



**BRITISH-IRISH INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-FIFTH PLENARY CONFERENCE

25 to 26 November 2002

Worsley Park, Manchester

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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Steering Committee

Mr David Winnick MP }	Co-Chairmen
Mr Brendan Smith TD }	
Mr Kevin McNamara MP	Mr Séamus Kirk TD
Mr Michael Mates MP	Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD
Mr Murray Tosh MSP	Mr Donald Gelling MLC

Members and Associate Members Attending

Mr Barnes MP	Mr Hume MP	Mr Morgan TD
Mr Brady TD	Senator Hayes	Senator O’Brien
Mr Brennan MP	Ms Keaveney TD	Mr O’Brien MP
Rt Hon the Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville CH	Mr Killeen TD	Mr O’Keeffe TD
Mr Lenihan TD	Mr Kirk TD	Senator O’Rourke
Mrs Burnham AM	Mr Lenihan TD	Mr Öpik MP
Mr Crawford TD	Dr Lloyd AM	Mr Pattison TD
Mr Devins TD	Mr Llwyd MP	Mr Robertson MP
The Lord Dubs	Senator McHugh	Ms Robison MSP
Mr Ellis TD	Mrs McKenna CBE MP	Mr Sherlock TD
Mr English TD	Mr McMahon MSP	Mr B Smith TD
Mr Ennis MP	Mr McNamara MP	Mr I Smith MSP
Mr Gelling MLC	Rt Hon Andrew Mackay MP	The Lord Smith
Mr Glennon TD	Mr Mackinlay MP	Mr Stone MSP
The Lord Glentoran CBE DL	Senator Mansergh	Mr Thomas MP
Mr Griffiths AM	Dr Marek AM	Mr Tosh MSP
Mr Grieve MP	Mr Mates MP	Mr Walter MP
	Rt Hon Sir Brian Mawhinney MP	Mr Winnick MP
	Mr Melding AM	
	Senator Mooney	

Officials

Joint Clerks

Ms Alda Barry, *British Clerk*

Mr Jim Mulkerrins, *Irish Clerk*

Clerks of the Devolved Institutions

Scotland Mr Craig French

Wales Mr Peter Kellam

Northern Ireland Mr John Ross

Committee Clerks to the Body

Committee A: Sovereign Matters

Mr Colm McGrady Mr Huw Yardley

Committee B: European Affairs

Mr Mike Clark Ms Marianne Bolger

Committee C: Economic

Mr Colm McGrady Mr John Whatley

Committee D: Environment & Social

Dr Christopher Johnston Ms Marianne Bolger

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British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association

Mr Simon Burrowes Ms Muireann Crowley

Ms Jill Davies Mr Gerry Dunne

Mr Andy Philip Ms Vivien Wilson

BRITISH-IRISH INTERPARLIAMENTARY BODY

COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE AGUS NA HÉIREANN

25TH PLENARY SESSION

25 November 2002

The Body met at 9.35 am.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Welcome to the twenty-fifth plenary conference. I have some brief announcements to make. First, I would remind everyone to turn off their pagers, beepers and mobile phones while they are in the room. Secondly, I would remind Members that the proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

I should like to welcome new Members to our deliberations. Some are completely new and others are old friends. The Irish Membership has been reconstituted following the Irish general election. I am pleased to inform the Body that my good friend, Brendan Smith, has been appointed as Irish Co-Chairman. I am also pleased to announce that Seamus Kirk, who is a long serving member of the Body, has been appointed as vice-chairman and Jim O'Keeffe, who served on the Body in its early years, has also been appointed vice-chairman.

I am also pleased to welcome back to the Body Mr Seymour Crawford TD, Mr John Ellis TD, Senator Brian Hayes, Ms Cecelia Keaveney TD, Mr Tony Killeen TD, Mr Conor Lenihan TD, Senator Paschal Mooney, Senator Francis O'Brien, Senator Shane Ross and Mr Seamus Pattison TD (Deputy Speaker [Leas-Cheann Comhairle] of Dáil Éireann) who was a member of the Body in the early years.

I am also pleased to welcome as new Members of the Body: Mr Johnny Brady TD, Dr Jerry Cowley TD, Dr Jimmy Devins TD, Mr Damien English TD, Mr Jim Glennon TD, Senator Joe McHugh, Senator Martin Mansergh, Mr Arthur Morgan TD, Ms Liz O'Donnell TD, Senator Mary O'Rourke, Senator Brendan Ryan and Mr Joe Sherlock TD.

I am delighted to welcome Mr Gareth Thomas MP who has replaced Ms Gillian Merron MP.

The following Members have tendered apologies: Mr John Battle MP, Mr Joe Benton MP, Mr Henry Bellingham MP, Ms Jean Corston MP, Ms Helen Jackson MP, Mr Elfyn Llydd MP, Lord Temple-Morris, Ms Liz O'Donnell TD and Senator Shane Ross.

In accordance with rule 2(a), the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of this sitting: on the British side, Mr Brennan MP; Mr Ennis MP; Mr Grieve MP; Mr Robertson MP; and Mr Thomas MP. The Scottish associates attending are Ms Robison MSP and Mr Stone MSP.

The debates of this sitting will be recorded by Hansard staff of the member institutions under the direction of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association (BIPRA). This is the first time that the Body and the Association have collaborated. We are grateful to the Association for its kind offer to undertake the work, and we understand that it expects to be able to provide transcripts of the proceedings within two weeks.

I should inform Members that a group photograph will be taken in the foyer at approximately 3.30 pm. That is all that I have to say for the moment so I will hand over to my Co-Chairman.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): Thank you, Mr Winnick, for your warm welcome. I look forward to working with all Members of the Body during the next few years. The revised programme of business has been circulated, and I beg to move that it be adopted.

Mr Mackinlay MP: Will we have an opportunity to discuss future business and to look ahead to the next plenary session? For example, I believe that Tony Blair has never addressed this Body. I realise that the Chairmen cannot necessarily arrange that, but might we have time, during the next two days, to discuss possible future business, future invitees and the direction of the Body?

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): There will be such an opportunity tomorrow morning when we discuss Committee reports and alternative business, and I hope that you will be able to stay for that, Mr Mackinlay. If I tell the Prime Minister that you would like to see him here, that would be the best guarantee I could imagine that he will never attend. [*Laughter*].

Programme of Business agreed.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The first major item of business is the motion on recent political developments. It would be helpful if Members who wish to speak in the debate and who have not already given their names would tell Ms Barry and Mr Mulkerrins as quickly as possible.

Last night the Steering Committee discussed whether there should be a time limit on speeches. The consensus was that there should be a maximum limit of four minutes, which could be stretched to five minutes, although I probably should not tell you that.

In previous debates, Members have been reluctant to speak in the first 15 or 30 minutes. That might not happen today, as all British and Irish parliamentarians will wish to speak on such a controversial issue as the major political developments. It will be unfair if some Members are allowed to speak for eight, 10 or 12 minutes, while others have to squeeze their speeches into two minutes in the last hour.

Members, therefore, should indicate that they wish to speak, and we will try to be as flexible as possible. However, Members should try to keep their remarks to four to five minutes.

9.45 am

This is the perfect opportunity for Members to say that they wish to speak, but that does not mean that they cannot do so later. Neither the proposer of the motion nor the colleague who gives the winding-up speech at the end of the debate will be subject to the four-minute restriction. I remind everyone to turn on their microphones prior to speaking.

