCarthy reference, I thought Jeff was going to tell us he had worked down the mines with Mick. Eleanor Burnham outlined the various facts and statistics as well as the general welcome there is from the body for this issue. I hope I have been fair to all those who contributed and that I outlined the mood in Ireland regarding this bid. I share what seems to be reflected here - overwhelming support - and we wish it well.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you. There seems to be common purpose among all of us here, even the Anglo-Saxons support this joint venture.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): Thank you very much.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I took your silence as betokening assent. It has been remarkable here - the Gaelic Athletic Association, as Senator Mooney indicated, seems to be disposed towards making its grounds available, and the IRFU and FAI are all at one common cause. I hope political positions will reflect that solidarity as well, as I believe they will.

I will put the motion. Having been in Parlaimid na h-Alba a while back and our people would greatly welcome the support of that body and the Dáil for both bodies.

I move:

That the body welcomes the joint Scottish-Irish bid for the European Championships 2008, recognises that Euro 2008 provides a great opportunity

for
both Scottish and Irish tourism and looks forward to Euro 2008 further
enhancing
relations between both nations.

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Next, we have a group photograph in the Herbert Room, which is where we had the reception the first evening. The light outside is not good and with the Irish weather we might get drenched. We will convene there before 3.45 p.m.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): The Anglo-Saxons are included?

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Yes, as long as you do not tog out in all colours. The photographer wants the picture with the Minister and we will reconvene at 4 p.m. sharp.

Sitting suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.08 p.m.

Co-Chairman, (Deputy O'Kennedy): I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Brian Cowen, who was a Member of the Body for some years before he took on the responsibility of government. While this is his first time to address the Body as Minister, he is familiar with our procedures, programmes and purpose, having played a major role in the Body. Many Members will know him personally from that time.

Since those days we have been joined by our Scottish, Welsh and island colleagues, and some Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is a much expanded Body, a fact reflected by the issues which it discusses. Apart from the political issues, earlier today we reached a unanimous conclusion regarding the bid by the Scottish Football Association and the Football Association of Ireland to host the European Championships in 2008. The Minister must leave here by 5.30 p.m. at the latest. Following his address, he will take questions that have been submitted. Only the questions of members present will be addressed. I thank the Minister for joining us.

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Deputy Cowen): I wish both Joint Chairmen, Deputy O'Kennedy and Mr. David Winnick, well. I have fine memories of my membership of the Body in the early days when we were finding our feet. I am pleased, therefore, to attend the plenary session today in Dublin. This is my first address to this Body in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs. As one of its first members, it is a pleasure to be back in these welcoming surroundings among some familiar figures and faces.

Since becoming Minister over two years ago, hardly a day has passed without my direct involvement in issues relating to Northern Ireland and the broader framework of British-Irish relations. However, I am very conscious that today I am meeting a Body which has been addressing these issues since its inception in 1990. I want to put on record, therefore, the appreciation of the Irish Government for the significant

and continuing contribution made by the Body to the achievement of a lasting political settlement in Northern Ireland.

The Body's ongoing dialogue on developments in Northern Ireland and the wider ambit of Irish-British relations has clearly had a beneficial impact on the improved climate of partnership and mutual understanding between the two Governments and, indeed, between the people of these islands. The presence of colleagues representing so many administrations here today is a powerful symbol of the immense changes brought about by devolution and the Good Friday Agreement. I am confident the Body will continue to thrive in this more inclusive environment and appreciate that our colleagues from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey are already adding a new dimension to its work.

I warmly pay these compliments to the Body not just because it is my duty to do so nor because they are well deserved, which they demonstrably are, but also because of a strong sense of personal identification with its work. I felt honoured to be among the first members of the Body and recall with pride and affection the collective work we began in 1990 and that it is now so ably carrying forward. The distinguished joint chairman, David Winnick, was then a colleague of mine on the Body and we were extremely fortunate in having two exceptional joint chairmen in Peter Temple-Morris, who happily is still a stalwart of the deliberations, and my party colleague, Jim Tunney, who sadly passed away earlier this year. I wish also to acknowledge the sad demise recently of my colleague and former member of this body, Colm Hilliard. Ar dheis Dé to raibh a n-anamacha.

When Gerard Collins, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, addressed the second plenary session of the Body in December 1990, he referred to the prevailing atmosphere of "promise and possibility" and focused his remarks on the themes of dynamism and change in Anglo-Irish relations, both in regard to Northern Ireland and the enhanced relationship between both Governments as partners in an evolving European Community. I think most of us on the Body at that time sensed the fault lines in the sterile *status quo* were dissipating and that we were part of this exciting process of change. However, we could hardly have foreseen the rapidity or extent of that change.

As politicians, it is our job to focus mainly on current problems. We rarely get votes for what we did last year, never mind 12 years ago. Our focus is rightly on what issues need to be addressed now and in the near future. However, in tackling these issues it is instructive, and perhaps sometimes inspiring to take account of what has been achieved, to look in the rear view mirror and see what distance has been travelled. From this distance, a retrospective look back at 1990 sees mixed signs of incipient hope amid continued failure.

On the positive side, the unionist parties were beginning to re-engage following the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the two Governments were working hard to find a basis for talks involving the parties exclusively committed to constitutional means. The Secretary of State delivered a landmark speech declaring the British Government had

no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland, greatly helping to advance the internal debate within republicanism. I am pleased that through this Body, Lord Brooke continues to make wise and helpful contributions to the process. New fair employment legislation entered into effect and there were some signs of a rapprochement in North-South relations, including Charles Haughey's attendance, as Taoiseach, at a major cross-Border conference in Belfast and the welcome attendance of Ken Maginnis at the inauguration of President Mary Robinson in December of that year. On the negative side, there was a continuing and depressing litany of violence. Some 84 people were killed in 1990.

Against that mixed background, it would have been a shrewd colleague who would have predicted in 1990 that within 12 years a multi-party agreement would have been negotiated and endorsed by the people of this island, that a partnership-based Assembly and Executive would exist in Stormont, that vibrant political institutions covering the all-island and British-Irish relationships would operate without controversy, that a policing board comprising representatives of both communities would oversee a policing service beginning an historic process of transformation, that the IRA had begun a process of putting its arms permanently and verifiably beyond use, that the process of normalising the security infrastructure had also begun, that peace on the streets, however imperfect, prevailed across most parts of Northern Ireland and that, in the context of deepening relations between Britain and Ireland, members of this Body would be joined by colleagues from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey.

As against where we were when the Body commenced its work in 1990, the political landscape on this island - indeed, across these islands - has been transformed. Only those in the deepest denial could possibly claim that life is not better as a result of what has been achieved in Northern Ireland over recent years.

To recognise what collectively has been achieved is not to deny that some of the changes involved have been difficult or painful nor that there will be further challenges and obstacles to be faced as we go forward. Nor does it imply that we are smug or complacent in the long term. The reason to reflect on and affirm the extent of our collective achievements is not that we wish to rest comfortably on our past record, it is because it inspires, motivates and emboldens us to complete the job of the Good Friday Agreement and thereby secure a future of harmony and stability for all the people of the island. How do we do that? To paraphrase a political slogan used by the Clinton-Gore campaign in 1992, I would suggest the answer is "It's the Agreement, stupid".

Members will all be aware that the political narrative of the last few years has been dominated by the efforts of the two Governments, working with the pro-agreement parties, to fully implement the agreement. We quickly recognised that only by addressing those issues collectively could we make any progress. However, as we tackled all of these issues - policing, the stability of the institutions, decommissioning and security normalisation - I have been struck time and time again by the integrity and ingenuity of the agreement. It has been and, in my view, will always remain the

template for political progress in Northern Ireland. This should perhaps come as no surprise. The agreement was, after all, the distillation of practically two decades of dialogue and reflection on how we solve the Northern Ireland problem, in which successive Governments and numerous political leaders all played their part. If we adhere to the totality of the agreement - not selectively, not spinning it for our political comfort - I believe the process will endure and succeed.

I have also been very impressed over the last two years by the commitment of the pro-agreement parties to the achievement of Good Friday 1998. Each of the parties has its own difficulties. Each has to manage its internal constituencies. Nevertheless, notwithstanding whatever stresses and strains each party has to deal with, their core commitment to the agreement has remained solid. As David Trimble has often remarked, the agreement has proven to be a great deal more robust than most people imagined. How do we explain this inherent robustness? The answer is that most people realise there is, ultimately, no realistic alternative to the agreement and that, if it failed, we would inevitably, after a period of political sterility, return to its fundamental principles and values.

Looking to the challenges ahead, I also believe the agreement provides the way forward. There has been a great deal of discussion recently about the possible dangers of one alienated community in Northern Ireland being simply replaced by another and what we need to do to address this deficit in confidence. I am very conscious that the acceptance and management of change is difficult and there is always the potential for it to be perceived as threatening. While some may seek to abuse this debate as a coded resistance to the partnership politics envisaged by the agreement, I recognise that many unionists, in particular, people from the loyalist community, are genuinely concerned about their long term future in Northern Ireland. I also accept it is the duty of all political leaders to responsibly address these concerns.

In terms of problems stemming from economic and social marginalisation, disadvantaged loyalist and nationalist areas have ultimately more in common than separates them. I also accept it is the duty of all political leaders responsibly to address those concerns. In terms of problems stemming from economic and social marginalisation, disadvantaged loyalist and nationalist areas have more in common than separates them. After all, the human indignity and demoralisation which results from material deprivation, poor educational attainment and lack of employment opportunities are no differently experienced on the Falls Road than they are on the Shankill Road. I was struck recently by the degree of commonality between the reports of separate task forces looking at the question of economic development in Catholic and Protestant west Belfast. As one distinguished US Senator recently told the Taoiseach in Washington, "The issue here may be less about the relative size of the slice of each community than about increasing the pie for all".

While accepting that the particular nature and dimensions of a problem may vary between communities we must, nevertheless, recognise and act on the commonality of economic and social deprivation on both sides of the community. A segmented

approach which politically prioritises the needs of one community merely risks displacing the alienation from one side of the equation to the other.

It is sometimes argued that since the Agreement the sense of Britishness is being eroded in Northern Ireland and that symbols of importance to unionists are under attack. I would point to the complex balance which the Agreement struck on this issue and to its explicit acknowledgement of the sensitivity of the use of symbols and of the need to ensure they are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. The simple fact is that the circumstances of Northern Ireland are unique. The exceptional constitutional and institutional arrangements under the Agreement reflect that uniqueness. Northern Ireland is neither wholly British in identity nor wholly Irish, but both British and Irish. Its two communities have different and in many ways competing political aspirations and identities, both of which are equally legitimate. In the Agreement we have sought to provide a basis for peaceful and mutually respectful co-existence. In pragmatically handling the issue of symbols we need to find a *modus vivendi* acceptable to all sides which reflects this unique reality and is grounded on the balanced principles and provisions of the Agreement itself.

Another element contributing to a sense of anxiety among some unionists is the long term constitutional future of Northern Ireland, provoked in part by speculation about demographic shifts and the result of the 2001 census, early analysis of which will be published later this year. Some on the nationalist side are keen to fast forward the process and to focus on the context in which unionism would give its assent to a united Ireland. Others on the unionist side wish to arrest the debate by testing the matter in a Border poll next May. The debate which would surround such an early poll would, inevitably, be divisive and polarising at a time when our immediate task must be to continue the work of implementing the Agreement and of building on its fundamental principles of partnership, equality, reconciliation and mutual trust. That is one of the main reasons for my deep reservations about the wisdom of any Border poll in the near future and I fear it would distract from the urgent challenges we now need to address.

Despite the undoubted progress we have made, it is clear that the core values of the Agreement have yet to be embraced by many in Northern Ireland. From the appalling scenes at Holy Cross school and recent events in north Belfast we know the cancer of sectarianism remains a virulent phenomenon in some parts of Northern Ireland; that paramilitary organisations continue to prey on disadvantaged communities; that the despicable practice of punishment attacks is a reality and continues; that the abhorrent practice of exiling by paramilitary organisations remains a problem; and that dissident republicans and renegade loyalists continue to defy the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland and of this island as a whole.

What we need in the immediate term is a sustained period of political calm in which we can address these problems by demonstrating the tangible benefits of partnership politics across all communities on the island and within Northern

Ireland; by consolidating and implementing the promised new beginning in policing so that the PSNI is welcome, accepted and supported in all communities in Northern Ireland; by ensuring that the process of putting arms beyond use is further progressed by the IRA and that it begins on the loyalist side; and by further securing the human rights and equality agenda at the heart of the agreement.

The greatest reassurance that can be given to those who have genuine fears about the future is to highlight the central organising principle at the core of the Agreement. That is the rigorous equality now prescribed between both communities in Northern Ireland. The Agreement recognises that if the problems in Northern Ireland stem from a failed hegemony of orange over green the situation would be equally shameful and unworkable if it merely reversed the order. Some of the current fears arise from a mistaken view that the equality agenda represents a litany of concessions to nationalists at the expense of unionists. The opposite is, in fact, the case. The equality provisions of the Agreement transcend the traditional political model in Northern Ireland which in the past always operated through a zero-sum prism of winners and losers.

Recognising that equality was the indispensable condition for stability and a democratic society, the Agreement provided equal rights and protections for both communities, irrespective of the constitutional status in Northern Ireland or which of its communities should be in the minority. Equality is not about political expediency and is most certainly not about a nationalist gain and a unionist loss. It is about ensuring that everyone in Northern Ireland is a winner, both now and into the future.

In pressing on with the implementation of the Agreement we should be sustained and encouraged by the remarkable progress made over recent years. None of the problems we face are insuperable. Compared to the obstacles already overcome, the outstanding difficulties are not intractable. In going forward, we should be determined to pursue the next phase of the process with energy, positivity and commitment and above all, the peace process must not be a cold house for confidence, hope and optimism.

The progress in Northern Ireland in recent years owes much to the greatly improved climate in the wider British-Irish relationship. At all levels the nexus of relationships between these islands now displays a remarkable vibrancy and maturity. Our political relationships have never been stronger. The close political partnership which has characterised the London-Dublin axis in recent years - exemplified by the effectiveness and ease of the working relationship between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister - has been complemented by the rapid development of contact and dialogue with our colleagues in the devolved administrations in Cardiff and Edinburgh. We attach great importance to the development of our relationships with Scotland and Wales and intend to build on the presence of our consulates there and on the success of the recent high level visits between our respective capitals.

The collective relationships between the various administrations on these islands has also been greatly assisted by the establishment, under the Good Friday Agreement, of the British-Irish Council. The council is taking forward an important programme of work in a range of areas which are of concern to its members, including the issues of combating drugs and environmental matters. In regard to the latter, the nuclear safety and public health dimensions of Sellafield remain of great concern to our Government.

The Irish Government is happy that in recent years members of the British Royal family have made various visits to this country. I was very pleased to meet the Prince of Wales on his recent, and second, visit to this part of Ireland and to be present for his generous and sensitive remarks at the Glencree centre for reconciliation. I was particularly struck by his comment that peace is not just an absence of conflict but also a climate in which "understanding of others goes beyond caricature and where frozen images of hatred and negativity yield to a new vision of shared values and goodness". In many ways the work of this Body, and the presence of the Prince of Wales in this country on that occasion, has helped to move us all beyond those frozen images. His comments about peace echo my own views that peace is brought about, not just by the absence of violence, but also by the presence of justice.

The visits of President McAleese to various parts of the United Kingdom have also been enormously effective in projecting a modern image of Ireland, which transcends the old caricature, and in affirming the importance of the Irish diaspora in Britain. The remarkable success of the this year's St. Patrick's Day parade in London reflects the depth and breadth of that diaspora, that its culture is now part of the mainstream in Britain and that we have happily left behind the troubled years when events of this kind in British cities would simply not have been possible.