The Chairman of Committee A (Mr O'Keeffe TD):
I beg to move

That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement; is saddened at the suspension of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland; welcomes the determination of the two Governments to press ahead with all aspects of the agreement; calls on all political parties to redouble their efforts towards the restoration of the institutions which have benefited all the people of these islands; and urges all involved parties to continue their efforts to secure an early resumption of the Northern Ireland institutions.

I am delighted to return as a member of the Body. I recognise some of those who joined the opening meeting of the Body in Committee Room 15 in the House of Commons in 1990. After a long break, I am pleased to see the old Members again and to meet the new ones.

The Body is meeting at a time of great uncertainty in the Northern Ireland peace process. For that reason, this is a most significant meeting, and the signal and the message that emerge from it will be highly important.

The Northern Ireland institutions have been suspended, which is a clear regression of the peace process. None of us would wish for that. However, it is important to bear

in mind that although the institutions have been suspended, the agreement has not. That demonstrates the centrality of the Good Friday Agreement in everything that we say and do in relation to Northern Ireland's future. The agreement must remain the template for future political progress in Northern Ireland. It draws its strength from the authority and will of the Irish people, North and South. There can be no firmer mandate than that.

The agreement is also the reason for the motion. The Steering Committee began by seeking to have the Body reaffirm its support for the Good Friday Agreement.

We are saddened by the suspension of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, but we welcome the determination of the two Governments to press ahead with all aspects of the agreement. We call on the political parties to redouble their efforts to restore the institutions, which have benefited all the people of these islands. We urge all parties to continue their efforts to secure an early resumption of the Northern Ireland institutions. That is the motion that we will be asking you to adopt.

The central basis on which we deal with the motion is our absolute commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, but we also have to examine the problems that have given rise to the present suspension of the institutions. In that way we can map out a path to the restoration of the institutions. It is clear that in Northern Ireland there has been an enormous deficit of confidence, and major steps are necessary to restore that confidence. Those major steps will not be just on the part of any single body or party; the Good Friday Agreement was a collective act, and there will have to be a collective act by all for progress to be made.

That leads me on to issues that are hugely important and central to the restoration of the confidence that will ultimately lead to the restoration of the institutions. The central issue in Northern Ireland is policing. It is appropriate for this Body to recognise the major progress that has been made on the policing issue. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was established in November 2001, and it has just celebrated its first anniversary. The Policing Board has been in operation, but it has not had the support of all the parties in Northern Ireland. The board deserves the support of all parties and all communities in civil society in Northern Ireland. That is the absolute key to the future of Northern Ireland.

I am delighted that the new policing Bill will be circulated on Thursday 5 December in the House of Lords, and that the Second Stage debate will open there on Monday 16 December. The UK authorities are taking the issue seriously, and progress will be made on that front. Apart from the legislative moves, all parties need to give full support to the PSNI, and that involves Sinn Féin joining the Policing Board. I hope that that move will be made very soon.

In addition, there must be a focus on paramilitarism. I see no future for any kind of paramilitarism in Northern

Ireland; any future Northern Ireland must be based on exclusively democratic means. We now need a clear acceptance of that viewpoint by all those involved in or associated with paramilitary activity. The message from the Body should be quite clear — all paramilitary activity should be at an end, whether it is carried out by the Provisional, Official, Real or Continuity IRA, or, on the Loyalist side, by the UDA, LVF and the others. All those involved in any such activity, and all those associated with it, or who might have an influence on it, should accept totally and completely that paramilitaries are now redundant. It is time for those involved in paramilitary activity to accept their P45s and get off the stage. Northern Ireland's future must be based on a clear acceptance and understanding of that fact. We must say "goodbye" to the paramilitaries.

The third issue on which I want to touch — and, to some degree, it is related to the other two — is punishment attacks. Many of us have been horrified recently by the frequency and barbarity of such attacks. Three cases stand out: the McCartan attack; the McBrearty attack; and the Kelly attack. Loyalists have largely, but not exclusively, carried out such attacks. However, the Provisionals have also been involved. The McCartan case — in which a young man was nailed to a fence post in an attempted crucifixion — received huge attention, as did the McBrearty attack, which was obviously connected to suspected PIRA members. Of course, the attack on Raymond Kelly in south Armagh was also savage.

Those are examples of the continuation of punishment attacks. The Body should have a clear stand on such attacks, because its Members want to see an end to all such activity. The centrality of policing, which I mentioned earlier, is the only way those punishment attacks will be stopped. The BIIPB's support, and the support of everyone committed to the future in Northern Ireland, must be totally behind the new Policing Board.

I promised to keep within my time in presenting my argument. Progress in Northern Ireland has been moving on the basis of "two steps forward, one step back". Northern Ireland is in a "step back" situation now, and it is incumbent on us all to ensure that we return to the "two steps forward" mode as quickly as possible. The BIIPB has a role to play in that, and that role can be demonstrated through the contributions made in this debate and, above all, by the adoption of the motion. The Body's role in ensuring that Northern Ireland returns to "two steps forward" mode can also be demonstrated by its support for my comments on policing, paramilitaries and punishment attacks in Northern Ireland.

The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation will meet in Dublin Castle on Wednesday to hold a follow-up meeting on this issue. The forum was designed to examine ways in which lasting peace, stability and reconciliation can be established among all the people of Ireland. Although

the forum will be meeting in Dublin Castle, that is the central basis on which it will meet.

I am delighted to be back in the BIIPB, working with it towards achieving the objective that I outlined. In this time of great uncertainty, I ask the Body to adopt the motion. It encapsulates the approach that will lead Northern Ireland back to the “two steps forward” mode.

10.00 am

Mr Hume MP: I will be brief. An important point that should be made during the debate, which has not been made often enough on the streets, is that for the first time in history the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, by coming out in strength and voting for the Good Friday Agreement, have spoken clearly about the way in which they wish to live together. It is, therefore, the duty of all true democrats in Ireland, North and South, to implement the will of the people. That sends a clear message to certain paramilitary organisations, whose reasoning behind their paramilitary activity has always been that they are acting in the name of the Irish people. Those organisations can no longer claim that. If they wish to act in the name of Irish people now, they should make it clear that not only have their guns been left aside but that they have ended their activities, got rid of their weaponry and are completely committed to not being paramilitary organisations any longer.

That also sends a clear message to those Unionists who are working to end the agreement. The principle of consent is the primary principle of Unionism. Through the Good Friday Agreement, for the first time in history, all Nationalist parties in Ireland have accepted the principle of consent. Any change in the North requires the consent of its people. Therefore, the message to those Unionists who wish to overthrow the agreement is that if they do so, they will also overthrow the principle of consent. If that happens, any decisions on Northern Ireland can be made only by the two Governments acting together.

It is important that those messages to the two extremes — the bodies that withhold the full implementation of the agreement — are not only sent out once but are repeated until they are eventually followed.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you, Mr Hume, for that brief and useful contribution, which we all appreciate.

Ms Keaveney TD: Go raith maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. I agree with what has been said and, in my usual way, want to add a parochial tone. In one respect I come from the same constituency as John Hume, given that he lives down the road from me. I believe that I am now his local TD. He is definitely my local MP. Both of us come from the perspective of a tangible realisation of the value of the Good Friday Agreement for our area. Everything is not perfect, and there is a long way to go. However, the agreement has opened up many new frontiers.

I have often come here to complain to anybody who would listen — and to some people who would not — and to seek support for such matters as a car ferry across Lough Foyle. The car ferry became a reality in June 2002, and by mid-September 150,000 people had used it.

That, to me, is a tangible and concrete example of how the Good Friday Agreement has impacted positively on an area. It has helped its tourism and economy, and it has helped peace and reconciliation between North and South. Strangely, that has been reflected in the fact that people in Portrush and Portstewart are organising demonstrations on the beaches against a proposed wind farm in the Foyle area and have asked people to come over on the car ferries from Donegal to join the demonstrations. That has had a galvanising effect, as people see it, against something that has been imposed by the British Government. Anyone else who is interested in the subject can discuss it with me later.

We are saddened by the suspension of the institutions, because we cannot, for example, in the case of the proposed wind farm, talk to the local representative about our concerns and have them addressed. All parties agree with that. Mark Durkan, the Ulster Unionists and others were heard to say that people were happy to be able to talk to their own Ministers in their own areas about issues and to be able to explore local solutions to local problems.

I want to look at the policing issue in the context that I have already mentioned and from other perspectives. Burglary in County Donegal has risen by 29% this year, compared with the national average of 3%. We must have local solutions to local problems. Although, that is not to deride the direct rule Ministers who have taken over in the meantime. We want to see the institutions operating again so that we can work on real solutions to our problems.

There are some simple issues on which we must make progress. Therefore, I agree that the two Governments must keep the show on the road in the meantime. Aquaculture licensing is needed on the Foyle. The Loughs Agency must be operational statutorily. Infrastructural developments must be initiated and progressed. We cannot wait ad infinitum. However, it would be better if the devolved institutions were reinstated and politics returned to the people.

I agree that all paramilitary activity must cease. Policing must become “of the community” and “for the community” rather than, in this instance, “a local solution to local problems”, which we hear every day. I want to give policing my full parochial backing, and I know that the people in this room who have a good knowledge of the situation will deal with the wider issue. I fully endorse the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Barnes MP: As a British Labour MP, I have never really been on board with the idea of New Labour and the Third Way, except when it comes to Northern

Ireland. I have always believed there to be a third way, one that was distinct from the position of a united Ireland by force, by consent or by some modified version of joint sovereignty, and from the intransigent “No” position of many Loyalists who argue for integration with the UK. I believe power-sharing and co-operation with the Republic to be the pattern for a way forward that came out of the Belfast Agreement.

Therefore, I quote Tony Blair favourably on Northern Ireland matters. In his speech on 17 October in Belfast, he said that

“the continuing existence of the IRA as an active paramilitary organisation is now the best card those whom Republicans call ‘rejectionist’ Unionists have in their hand.”

He went on to say that

“To this blunt question: ‘How come the Irish Government won’t allow Sinn Féin to be in Government in the South until the IRA ceases its activity, but Unionists must have them in Government in the North?’, there are many sophisticated answers. But no answer as simple, telling and direct as the question.”

The ball is now in the hands of Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin has served its democratic political apprenticeship, and it now needs to be fully and fearlessly on board the democratic process. It went through the stage of “the ballot box and the Armalite”, which was a distorted form of democratic activity. It then moved to a power-sharing position, but we knew that the IRA had not gone away; it was still there.

Sinn Féin must take clear action, and that could be something like disbanding the IRA or detaching it entirely from Sinn Féin. It could take a lead on matters that other democrats would find appealing, such as detachment from anything that involves punishment attacks, or the disastrous situation where Loyalist paramilitary groups and the Provisional IRA forced people out of the country into exile, who now wish to return. Sinn Féin must act on that according to the norms of normal democratic politics and the belief in civil liberties that goes along with that.

Real debate is taking place in Sinn Féin. People are saying that they joined the organisation with the ideal of a united Ireland and not to be associated with a load of crooks. The paramilitary bodies throughout Northern Ireland have increasingly degenerated into mafia-type activity. The key is to have a situation where we can return to power sharing in Northern Ireland, and where we are ready to move ahead to the coming elections.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you, Mr Barnes. You can rest assured, and I give you a firm promise, that your first few words about new Labour will not be reported to the Whips — because I am your friend. I might even share those views.

Mr Kirk TD: I am glad that this Body can meet when the Assembly in the North is suspended. There are 14 or 15 new Members on the Irish side who are attending a plenary session of the Body for the first time. It is an opportunity for them to see at first hand the important,

and perhaps unsung, role that the deliberations at the plenary sessions since the Body’s inception in 1990 have played in promoting a greater understanding of the respective positions across the spectrum in Northern Ireland.

Today’s meeting is an opportunity to debate the problems that are holding up the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and, if the contributions here are sufficiently positive, we hope that they will ring the necessary bell with those who need to see things differently in order to restore the dialogue that will lead to the re-establishment of the Executive and the Assembly.

However, that will not be easy, as several issues are driving a wedge between the respective parties. The position has been compounded by the fact that some parties have Members in the Assembly who wish to see the institutions break down altogether. There is no alternative arrangement to the Assembly and the Executive, and it is in all our interests to see them restored. Intensive and detailed discussions went on for a long time to establish the institutions, and there is no alternative arrangement. There is an obligation to address the issues that divide the communities and to get the talks going in a positive way — whether that lies with the Ulster Unionist Party, Sinn Féin, the DUP or whoever.

Jim O’Keeffe referred to the twin issues of policing and paramilitary activity — those are the major wedges that keep both sides apart.

10.15 am

I am pleased that there is provision for reciprocal arrangements on policing in the Good Friday Agreement, which could be implemented through secondment opportunities or through lateral structures. However, that has not been highlighted to any great extent. For example, the presence of the Garda Síochána in Crossmaglen or in an area deeper in the North as part of the police force of Northern Ireland would be an opportunity for confidence building. It could reassure communities who have been indifferent to, or reluctant to accept, the new arrangement. Our Government would have to create new legislation, as would Westminster, but we should focus on that aspect of the policing debate. If it could be utilised to build confidence as part of the process, we should seriously consider it.

There is the issue of normalisation. Like others around the table, I live not far from the border, and watchtowers are a major problem. There is a symbolism about them, which if taken out of the equation would help to build the necessary confidence.

Punishment beatings and the exiling of people from their respective communities are not part and parcel of a democratic society. We must achieve the norms expected in such a society, particularly in the areas where punishment beatings and exiling occur. There is no point in saying that punishment beatings are the only alternative because

we do not have a policing arrangement in place. It is unacceptable, and today's plenary must convey that message.

Despite the suspension of the Assembly, there is no reason why economic co-operation should not progress in the normal way. There are several matters that need to be advanced, but I will mention those only briefly because time is restricted today. For example, serious consideration should be given to the possibility of developing industrial sites in unemployment black spots along the border, which will benefit the North and the South.

Those of us who are familiar with local authorities will know that waste management strategies have been evolving. I do not know how far those have evolved north of the border, but there are distinct opportunities for co-operation in that area with the formulation of an all-island waste management strategy.

Animal health and the harmonisation of farm development schemes have been highlighted many times, and there are benefits in progressing those.