The new confidence and maturity in political relationships is also matched in economic and business engagement between Ireland and Britain. Trade between the two countries in the first 11 months of 2001 amounted to some £36 billion, an increase of 20% on the year 2000. The balance of trade falls slightly in our favour with an export surplus of £1.3 billion. While our exports to Britain were traditionally in the area of agrifood, the fastest growing sectors are now software, electronics, telecommunications and other high-tech products and services. Britain also accounts for 55% of total overseas visitors to Ireland, 3.5 million in 2000, and 40% of total tourism revenue. It is also the second largest source of inward investment into Ireland after the US and, reflecting the buoyancy of the Irish economy, several British chain stores have in recent years established new outlets and expanded existing operations in Ireland. Investment is by no means a one-way street. A growing number of Irish companies is investing in Britain, including some State sector companies like Aer Rianta International, which operates the Eurotunnel duty free. In the realm of sport, as the co-chairman said, the degree of interaction between these islands has never been greater. The joint SFA-FAI bid to host the European Championships in 2008 reflects the collective self-confidence and spirit of partnership which now exists between sports organisations in these islands. Even in popular culture, for better or worse, we are progressively blending. Our

susceptibility to British soap-operas is only matched by your enthusiasm for Irish pop groups and rock bands.

A further demonstration of the new maturity I have been speaking of is the transformation that is taking place in the relationship between North and South on this island. Historically, since partition, that relationship had been characterised - let us be frank - by hostility, apartness and mistrust. We lived many decades as strangers to each other. With the Good Friday Agreement, and its recognition of the need for a new beginning, we are starting to change all that. Primarily through its new North-South institutions, new relationships are being forged and developed. Those new relationships have one fundamental truth at their heart - that the best interests of both parts of the island require us to work in partnership together, rather than apart from each other. Partnership makes utter good sense at so many levels and we are already seeing its benefits in tangible terms.

We saw it last year in the hugely effective way the two agriculture Ministers, Joe Walsh and Bríd Rodgers, combined to curtail the potentially devastating impact of foot and mouth disease. We are seeing it also in the new island approach to tourism. Under the umbrella of the Ministers, Deputy Jim McDaid and Sir Reg Empey, in the North-South ministerial council, a new company, Tourism Ireland Limited, has been established to market the entire island of Ireland overseas as a tourism destination. Tourism is a critical economic sector for both parts of the island and one with enormous potential. This initiative makes such obvious good sense for both of us and we have high hopes that Tourism Ireland will be a tremendous success. We are seeing the benefits of partnership also in the world of trade and business. Intertrade Ireland has been established as the body with responsibility for promoting greater trade and business linkages between both parts of the island. It is already making a real impact and demonstrating that by working together we can both achieve more than either of us could do alone.

In political terms also, barriers are being broken down and replaced by bridges. The North-South Ministerial Council has met 53 times since its inception in December 1999. What was previously unthinkable has now become routine. When Seán Lemass met Terence O'Neill in 1965 it was rightly regarded as an historic encounter, but today, Ministers from North and South meet on a routine basis to take forward co-operation to our mutual benefit on a whole range of areas, without fuss or controversy, just simply getting on with the business. Our task now is to build on the North-South foundations that have been laid to continue to deepen trust and mutual understanding, and to ensure that the tremendous potential that the new partnerships hold for all of us on this island in practical terms is realised to the full. There are many challenges ahead, but I am excited about the great opportunity that has been offered to this generation on the island to make sure that the future is very different to the past.

When my predecessor addressed this Body in December 1990, he also spoke of a "fluid and evolving" European institution that was "possibly on the verge of far reaching change" and how people were grappling with absolutely fundamental

questions about the future path the Community was to take. Twelve years later, Europe is again at a similar juncture, although in a radically different economic and political context. As you are all aware, the European Union is entering a crucial phase in its development. This time the forum for the debate is the Convention on the Future of Europe, which has just held its second meeting. I am delighted that the Body has recognised the importance of this debate for Ireland and Britain and that you will be discussing the issue in depth tomorrow morning.

One of the most fundamental questions we now face is how to address the sense of disconnection between the citizen and the European Union. It is not an easy question to answer. What citizens want varies across the Union, as it does within every country. There are, however, certain elements of broad consensus. They want a European Union that is accessible and transparent. The purpose and the actions of the Union must be clear and must be relevant. Its institutions must be effective. They will be judged by how far they can deliver peace, prosperity and security and by what they can deliver above the capability of member states acting alone. In saying that, I recognise that the current institutions have served Ireland well, as I believe they have served the EU well. The Union needs sensible reform and renewal.

Member states also have a responsibility closer to home. National parliaments must play a greater role in the scrutiny of EU business if the sense of disconnection is to be successfully addressed. Our National Forum on Europe addressed this issue recently when it heard from Lord Brabazon of Tara, chairman of the House of Lords European Affairs Committee, on that chamber's scrutiny arrangements. The new scrutiny arrangements planned for the Oireachtas will greatly enhance existing oversight procedures in our legislature and place us towards the top of the European parliamentary league table in that regard. It is also vital that debates take place nationally on issues relating to the European Union. Ireland's National Forum on Europe has succeeded in identifying some of the factors behind the "No" vote against the Treaty of Nice last year. The Government is working to address those concerns while, at the same time, remaining steadfastly committed to the ratification of the Treaty before the end of the year, so as to allow enlargement to take place on schedule. The focus of our national forum has, however, been broader than Nice. It has been a platform for effective and wide ranging debate on Europe and Ireland's place in the European Union. The forum has succeeded in its goal of an inclusive debate and its "mini-fora" held around the country were a particularly effective in helping to bring the debate on Europe physically closer to our citizens.

If the current convention is to succeed, these national and regional debates must be given the opportunity to feed into its work and to make a valuable contribution to the strategic debate on the future of Europe. The Irish Government was very pleased that a number of the Northern Ireland parties took up the invitation to send observers to our National Forum on Europe. I was also delighted to be present at the forum last Thursday when the Deputy First Minister from Northern Ireland, Mark Durkan, made an extremely cogent presentation on the future challenges for the Union and for this island's relationship with a changing Europe.

Both in regard to Northern Ireland and our common membership of the European Union, the British-Irish story of the last 12 years has been delivering on the promise and the possibility identified back in 1990. In this narrative of hope and achievement, the Body represents a very important, if unfinished, chapter. I know that your work continues, enriched by the participation of members from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. Your future work will reflect the benign complexity of the new British-Irish relationship. The Dublin-London axis will now be complemented by a diversity of partnerships on these islands through which we all will benefit. The circle of partnership within the Body will be complete if and when representatives of unionism from the Northern Ireland Assembly take up your invitation to participate. I share your hope that this outcome can soon be achieved.

Finally, as one of those who will soon again have the honour of placing my name before the electorate, I am very conscious that this will be the last plenary session for a number of members of the Body, not least your distinguished Co-Chairman, Michael O'Kennedy. In his distinguished career, Michael has served in a number of Government Departments, including as Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as being EU Commissioner and Co-Chairman of this Body. In the honourable way he has discharged his legislative and ministerial duties over many years, Michael has made an immense contribution to the quality of the relationship between Ireland and Britain. I thank him for his outstanding public service and wish him and his wife, Breda, every happiness and success in their future lives outside of politics. Thank you all.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick): On behalf of the Body, I say how encouraging we found your remarks and the kind reference to the Body's work. As the Minister said, he was among the founding members and made a positive contribution at the time. You said that all is not perfect in Northern Ireland and rightly so but what a remarkable amount of progress has been made in the last four years since the Good Friday Agreement. It is our job as a Body to contribute to that process and consolidate it. Both British and Irish parliamentarians, in their workplace and on this Body, have that responsibility.

I thank Minister Cowen, on behalf of the Body, for his kind and genuine words about his colleague, Deputy Michael O'Kennedy who has had a distinguished career in Irish politics and as the Co-Chairman of this Body. We are pleased that he has been the Irish Co-Chairman and it has been helpful to have someone like him to work with. We are pleased the Minister came along. As someone who remembers his contribution on the beginning of this Body I can say that it is good to see him again in his distinguished role as Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Co-Chairman, (Deputy O'Kennedy): I will refrain from a detailed response to the generous comments made about me. It has always been a privilege to serve in public life and that privilege has been enhanced by being Co-Chairman of this Body.

The Minister has agreed to take questions and some questions have been formally tabled. I remind everybody that he has to leave before 5.30 p.m. The procedure is that the Member in whose name the question is tabled should just signal that he is here to have his question answered. He then gets the first supplementary question. The following supplementary question goes to one or other of the other Members or groups represented here.

6. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

Police Ombudsmen

1. **Deputy Tony Killeen** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs what the implications for the Gardaí are arising from the appointment of a Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

11. **The Lord Dubs** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if the Irish Government has any plans to introduce an Ombudsman system for dealing with complaints against the Gardaí on the lines of that in Northern Ireland.

Minister Cowen: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 and 11 together.

The Office of the Police Ombudsman was established to address the very particular circumstances and concerns about policing in Northern Ireland. These concerns were acknowledged by the parties to the Good Friday Agreement and are currently being addressed by the implementation of the Patten Report recommendations. The Office of the Police Ombudsman is an important element in the new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland.

In this jurisdiction, since 1986, the Garda Complaints Board has been the statutory body with primary responsibility for handling Garda complaints. Following a comprehensive review of these arrangements the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has published a set of proposals to be introduced for dealing with complaints against Garda members by the public. A new Garda inspectorate will be set up for the investigation of such complaints. One of the most significant aspects of the new complaints arrangements will be the fact that the inspectorate will undertake its functions completely independently of any other body, including the Garda Síochána.

In that regard the inspectorate will itself conduct investigations into complaints and for that purpose will use its own personnel, resources and powers. Moreover, the staff of the inspectorate will be appointed specifically for the new body and will be directly responsible to it. I am aware that, in the course of determining the powers and other functions to be conferred on the inspectorate, the Minister for Justice for Justice, Equality and Law Reform has examined the Police Ombudsman machinery that has been put in place in Northern Ireland and also how police complaints are handled throughout the world.

The view the Irish Government has adopted is that what is required is to adopt a system that is best suited to our own needs. This is the principle on which the inspectorate will be introduced. There are elements involved which are similar to those in operation in Northern Ireland. The legislation which is necessary to provide for the establishment of the Garda Inspectorate is currently being prepared. The Irish Government is anxious that it should be introduced as quickly as possible and, accordingly, it is being included in the Government's legislative programme.

Deputy Killeen: The most high profile case examined by Mrs. O'Loan was the Omagh bombing. Most attention focused on the tension, or perceived tension, between the ombudsman and the Chief Constable. There is a North-South dimension to examinations or investigations of this nature but it does not seem to be provided for specifically. It is difficult to see how the excellent relations which have been developed between the Gardaí and the Police Service of Northern Ireland can be transposed effectively into a system to support investigation by the ombudsman's office. That office has become an important institution in the post Good Friday political landscape.

I understand that Mrs. O'Loan wishes to have a serving Garda seconded to her office in Northern Ireland. Where does that proposal stand?

Minister Cowen: In December the Police Ombudsman issued a report in relation to the Omagh bombing investigation which raised issues of serious concern about the conduct of the police investigation. At that time the Irish Government said that those concerns had to be fully addressed. The Chief Constable issued a response in January and it then fell to the Policing Board of Northern Ireland to consider in detail the two reports and take the investigation forward.

On 7 February the policing board issued its decisions in relation to the Omagh bombing. These were welcomed by the Government. We stated at the time that the board's decisions would assist the investigation and in the longer term would help to address the important structural issues raised by the ombudsman and by the internal police review, the McVicker report. That remains our view and we look forward to a strengthened investigation as these recommendations are implemented. This represented a significant achievement for the policing board. It is a reflection of the ability and authority of the board that such complex and sensitive issues could be resolved to the benefit of policing and the community in Northern Ireland.

Regarding the North-South aspects which the Deputy referred to, the matter of investigation is for the respective police forces. The level of security co-operation is excellent and at an all time high. There is commitment on all sides and all Governments and authorities are determined to ensure that those responsible for the atrocity are brought to justice. We have had a conviction on a conspiracy charge in this jurisdiction and our investigations continue. The necessary co-operation will continue to be available between the respective police forces until those responsible for the crime are brought to justice.

The Lord Dubs: I thank the Minister for his reply. My understanding is that it goes a long way towards setting up an independent system for investigating complaints against the Garda which is not that different from the system in Northern Ireland. May I put a point bearing on the supplementary question he has just answered. Given the close co-operation on many matters between the Garda and the police in Northern Ireland, and given the likelihood that, on occasion, there may need to be an investigation of a complaint against the police which will involve a joint action, is it possible that the new system for investigating complaints envisaged here and the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland would be empowered to conduct joint investigations of such complaints?

Deputy Cowen: I understand the motivation and the thinking behind the question. One would be naive not to recognise the jurisdiction of issues that are involved. What must be done is to respect the jurisdictional issues on both sides in terms of enforcement of the law. The need for the highest level of co-operation between Gardaí and the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a prerequisite to ensuring we have security and stability and that people engaged in any activities which defy the democratic will of the people of Ireland, North and South, will be dealt with in a way the people are entitled to expect - that is with the fullest possible co-operation.

The best reply I can give Lord Dubs in relation to the question he raises is that it is important that the procedures, North and South, do not deter either side from pursuing the issues that come to their attention for the purposes of transparency and accountability. The only way one can be assured that will not happen is that both Governments are fully committed to the highest possible level of security co-operation on these matters. We all recognise that it is by the authorities working together, both politically and at security level, that one can hope to obtain an outcome which the people would wish to see, which is that those responsible for these terrible attacks are brought to justice.

Mr. Lembit Opik, MP: Does the Minister expect that anyone in the South will be involved in the investigations into the Castlereagh police station break-in and how does he feel about the fact that there will be three investigations rather than one, one of which will be conducted by the Northern Ireland ombudsman? Does he see any potential contradiction in having the three together?

Deputy Cowen: Obviously the Secretary of State has raised the issue given that the question of national security was involved and, therefore, asked that Mr. John Chilcott should conduct an investigation. The primary body which has responsibility for the Police Service is the Policing Board. Obviously it is observing the situation and waiting to see what emerges. We have to see who precisely is responsible for what happened at Castlereagh and there is no point in me pre-empting that. The ombudsman has indicated that it is not her intention at this stage to get involved until she sees whether her terms of reference would enable her to do so. Whatever is the case, I am satisfied this is an issue that must be pursued with the utmost vigour so as to get to the bottom of it because it is important in terms of public confidence in policing arrangements and in the interests of defending the good

name of the policing service itself, should there be no involvement on that side. Instead of adding to speculation let us await the precise parameters. We can then best engage in ensuring that public confidence is restored, which is the important issue. Public confidence must be there for all to see. This matter must be properly investigated and dealt with.

2. Mr. Kevin McNamara MP asked what progress has been made in achieving common policing standards within the two jurisdictions of Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Minister Cowen: The Patten report made a number of recommendations on the need for closer and more structured co-operation between the Garda and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Following the talks at Weston Park much progress was made in taking forward these recommendations. In December, the two Governments agreed a joint implementation timetable. One of the key elements in that timetable on intergovernmental agreement covering all areas of North-South police co-operation is currently being finalised and should be ready for signature in the very near future.

Under this agreement both Governments are going to introduce the necessary administrative and legislative measures for lateral entry enabling Garda officers to apply for posts above inspector level in the PSNI and *vice versa*. In addition, the necessary provisions for secondment with policing powers will be in place by summer 2002, enabling gardaí to serve on a temporary basis in the PSNI between sergeant and superintendent level and *vice versa*. The agreement also involves provision for annual conferences and personal exchanges and hence, liaison, cross-Border training, joint disaster planning, joint investigations and improved communications links.

The two Governments have also agreed to put in place the necessary arrangements to facilitate personnel exchanges in specialist areas such as training and IT. The Garda Síochána and the PSNI have already prepared a joint training scheme. The first exchanges under this scheme commenced on 11 March when Garda training officers from Templemore assisted in the training of the first batch of new PSNI recruits. Such exchanges will take place at regular intervals each year.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: I thank the Minister for that very full and encouraging statement indicating that that part of Patten, following Weston, is being carried out very fully. Given that he made no statement about the common standards for the securing of archives and other documents I hope that will be borne in mind also by the PSNI. What progress is now being made? Following that very comprehensive statement I am looking around carefully for some question to ask. Since he has covered all points I wished to raise, I thank him and suggest we move on to the next question.