Recently, we introduced a penalty points system in the South. However, the difficulty is that Northern motorists who drive to the South are not subject to it. The databases, North and South, should be harmonised — it is practical and possible, and it should be progressed.

The last area I will mention is healthcare. The cost of providing healthcare is high — certainly for us — and our Minister for Finance is examining his annual budgetary provision. The recent Estimates do not diminish the arithmetic necessary to maintain and support our healthcare structures.

The obvious question is: are there opportunities for co-operation on the whole island or, indeed, further afield? That would help maximise the use being made of the investment in our healthcare facilities in the Republic, north of the border, in the UK as a whole and further afield, in such places as the Isle of Man.

Thank you for your tolerance. It has been very worthwhile, and I look forward to a good debate. I sincerely hope that, at the end of the debate, new Members in particular will have a greater understanding of the Body's importance and the complexities of the problems in the North and that, in some way, we can help bring forward the re-establishment of the Executive and the Assembly.

Mr Mackinlay MP: One issue to which I feel we should address ourselves and about which we should put pressure on our respective Governments is this: there should be a presumption that the elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly scheduled for May 2003 will go ahead. There should be no hint or suspicion that they will be put off because someone might not like the result, and there is certainly a view in some quarters that this should happen. Not only would postponement be foolhardy in the extreme because of its long-term impact on the political

process; it would be anathema for those of us who go around the world criticising such people as the President of Belarus for moving the goalposts. We should send that message very clearly.

The Police (Northern Ireland) Bill and progress on the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have been mentioned. Those of us who wish to see the Patten Report implemented with vigour and as soon as possible should nevertheless temper that desire with some sensitivity towards the Police Reserve.

I know that the title Police Reserve is a misnomer, for the organisation overwhelmingly, almost 100%, comprises one religious persuasion, and I am fully aware of its history. Nevertheless, those men and women have for many years borne the brunt of a great deal of trauma and heartache. At a time when the PSNI has accelerated recruitment and promotion of Catholics — something that we all want to see — we must have some regard for the human dimension, and reservists should not feel that they are simply being dismissed. I cannot believe that it is not within the capacity of men and women to find a formula which will soften the blow for such people during the period during which the reserve is run down and provide some form of recognition for what those people did.

I am also concerned at the fact that John Hume is the only elected representative from Northern Ireland at the Body. It is not the fault of anyone present, but we really ought to be soberly aware that the principal issue before us is underrepresented. There is no easy solution, but, as I said earlier, the Body must make itself more attractive. We should have many more topical issues, and our provisions should allow more issues to be raised at short notice. I listened to two colleagues from the Oireachtas this morning who spoke about the environmental impact of the proposed wind farm in County Londonderry on County Donegal. It would be very useful if we had the Northern Ireland Environment Minister, Angela Smith, here to listen and respond. Cecilia Keaveney's very valid representations are not lost on me, but they will probably not reach the Westminster Minister.

The issue of penalty points is extremely valid. We really ought to have in attendance — not merely visiting to make a speech — and sitting throughout our sessions at least one Minister, if not two or three, from Westminster and from the Dáil so that our points can be responded to. Perhaps we could get the Governments to agree that, just as they respond to Select Committee reports, they will respond to issues raised by this Body.

Another issue that is not before us — although we should be addressing it and getting some attention for it — is the critical one of fisheries, which affects colleagues in Scotland and the Isle of Man, in the North and the Republic, and in the fishing communities along the east coast.

We need to give some oomph to this Body. It has served well, and I realise that I am in the presence of people who pioneered it, and very brave they were too; they have created a very good body. We must now beef it up and try to set a target of giving it some statutory, treaty or agreement base, so that it can take on a parliamentary dimension in law as well as in fact.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you very much, Andrew. You have given us quite a lot to think about.

Senator Mooney: I reiterate what other Members in welcoming back many familiar faces have said. Because I know the new Irish Members, the Body, from an Irish perspective, has been considerably enhanced by the quality of the appointments, and I presume that the same is true of the UK Members. As a 'new' member since 1997, I am sure that they will grow to appreciate the importance of this Body in the ongoing relations between Britain and Ireland.

We would all agree that a positive mood came out of the meetings held in Stormont last week, which was co-chaired by the British and Irish Governments. There seems to be a real willingness among the former Executive Members to work towards a resolution and towards restoration of the institutions. A growing number of participants seem to be working to a February time frame for such a restoration. That is very welcome.

There is a real challenge for both Governments to encourage voters in Northern Ireland to acknowledge the importance of the middle ground in the next Assembly elections. The continuing existence of groupings such as the Alliance Party, the Women's Coalition, and those with a link to the Protestant paramilitaries, such as the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party, are an essential ingredient to re-establishing consensus in what John Hume has regularly referred to as a fractured society.

I have often tried to get inside the mind of David Trimble in his attitude to the agreement; certainly the perception is that he works against, rather than for the agreement. Perhaps that has something to do with what he believes to be reflective of Unionist opinion. A recent survey in Northern Ireland — published in September — made for depressing reading. Of Protestants surveyed, 54% did not support power-sharing with Catholics of any hue whatsoever; and this despite the fact that power-sharing has been on the agenda since the early 1970s, and despite the fact that all participants to the Assembly and the Executive — including the DUP — state privately or publicly that those institutions have worked in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland. Cecilia Keaveney was quite right that the removal of local accountability and democracy is a very real threat to the continuing prosperity of the people of Northern Ireland.

I also suggest that there is a need for Mr Trimble and Mr Adams to move their respective supporters towards a better understanding of the others' viewpoint. For the Unionists, there needs to be a recognition that the Republican movement, the militarists, have made considerable advances since the 1994 ceasefire. I will mention some of them. First, there has been an acceptance of the existence of what the movement had regularly referred to as partitionist parliaments, both in Stormont and in Dublin.

10.30 am

It is hard to believe that it was only in 1997 that Sinn Féin as a political party accepted the legitimacy of the Dublin Government by allowing Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, a former member of this Body, to enter Dáil Éireann as a TD.

The Republican movement has also accepted the concept of consent, which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement. Those who understand Republican ideology and history know that Republican consent to the existence of a partitionist state — two states in the island of Ireland — was a quantum leap. The agreement — which culminated in Republicans' acceptance of the elements of the agreement, and which they defend — is, and will remain, the umbilical cord that binds us together, North and South, east and west. The remaining elements — the establishment of a police force acceptable to all and the decommissioning of weapons — are moving towards conclusion.

As an aside, Séamus Kirk spoke about the possibility of Garda Síochána, under the agreement, policing certain parts of border areas of Northern Ireland as a confidence-building measure. Our British friends may not be aware that a few weeks ago RTE Television broadcast a programme entitled 'All the Queen's Men' about the tradition going back several hundred years of Southern Irishmen joining the British Army. I understand that more than 300 join each year.

One member of a regiment that was patrolling in south Armagh was interviewed on camera. He related an experience he had some weeks after his arrival there on his tour of duty when he was working at a checkpoint. A man who was presumably a native heard the soldier's accent and wanted to know whether he had lost his way, and whether the Irish Army had invaded Northern Ireland. The soldier quickly reassured the man that he was on the Queen's highway and that he was speaking to a member of the British armed forces. That was an amusing aside, but perhaps it gives further credence to the belief that many of us have always held — there is far more that unites us across the Irish Sea than divides us.

Mr Adams and Sinn Féin are aware of the legacy of history because they — I do not want to use the word "lecture" — certainly remind people, especially people in the South, of history. Therefore, I hope that they can also learn from history. Gerry Adams has led his people

a long way since the black, bleak decades of bombings, burnings, murder and mayhem in Northern Ireland, and indeed in the South.

Gerry Adams could look to the actions of his predecessor, the leader of the then dissident Sinn Féin faction in the newly emergent Irish Free State. His predecessor's name was Eamon de Valera. He was anti-treaty. He was the titular and political head of the dissident Sinn Féin movement that split from the then main body of Sinn Féin just three years after a civil war of unparalleled savagery. England has had its own civil war, which is dealt with regularly on radio and television, and Members will be aware that civil war, by its very nature, is about unparalleled savagery. Just three years after the civil war in Ireland, Eamon de Valera walked away from the militarists in the Sinn Féin movement. He led his party into democratic politics, and ultimately into the Government some five or six years later.

However, eight years on from the first IRA ceasefire, we are still haggling about decommissioning and about Gerry Adams, whom I believe is genuine and sincere in his aspirations for leading his people into mainstream political and parliamentary democracy. Eight years later, we are still waiting for the IRA to melt away.

Eamon de Valera took the action he did in the full knowledge that it would lead to a split, but he pursued it nonetheless. The fear of a split is holding up the political leadership of Sinn Féin. Is it too much to ask Gerry Adams to learn the lessons of history, and to take the ultimate step by asking the IRA to melt away?

The continuing commitment of both leaders to work towards a just solution, which will steer all the people of these islands once and for all to finally set aside the age-old problem, allowing us to pursue normal non-constitutional politics, bodes well for people North and South, east and west.

The Lord Glentoran: It is always interesting and exciting to listen to Paschal Mooney. Once again, he has reminded us of our history and has put it into context. I would also like to support much of what Andrew Mackinlay said about the future of this Body. It is time to have another serious look at how we can take a step forward and change direction, perhaps gain a few more teeth, and continue to make the impact that those who started the Body undoubtedly made in the early days.

As frequently happens, I disagree with part of the motion, although I will not be formally moving an amendment. I agree on the support for the Good Friday Agreement, and I welcome the determination of the Governments to press ahead with all aspects of it. However, I find it difficult to accept the wording in the motion that the Body is

“saddened at the suspension of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland”.

I would have preferred the words: “that this Body believes that Her Majesty's Government were wrong to suspend the Stormont Assembly when they did.” It was unnecessary to suspend the Assembly, and the longer that it remains suspended, the more difficult it will be to bring the parties back in a meaningful way.

My party made it clear to the Government that if they were unable to remove Sinn Féin from the Executive — until such times as the Sinn Féin paramilitaries, the IRA, had disbanded — we would assist the Government in taking the powers in Westminster rapidly to allow them to expel Sinn Féin from the Executive of the Stormont Assembly. In the past, the President of the United States, the Taoiseach, and the Prime Minister have called for the IRA's disbandment — a call that has been repeated here today. In that way, the Assembly could have continued to work, and Sinn Féin could have continued to represent its constituencies — albeit from the Back Benches. The constitutional process could have continued, and there could have been a natural forum for debate. The Government will live to regret that mistake. I am afraid that it will be a long time before we see the reinstatement of Stormont.

Some complications about policing have been mentioned. I am not going to talk about the policing Bill because I have not seen it. I will be leading the Opposition on the Bill when it comes before the House of Lords. It was mentioned earlier that that will happen on 16 December and that the Bill will be considered in Committee on 7 January. Surveys have shown that the Police Service of Northern Ireland is making progress — albeit slow progress — and that it is becoming more acceptable in areas where it was not previously acceptable. The percentages are moving slowly, but they are clear in a recent survey that was carried out for the Policing Board. They are definitely going in the right direction, but the issue with Sinn Féin is featuring largely again. Sinn Féin cannot possibly join the Policing Board while it still has its paramilitaries — the IRA. If it were to join the board, the Unionist parties would walk out. Once again, the inability of Sinn Féin and the IRA to remove the paramilitaries is holding up the policing issue. Others have used the phrase this morning that the IRA should fade away. That is a key issue in policing.

With regard to bringing the Patten Report more fully into the process, we must remember that it was not part of the agreement. It was written for policing in a normal, peaceful society in Northern Ireland, but, sadly, we are not yet living in a normal, peaceful society.

There are horrendous paramilitary gangs — Loyalist and Republican of various hues — and some of them are probably not interested in politics of any sort: they are interested only in money making. Law and order is the most serious issue in Northern Ireland today, and the appalling crime rate means that it is extremely difficult for people to live comfortably in many areas.

The most serious problem is that the Assembly has been suspended. It was doing an excellent job, but perhaps not as good a job as some said. Not everyone was content with how it was operating, but it was working well. It handled the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease extremely well, and it has also managed several other issues effectively. Besides my other concerns, the suspension of the Assembly worries me because many civil servants were employed there. A civil servant, whom I did not know but to whom I spoke, told me that their morale is very low. They do not know from where the money for their mortgages or pensions will come because they do not know for how much longer they will have employment.

The entire machinery of government is running down. Somehow the Assembly must be returned, but I fear that that will be difficult. I should like to amend the motion because I believe that Her Majesty's Government were wrong to suspend the Stormont Assembly when they did.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Although amendments should normally be given in advance, I will accept a manuscript amendment from the Lord Glentoran.

The Lord Glentoran: Co-Chairman, I purposely have not moved an amendment. However, if several people support it, you will obviously have to take note of it.

Mr Lenihan TD: I welcome the new Members of the BIIPB. It is important to understand the importance of the Body. That importance has been underpinned by the fact that two new Members in particular, Dr Martin Mansergh and Arthur Morgan, bring enormous experience and knowledge of the peace process to the table. Dr Mansergh has served with three Taoisigh, and Deputy Morgan, a recently elected Sinn Féin Deputy, spent time in the H-blocks between 1978 and 1984. The knowledge and experience that they bring to the Body is enormous, and they underpin the other more illustrious Members of the Body, such as John Hume, Peter Brooke and, indeed, many others, including Michael Mates, with whom I often disagree, but who entertains us nonetheless.

Returning to Andrew Mackinlay's point, it is important that the BIIPB stops excoriating delays in the political process and in the establishment of the institutions while neglecting the enormous delay that it has incurred in reforming the Body. That is, in a way, an indictment of its work. The Body is important for all the reasons that I have stated, and it must be reformed within a tight timetable. I have been involved with the BIIPB for five years, and I had hoped that I might not be serving on it this time, but unfortunately, I am back, and I should like to see it thoroughly reformed before I have to leave it again.

John Hume, in his important but brief contribution, cut to the chase of the whole issue. It is important to note that Irish Republicans, Irish constitutional Nationalists and constitutional Republicans made a huge effort that

has taken many years to establish the concept of consent. The Good Friday Agreement enshrines that concept for the first time, and Fianna Fáil and all the Republican and Nationalist parties, North and South, have worked enormously hard to establish it and make it acceptable in the Republic of Ireland and North of the border. I agree with John Hume when he says that if the institutions are overthrown, consent will also be overthrown and everything will have to go back into the melting pot.