Minister Cowen: I welcome the Policing Board's decision of last December that the Bramshill senior command course would no longer be an essential qualification for

applicants to achieve assistant chief constable positions. This removed a major impediment to Gardaí considering applying for such posts up to now.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: I knew that was the supplementary I was expected to ask.

4. **Deputy Currie** asked whether he is aware of the efforts of relatives of the Omagh victims to raise £2 million sterling to fund a civil action against those suspected of being responsible for the atrocity; if he will contribute to the fund either directly or indirectly by encouraging others to contribute; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Deputy Currie: The atrocity at Omagh was a truly barbaric act of terrorism. I again extend my sincerest sympathies to the families and friends of those killed and injured. In regard to proceedings by relatives of the Omagh bombing victims I regret the Government is not in a position to provide direct financial assistance for private legal actions of this nature. However, I would like to reaffirm the complete determination of the Irish Government in partnership with the British Government to bring to justice those responsible for Omagh.

Tough legislation, the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act, 1998, has been introduced providing for extra powers of detention, new rules of evidence and new offences. The Garda Síochána, in full co-operation with the PSNI, has spared no effort in its continuing investigations which recently yielded a conviction on conspiracy charges in the Special Criminal Court.

Deputy Currie: Would the Minister share my disappointment and that of a great majority of people that nobody has been made amenable for this atrocity except one person in this jurisdiction? Does he understand the commitment among the relatives to appealing justice, in so far as they are prepared to take on their shoulders the colossal financial burden and the emotional shame of preparing and funding a civil action? While I understand what the Minister has said that he does not feel the Government is in a position to contribute directly, would he encourage others to do so? For example, would he support the campaign in Britain of Bob Geldof and others and the campaign of people in the South and North to encourage those with money to make a contribution towards the colossal expenditure in this case?

Deputy Cowen: While I understand Deputy Currie's sentiments in this matter and I am not in any disagreement with him I simply make the point, from any Government's point of view, that the question of financing a civil legal action by individuals is not open to a Government. I want to make it clear that this does not suggest a lack of support or a reduction in the determination by the Government, working with others, to bring to justice those who were responsible for this terrorist atrocity. As an individual, as a politician, as a public representative I welcome the fact that efforts are being made to assist the families in whatever way they deem fit to try to progress matters and try to bring people to justice. I wish to emphasise that the Garda investigation and the PSNI investigation continues. One individual has been convicted. I understand that recently others have been questioned by the

Garda Síochána on the bombing as part of an ongoing investigation. That criminal investigation continues unabated and undeterred by the length of time it is taking to bring about successful prosecutions. I recognise that the efforts of others to show support and solidarity to the parents and friends of those families in respect of seeking to finance a civil legal action is a matter to be agreed upon. I do not have a problem with any of that. I am merely outlining, on behalf of the Government, what we are seeking to do while recognising what others are trying to do to complement that effort.

Deputy Currie: I understand the position of the Minister and I would not expect him to be involved in any criticism of the efforts of the police North and South. I do not intend to enter into any such criticism either but will the Minister accept that the sentiments he has expressed, and I understand the limitations he believes are imposed on him, offer some encouragement to those who are in a position to offer financial assistance?

Deputy Cowen: I hope I have never been a source of discouragement.

5. **Harry Barnes MP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he will make a statement about the plight of people who have been exiled to the Republic of Ireland by paramilitary groups.

Deputy Cowen: The Government unequivocally condemns the abhorrent practice of paramilitary exiling. I have frequently called for an end to this unacceptable practice and urged the political parties associated with paramilitary organisations to make every effort to ensure that all exiles, wherever they currently reside, can return safely to their homes.

There can be no justification for any group in Northern Ireland to override the right of all citizens to freely choose their place of residence, a fundamental right which is recognised in the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr. Barnes: I welcome the reply, which is in line with the Taoiseach's comments in Barcelona. There may be some problem about knowing the number of people from Northern Ireland who are in exile in the Republic. The well-respected Maranatha Christian group claims that 3,000 families have been excluded from Northern Ireland. Problems arise in Border areas such as Derry, where Joseph McCloskey had to go in transit through the Republic before he came to England. Can any negotiating pressures be placed on paramilitary groups in terms of the extension of the Good Friday Agreement to ensure that they deliver in terms of the exile issues? In the United Kingdom there is talk of legislation to clarify the position as far as the "on the runs" are concerned and some of us believe that those who are on the run from the "on the runs" should also be cleared in some agreement as far as getting through that legislation is concerned.

Minister Cowen: As far as I am concerned, the exile issue is not a question of negotiation; it is a basic right given to citizens in any democratic society to live where

they wish. I recognise we are in the business of resolving a 30 year old conflict but I am adamant that this is not a matter for negotiation. It is a question of right.

A case has been made that the issues of the OTRs and exiles should be dealt with together. Both issues arose in the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland and both will have to be addressed and resolved as part of the outworking of the Good Friday Agreement, not just in letter but also in spirit. Punishment beatings, exiling and intimidation are contrary to the rule of law, the Good Friday Agreement and the Mitchell principles and as the Taoiseach has made clear, the best way of ending these practices is through support for and widespread use, by everybody, of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. At Weston Park, both Governments accepted that the issue of the OTRs needed to be addressed and the British Government is currently considering how that can be taken forward.

In relation to exiles, the Government's position is a matter of record, namely, the abhorrent practice of paramilitary exiling should be ended immediately and without preconditions, and those unfortunate persons who have been its victims should be allowed to return freely to their homes. Both the Taoiseach and I have raised our concerns about this practice with those parties who could have influence with paramilitary groups.

The two Governments and the political parties have a responsibility to do everything in their respective powers to resolve the outstanding difficulties in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that includes the question of OTRs and exiles.

Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Mawhinney: Given the Irish Government's position on exiles, would the Minister confirm that unless and until all exiles are permitted to return home without harassment or threat, the Irish Government would not contemplate giving any element of support toward an amnesty for those who are on the run?

Minister Cowen: That is not the position, to be frank. In terms of getting the full implementation of the Agreement, making one issue a precondition for another is not the way to get progress on anything. I acknowledge, however, that all of these issues are equally important and must be addressed hand in hand with the remaining implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. I can show empirical evidence to confirm that where one issue is given pre-eminence over all others, we do not get full implementation of the Agreement. I do not wish to be brought down that road, not because one does not want to see these matters resolved but to make one determinant on another is not necessarily the way these matters can be resolved. I take the point, however, that these are difficult and sensitive issues.

The question of the OTRs arose at Weston Park in respect of alleged offences committed many years ago and whether prosecutions should be put together and people brought before the courts. The question of the terms of the Good Friday Agreement being available under the early release schemes would be the issue, and there was a question of having to deal with this matter in a pragmatic way which would be acceptable to all. I recognise these are sensitive issues but I want to see

the OTRs and the exiling issues, and many other issues which are not yet fully implemented in the Agreement, brought to a speedy implementation as quickly as possible.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I propose to allow one more supplementary on this issue from Andrew Mackay.

Rt. Hon. Andrew Mackay: Following on the answer he just gave to Brian Mawhinney, would the Minister be good enough to confirm that an amnesty for terrorists on the run was not in the Good Friday Agreement in any shape or form? Apparently it only appeared later on at Weston Park.

Minister Cowen: The terms of the Good Friday Agreement are set out for all to see. The issue of resolving a conflict and the outworkings of the Agreement involve some of these difficult issues and the question arises as to how we can normalise the situation as quickly as possible to the benefit of everybody. The Weston Park issues were agreed by the Governments as a means of ensuring that we proceed to a full implementation of all aspects of the Agreement. I do not wish to state that that was a matter to be referred further on down the line. The Weston Park agreement speaks for itself in terms of resolving the matters needed to bring about full implementation of the Agreement, and the Good Friday Agreement speaks for itself in respect of all other issues.

6. **Shona Robison MSP** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs what role he envisages for the Convention on the Future of Europe, which had its inaugural meeting on 28 February 2002.

Minister Cowen: The European convention comes at an important time in the life of the European Union. The Laeken declaration makes clear both the extent of its achievement and the scale of the challenges it faces.

The European Union has been an enormous success story. The enthusiasm and determination with which so many countries are seeking to join the Union is the clearest proof of that. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that many citizens feel a sense of disconnection from the Union for whatever reason. The recently published report from our own national forum made it clear that this disconnection was clearly felt in Ireland. The Laeken declaration made clear that it was more widespread.

The European convention is designed to examine the development of the European Union in the 21st century. It is hoped that it will have a central role to play in addressing the sense of disconnection from the Union felt by many of our citizens.

I take the view that, ultimately, all political institutions must be grounded in the support of the people they serve. That is the simple reality which we ignore at our peril. The core goal of the process, therefore, must be to make the Union's institutions and processes more open and understanding. At the same time, while

seeking to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the institutions, we should take account of the fact that those institutions have served the Union, and Ireland, well and that the task should be to modernise the Union, not rebuild it from scratch.

Ms Robison: I thank the Minister for that answer. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my colleagues, Professor Neil MacCormick MEP, and Councillor Keith Brown, who serve on the convention and who fight Scotland's corner on that body. I listened with interest to the Minister's comments on the future of Europe, particularly about how to bring the debate closer to citizens. What more can be done to ensure that all Europe's nations, regions and communities can have a say and take part in the decision making process about the future of Europe?

Minister Cowen: The challenge the declaration sets out is the real issue, which is seen in decreasing participation in European Parliament elections and so forth. We have not successfully or sufficiently incorporated European issues into our national political debate in a way that is comprehensible to our citizens. The European Union has a huge influence on the quality of life of all citizens but too often we have the idea that the European debate takes place over there and our national debates are held here. People do not make the connections.

The reality is that we will have a European Union of nation states and people who suggest that we will see the elimination of the nation state are not living in the real world. The political consensus confirms that. One can point to many speeches by many people, past and present, but the fact is that I do not envisage 15 or 27 governments sitting down some day to write themselves out of business. It will not happen.

What will happen is a recognition that we need to do more to best serve our own citizens together with others. That is the *sui generis* model, the great experiment which has been a great success in many ways, in fact, in more ways than the shortcomings that have been pointed out. We have a model of a European Union some of which involves shared sovereignty in terms of the distance of the internal markets, some of which is governmental in terms of second pillar common foreign and security policy and some of which we have to examine further with regard to how best we serve our citizens and whether it is through the first and second pillars of the Union treaties or through a continuation of the second pillar. These are important issues which determine how we recognise the diversity of an enlarged Union and the historic imperative of enlarging the Union now that democratic forces have emerged from under the cloud of totalitarianism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

We must confront that reality and find governance mechanisms that are meaningful to citizens. It behoves all of us to improve our scrutiny mechanisms in national parliaments and to get out and talk to people more often. That could involve democratic models such as the mini-fora for the forum on Europe. I found it helpful to get out and listen to the views of people even if those views happened to be the result of the presentation of European issues they receive from the mass media,

which in many ways and at many times does not adequately or accurately reflect the issues at hand. It is important for public representatives to get that feedback.

The great irony for us, in view of the rejection of the Treaty of Nice, is that the declaration at Nice by the heads of government and states spoke about the need to find means by which subsidiarity happens. In other words, what can we do locally rather than at European level and what are the appropriate divisions of competencies? It is Nice that produced the convention and the subsequent intergovernmental conference which, hopefully, will bring about the necessary treaty changes to make that a reality. At the same time, however, the Treaty of Nice was rejected in this country by some who claim it is a centralising treaty. In fact, it is simply the institutional arrangements by which enlargement can take place.

The question of how to decentralise and find the appropriate level at which decisions need to be taken is the work that is now going to take place through the convention and intergovernmental conference. The more we can get the public engaged in that discussion, the more accurately we will deal with it as public representatives and the more meaningful the public will find the debate and the affairs of the European Union going forward.

Mr. Robert Walter MP: There has been much talk of a second chamber. Has the Irish Government got a view as to whether that should be built around a more accountable and transparent Council of Ministers or does it see a role for national parliamentarians in the decision making of the European Union?

Minister Cowen: As a member of the Council of Ministers, I am more accountable than most European parliamentarians for what I do. However, that is just an executive versus parliamentarian natural tension. There are areas of the Council of Ministers' work which could become more public, certainly its legislative work. There is no reason that that area of work should not be open to public visibility. There is nothing untoward happening by it not being televised but, in terms of public confidence in what we do and to avoid the conspiracy theorists mounting their usual mythological worst case scenarios about what we are trying to do as democratic governments on behalf of our citizens, it would be helpful if that was more public.

The convention should discuss what role national parliamentarians can play in European affairs. With regard to whether there should be a bicameral parliament, I am not convinced of its merits. I am willing to listen to the idea but I am not sure that it will greatly enhance the situation. The European Parliament needs to be seen to be more meaningful to citizens. The Council of Ministers needs to be demonstrably more open and transparent to the public. We certainly need an independent Commission which will ensure that, as guardian of the treaties, we continue to have a level playing pitch and that the democratic accountability of governments is not lost. In other words, the scrutinising role of national parliaments applying to Ministers before they make the decisions as opposed to the Ministers returning and defending existing decisions would probably be a better and more sensible way of doing things. However, these processes should not at the same time

tie the Ministers' hands with regard to the negotiating flexibility they need when a particular issue is going through the Council.

I hope the convention is the arena where we develop and go beyond the conceptual ideas and examine the pros and cons of these ideas. We can then come to a more informed decision at intergovernmental council level, when we arrive at making the political decisions, as to whether we believe the views of the convention, which is purely advisory, are or are not relevant. The best chance of the convention being meaningful in the intergovernmental council format would be to be mindful of the broad political consensus on certain issues, particularly regarding the general direction of Europe. If the convention arrives with an over-ambitious suggestion, option or model, which is not grounded in the political realities of the nation states' governments, the governments will proceed to resolve these matters based on those realities. We need assistance from the convention but it does not replace the IGC. It is there to assist the IGC.

Punishment Beatings

7. **Deputy Brian O'Shea** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs if he has had discussions with the Northern Ireland Secretary in regard to punishment beatings; the number of punishment beatings that have taken place since 1 January 2002; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

16. **Deputy Michael Ring** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of punishment beatings that have been reported to the police in Northern Ireland and the number of such reports which have resulted in a prosecution.

Minister Cowen: I will answer Questions Nos. 7 and 16 together. Punishment beatings, shootings and other acts of intimidation are barbaric acts which have no place in a democratic society. They are totally unacceptable.

The Government has consistently condemned punishment attacks and called for an immediate end to all such acts of violence. The matter is discussed on an ongoing basis through the secretariat of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. The statistics available show that punishment attacks rose by a third last year on the previous year, with loyalist paramilitaries clearly responsible for the majority of this increase. In 2001, some 331 punishment attacks were recorded by the police and 212 have been attributed to loyalist paramilitaries, consisting of 121 shootings and 91 assaults. Republican paramilitaries were responsible for 119 such attacks, 66 shootings and 53 assaults.

From the beginning of this year to 10 March, 57 punishment attacks took place. Of these, 37 have been attributed to loyalist paramilitaries, 30 shootings and seven assaults, and 20 have been attributed to republican paramilitaries, 17 shootings and three assaults. This figure is nearly double the total number of attacks carried out by both loyalists and republicans for the same period last year.

Punishment attacks have been a part of the violence which has scarred Northern Ireland for the past 30 years. It is right that society expects such attacks to end immediately.

Deputy O'Shea: Is the Minister satisfied with the efforts being made by the PSNI to deal with these barbaric attacks? Is he aware of any new approaches or measures or any extra resources being allocated to this area? I know most of the increased attacks are on the loyalist side. Does he think that if Sinn Féin took its place on the board of the PSNI, it would be a positive contribution towards resolving these problems?