10.45 am

John Hume set a headline when he said that there must be a complete disposal of paramilitary weapons rather than a halfway house. That might seem ambitious, but it must be done.

The agreement is about implementation and the ending of Unionist and Loyalist obstruction. Let us be honest: a thoroughgoing campaign of obstruction to the agreement has emanated principally from the Official Unionist Party and from other Unionist and Loyalist parties. It is important that the paramilitaries meet the commitments that they have made and find a methodology with which to remove the weapons from the equation and end the panoply of paramilitarism. I take great confidence from Martin McGuinness's recent statement that he believes that his own personal war is over. That significant statement, made from the confines of the Republican movement, represents progress.

The importance of policing must be recognised. If Sinn Féin were to join the Policing Board, it would be a huge practical step that might allow former paramilitaries to join the district policing partnerships. Former paramilitaries must also be able to see a light at the end of the tunnel. We ignore them at our peril.

Finally, I must admonish Harry Barnes about Mr Blair's announcement on the reasons that Sinn Féin is in Government in the North of Ireland but not in the Republic. I pose this question to Mr Barnes and to Mr Blair: if Sinn Féin were to hold the balance of power at Westminster, would Mr Blair allow the party into Government? Would he accept its support? I suspect that he would not. For that reason, my party leader, Mr Ahern, has put down markers. That point is particularly germane, given that the paramilitary structures have not been dismantled.

The Lord Smith: I agree with only one of Lord Glentoran's points: there will be a long suspension. I am pessimistic, not least because of the negativism that comes from Unionist quarters, which was reflected in Lord Glentoran's comments. As he implied, there will be much toing and froing about the Policing Board. It is vital that Sinn Féin joins the board. If its members do so, the Unionists may use that as a reason to withdraw from the board, which would be a typical example of the zero-sum politics of Northern Ireland. It would be one step forward and one step back.

Political leaders and the two Governments will be tempted to postpone the May 2003 elections. As Andrew Mackinlay mentioned, that would be fatal. Unless there is a date to work towards, it is pointless to believe that the black arts can somehow sustain a process. If the elections did not take place, it would be an almighty act of gerrymandering. Democrats cannot continue to fiddle about with postponing the elections and, as Andrew Mackinlay said, moving the goalposts. It is vital that the elections take place, whatever their outcome.

Secondly, political parties in Northern Ireland not only need to keep confronting one other, but to confront their communities rather more. Sinn Féin has, not always successfully, tried to maintain that it has no power over the IRA and that it is distinct from them. We know that that is not true. Against that, the Unionist parties claim that they have no control over the Loyalist paramilitaries, who, frankly, are responsible for the worst butchery in Northern Ireland at the moment. That is because those parties have walked away from areas such as north Belfast. They have not sought to exercise Unionist political leadership there. Instead, they have given that leadership away to the PUP and other parties that have close relationships with paramilitaries.

We should call on parties to show greater political leadership in their communities; they should not simply pay lip service by saying that the paramilitaries are nothing to do with them and that they deplore their activities. Paramilitaries are very much to do with them. They are part of the political landscape of Northern Ireland, and I suspect that, at times, it suits the conventional parties to live off the fact that there are paramilitaries in the wings. To some extent, those conventional politicians resemble Pontius Pilate. However, they cannot wash their hands of their responsibility; they cannot just tut-tut. They must seek to give much greater political leadership to their communities than they have done. Only then shall we effectively move towards a reduction in paramilitary activity.

Senator O'Rourke: Go raibh maith agat, Co-Chairman. As one of the new Members of the Body, I am happy to be here. I have listened with fascination to all the contributions so far and look forward to what is to come. We support Jim O'Keeffe's motion, to which he spoke in such an admirable and cogent fashion.

I was interested in what John Hume had to say. In the very best tradition, he cut right to it when he said that it was vox populi that had us all here. We have been here before, for the Good Friday Agreement. However, it was the voices of the people North and South that gave a resounding "Yes" to the agreement. That fact must always be central to our reflections and deliberations. The democratic nature of those two votes cannot be denied. Although surveys have been conducted and some Members have emphasised that support has diminished in the inter-

vening period, it is the democratic support on to which we must hold.

There has been much talk of the importance of the PSNI. There is no doubt that it has become a totem pole for the hopes and aspirations of the people of Northern Ireland. It has become a fulcrum, and people are hinging a lot on it and looking forward to the upcoming legislation. I feel positive about that legislation, and, unlike the earlier speaker, am not imbued with pessimism about it. I hope that the incipient signs that Sinn Féin will join the Policing Board are true, because it would make an enormous difference to the perception of that body, to its working and to its accountability if Sinn Féin were on board.

We will be introducing legislation in the Dáil and Seanad this week that has already been signalled and issued. It is technical in nature, but, as in all such technical legislation, the underlying *raison d'être* is hugely significant. It will give the secretariat and the civil service, who guide the joint implementation bodies, an assurance that their financial situation is reinforced by legislation. That relates to the point made by Lord Glentoran — he referred to the Secretariat of the Assembly.

The signal that will be sent out by this legislation will show that at every level in political endeavour there is — insofar as is possible — a guarantee of stability to come. We have set aside many hours in the Dáil and Seanad for this legislation, and I know that it will be passed. It will be pivotal in directing people's attention to the fact that we all, collectively, intend that the underpinning and the framework for the joint implementation bodies, and for the civil service that guides them, will be guaranteed for the future.

Progress to date in all of the business since the Good Friday Agreement has been incremental by nature. I, and many other Members here, spoke about that in the Seanad last week. I would not call it one step forward and two steps back. I think that it is a step forward and then, perhaps, a step sideways, rather than backwards, because the underpinning factor is the Good Friday Agreement and the votes it received.

We share the regret articulated in the Steering Committee by Jim O'Keeffe TD, and we are saddened by the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Bríd Rodgers, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, handled the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak very well. There were many other such events. People in Northern Ireland did not say it, but when I was talking to them they strongly felt that they had their own guys and girls dealing with local matters and talking about issues that interested them — local government, transport, the environment — and affected everyone. They had an organisation and a person that they recognised, to which they could direct their thoughts and concerns about such issues, and that was important to them.

I feel very strongly, on a philosophical level, that the gap that has appeared can be filled. A lot of activity is going on, including the meetings in Belfast and this meeting. Other arrangements are in place, such as the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which is meeting in Dublin this week. Although all those activities serve to fill the lacuna that has arisen, it is also a time for positive reflection and looking forward.

We can use the time in a positive way, and rather than lament and say, “Ochón is ochón ó”. We can do things that will bring rigorous reflection to each participant and group in that arena of political activity. If we are engaged in activity all the time — going from one thing to another — it does not leave time for reflection, which both the Republican and Nationalist side and the Unionist and Loyalist side need. Time allows close reflection, and you can examine yourself and the body to which you belong to see what can be done. We should look upon the gap as a time for positive reflection — but not for too long. I agree with the many speakers who said that they did not want the gap to be too long. No one wanted a gap.

However, it will serve a particular purpose if it we have active reflection as well as activities. We could look at it as a period of opportunity. Sometimes we do not reflect on the fact that we have worldwide support — the diaspora has seen to that. People throughout the world come forth in times of trial and difficulty. However, we also have a responsibility to all of the peoples who have settled in many places.

11.00 am

I am tremendously happy to be part of the Body, and I share the call for reform because much has happened in the 12 years since its establishment in 1990. Perhaps we need a new focus, and we could use the in-between period to take a look at ourselves.

Finally, we still hear about punishment beatings in the news, yet somehow we have become, if not immune, at least removed from the subject. Punishment beatings are an abhorrence and an affront to human dignity, and we should condemn them.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): As regards the issue raised by Andrew Mackinlay, Mary O’Rourke and others, we will be discussing our internal arrangements tomorrow. However, I would say to everyone, particularly to our new Members, that the Body has changed a great deal. We now have representatives from all the devolved institutions in the UK. Although far from being the official body as recognised by the two sovereign Governments, we are, to a large extent, the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council. We are as close as possible to being that tier, although we are not recognised as such. That will be the subject of further debate.

The Lord Dubs: I am privileged to continue as a member of the Body. We have lost some friends, but

gained some new ones, and I am delighted to be speaking after Mary O’Rourke. I remember when the Irish Embassy in London, which provides tremendous hospitality and events of interest, had an election night party. RTE was there, so we were able to follow the results. I was heartbroken to see Mary O’Rourke lose, but I am delighted that she is back. I am also the embodiment of life after death politically and I know what that is like. However, one can deal with it, so there is hope for everybody.

I was particularly interested in Séamus Kirk’s comment on the penalty points system. When I was a Minister in Northern Ireland, I introduced the system there. I met with my opposite number in Dublin, and I suggested a reciprocal arrangement. Clearly, that would require changes in legislation in both jurisdictions, so that penalty points imposed in one area are counted against one’s ability to hold a driving licence in the other. It is a sensible move. My impression is that Belfast motorists drive badly in the South and that Dublin motorists drive badly in the North. As a problem, it is simple and straightforward, even though, legislatively, it requires more consideration. I suggest that the Body, or the appropriate subcommittee, seek meetings with Ministers in both jurisdictions to see if that can be taken further. Although I understand Andrew Mackinlay’s point, I do not think it is feasible to have Ministers sitting on the Body all the time.

Mr Mackinlay MP: Why not?

The Lord Dubs: We do not know which issues will come up during the sitting.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Please address your remarks through the Chair.

The Lord Dubs: I apologise.

When an issue arises, the appropriate subcommittee, if not the entire Body, should send a delegation to the Minister to take it further. That is one way forward.

No Northern Ireland Members are present, apart from John Hume, who is here as a British MP, not as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, so during this difficult period of direct rule, could we invite Northern Ireland politicians, who were formerly Members of this Body, to attend as observers? We are discussing all sorts of issues that directly affect them, and they need to give us answers. If Northern Ireland politicians were present as observers, might we not then engage with them in the margins of the discussions, which would allow us to interconnect in a way that we cannot when they are miles away?

The elections should proceed. However, I have one reservation: is it possible to have sensible elections when there is a complete political vacuum? The North’s election must not become an artificial event. Assuming we can overcome that problem, the election should go ahead, but it might be more difficult than has been suggested.

The achievements of the Assembly have been great. It has worked well, and it is acknowledged that Ministers from all parties have been effective and have done a good job, whether we are talking about Reg Empey, Mark Durkan, Martin McGuinness or Peter Robinson. They and others have all contributed well.

Sinn Féin must bite the bullet and join the policing body. Many changes have taken place in policing in Northern Ireland, and although Sinn Féin stands aside and says that “It is not right”, inevitably it will have to join sooner or later. If Sinn Féin believes in the future, it should join the policing body. At the very least, it should stop telling young Catholics in west Belfast and Derry that they should not join the Police Service. It should tell them that they are free to join if they wish.

Some months ago I went to see police training in Belfast with Committee A, and I was impressed by the calibre of the recruits on the first training course — both Catholic and Protestant. Even if Sinn Féin is keeping itself distant from policing, it should tell Catholics that they can join if they want to.

Politicians in the North have little margin for manoeuvre. That is the case with David Trimble, and we see it in the public debates. We do not know what is going on inside Sinn Féin because it is more secretive. Gerry Adams must also feel that his margin for manoeuvre is small, although not as small as his actions suggest, but he is more constrained than is allowed for.

If we are to move the process forward, the time has come for a significant gesture from Sinn Féin — and that would not cost anything. It could make the sort of gesture that has been talked about: finish the decommissioning and let the IRA disband. We all know that it has to happen sooner or later, and when it does we can move forward to proper democratic politics in Belfast.

Sitting suspended at 11.09 am and resumed at 11.32 am.

Senator Hayes: I welcome new Members to the Body. It is good to be back in a new capacity as a Member of Seanad Éireann. I enjoyed my recent time on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, and I agree with Andrew Mackinlay that we must agree a new way forward to ensure that many topical issues are debated when we meet in plenary session.

The British-Irish Council met last week; it is doing important work. However, we are not shadowing it as we should. None of us are Members of an executive — we may want to be in some cases, but we are not.

Mr Mackinlay MP: Or should be.

Senator Hayes: Exactly — or should be, in other cases.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That would be unanimous, regardless of political views.

Senator Hayes: Needs must. However, we should be shadowing the British-Irish Council and ensuring that

the Executives are doing their jobs. The fundamental job of a parliamentary committee system is to ensure that the Executive is held to account, be it in Wales, Scotland, London or Dublin. That is not being done, and we must do that.

I support the motion and I would encourage colleagues to support it. A point I would make to all the parties in Northern Ireland is that some hold the view that the Good Friday Agreement is some kind of temporary arrangement. We, as parliamentarians from both sides of the Irish Sea, must say that the Good Friday Agreement is the historic compromise of this generation. It cannot be put to one side, and it cannot be rowed back on. It must be made to work.

Unfortunately, some parties in Northern Ireland present the Good Friday Agreement as something that it is not. It is not a stepping stone to a united Ireland, as some Republicans suggest to their constituency. It is not what the DUP suggest it to be. We must continually stress that it is the historic agreement that we have all accepted by virtue of the fact that both parts of Ireland voted on it in 1998. It is a new form of self-determination.

We will see the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation relaunched in Dublin this week. I want to take this opportunity to encourage Unionists to attend that meeting. When the forum was created, Unionists argued that until articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution were recast and reformed, they would be unable to attend. The SDLP and the Alliance Party will be represented, but there will not be a Unionist voice in Dublin Castle. Articles 2 and 3 have been changed. The Unionists now have an opportunity to put their case, and I call on them to do so. We lack representation of the Unionist parties here and at the forum, and I would like to see that change.

We must make much more progress on the outstanding matters, which are decommissioning and the standing down of paramilitary organisations. I suspect that one of the reasons why an increased majority of Protestants in Northern Ireland do not want to engage in power sharing is that they have not seen progress on the matters that Tony Blair promised them there would be progress on when he campaigned during the referendum in 1998. We have not seen ultimate progress on decommissioning or on ensuring that paramilitaries are put to one side. The number of Protestants who do not support power sharing will continue to rise unless there is fundamental progress on that issue.