Minister Cowen: I would like to see all parties committed to the agreement taking up their places on the policing board. I encourage people to do that. Every political party must make that democratic decision in their own time. The more quickly that is done, the better. In the meantime, we are committed to fully implementing the agreement and the policing arrangements agreed at Weston Park. There is an ongoing need to continue with that and it is a top priority for us all.

As regards the question about effectiveness, it is a difficult and insidious aspect of the breakdown of law and order in certain communities in Northern Ireland. I do not wish to say any more about the performance of any police force other than it is trying to deal with it. The best prospect of it being dealt with effectively and eliminated from the culture which has brought it about is to have a fully representative and effective Police Service of Northern Ireland which will have the ability to obtain the necessary co-operation and intelligence from the areas where this takes place so that effective prosecutions can take place and those responsible for it can be dealt with under the criminal justice system. The unfortunate problems of the past, which is true on both sides of the community as the figures show, mean it is difficult to obtain the necessary information to bring prosecutions. I hope that improves. Everybody involved in policing in Northern Ireland is anxious for that to happen. It is important to get full implementation and the full support of the community on all sides for policing. I hope and trust we are on that road and that we will get to that position as quickly as possible as it is in everyone's interest.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We will take one more question. I call Mr. Michael Mates on Question No. 8.

Mr. Mates asked if the Minister for Foreign Affairs will make a statement about progress in the peace process.

Minister Cowen: As members are aware, on 1 August 2001 the two Governments brought forward a package of proposals which we believed could deliver the full and early implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The package addressed in particular four key issues - policing, decommissioning, demilitarisation and stability of the institutions. In the period since we have been able to make considerable progress. The institutions have been working on a full and inclusive basis since the

election of David Trimble and Mark Durkan as First and Deputy First Ministers, respectively. The Assembly and Executive have been advancing their work.

On 30 November last the Taoiseach hosted highly productive summit level meetings of both the British-Irish Council and the North-South Ministerial Council in Dublin Castle. On 17 December last, together with the First and Deputy First Ministers, I attended the first meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council in its institutional format which was designed under the agreement to address institutional and cross-sectoral matters in Stormont. Further plenary meetings of the BIC and the NSMC are being planned for early summer and substantive programmes of work are being undertaken in both institutions.

The new policing board established on 4 November 2001 has made an encouraging start. The first recruits, recruited on a 50:50 Catholic Protestant basis, will pass out from training on 5 April. As I said before, I look forward to the day when the board will be fully inclusive and when all parties play their part on it. Further steps have been taken towards the achievement of a normal security environment in the North. In addition to the measures identified at Weston Park, the British Government has announced the removal of military installations at Glasdrummond in south Armagh and the closure of Ebrington Barracks in Derry. These are welcome steps. Continuing progress in this area will have an important role to play in building and sustaining confidence in the agreement's ability to deliver change in people's lives.

We have also seen the IRA take historic steps in the process of putting arms beyond use. I hope that process will continue. I urge the loyalist paramilitaries to also deal with the question of their weapons. There are constant reminders that we cannot afford to be complacent. I mentioned some of them in my speech, such as the sectarian murders, including that of postal worker, Danny McColgan, the Holy Cross school issue, the hundreds of pipe bomb attacks on the homes of innocent Catholic families, the continuing carrying out of so-called punishment beatings and the hold which paramilitary organisations continue to exert on vulnerable communities. The activities of dissident republicans are also a concern.

The best way to ensure such issues become a thing of the past is to demonstrate to both communities that their fundamental interests are best protected now and in the future through the full implementation of the agreement. We will continue in our efforts with the British Government and with the pro-agreement parties to secure that outcome.

Mr. Mates: I thank the Minister for that full answer. While it may have been historic, is he satisfied that the single act of decommissioning has furthered the process, given that there is no sign of a follow-up? Does he agree that it is one thing for the paramilitaries to decommission their weapons or to put them beyond use, but it is another for them to put old weapons beyond use while they purchase new ones, as the recent gun running trial in Fort Lauderdale showed? Is that the height of cynicism? The Minister said that linking one event with another was sterile. How then does he interpret the phrase, which both Prime Minister Blair and the

Taoiseach used when putting the referendum to the people, that the whole progress of the agreement means there must be parallel progress? What does parallel progress mean, if it does not mean measuring one move by one side against another?

Minister Cowen: My basic analysis was that if we continue to look at what one side does compared to another, we will not get too far. The purpose of the Good Friday Agreement is to transform that paradigm, as I discussed in my speech, to recognise that there are winners for everybody. That means that people cannot be selective about the implementation of the agreement. I do not have any problem with the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister speaking about things working in parallel. We must move incrementally on all aspects of the agreement. As those who are involved in Northern Ireland politics know, such as Mr. Neeson and others who are here, problems emerge when one deals with something where there is an idea of pre-conditionality. They emerge for both Unionists, Nationalists, loyalists and republicans. We must move together on all issues. I accept the point that decommissioning is not an event, but a process. We must move on all parts of the agreement.

I have acknowledged that where parties or leaderships have constituencies to manage, the tactics must not subvert the overall strategy. The strategy must be that we get full implementation of all aspects of the agreement. That will bring about a new dynamic in Northern Ireland politics and a recognition of the relationships which are essential to make that happen. It is a difficult task and there will be times when people on both sides feel the stresses and strains.

As the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said, having begun a process of decommissioning on the republican side, it would be greatly helped if loyalists began that process. That is not to create an equivalence, a dependency or a pre-conditionality. If confidence is to build in the political process in Northern Ireland, particularly among those who are coming into the process and living up to the democratic requirements which are an imperative of the agreement, we need to see progress on all issues. That does not allow anyone to neglect issues for which they have responsibility. However, it is important that we see progress and portray the need for progress in all areas where full implementation is not yet available.

To particularise one issue, which I know is of great importance, outside the wider political context has brought greater difficulties in trying to achieve what we all desire than that approach would suggest. Solutions will be reached by a broad all-inclusive approach to the outstanding areas of the agreement to be implemented. There have been historic breakthroughs on a range of areas. However, more progress must be made. We do not want to fall into the trap of deciding that unless one issue happens in isolation from others, nothing happens. That is only making the issue more difficult for those on all sides of the argument who are committed to making this agreement work.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you, Minister. I want to mention to all colleagues that I undertook to have the Minister out of here by 5.30 p.m., although I am afraid that undertaking has been slightly breached. I knew that in giving that undertaking, the Minister would engage with us freely, openly and with a conviction that has always been the hallmark of his approach. I want to thank the Minister for doing so. As parliamentarians, we appreciate a frank and open exchange which is based on the Minister's competence and capacity to express his position in what is a very delicate and difficult area.

I thank the Minister for attending the meeting and I also wish to thank all my colleagues for the questions they posed. I hope they feel they have had a reasonable response to all their questions, having regard to the time constraints.

I wish to remind colleagues that committees B and C will meet at 8.45 a.m. tomorrow morning. Committees A and D will meet at 9.20 a.m.

The sitting adjourned at 5.30 p.m. until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 26 March 2002.

BRITISH IRISH INTERPARLIAMENTARY BODY

COMHLAUGHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BRETAINE AGUS NA HÉIREANN. 26 March, 2002

The Body met at 10 a.m. with **Deputy Michael O'Kennedy, Co-Chairman**, in the Chair.

The Co-Chairman, Deputy O'Kennedy, welcomed Members to the session.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): The usual procedures will apply for this, the last day of our meeting. We will first deal with the business reports from the chairmen of the individual committees. I hardly need to remind colleagues that these reports should be brief and should last for approximately three minutes. We will then proceed to the substantive debate on the Adjournment this morning, on the future of Europe. I hope we will reach that before 10.30 a.m. I call on the Chairman of Committee A, Deputy Deenihan.

Deputy Jimmy Deenihan: On Monday, 25 and Tuesday, 26 February we visited Belfast. It was an interesting visit. We met and had dinner with Mrs. Nuala O'Loan, the Police Ombudsman. She outlined a number of the problems she was facing and we discussed a number of issues.

The following day we met with Colin Cramphorn, the Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately Sir Ronnie Flanagan was unable to be present. We had a long and detailed discussion with Colin and we discussed issue like Omagh, the implementation of Patton and the Policing Board, and other issues including the problems in North Belfast. As has been mentioned, the peace Agreement was working very well in Stormont but it was not working too well in the Ardoyne.

Then we went on to the police training college. We were given a presentation on the training course's content and structure and on the approach and the philosophy that is being adopted in the training college by Chief Inspector Christine McCullough. Then the Members dispersed among the trainees and we had a very good exchange with them. Different Members spoke to different groups of people and the interaction was very good. The Members learned a great deal from the trainees, including some of their fears and reservations for the future. Overall we found the trainees well-motivated. Generally they were looking forward to getting out and doing their work on the streets. There were some Nationalist areas, such as South Armagh, which were not represented.

Then we visited the Policing Board. We met with Professor Des Rea, the Chairman, and Denis Bradley, the Vice-Chairman. We went through a number of the issues and the problems with which they are faced and it was quite an informative meeting.

Overall the committee felt that it was a very worthwhile exercise. At our meeting this morning, we decided that we will re-visit Northern Ireland in September when the new body is reconstituted and follow-up on developments, especially with the trainees. We will want to see how they are working on the streets, etc. That concludes the report. It was a useful exercise, to meet the various bodies and the trainees.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you, Jim. That was a very precise report on the activities of the committee. I hope the incoming Body will follow-up on the suggestion that you made regarding those visits and discussions, but it is a matter for it.

I call on the Chairman of Committee B, Mr. Brian Mawhinney to give his report.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Mawhinney MP: The committee this morning agreed a report on its transport inquiry. The Body will recall that this inquiry has been proceeding for a considerable amount of time. It was slowed down, first, by the tragic death of my predecessor, Michael Colvin, and then by having to wait for the appointment of the British Members after the general election.

In Bournemouth, we decided that the next step was to try again to pay a visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly. That was baulked by existing Unionist policy. Mr. Alban Maginness MLA made it clear that he and I could meet if we wished but that was not what the committee had in mind and I did not take up that opportunity. Therefore we agreed a report this morning but it is by way of a commentary rather than a report with recommendations. The committee felt strongly that the position relative to our dealing with the Northern Ireland Assembly was not satisfactory but we also recognised that it was not the job of our committee to try to resolve that matter.

We felt strongly, however, that the work the committee had done was worthwhile and so decided that, in addition to the report being transmitted to the two Governments, as is the normal procedure, we would seek to draw it to the attention

of the Chairman of the appropriate committee in the new Dáil dealing with transport issue and I undertook to make an approach to the Chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on Transport to see whether they might be interested in taking the issues further because the committee felt that there was a great deal of good work that had laid the foundation for more useful activity that could take place. As a consequence, we decided that once the new Irish members of the committee were determined later this year, we would agree a new committee inquiry at our meeting in Manchester.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you, Brian. On the matter of the position in which the committee found itself in pursuing matters with the Northern Ireland Assembly, we are conscious of that problem in the overall context and it is something to which we will be referring in the sixth annual report. Obviously we can only co-operate with those who wish to co-operate with us and we can only engage with those who wish to engage with us. It is a matter we need to look into further and the Body, when it is reconstituted, will obviously want to do that. Undoubtedly the matters under the remit of your committee are ones of considerable common interest and I would hope that you will be able to proceed as you suggest when the new Body is established later this year.

I call on the Chairman of Committee C, Mr. Bill O'Brien to give his report.

Mr. William O'Brien MP: We held a meeting this morning. Following the meeting that we had in Bournemouth it was decided that we would continue with the report on tourism on the island. We consider that the provision of tourism on the island is paramount if we are going to pursue the question of the bid for the European Cup as part of the joint arrangement with Scotland and Ireland. Therefore the infrastructure that will help to development tourism is one of the serious issues that the committee considered this morning. This is the important business that we will be looking at. We will present a report on our progress on the tourism issues to the next plenary in Manchester and also to the two Governments.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We had a good debate on the European Championship. We were reminded it is not the European Cup. Apparently the soccer experts see a significant difference in that. Obviously the event has huge potential. When we report to the Government on our debate on the substantive issues, we will then refer their responses to the committee. I hope we will be able to find a common position that will be helpful to the programmes of tourism, particularly in that area.

I call on the Chairman of Committee D, Mr. Kevin McNamara to give his report.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: The committee discussed the future progress on our debate and report on Sellafield which arose from the Bournemouth plenary. Members of the committee visited Sellafield earlier this year and had useful talks with the site management and the chairman of the new board. Last month, officials from the various agencies appeared before us in the House of Commons to answer a

wide-ranging set of questions. We found them to be very open in their replies. The amount of information exchanged by and co-operation between the Irish and British Governments is far greater than the majority of the public and informed commentators realise.

It was agreed that we would meet in Dublin on 10 April to finish our work in order that there will be one completed report with, possibly, a couple of recommendations attached into which the new plenary could sink its teeth. We then went on to consider what future inquiries we might engage in, but we felt we could not reach any binding decisions until our new Irish Members were appointed. However, three matters did arise. The first of these was the protection of particular tourist sites from being destroyed by the public by virtue of the sheer weight of numbers visiting them. We focused not on restricting access but on finding how best to preserve these sites. Coupled with this are problems involving rural planning.

The second matter we considered was the question or possibility of waste management across all the islands and the third, which is not relevant to environmental issues, was state support for theatres. These three matters will go before the committee in November.

We also discussed Lord Laird's letter and we agreed that I would write to him pointing out that Ulans comes under our remit, although we have no particular inquiry in place at present, but that if he wishes to submit a paper on the matter to add to the general corpus of our knowledge on minority matters within these islands we would be very pleased to receive it. I also informed him that I would be quite happy to meet him at Westminster to discuss various matters.

Finally, there was a rather strange constitutional development. Our new Welsh colleagues are very keen to join the committee and three of them attended this morning's session. All three of them want to be members. There is nothing to prevent all three from becoming members and they are all welcome under the terms and constitution. We, therefore, welcome them on board. It is stated that no committee shall have a membership of more than 18 and we do not have 18 members at present. Therefore, anybody else who feels particularly attracted to the work and opportunities presented by Committee D are more than welcome to join until our membership reaches the maximum number. In light of the question of state support for theatres, all offers for membership should be made in brown envelopes with greasy pound notes and no serial numbers.

The Lord Dubs: And euro.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Perhaps we should strike those last observations and suggestions off the record. I understand the committee proposes to meet on 10 April in Dublin. Is that correct?

Mr. Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon North Hull*): Yes, 10 April at Dáil Éireann just to conclude our report. I presume that it will be somewhat out of date when we meet

in November but we will include an additional paper bringing matters up to date. We felt it important that we should have a completed report for the new plenary with the new Members.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): So you will be the last remaining remnant of the Body's activities in the current year and your report will be available for the meeting in Manchester. It is obvious that said report will deal with matters of considerable common interest and purpose so I wish the committee well. I may have the opportunity, while I still hold this position, of meeting its members when they visit on 10 April.

Members: Speech.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon North Hull*): The Co-Chairman would be more than welcome. I recall that when he was first appointed he took the unprecedented step of attending meetings when we were dealing with our transport report. His knowledge of what was going on at that time was particularly helpful to the committee.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I hope I will be provided with a visible forum or rostrum to allow me to deliver the speech requested. This has been a very helpful session because the reports signal that the committees are active, effective and dealing with ongoing issues, many of which will be priorities for the incoming Body. I note particularly the reference Kevin made to his communication with Lord Laird. I do not believe I should make any further observations on that matter at this stage, but perhaps it will arise in the course of the sixth annual report. That concludes the first item on our agenda this morning, namely, the business reports.

We now come to the sixth annual report. Members should have copies of the report which summarises the work of the Body for 2001. I call on my colleague, who relieves me of burdens from time to time, to move the sixth annual report.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I move: "That the Body takes note of the sixth annual report of the Body."

I do not intend to speak on the matters contained in the report because they are purely factual and no purpose would be served if I was to initiate a short debate on the subject. However, a point of order was raised yesterday by one of our colleagues and there may be other questions which I will try to answer.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I should have invited people to indicate earlier if they were ready to or interested in making contributions on the report. However, I see that Andrew Mackinlay is signalling that he wishes to contribute. Anyone else who wishes to do so should also signal their intent.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (*Thurrock*): I believe the Chairman or his colleague replied to my point of order yesterday about Unionists. However, I do not know if they want to add anything more. It seems to me that with one more push we might be able to

attract not only the UUP but also probably the DUP. If the Chairmen have anything further to add on that matter I would be glad to hear it.

My second point is that I notice David Ervine, MLA, is an associate or substitute to this Body. What arrangements were in place to inform him that there would have been a vacancy for him here today had he been able to attend? Is it just assumed that this was indicated to him?

My final point is that I thought yesterday's question time was extremely good. I was a casualty by virtue of the fact that there was not enough time for me to ask my questions but I have no complaints. Would it be possible to set aside a guaranteed period for question time? Everyone benefited from the address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs because he painted a very worthwhile canvas. However, there is a definite need for a guaranteed question time.

I hope Seán Neeson will not mind me referring to the fact that he was the person whose question was next to be taken when question time concluded. While I would consider my questions the most important in the world, I can see that yesterday's question time was particularly important for Seán and others and their constituents. Seán's question related to a bread and butter issue affecting his constituency in Northern Ireland. It occurred to me that the Steering Committee might consider not only putting in place a fixed, guaranteed question time but also - this might work to my disadvantage - that we should try to ensure that the questions, whether drawn out by lots or taken in order received, reflect the concerns of politicians North and South and all political parties and traditions. There would, therefore, be positive discrimination in terms of ensuring that most of the interests present get a bite at the cherry. If questions are drawn by lot as at present, we could end up with a situation where either one party or Members from one jurisdiction would ask the majority of them. I hope that perhaps could be taken on board to see if we could improve question time to benefit those who have more interest and to give them a better chance of having a say.

The Rt. Hon. Andrew Mackay MP: I refer back to the issue of the Unionists boycotting the Body. Quite often when matters relating to Northern Ireland are discussed, it is like Hamlet without the ghost. We are hugely disadvantaged by not having Unionists present and by the poor attendance of Sinn Féin. Two of its members were supposed to be here but neither has attended our deliberations and it makes them very incomplete. I can recall being involved in setting up the Body with Peter Temple-Morris and others. At that time I was Tom King's PPS acting as a go-between between those setting up the Body and the British Government. The Unionists would not join because they felt the Body flowed directly from the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That has been completely superseded by the Belfast Agreement but because they are stuck on a hook through that link they find it very difficult to get off.

I have absolutely no doubt on the basis of private conversations with many Unionists that they would like to be part of the Body. There are huge advantages for them as

well as us. Somehow the Steering Committee must find a way to get them off the hook and formally break the link with the Anglo-Irish Agreement even though the co-chairman will tell me quite correctly that the agreement does not exist. Perhaps it could be recast as part of something that flows out of the Belfast Agreement such as a North-South or all-island body, which would give us a great excuse to get involved with them. This should be the priority of the steering committee in the months ahead. It would be a huge prize to have Unionists present *en bloc* at our next plenary session.

The Lord Temple-Morris: I very much agree with what Mr. Mackay said. We must put every effort into getting the Unionists off the hook. We are getting very close to it. There are sounds coming not only from the Lords but also from the Commons for them wanting to be with us. If they want to be with us, we must find ways to facilitate them.

A report from the Steering Committee about how it is approaching this is called for as well as on the question raised by Lord Laird. It was a significant development. He has an office upstairs from mine and we have lunch together periodically. We fell into conversation about the Body one day and it was his suggestion that he should come here, as a lifelong Ulster Unionist who is a former member of Stormont and so on, with a small team to address the Body and have an exchange on the workings of the Good Friday Agreement. Following that he wanted to engage socially during a working lunch with Members of the Body. The plan was that if all went reasonably well he would go back to David Trimble and suggest to him that we were not that bad and they should work on finding a way to join us. That is significant.

He had an entire weekend to consider this and to telephone around within Northern Ireland and he then wrote formally to the Steering Committee. We still have not discovered the committee's reaction to John Laird. I spoke to him last week and he did not underline the blame he rashly put into the Irish press on Irish colleagues for keeping him out of the Body. The way he assessed blame last week went far wider. I do not know what is his situation overall but he is certainly willing to repeat the offer and that is an important and constructive point.

Other people, who are better known in House of Commons terms, might well come with him, if we were to suggest those names. It is not for me to suggest them but one sitting member of the House of Commons has expressed interest. The bid by John Laird to come to see us and sound out the ground could be enhanced if it is approached constructively. I would like to hear from the Steering Committee about it.

Ms Rosemary McKenna CBE MP: I support the comments about the Ulster Unionists because we must find a way to allow them to be part of the Body without losing face. I agree that is our priority. I reiterate that a structure must be found to allow MPs, MSPs and MLAs to attend the Northern Ireland Assembly in a supportive role. Our colleagues there need to know we support what they are doing.

Following the departure of Patricia Ferguson, MSP, the membership of the steering committee is all male. When the Dáil elections have been held the Body might bear in mind it needs to examine this when it appoints people to the Steering Committee so that it is more modern than it would have been 20 years ago.

Mr. Henry Bellingham MP: I endorse Ms McKenna's comments. The Steering Committee could bear in mind that when our committees visit Northern Ireland they should make a point of focusing on Members of the Assembly and involving the Westminster MPs when they visit their constituencies. They should also meet as many Ministers as possible. If that happens and Ulster Unionists on the ground see that we are a Body that is involved in issues that concern and could benefit their constituents it will bury their perception that we are a relic of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I support the comments of Mr. Mackay and Mr. Mackinlay. I would like to see a concerted effort made by the Steering Committee to get the Unionists on side and it should report back to us before the next plenary session by way of letter to outline what steps it has taken and whether it has followed up on the suggestion of Lord Temple-Morris.

The issue of questions has been raised. I valued yesterday's session enormously. The Body is developing in the area of questions but we need to move further. I do not agree with Mr. Mackinlay that the balance should be rigged because there could be all sorts of disappointments. However, there ought to be shorter replies from the Minister. Why can the Cabinet Minister not be accompanied by his junior Ministers and make an effort to get through the Order Paper? For example, yesterday, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Brian Cowen, wanted to put on record an important speech and he then answered questions. His replies were much too long and, Co-Chairman, you should have allowed more supplementaries and that would have brought in people from different parts of these islands. Once Brian Cowen had gone there should have been a Junior Minister here to complete the Order Paper, because I regarded yesterday's session as immensely valuable. Maybe you could take those ideas on board. I have been discussing this with various members of the body overnight and there are people who feel that time is extremely valuable and we should try to find ways of developing this in future.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you Henry, we will take your views on board and I will give my responses in a moment.

Mr. Sean Neeson MLA: Chairman, in relation to the Unionists I agree with Robin's remarks yesterday, that the best way to approach this is to work behind the scenes. That is something I have been doing. The argument I put to Unionists is that if they are prepared to participate in the Council of the Isles I do not see why they should not be able to participate in this body. That is the best way to approach this. I am disappointed that the Committee on Regional Development has refused to meet with Brian Mahwhinney's committee. My Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Investment would, I think, be happy to meet with Committee C. We are just about to

embark on an inquiry into tourism and I said yesterday I would be very pleased to work alongside them on that issue.

Another issue I would like the Steering Committee to focus on is this: in all the meetings I have attended the focus has been largely on the peace process and Northern Ireland and I hope that sooner rather than later this body would meet in Northern Ireland. That in itself would show that this body has been part of the overall peace process. It has been part of what has been emerging in Northern Ireland. I do not know whether the UK or the Irish would have to give up their slot for that to happen but it would be of enormous benefit not just to Northern Ireland but to this body as well.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thanks, Sean. Just to clarify, when referring to meeting in Northern Ireland, you made some suggestion about whether we would have to have some change of position. I just want to be clear I understood what you were saying.

Mr. Sean Neeson MLA: Obviously the meetings alternate between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. What I am saying is that maybe some concession would need to be made either on the part of the UK or on the part of the Republic of Ireland.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I see.

Mr. Brian Mawhinney MP: I have two points. First, about the Unionists, in private conversations in the last couple of days I have made my view clear: my assessment is the same as others that have been heard, that the time is now right to try to resolve this. This is not driven by logic. It is a paradox that the Unionists will not meet this committee but they are perfectly happy to go down and give evidence to a Dáil committee. The Steering Committee should not be hung up here on logic. My very strong view is that whatever the rights and wrongs, the resolution to this lies with the Steering Committee. It does not lie with the Unionists. It lies with the attitude the Steering Committee is willing to take and the latitude it is willing to adopt in order to find a mechanism all of us may think is silly but nevertheless turns out to be effective. Therefore, before the Steering Committee embarks on anything, I hope it will spend quite a bit of time on reflection and rid itself of all of the normal constraints of political behaviour in order to go forward to find a solution. If there has to be a very short term jumping through hoops, which is very unseemly for such senior politicians as those who lead us, this nevertheless may turn out to be the way forward.

On the second point, at question time yesterday I was not nearly as impressed as some other colleagues were. Because I have been a Minister, I know the easiest possible way to handle question time is to have one supplementary and then move on to the next question. Frankly I do not care how many questions get answered - what we should do is have far more supplementaries for whatever questions are asked so that the Minister cannot evade, duck, weave, prevaricate, obfuscate and do all the other things Ministers do---

Mr. Brian Warnock MP: Confess to having done it.

Mr. Brian Mawhinney MP: ---which I confess from time to time I have done and which, if no-one will take it as being unseemly from me, the Minister did yesterday. My view is fewer questions but proper scrutiny of the questions we put to the Minister.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): For clarification, you are saying fewer questions. Are you saying the Steering Committee should confine the number of questions formally submitted? Let us assume that there would be eight questions only but we would leave considerable time for supplementaries on those.

Mr. Brian Mawhinney MP: Personally I share the view of others that the question time is an important part of the activity. I would have much preferred to listen to half the speech and have far more time for questions. The steering committee should ensure there is a significant time for questions and that the number that are answered in that time should lead to a proper examination of the Minister and not the superficial stuff we had yesterday.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I understand exactly what you are saying. The introductory speech has been the pattern both here and in England when we have meetings there. The pattern has been to have an introductory statement with question time following. I would certainly support the idea that we could ask the Minister or Secretary, as the case may be, to abbreviate the introductory statement and then have vigorous supplementaries. The problem we might have there is that if we, from time to time, want to be updated on the progress or lack of it in the ongoing discussions that Governments are having, we may find then that we will be complaining at not getting a full report to this body of what is going on.

Mr. Brian Mawhinney MP: Forgive me, Chairman, I have been here a relatively short time compared to others but I have not heard a speech yet that updated this committee on anything that one could not have read in any local newspaper in either the Republic or the United Kingdom. Let us not kid ourselves that we are getting it straight from the horse's mouth and the leading edge. We are getting a composite of what any good press agency could have adduced from newspaper reports. Let us cut down on that and get to the meat. The experienced parliamentarians in this room are much more likely to get to the leading edge if they quiz a Minister than they are if they have to listen to one.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Having worn two hats from time to time, I entirely agree with you. We will discuss that and deal with it in the reply.

Deputy Currie: Just to be one up on Brian Mawhinney, as one who has answered questions in two jurisdictions, one of the problems is that there is a different attitude and pattern in the two jurisdictions in relation to questions. In the Dail we have Priority Questions, which tend to go on a lot longer than ordinary questions. Procedure has grown up over the years wherein Ministers tend to spend a lot longer

answering one question than is the case in Westminster. If we are to improve the situation, and I agree entirely about the usefulness of the question time that we have, the more opportunity we have to get through the waffle that all Ministers throw up, then the better for us. However, one has to give some consideration to the fact that there are two different procedures involved here.

Second, I find myself in the unusual position of defending Sinn Féin. The Rt. Hon. Andrew MacKay referred to the non-attendance of Sinn Féin, but this is the first time this has happened. On previous occasions Sinn Féin has been a good attender and has made a point of making the maximum capital from its attendance. My experience in the Dáil regarding Sinn Féin's one Member is that he makes a point of not turning up when he thinks there is some issue on which he might be attacked. Sinn Féin may have been sensitive to certain matters which might have been raised had it been present. It was correct in that speculation as, in my speech yesterday, I was determined to make the point that what is involved on this occasion is more cowardice than idleness.

I am in agreement with the Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Mawhinney regarding the Unionists whose position is illogical, not that logic has much to do with it. It is strange that these great defenders of the UK are prepared to come south and attend meetings of Dáil committees and that Members of the Dáil attend meetings of Assembly committees. However, they are not prepared to attend a meeting of this Body or to allow this Body attend their committee meetings. That position is illogical and is made more so by the fact that, at their demand, the Anglo-Irish Agreement is no longer in existence. Therefore, they continue to protest against something which is no longer in existence. To add to that illogicality the Unionists are refusing to attend a Body where the Government which they recognise as their sovereign Government is in attendance. In addition, the devolved assemblies throughout the UK are also in attendance. There is no logic to their position.

I understand that this illogicality is beginning to bear in on the Unionists. I have been in conversation with two of them who recognise that their position does not stand up to scrutiny in the present circumstances and they are seeking a way to get themselves off that hook. I am in favour of letting them off the hook as easily as possible, but not in terms of a situation which might be described as "fundamental", though I do not wish to use that word. I am glad to have been associated with this Body since its inception, but I do not wish to be involved with a body which pretends to be different. There may be some way around this issue and I am heartened that there is good evidence that the Unionists recognise the illogicality of their position and that they are prepared to meet us. I would welcome the approach of John Laird. When reference was made to his team I was not sure what was meant by "his team". He runs a PR firm. Is his team from the Scots-Irish organisation or from his PR firm? I would hope it would be from the Scots-Irish organisation because that would be more meaningful in terms of this Body.

The Lord Temple-Morris: As the person who spoke to John Laird, as I understand it the basis of the team would be the Scots-Irish body in Northern Ireland of which he

is chairman. However, the membership would be virtually exclusively Ulster Unionist. He would use the Scottish body to bring what is essentially an unofficial Unionist delegation to talk to the Body.

Deputy Currie: That would be welcome.

Mrs. Jean Corston MP: With specific reference to the question of Unionist participation in the Body, I have been involved with this Body for five years. When I first attended it was the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body and membership was confined to British Peers and Members of Parliament and Deputies and Senators from Dáil Éireann. It was clear that the Body's inception was the Anglo-Irish Agreement to which reference has been made by many colleagues.

During this debate several contributions referred to the Unionists' antipathy towards the Anglo-Irish Agreement and anything which arises from it. However, no one could deny that this Body has changed completely in the past three years or so in that we have representatives from the Tynwald, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and we have had membership from the Northern Ireland Assembly. Given that we know that symbols are important everywhere, but particularly in Northern Ireland, perhaps it would be sensible for us to recognise this change by changing the name of the Body to ensure that it no longer reflects the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Perhaps we should consider calling ourselves the parliamentary body of the isles or the islands and then ask the Unionists if they would participate.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: I found the question time very useful. I received the most complete answer, and more, regarding matters I had been raising in the House of Commons. The surprise was that I was expected to ask a supplementary question to which I already had to answer so I was not going to waste time, but it was felt necessary to bring it in. However, there is a question of different traditions and there is sometimes an opportunity during questions to make what amount to policy statements and updates which are important and which we do not always get in our own parliaments.

As regards the Unionists and Lord Laird's enterprise, we should first note that the changes which have taken place in the Body have been as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. These changes have been specifically designed to bring in the islands and the devolved assemblies so we now have the Council of the Isles which is what William Craig advocated in the 1970s. This came into our parliaments via Mr. Trimble who was an old Vanguard member.

As regards changing the name, I have no hang-up on a particular name if it would be helpful for the Unionists to come in. However, while I would welcome Lord Laird appearing before committees which are relevant to his particular interests and his attending social occasions and gatherings in the corridors, I would be concerned that we have never asked people to make a presentation when the party they claim to represent has vacant seats in this Body. With the greatest respect to Lord Laird,

whether or not he was a specific and direct emissary of David Trimble, we do not know whether or not he was speaking on his behalf.

In the House of Lords and in public statements he has made, he has been very derogatory of many of the institutions which have been established under the Good Friday Agreement such as the Human Rights Commission, the Police Ombudsman and the Equality Commission. This makes me legitimately wonder why he should wish to come here with a delegation which is self-chosen and not necessarily representative of the Ulster Unionist Party officially and ask for an audience before the entire Body. This has not been done in the past and much more thought and connection must take place. I am not against talking to anyone about anything. However, when representation is provided in the Body for the party of which he claims to be a member, I find it strange that he should demand to sit within the plenary Body to make his position clear. If he wishes to hold meetings on the fringes or in the corridors that would be sensible.

As I indicated earlier, in terms of the responsibilities of the Body and the issues he raised in his letter to the Steering Committee, we have shown more than a willingness to take on board his points. May I make one point on when people asked the Steering Committee to take a more positive line on this. While I have been a member of the Steering Committee, it has bent over backwards to try to get the Ulster Unionists in. It had backbench talks and nominated people to talk to their leadership in order to examine their problems. The problem has not been a lack of elasticity on behalf of the steering committee but a reluctance for a variety of reasons, certainly within official unionists, for the leadership to take the necessary steps because of problems within their own political parties. Given that Mr. Trimble was elected unopposed at his last party meeting, perhaps he is now in a stronger position to make a move for his party to join a Body, the purpose of which is written into the Good Friday Agreement to meet his demands and needs. The question of names and so on is ephemeral to the issue. I want the Ulster Unionists in. Following unofficial soundings, I understand that, but one should not appoint himself without coming here with a specific remit from the leader of his party to make representations.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): As we have overrun our time, there are two other requests to which there should be brief contributions. The issues that have been raised here are very important and require some response from the steering committee and from both of us here.

Mr. Ruane MP: On Kevin McNamara's point about the status of Lord Laird's wish to come before the Body, whether he is probing if he can bring along other Ulster Unionists at the behest of David Trimble or whether it is an attempt to undermine the Body and all it stands for, I believe we should allow him to come before the Body, in whatever form, whether socially before a committee or before the full Body. We should welcome the opportunity to draw them in. I do not know the Lord or his history but it seems he is appealing to perhaps a narrow party political audience. If he came before this Body, there are different audiences from different

parts of the UK and Ireland. It would give him an opportunity to broaden his appeal, and draw him in.

Lord Smith of Clifton: I support what Kevin McNamara said. Lord Laird is a maverick, even among the unionists. As Kevin said, he has gone out of his way to berate, in particular, the Human Rights Commission. Jean Corston's approach is likely to be more popular and it would be better for the steering committee to negotiate with someone who is more directly reflective of David Trimble and his senior associates because John Laird is a bit of a maverick. I do not know whether he is a loner or a stalking horse and I do not want to know. I would rather know the steering committee is undertaking negotiations more directly with the former leadership of the Ulster Unionists.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Thank you very much, Lord Smith. David will first make some comments and I will then reply finally and formally.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick MP): I think it would be appropriate if the two of us responded briefly. To a very large extent, the issue which has arisen is the presence of the unionists. Brian Mawhinney said the steering committee should jump over loops, saying, in effect, we should not stand on our dignity. Andrew MacKinlay, Andrew Mackay and others made the same point. Can I emphasise that from the very beginning we wanted the unionists on board. It was not just a piece of empty rhetoric. We believed this would be a far more inclusive and representative Body if a unionist joined us. We all know they refused to do so.

The steering committee is not standing on dignity. It is not a matter of saying we do not want to beg the unionists - I suppose we do not. However, because we do not want to beg them in that sense does not alter the fact that, apart from what we wanted in the beginning, the point Jean Corston made is valid, that is, we have changed, we have brought on board the devolved Bodies. Some will recall the debates we had over a number of years on how we should expand the Body arising from the Good Friday Agreement. We did not stand on dignity there. We did not say we were originally a British-Irish body and devolved institutions and bodies have no part to play, or, if they come on board, they should be a sort of second tier. I made it clear from the very beginning with some of my colleagues like Michael that if they were to join us they must be represented on the Steering Committee. There is no second tier membership in this Body. Everyone is equal and remains so.

I wish to refer to page 16 of the report. When Committee B visited Northern Ireland it was told by the DUP, not surprisingly, that the party was unwilling to meet with a committee of the Body. The report states:

Likewise, the Ulster Unionist Party members of the Regional Development Committee were reluctant to meet with Committee B given the party's policy of non-participation in the Body. The SDLP chair of the committee, Mr. Alban MacGinnis, indicated that, while he personally supported a meeting, he wished to proceed only on the basis of consensus within his committee.

That is perfectly understandable. We find there this continued reluctance on the part of the unionists to come on board, which Austin Currie emphasised in his remarks. That does not mean that, arising from today's discussions, the Steering Committee will not the matter give further consideration. Jean Conston suggested a change of name, which is a possibility. I am aware there are reservations but there is no reason why we should call ourselves forever and a day the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. There is a case for considering a change of name and not necessarily to encourage the unionists to join us. I believe there is a case for change on merit alone. The reason we wanted to bring the devolved institutions on board is that we should become the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council. The British-Irish Council is a ministerial body, it is not really accountable in a parliamentary sense, except, perhaps, to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Dáil. We wanted to see the Body as the parliamentary tier, as suggested in the White Paper on the Good Friday Agreement. On merit alone there is a case for the steering committee to look at the matter again. Members can rest assured that it is not our wish in any way to discourage people, it is the very opposite. How far can Brian Mawhinney jump through hoops to do this remains to be seen, bearing in mind what I have just quoted.

Like Austin, I am most reluctant - anyone who knows my politics will not be surprised - to be an apologist for Sinn Féin. As far as I understand, they have no wish to boycott the Body. They would have to explain, like other people. They are not the only members who are not present at our meeting today and yesterday. As far as I know - Deputy O'Kennedy may have more information than I have - there is no wish on the part of Sinn Féin to boycott the Body in any way whatsoever.

Rosemary McKenna spoke about female representation on the Steering Committee. We had Patricia Ferguson but, as she said, that is a matter for the nominating bodies and the two sovereign parliaments. If I may say so - I am not abandoning my place on the Steering Committee - in this day and age it is rather odd to have an executive committee, like other bodies, made up purely and simply of males. That is a factor that, perhaps, nominating bodies should take into consideration and not dismiss it as "political correctness", as the old cliché says.

We also said we should be a modern Body. Rosemary McKenna also said we should be a modern body. I know of no politician the world over who argues that the institutions with which he is involved should be anti-modern. We want to be a modern body and we do our best - as I have indicated about membership of committees - to make us so.

Lord Laird wrote to me, arising from a conversation he had with Peter Temple-Morris and then we had a long telephone conversation. I wrote back on 18 February and said, "Many thanks for your letter regarding the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. Peter Temple-Morris did tell me the conversation you had with each other over participation in our proceedings". Then I went on in the short letter to say, "British and Irish members of the Body have, since our inception 11 years ago (it actually should have been 12), strongly been of the view, as Peter would have

mentioned to you, that it would be very helpful for all concerned if representatives of the Unionist bodies were fully involved. As regards making a presentation, I would consult with my colleagues on the Steering Committee regarding this and will write to you again."

The Steering Committee did consider it. Other individuals, as Michael will know, have made approaches to us since 1990 to make representation. How far does Lord Laird represent the Unionist point of view and how far we should say, in effect, that individuals - not parties or representatives but purely on their own wish and initiative - should come along? It is clear that Lord Laird wanted to come and say, to the Irish in particular, that you have not fulfilled most of the obligations of the Good Friday Agreement. If the Unionist parties were represented as they should be they would make that point. We would be a much more lively and controversial Body if they came along. Have no illusions on this. If the Unionists, let alone the DUP, engaged in our proceedings they would not come along to be part of a mutual admiration society. They would certainly be critical and very controversial, but why not? We never intended to be a mutual admiration society. However, how far one individual should come along and claim to be representative when he is not, as far as we know, and when his party boycotts this Body is another matter. I am sure the Steering Committee will be willing to look at the matter again.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): It has been very useful to clarify some misunderstandings which may have existed and to bring members up to date on what has happened over a number of years.

Let me start with the first informal contacts which were made six or seven years ago when one or other member of the Unionist Party who was in Dublin for discussions and negotiations approached me - and I was very happy to have that approach - and indicated to me that if we could consider changing the constitution and format of the Body as it was then to make it more akin to what we have now - a representative council of the isles representing the islands and the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies - it would ease the path for the Unionist Party to become involved with us. That was personally conveyed to me.

My colleagues on the Steering Committee will know that from that time on I made every possible effort to accommodate that view. I am conscious also of the fact that sometimes there are understandable sensitivities on the part of the Unionist Party, which I have always taken on board in the course of my political life. As a consequence of that we reconstituted this Body. Members will recall that we passed a resolution in Killarney changing the constitution of the Body to embrace what we now have from the other devolved Assemblies and Parliaments and from the islands, to meet those wishes.

I do not denigrate the presence of our Scottish, Welsh and island colleagues here. It has given a new dimension to our proceedings and I greatly welcome it. However, they will understand that this was not our priority at the time. Our primary purpose

at the time was to meet the wishes of the Unionist Party, and that we did. Having done that the response is as we know.

Members who are not in regular contact may feel the Steering Committee has been preventing this development. We are individuals who do not meet every day and this is a problem. I have heard implied hints that the Steering Committee has put the brake on the involvement of unionists but this is not the case.

When Unionists did not join the Body we met and discussed the matter a number of times. Eventually, at the end of December 2000, a letter was sent in the joint names of David Winnick and myself to David Trimble. We said:

At a recent meeting of the steering committee of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body it was unanimously agreed that a formal invitation should issue to your party to join with other parties and nominate members to the Body. You will be aware that the rules of the Body were amended by unanimous decision at our most recent plenary session to permit Members of the new Scottish Parliament the devolved Assemblies of Northern Ireland and Wales and of the States of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man to participate fully on this Body and this option has since been taken up by Members of those Assemblies.

We sincerely hope that the new arrangements, which effectively create a new parliamentary platform for the democratically elected representatives of all the people concerned, will facilitate your party's decision to accept our invitation to become full and valued members of the Body.

We enclose a copy of the rules of the Body for your information.

We got no reply to that letter. No one could suggest that was other than a generous offer. As a consequence of that we considered that the Unionist Party might not want formal requests. It was suggested that we make informal contacts or that those in Westminster who would meet Unionists Members more regularly than I would, for example, would let them know informally and come back with their reports. That has gone on. A member of the Steering Committee who is not with us this morning, Michael Mates, will confirm that he was engaging in those informal consultations for some time. Peter Temple-Morris has been involved with this Body for a considerable time and John Laird's approach to Peter seems to open up a new dimension. Members will understand that we could not interpret John Laird's approach as being on behalf of the Unionist Party while our letter awaits response.

I have no hang-ups about the name of this Body. This is a matter which the Body itself can consider from now on. Before I conclude my responsibilities, I would like members to know that I have always taken the view that we have an obligation to involve ourselves on the broadest front and take account of all sensitivities. There is a world out there which is bigger than Britain and Ireland together. It embraces Europe and many international issues about which all elected representatives should

be concerned and to which we should apply ourselves. Sometimes the best way of solving problems on a narrow ground is to elevate the debate above and beyond that narrow ground and onto a wider range of issues. I had always hoped we could engage our Unionist colleagues in that kind of discussion. I dearly hope that that opportunity will arise in the next course of the Body's consultations.

I have found that the presence of our colleagues from the islands, the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, has added a new dynamic to the Body, even though they were not always our immediate priority I say honestly.

Members: Hear, hear.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I express my appreciation to them.

If there are members of that party, who do not wish to have any contact formally or otherwise with this group, nothing that we say or do will change that, although I wish it were not so.

We have had contacts, because of the evolution of this Body, with others who have noted our progress. The Nordic Council has invited steering committee representatives to attend its next meeting and two or three of us, on your behalf, will go. We are expanding and reaching out.

I do not wish to have my position distorted. I saw a report in *The Irish Times* that Lord Laird, following on from David Trimble's comments on this mono-ethnic, insular place, stated that he could testify to the veracity of what David Trimble had said because he himself had been subjected to the same isolation in his contacts with the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. Do I need to say anything more?

For those who have not been to the Body's meetings for some time, such as some who made contributions this morning, I say - and Michael Mates can confirm this - that there has been Sinn Féin presence from time to time, from the Dáil in the person of Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin and from the Northern Ireland Assembly in the person of Barry McElduff. However, someone has concluded that this session might not have suited them or their political agenda, and so I speculate that is the reason for their absence. I wish they were here to listen to the views of the elected representatives of the people of these islands.

Co-Chairman (Mr. David Winnick MP): There is a further point arising from the procedures at Question Time. I agree entirely with the points made by Mrs. Rosemary McKenna and Mrs. Jean Corston on the need to change Question Time and liven it up.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I have worn both hats for a considerable time and I believe that Parliament is the place where the Executive should be tested constantly and, if this is an extension of Parliament, then we should not allow the Government of whichever jurisdiction to use the procedures to hold information back that should be forthcoming among parliamentary colleagues or refrain from

answering questions. I fully support that position although it may mean that we will have to review the actual procedures because, as Austin Currie pointed out, they differ slightly in the sovereign Parliaments at least. I was impressed by the procedures in the Scottish Parliament when we visited it recently. As far as this Body is concerned, we will do everything to ensure that when we meet again in Manchester, we will have a vigorous question time such as has been demanded.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): Arising from the points made by Andrew McKinley and others about Question Time, I will make sure that it is on the agenda of the next meeting of the steering committee, although Michael will not be around then. I take the points raised by Rosemary McKenna and Jean Corston that to liven up the body we need a better Question Time. On the matter of Ministers making statements, we want them to come and the content of their statements must be a matter for them. It is unlikely that they will be controversial. However, Question Time can provide a cutting edge and should not be curtailed too soon, as we tend to do because Ministers are anxious to get away to other duties, as it dilutes the proceedings. We will look at this again in the steering committee.

Motion put and agreed to.

Substantive Motion for the Adjournment of the Body

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): We now come to No. 2, the substantive motion for the adjournment of the Body. The debate will be on the future of Europe and will commence with Michael O'Kennedy. Those who wish to speak should indicate their intention to the clerks or me. We have little time left as we have to end at 12.15 p.m. and Kevin McNamara will conclude. Therefore, if Members keep their remarks brief, as Michael O'Kennedy and I do, there should be no difficulties.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I do not propose to take much time. There are many matters in which I have considerable interest and concern relating to this. As we move towards common positions and co-operation on domestic fronts, there are issues arising from our common membership of Europe that affect our peoples and it would be strange if we did not examine the issues in this Body. That is why I suggested putting this item on the agenda, if not for a full discussion at this session, then with a view towards a report on developments in Europe insofar as they affect us.

One practical example is the fact that Ireland is now part of the new European currency and our old currency, which was in association with sterling for some time, has gone. This means that there are now unintentional barriers and distortions between the UK and Ireland, particularly along the Border, where, for a few weeks, three currencies circulated. There are many other important issues to be discussed and I now leave David Winnick to chair the session.

We have with us now, my good colleague, the former Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton. He is a member of the presidium on the convention of the future of Europe. I hope

the Co-Chairman will be able to invite him sometime to give us an update on what they are looking at. He may be able to give some insight given the strategic role of the presidium.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I welcome Deputy John Bruton. I served with the Deputy on the same committee for a time and we have had some interesting conversations. I hope he will be able to speak today. We will begin with Mr. Walter MP.

Mr. Robert Walter MP: Thank you Co-Chairman for calling me early because, unfortunately, I have to leave before we finish. I have been attending the meetings of this Body for about five years and we have spent a lot of that time talking about the divisions and conflicts of the North rather than areas of genuine common interest. The greatest of these is our membership of the European Union and the development of Europe. We both joined in 1973. In recent years we have different emphases. The UK is probably more concerned with common foreign and security policy and Ireland is now a fully fledged member of the euro zone and the punt has disappeared.

There are significant areas of common interest although Ireland has had its problems with the referendum on the Nice Treaty and we have yet to face the referendum hurdle on the euro. We should focus together on the next inter-governmental conference in 2004 and particularly on the convention on the future of Europe. Because they are common problems, we should together be looking at the consequences of enlargement. There are the small problems of voting rights but the much bigger consequence of enlargement, which governments have failed to address ever since we joined the European Union, is the future of the common agricultural policy. It is quite clear that the common agricultural policy, in its current form, cannot survive enlargement which brings in countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

The whole evolution of the European security and defence policy needs thorough debate. There are many unresolved issues on that not least of which is its ability to do anything meaningful in the short run. Other unresolved issues are its relationship with NATO, with the new states on enlargement, with traditional neutrality and with democratic accountability. There are wider trade issues we should also examine because even within the World Trade Organisation we now appear to be embarking on a trade war with the United States.

We should be looking towards a union that looks outwards and that seeks to embrace all the work we have done in the union to create the largest single market on this side of the Atlantic. We should also to come together and combine that with the work done on the other side of the Atlantic in NAFTA and try to build a common north Atlantic free trade area which would resolve many of the problems we currently have with the United States and others.

This is a fairly large shopping-list but if we are to progress this for the benefit of our people on both sides of the Irish Sea this Body must engage in a relevant debate about the future of Europe. As politicians we spend a lot of time talking about structures and mechanisms and voting rights and far too little time talking about delivery and outcomes. This Body has a genuine role to play in articulating the common interests of the British and Irish people in the development of Europe. My plea is that we spend more time talking about our common European destiny and a little less time talking about our historical conflicts, important though the resolution of those is.

The Lord Dubs: I would like to say a few words about European enlargement which has an important influence on all of us. I also declare an interest in that at Westminster I am chair of an all-party parliamentary group, covering both Houses, on European accession. As such I have had a lot of contact with politicians, diplomats and officials from the accession countries and a lot of the discussion has focused on the Irish referendum which rejected the Nice Treaty. I understand the difficulties and it is not for me to comment on what went wrong but there are a number of lessons in it.

First is that it had an element of a wake-up call for all of us and not just for people in Ireland. It is clear that people in Europe, both in existing EU countries and possibly in accession countries, are becoming a little more remote, detached and less enthusiastic about being committed to membership and full participation. Although the referendum took place only in Ireland it is quite likely that if other EU member states had a referendum on the Nice Treaty the result might not have been that different from the Irish result.

Secondly, the result has put a spanner in the works of European accession. Some of the accession countries said to me that they felt the drawbridge was being pulled up by existing members to stop them getting in. They were surprised that Ireland, of all countries, should be doing this particularly as many of us have held up Ireland as an example of an EU country which has not lost one jot of its character, individuality or national status through being part of the EU. If anything, the national status and individual character of Ireland has been enhanced through its membership of Europe and through its success as a member of the European Union.

I am concerned with the effect this has had on the accession countries and with the changes we must make. Mr. Walter was right that the CAP is the biggest hurdle. The way that is resolved, possibly under pressure from the WTO, will have a major impact on agriculture in Ireland, Northern Ireland and to a lesser extent in Britain where our agricultural sector is small. The impact of this will be important and there is no way in which the accession countries, particularly Poland with its large agricultural sector, could join under the present CAP without causing all of us to have to pay significantly more into the European budget of which agriculture is already nearly 50%.

There are enormous implications and a short debate at the end of our meeting is not the way to do justice to it particularly as the debate can range over other issues like defence etc. We should all be aware that our people need to be more actively engaged in what is happening in order that they do not reject proposals as the Irish did with the Nice Treaty. I wish some of us could help Ireland to deal with the next referendum on the Nice Treaty but I fear that outside interference would only make things worse.

Co-Chairman, Mr. David Winnick: I will explain the procedure for the time we have left. Senator Paschal Mooney is next, followed by The Lord Temple-Morris and then by Mr. Elfyn Llwyd MP. Mr. Kevin McNamara MP will then reply. Then Mr. John Bruton TD has been invited by me, in writing, to address us briefly at the end of our proceedings on this debate.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I am pleased that this particular debate is taking place because Lord Dubbs put in context the Irish position on future EU enlargement. The Body should note that the Government has embarked on an information exercise through a National Forum on Europe, to which references were made by our Minister for Foreign Affairs yesterday.

We were very privileged to have a member of the House of Lords making a presentation to us last week on the accountability element of the UK's membership. I agree with Lord Dubs that it was a wake-up call. However, opinion polls that were carried out by the European institutions came to the conclusion that over 60% of the people of Ireland stated they did not understand the issues surrounding the Nice treaty. Partly because of that, an overwhelming number of people did not vote. I am now more optimistic about a second referendum being carried than I was in the immediate aftermath of the referendum last July.

The National Forum on Europe has certainly reawakened interest in a wide variety of issues facing the Irish people and the peoples of Europe. It is doing a very good job. I am very pleased that Deputy John Bruton is here. He will give this Body an opportunity to hear at first hand the deliberations that he has made and the excellent report that he presented as a member of our Joint Committee on European Affairs. The report was also presented to the National Forum on Europe at Dublin Castle recently.

It is rather ironic, and a side issue, that we have been discussing the absence of the Unionists. I am delighted that Deputy John Bruton, being the pro-European that he is, was able to overcome the difficulties within his own party, which is not represented at the National Forum on Europe. It has opted out of it completely, much to our regret. However, Mr. Bruton has been a shining light in that regard and I look forward to hearing his comments.

It was pointed out by Mr. Robert Walter earlier that there are issues that separate us in Europe, Britain and Ireland. We do have different interests. Certainly, what has emerged as a result of the post-Nice referendum debate so far is that the interests of

smaller states *vis-à-vis* those of larger states will become central in the context of the Convention on the Future of Europe. In order to address the difficulties that have arisen as a result of the rejection of the Nice treaty, we are seeking a declaration from the leaders of the EU, who have agreed, following the Barcelona summit, to attach a declaration or make a declaration at the Seville Summit in June. I hope this will go some way towards allaying the fears of many people in this country that Irish neutrality would be compromised as a result of the ratification of the Nice treaty.

In the debate following the Nice referendum, it has certainly emerged that there was a great deal of obfuscation and downright dishonesty on the part of those on the "No" side. They attempted to inject into the debate issues that had absolutely nothing to do with the Nice treaty. Nowhere is neutrality mentioned in the treaty. That matter was dealt with in Amsterdam. There is no doubt that people were genuinely concerned about the question of European armies etc.

The other main issue which has arisen, and which will continue to interest those of us involved in this great European experiment, is that of accountability to national parliaments - I hope this Body will address that issue. As the Minister said in one of his answers yesterday, there is almost certainly a lack of connection between the ordinary citizens of Europe and the legislators and those who have a vision for the future of Europe. It seems the vision makers have moved one step too far ahead of the ordinary citizens of Europe. They have not brought the citizens with them in respect of this great experiment and vision that the European Union is.

Increasingly, Ireland takes the position that we should talk of a union of nation states where national parliaments will continue to have a very primary role to play because most citizens in individual countries relate to their national parliaments and representatives rather than the representatives elected to the European Parliament. That debate is now in progress and the Convention on the Future of Europe will be examining the accountability factor. Perhaps Deputy John Bruton will have something to say about that.

The question of the future of all states, not just the small states, has emerged as a result of the ongoing debate that we have had at the National Forum on Europe so far, and also the issue of the status of the Commission and the Commissioners. As one will be aware, the Nice treaty states that once we reach the magic number of 27, each country will lose the automatic right to nominate a Commissioner. However, it has not been made clear how the alternative Commission membership will operate. It has certainly become a key issue in our debate because the Commission, as a guarantor of the treaties and as the institution that initiates legislation, is for us - perhaps there is a different view in Britain - beneficial to smaller states. We jealously guard the view that the Commission should continue to be enhanced. Therefore, we feel we should be part of that process. It is part of the ongoing debate on how the entire institutional framework will develop once we hit the magic figure of 27.

As has been said by other speakers, there are many issues we could debate here. It is important that we put this matter on the agenda today and I suggest to the standing committee that this become a permanent feature of the deliberations of this Body.

The Lord Temple-Morris: I very much echo what other speakers have said about the importance of having this on the agenda. Understandably, we are concerned with the island of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As far as the future of our two countries within Europe is concerned, it is very important, and not just a case of navel gazing, that we discuss the issue of co-operation and our ideas for the furtherance of the mutual interests of a leading large country and a leading small country. We are well placed to do that. It is the bringing of those two together that, in many ways, creates a positive future for Europe.

Britain is the only country in the European Union, as it is presently constituted, that has not really made up its mind about its role in Europe. I am not saying this in a party-political sense. Whether we should be in or out of Europe is still being debated. Everybody else is working on the sort of Europe that they want. We cannot afford much more of this important delay. Again, we are losing, round after round, to a Europe that is developing, to a certain extent, without our maximum influence.

That leads me to my second point. The sooner the European referendum comes along, the better. I hope our Prime Minister and Government will be bold about this. They have every reason and facility to be so at the moment. The European referendum debate, in which I believe the euro will win, will in many respects revolve around whether we are in or out. That is almost inevitable. It will flush out the real anti-Europeans. Provided that the euro wins - it is a risk but everything is risky in this regard, particularly a referendum - the "in" case will win and the matter will be removed from British domestic politics. That would be a very healthy thing for all political parties and, as I said, I am not being party-political in saying so. We could then proceed with a more genuine national debate as well as an international and European debate.

With regard to the enlargement of the institutions, it frightens me how Europe can put the cart before the horse in many respects. The lack of ability to agree even on simple things, in Barcelona for example, because of national considerations is evident. At the same time, we will be taking on ten or more new accession countries although we do not have even a basic agreement on the sort of institutions that could possibly deal with such an enormous influx.

We desperately need to agree, not only on the rhetoric about how marvellous Europe will be and the unity of the family and all that lovely, generalised stuff which is in the setting up of this all-important convention, but also on the nitty-gritty. That is why I welcome Deputy John Bruton, one of our former members who departed for high realms of Government and has come back in this important capacity. It is vital to hear his view on how such a large and ungainly convention with the enormous task it has will reach conclusions which will have the authority to get through the

Council. However, nobody is better qualified to do this than Deputy Bruton, having been a member of the Council himself.

There were many good elements in our Foreign Secretary's speech recently in the Hague which pointed out that we should not refer to a European constitution, rather that a statement of principles and objectives with particular reference to subsidiarity is an important thing for national parliaments as well as devolved institutions. The European Parliament must function as a European entity - at present it is ridiculously national in the way it conducts its elections and in its accountability to the electorate. For instance, there are elections on different days using different electoral systems, press conferences are addressed by national leaders and most of the electorate does not vote anyway. Most of the electorate do not have the faintest idea who the leaders of the European political parties are. There are no effective European international political manifestos spoken of by any form of leadership at European level.

Until, say, the German leader of a European party that the British Labour Party belongs to comes to talk to the UK public and is given media coverage, it will never be perceived as an important election. We must make it accountable and the institutions have much to do themselves in this respect. The only time it was referred to recently in the national media - apart from the odd bit here and there - was when there was a first class row over the sacking of the Commission and suddenly it was a juicy story on the news every night.

The balance of the Council, the Commission and the role of national parliaments must be worked out. Unless we get it right in Europe, there are clear signs that the imbalance of world power and the role and omnipotence of the United States will remain completely unchallenged. That is not necessarily in the longer term, let alone the immediate term, the healthiest thing. It is up to Europe to get its act together in world terms.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick MP): I did not interrupt Lord Temple-Morris's contribution because it was interesting and reflected his life long interest in Europe but I point out to other speakers that if they take the same amount of time, we will be hopelessly late. I call Mr Llwyd, MP to be followed by Senator Bonner and David Melding.

Mr. Llwyd MP: I appreciated the interesting question and answer session with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Brian Cowen yesterday. It referred to the Laeken declaration and the challenges ahead as well as the need to recognise diversity and to find governmental mechanisms which are meaningful enough to our citizens for them to re-engage. I fully support Lord Temple-Morris's comments, particularly regarding the euro debates and where Britain seems not to be. There is much scepticism and disillusionment both within and without the EU which is to do with a democratic deficit at the hearts of the institutions. We must look for ways to bring Europe closer to the people.

Subsidiarity is important and I echo what Senator Paschal Mooney said earlier about small nations and regions being essential elements in a democratic and transparent Europe because people relate more closely to their own nation and regions. However, there is a growing gap between European citizens and the institutions and it behoves us all, regardless of what country or party we belong to, to engage with citizens and explain the benefits of developing a Europe of the regions. The small nations and regions have an important role in implementing legislation - they must have a voice in preparing and determining European policies and legislation which should be in the form of involvement by member states and at EU level. Mechanisms must be established to ensure the views of the smaller nations and regions are fed into the legislative process appropriately and at the right time.

One way the UK Governments could foster this arrangement would be to hold meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee in European format or call meetings of the EU officials sub-committee of the JMC. Such meetings could be reported back to the devolved Administrations. Member states should also be required to take into account the views of the small nations and regions when discussing issues which fall within the latter's policy areas. My party and I would like to see the preparation of a code of conduct setting out minimum standards for consultation because there has been insufficient consultation between European level and member states.

We must promote a bottom-up approach to policy development and involvement. That is why the principle of subsidiarity is so important - it is not simply a word - and it is the key to the development of the European Union. I hope the small nations and regions will be given an adequate opportunity to participate directly in the preparatory work of the IGC in 2004. In the enlarged Union there will be many more small new nations, most of which will have emerged from the larger entities which considered them as regions. As member states they will take their rightful place at the top table of the EU with full voting rights on the Council. This raises questions such as how similar sized countries within other states - or so-called regions - such as Wales, Scotland, Flanders or Catalonia stand in comparison to these new states. The majority of these small nations already meet the Copenhagen criteria set for membership. There are many challenges ahead and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. As Senator Mooney and Lord Temple-Morris have said, I believe this subject should be returned to consistently throughout our deliberations.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick MP): I thank Mr Llwyd for his contribution and for being aware of the time limit because I know there is much more he could have said given more time. I call Senator Bonner followed by David Melding MP.

Senator Bonner: I welcome the comments made by Lord Dubs, they re-iterate my own views expressed in Bournemouth after he expressed surprise on the defeat of the referendum on the Treaty of Nice. I used the same words as him to describe it as "a wake-up call". The forum for Europe debate has been continuing and the body has travelled the country meeting ordinary people in different venues. It was obvious at

the forum meeting I attended that there was a number of crackpots. They were some of the people who spread false information.

The Irish people expressed their views and while they have no difficulty with enlargement, they were speaking up for the first time about how Europe was affecting them. Neutrality was one issue frequently referred to - and the Taoiseach raised it in Barcelona - but there were other issues raised which affect small communities. I have difficulty with the structures and systems in Europe which make it seem that we are ruled by a bureaucratic system involving the President, the Commissioners, the Council of Ministers and so on. The MEPs we elect have provided little feedback to the public in the same way as members of national parliaments must report back to the people. The people are confused and do not know what is going on.

The issue of enlargement and how it will affect agriculture has been raised. The west coast of Donegal has for years had to rely on the fishing industry but even in our national parliament I feel alienated when I speak about it because it does not affect other members. We have had difficulties with fishing during our membership of the EU which may beset agriculture after enlargement. It affects few Members. However, it affects my constituency. Almost from day one we had to deal with the difficulty that may result to the farming industry due to enlargement. We have had the CFP, of which a major review is now taking place. At a meeting of the CMPR I attended in Bordeaux, one of the buzzwords in relation to the fishing industry was "the socio-economic factor of coastal communities". This goes to show what we are facing in this country.

When our Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources tried recently to tackle a huge problem faced by small fishermen, he was debarred by the European Commission, due to the tonnage system and the national tonnage limits, from issuing licences or tonnage to people who had been traditional fishermen for years. How can we talk about socio-economic factors affecting small coastal communities when the Minister in our own Government has tried to tackle the problem and was prevented from doing so? Very small amounts of tonnage are needed to correct the system and regularise all these small fishermen, yet our own Minister was debarred by the Commission from doing anything. That shows how far out of touch the Commission is.

When European directives are sent back here one wonders whether the people who created them ever visited the areas at which they are directed. I have taken particular note of two directives: in relation to one of them, I cannot see any uniformity throughout Europe. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland is clamping down on the issue of food safety, yet when one goes to places such as Spain one can eat off the side of the street. The other directive, which affects areas such as Donegal - where there is much land and little development - very badly, is the one about Special Conservation Areas. We are hampered by rules in so far as the local people, who already have problems with An Taisce, are forbidden to build houses in

their own areas by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands whose agency Dúchas is clamping down on development because of this directive.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I now call on Mr. David Melding who will make his maiden speech. He is very welcome to the Body and we are glad to see him here.

Mr. David Melding AM: Thank you for that kind introduction. It is a privilege to be a Member of the Body and I am delighted to be here representing the National Assembly of Wales. I will start by recollecting a few facts. About 20 years ago I was an undergraduate studying politics and I remember a professor of international politics telling us impressionable youngsters that there were two certainties in international affairs: one, that the Cold War would last for several generations with the Soviet Union at its centre and two, that stagnation in the EEC was inevitable and that all the talk about moving the institution on was ill-founded because it was just an incoherent concept. I also remember studying Soviet politics directly and on the reading list as light relief was Andrei Amalrik's book, *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?*, which was read in a hilarious context. As it turned out, he was out by just five years. It is a stunningly good essay, actually, if anybody wants to read it. It speaks of European states in general and Central and Eastern Europe in particular.

I start from the premise that the European Union must be for the whole of Europe. That was the founding vision, as far as I can see. Certainly it was in the propaganda of the Cold War when we in the West quite rightly used to taunt those in the East, saying that a united Europe was what everybody wanted and what free people would choose. We must emphasise the importance of enlargement. Waiting to have all the political structures in place to allow for enlargement is doing things the wrong way around. The first countries, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, are likely to enter in 2004. That means they will have waited 15 years to gain membership. I am not saying that they should have become members immediately with full status but not to have allowed them any introductory, associate status, to leave them out in the cold for 15 years, was quite a gamble. We are fortunate that these states did not suffer greater political instability. Many of the states of Central and Eastern Europe will be waiting at least 20 years for membership and there is the question of our attitude towards states of the former Soviet Union when they demonstrate that they are stable democracies. I often hear EU officials pooh-pooh the idea that they could possibly apply for membership of the EU.

We need a renaissance in the status of member states because they are the democratic building blocks. Strengthening the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament is the way forward. I started on an optimistic note about how much we have changed *vis-à-vis* European issues. Politically, the EU was the greatest achievement of the twentieth century in Europe. Now we must make it fit for future generations.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): I will call on Mr. McNamara in a second, but first I must inform the committee, so the Members can put it in their diaries, that the next plenary will begin on Sunday 24 November, although of course the formal

proceedings will take place on the Monday. The session will run from 24 to 26 November. The delay is obviously due to the forthcoming elections in the Republic. We will be meeting in a hotel about seven miles outside the city of Manchester. I have a note saying that it has its own 200-acre park with an 18-hole golf course and a large indoor swimming pool. That is presumably an incentive. More details will be given nearer the time but for those driving, it is just off the M60 Manchester ring road, 15 minutes from Manchester Airport. A conference dinner will be held in the Great Hall, Manchester Town Hall.

Mr. Kevin McNamara MP: I thought it was very remiss of us on the Standing Committee that we could not guarantee tickets to see Manchester United who are at home that weekend.

This is perhaps one of the most important issues facing Europe, including both our member countries, at present and the Convention is very important. There will be much hyperbole and much cynicism about it but the future of Europe and our future as states within this world will be decided there to a large extent. It will be decided how far we develop, how far we come together, how far we recognise and respect diversity, in John Hume's phrase, and how far we are prepared as nation states not to surrender sovereignty but to pool sovereignty in order to improve the economic and social conditions of our peoples. That will be very important.

I listened to what Senator Bonner was saying. Before we joined the EEC, my constituency sailed 150 deep-sea trawlers. There is now only one and that is in the Maritime Museum. That was partly the effect of the Community fishing policy. However, having said that and overcome that, our future still lies within Europe.

Many issues have been raised here and there is no time for careful consideration of them all. Therefore I will comment on a number of matters which are of importance and have to be decided. One is the role of the European Parliament and the degree to which it will have real powers as a parliament and to which it will be effectively able to scrutinise not only the Commission but also the Council of Ministers. Two main developments have occurred in the growth of the Community which are of importance democratically. The first is the development of what is sometimes called the second pillar - matters of justice and security where the European ministers act together but where the European Parliament has no say. That developed before the idea of a common security policy and the European army and these have created real problems democratically because nation states and national parliaments have not been able to examine them properly and fully.

The European Parliament has been deliberately kept out of these matters by the Council of Ministers because the Germans, for example, do not want the Irish questioning how they use their army. The Brits do not want anyone daring to suggest how we should use our army, even with the developments that have taken place in Europe. On security grounds, however, our own national parliament is not properly able to examine the role of the British Government and Ministry of Defence in terms

of the European set-up. There are democratic deficiencies that must be addressed at the start.

The Council of Ministers must be much more transparent; its debates must be seen. Too often Ministers return to their parliament and say they fought their corner but were outvoted. The story should really include that they did a deal on the issue and got something in return but cannot admit it because of interests at home being offended.

Those things go on but they must be explained. If there was transparency the feeling of suspicion towards the Council of Ministers would disappear. Senator Mooney raised the question of the Commissioners. There are various attitudes towards them. As defenders of the treaties they are very important but one sometimes wonders what treaties they are defending at any one time. There is a need for greater discussion and awareness to stop the parliament blaming the Ministers or the Commissioners. The Commissioners are, after all, public servants and they should be accountable to the parliament. Consideration should be given to the idea of the European Parliament having the right to dismiss individual Commissioners on a two thirds majority vote instead of only having the power to get rid of all of them, as happened under President Santer.

There are important matters here that go to the root of our vision for Europe and I hope there will be further debates on the issue. I have come to the conclusion that the only way we can maintain good attendance at the Tuesday morning debate is to have Members' salaries and conditions of service as the last item on the agenda. Everyone would then be present. We could look at this debate in Manchester or at the next plenary meeting in Ireland. It will be a major issue, particularly once we know the results of the Convention and their meanings for our own parties, parliaments and countries.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): That concludes the debate on the Adjournment. It is now my pleasure to invite Mr. John Bruton to address the session.

Deputy J. Bruton: It is a privilege to be asked to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Body, of which I was once a member, on the subject of the Convention on the Future of Europe. It is indicative of the standing of the two sovereign parliaments here, among the parliaments of all the 15 EU member states, that a British MP, Gisela Stuart, and I were elected by all of our national parliamentary colleagues to represent them on the praesidium of the convention. That is a tribute to the work we have done in our joint tradition of developing the concept of responsible government over many centuries.

The convention got off to a good start. Last week we reached agreement on our rules of procedure, and on the role of candidate countries and their languages in our work - two issues that had the potential to be very divisive. The president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, has shown just the right mixture of firmness and flexibility, and the praesidium works in a relaxed, almost jovial, way.

Last week we had an initial debate asking ourselves the question, "what do people expect from Europe?". In a sense that is a loaded question because we are not asking the same searching question about our national and local governments. The questions should really be "what do people need from governments at whatever level they operate?" and "at what level of government can those needs best be met?".

The first thing people need is personal security - freedom from war, and freedom from crime. The second thing people need from government is the means of making a living - the chance to have a job or, if they cannot work, decent social support. The third thing is fairness and democratic involvement.

Personal security cannot be achieved without action both at national and European level. The means of making a living cannot be provided without action at both levels. We will make no progress at any level of government without fairness and democratic involvement. I hope the Convention will avoid sterile debates about "federalism" and "super-states", setting one level of government against another, and the pursuit of elusive concepts like "sovereignty".

The convention should not be apologetic about idealism about European integration. Remember what we are against; as the Laeken Declaration put it, we must oppose the "forces of religious fanaticism, ethnic nationalism, and racism".

The European Union is a huge achievement, unique in world history. It came about because some visionary people saw that nationalism and the idolatry of the nation state had given us two world wars. These visionaries did not wait for focus groups and opinion polls to tell them that it was time to move forward. They led from the front. This convention must do likewise.

We are moving from a Europe of diplomacy to a Europe of democracy. The big difference between national and European government is that the public feel that they elect, and can sack, their national government. They do not feel they can elect or sack the government of Europe - that is the problem. Even when the European Parliament sacked the Commission, the people did not really feel that this was a decision of the sovereign people of Europe, rather a clash between two European elites.

It is not that people do not have a chance to vote on European questions. They vote for their members of the European Parliament - almost as many voted in Britain as in a recent "Big Brother" poll - they vote for the members of the European Council of Ministers and they even vote for the people who select and ratify the Commission.

While casting all those votes, however, they do not feel in any direct sense that they elect or sack the government of Europe in the same way they can elect and sack their national government. That is why we should have a presidential election every five years, when the voters of Europe themselves would choose the President of the Commission, rather than him or her being chosen in a smoke filled room. It would

create a direct personal link between each voter and the European Union at its highest level. I am glad that Irish political opinion is moving in the direction of such an election, with representatives of the three main all parties endorsing this proposal, or variants of it.

In this way, we can complement the constitutional democracy we all will continue to enjoy at the level of our nation state with a new system of constitutional democracy at European Union level.

Every crazy directive mentioned by Senator Bonner was agreed to by Irish civil servants or Ministers on their way to becoming law but institutional memory is not always good and people forget what they agreed or believe they agreed to something else. They will then blame Europe for what they agreed themselves.

I agree with David Melding on drawing attention to the need for enlargement of the European Union as an underpinning of democracy in central and eastern Europe. I was shocked to discover at a recent meeting I attended that the Sudeten question has re-emerged. There is an argument arising out of the Benes laws, which drove the Sudeten Germans out of Sudetenland in 1946. Considerable tension is brewing between Austria and the Czech Republic on this matter. This issue highlights the fact that if countries such as these are kept outside the EU, potentially dangerous political situations will be allowed to develop.

I agree with Kevin McNamara's statement that we do not have adequate parliamentary scrutiny of the Second and Third Pillar, the justice, home affairs and defence pillars of the EU's work. That is another challenge that must be met by the Convention.

It is a great honour to have been invited to speak at this meeting and to meet many of my old friends again. Thank you.

Co-Chairman (Mr. Winnick): Thank you very much, Deputy Bruton. Of course I should have mentioned that Deputy Bruton is a former member of this body. It is remarkable to note the number of Irish politicians who have held high ranking positions in public life and have also been involved with this body.

I am delighted to see that Mr. John Hume M.P. is present at this meeting. I thank him for attending, we all know what a busy life he leads in Northern Ireland and in Europe.

I have a list of members of the British-Irish Parliamentary body who will not be standing for re-election: Mr. Michael O'Kennedy, Mr. Seán Doherty, Mr. Brendan McGahon, Mr. Matt Brennan, Mr. John Browne and Mr. de Rossa. I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. O'Kennedy in particular for his contribution to the work of this body. He has a great sense of humour and the role that he has played has been a unique one. These are not just empty words from his Co-Chairman, Michael O'Kennedy has truly played a positive role in this body. Over many years, he has

been involved at all levels of Irish political life and I would like him to know that this body is deeply grateful for the contribution that he has made to British-Irish parliamentary relationships. From the very beginning, he has sought to establish dialogue between the parliamentarians of our two countries. I wish Mr. O'Kennedy and his wife every happiness in the future.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): I have always relied on the generosity of Mr. Winnick's Co-Chairmanship. Before concluding this meeting, I must say that I do appreciate Mr. Winnick's kind words and those of the rest of my colleagues, who I have come to know and respect over the years. It means a lot to me. Together, we have made some considerable progress and development. Former Chairpersons of this body have made an enormous contribution to the launch and successful continuation of this committee.

The debates that have taken place this morning demonstrate what we are all trying to achieve. We have tried to broaden the base to include all democratically-elected representatives in Britain and Ireland. This is a development that I welcome. I am delighted that, during my time as Co-Chairman, our colleagues from the Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Assemblies, as well as representatives from the islands of Jersey and Guernsey have joined us. I would be happier if representatives of the Unionist parties would also join with us. I hope that my successor will have the privilege of being able to advance the common interests shared by all here.

I am pleased that this session concluded with a debate on developments in the EU. At my suggestion, the steering committee included this topic on the agenda. It was appropriate to do so because the evolution of Europe is something which affects all of us. Clearly, there are different points of view within and between our various political parties. Over the years, we have also seen that there are different priorities. This inter-parliamentary body cannot ignore the significance of our role in Europe. That is why I thought we should have this debate. It is but a beginning, but it is one which I am happy to be a part of. A large proportion of my political life has been spent on European issues. The confident approach of this body will be demonstrated in further discussions of EU matters.

As I conclude my responsibilities with this body, I am pleased to note that my good friend of many years, Mr. John Hume, is present at this meeting. He has made an enormous contribution to this and many other bodies. Mr. Hume is now a member of this inter-parliamentary body, having taken over from his friend Mr. Seamus Mallon, M.P. I cannot think of anyone who personifies more the concepts of reconciliation, common purpose, understanding and obligation to the next generation. This body is privileged to work with him.

I am going to miss this job a little. I intend to visit from time to time, if I may. I will attend the committee meeting that Mr. Kevin McNamara is going to organise; that will be my last formal role. It has been an enormous privilege for me to work with this body and I wish all of you every success in this very important work. Thank you.

Mr. John Hume: I apologise for not attending this meeting yesterday, but I had already accepted an invitation to give the Bergman Memorial lecture in Belgium. The main reason that I am here today is because my colleague Dr. Joe Hendron had a serious operation yesterday. He has been quite ill for some time. The colleague who was supposed to attend this meeting on Dr. Hendron's behalf, Mr. Danny O'Connor, has suffered a bereavement. His father died yesterday. I would like to express my sympathy to him and his family.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): We appreciate you coming here to inform us of that, John. We are obviously sorry to hear about Joe's health at the moment and wish him a speedy recovery. We also express sympathy to Danny O'Connor on the death of his father.

Mr. McNamara MP: This is one of the most pleasurable speeches I will ever have to make, as this has been another very successful conference organised by our Irish colleagues. The hospitality has been superb, the accommodation great and the arrangements very fine indeed. I would like in particular to thank the staff, clerks and organisers of both parliaments, but particularly the Irish parliament for the work the work they have done in organising a conference of this size. It takes a considerable amount of time, lots of egos have to be gently stroked and matters have to be arranged very carefully. That has been done extremely well.

I also thank the staff both of this hotel and at Killiney Castle last night for the care and attention they have paid to us. They were ever present, ever helpful but never either obsequious or obtrusive, and that shows what splendid staff they have, what personal dignity they have, and the whole experience has been thoroughly good and very well done.

Co-Chairman (Deputy O'Kennedy): Before formally adjourning, my co-chair has asked me remind our British colleagues that their delegation departs from Dublin airport at 2.30, but before sending you on your way, we will of course accord you the usual hospitality. There will be lunch now in the hotel here for members and partners, whom I believe have rejoined us again. The body is adjourned until November 2002.

The meeting adjourned at 12.32 p.m.