I want to commend others who have spoken today about the need for Sinn Féin and the paramilitary parties on the Loyalist side to make progress on that matter. The view that decommissioning must happen is not held only by the Unionist community; it is part and parcel of the Good Friday Agreement. Every Irish person, North and South, who voted in 1998 to establish that new self-determination voted to ensure that the paramilitaries'

day was at an end. Failure to comply with commitments on decommissioning is failure to recognise the self-determination of the Irish people who accepted it as an essential and integral part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. I encourage those parties with influence and persuasive abilities to ensure that we make progress on that matter as soon as possible.

Mr Öpik MP: The secret of this Body's success has been to create a political and social dialogue between two Parliaments that did not get on well before the organisation was established. It is a credit to the organisation's creators, some of whom are here, that that has been achieved. Conor Lenihan said that the Body must be reformed. We have discussed that many times before, but that debate is for another occasion. To achieve such reform, we must be clear about the Body's desired outcomes. It has achieved its original goal of creating a dialogue that has helped to underpin the general interaction between Dublin and Westminster. If we are to discuss that in more depth, we must do so on another occasion.

The Liberal Democrats support the motion, which goes to the heart of the problem, as John Hume and others have pointed out. The actions of some suggest that there is an alternative to the Good Friday Agreement. Hardliners tend to be defined as those resistant to the Good Friday Agreement or at least to the implementation of large parts of it. We must recognise, as Alf Dubs stated, that people on both sides of the traditional divide in Northern Ireland have problems with hardliners. Those problems are more public on the Unionist side, but I have no doubt that a similar reciprocal difficulty exists within Sinn Féin.

The problem is that, at the moment, it looks like a successful political strategy, particularly for hardliners on the Unionist side. That strategy feeds on an inherent distrust in the communities that they represent. However, it does not cause that distrust. Politics is not powerful enough to engender a true scepticism of things such as the Good Friday Agreement. Therefore, we must recognise that the DUP, for example, reflects a genuinely held scepticism on the Unionist side about the process.

It is also reasonable to assume that something similar exists reciprocally on the Republican side. It is also a simpler message to sell. The DUP has what looks like a strong message, and it is easy to ratchet that up using some central calls, such as that for decommissioning. We all want to see decommissioning, and we have heard some insightful points about that today. The problem is that decommissioning becomes the end in itself, for it is an effective political strategy. That is not the case, however; the end that we are trying to achieve is the normalisation of Northern Ireland. One can easily see why it is tempting for those who have detected the scepticism in their inherent political bases to play powerfully on it.

I am sorry to say that the Good Friday Agreement itself to some extent enshrines those divisions. Because you

have to define yourself as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "other", the implication is that the two labels that count most are "Nationalist" and "Unionist". I have made the point many times, not least because Ministers — certainly those in Westminster — have fallen into the trap of using the phrase "both communities", implying that you are one or the other. As Senator Mooney said, that really rankles with the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and the Women's Coalition, both of which have tried very hard to illustrate that there are alternatives to simply defining yourself in the more traditional way. When the long-awaited and, in my view, overdue review of elements in the Good Friday Agreement finally takes place, I hope that both Governments seriously take on board the volition of many people — a significant minority in the North of Ireland — who do not wish to be labelled as "Nationalist" or "Unionist". That would be a healthy development.

It is also necessary to recognise that the hardliners' current focus on divisions and scepticism, while it may be an effective electoral strategy, could leave them in a hole afterwards when it comes to delivering outcomes which would be valued by their communities. I shall say more on that in a moment. I agree with Andrew Mackinlay and others that the upcoming elections must take place. The suspicion or suggestion that the date of the elections is negotiable is dangerous in itself. The adherence to May 2003 is one of the strongest tools we have to force a focus on all parties in the North of Ireland to take a rational, sensible and, one hopes, flexible approach towards the future of the Good Friday Agreement and where they stand.

I wish briefly to talk about the suspension itself, because I have a different view to that set out by Lord Glentoran on behalf of the Conservative Party. He expressed a strong view that suspension was a mistake. When I examine such things, I always ask myself what I should do if I were Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The suspension may have been avoidable, but not at the time when it was carried out. By that stage, the choice was either to suspend proactively or to allow the Assembly to collapse.

Lord Glentoran made a very important analogy, saying that Sinn Féin could not easily enter the Policing Board without the Ulster Unionists walking out. The Ulster Unionists made it very clear that, unless Sinn Féin had taken some implausible actions — implausible in the sense that there was no likelihood of its doing so — the Unionists would have walked out of the Assembly, leading to that very collapse. The reason for my difference of view with Lord Glentoran and the Conservative position is that it is not at all clear to me why it would have been better to risk an inevitable collapse of the Assembly and why he feels that it would have been easier to retrieve a collapse than a suspension, not least because we have been suspended before. We have seen that it has been a fairly effective tool to allow a breathing space. I highlighted

that difference of view because it would be interesting to hear what others have to say on the issue.

Finally, I should like to turn to the immediate future and the Assembly elections. The reason why I am so concerned that the elections take place is that they provide an opportunity for all sides to display some political flexibility and strategic thinking about the future. If my assumptions are right, however the hard-line groups choose to portray themselves in the run-up to the Assembly elections, they must leave themselves enough room for manoeuvre afterwards to deliver outcomes for their communities. It is no good getting power in an environment in which you have solemnly promised not to exercise that power in the interests of the people whom you represent.

For that reason, the elections need to be clearly in place. My opinion differs slightly from that of Lord Dubs on the issue. We need to work on the assumption that the elections will take place, because the campaign strategists then have the job of looking at recent history in Northern Ireland and ensuring that, as outcomes-focused politicians, they do not corner themselves into a situation where they could not work with individuals whom they do not feel like working with but whom they would have to work with after the elections.

11.45 am

Turning to our responsibilities, Governments and parliamentarians in Westminster and Dublin must not limit the room for manoeuvre for those hardliners by pushing them into a corner. I once said to someone that politics is about not painting yourself into a corner; it is about painting yourself into a corner as slowly as possible. We have the choice about how quickly we do it. It is incumbent on this Body, and on the Parliaments and Governments that we represent, to ensure that we do not make it easy for people to run into a corner.

Mr Crawford TD: I congratulate my constituency Colleague, Brendan Smith, on his election as the new Co-Chairman of the Body, and I have no doubt that he will do an excellent job. I also welcome the new Members and say a genuine word of thanks to the former Members who have left us for all sorts of reasons. As I have been on the Body for eight and a half years, I know that many of those Members have made a tremendous contribution to building up relationships and camaraderie, and to breaking down barriers — because that is a major role of the Body.

The Good Friday Agreement had major benefits for the island of Ireland, especially Northern Ireland and the border regions. Even after the commercial borders were removed under the EU, it was not until the ceasefires that the freedom of movement without army and police patrols really took place. There are still problems, as Deputy Séamus Kirk mentioned, concerning watchtowers, but the IRA and other similar bodies can quickly make

changes possible. If the Good Friday Agreement were fulfilled and if decommissioning, et cetera, took place, watchtowers and other difficulties in pockets of Northern Ireland could be removed.

Anyone driving through Northern Ireland today will notice a major difference compared with eight or ten years ago. The Assembly has proved that it had a major role to play during the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. A body such as the Assembly can be very beneficial to the island of Ireland in animal disease regulations, the control of drugs and the control of diesel laundering. Illegal activities are taking place in a big way along the border, and we can argue about who is responsible. The Garda Síochána and the police can work together to control those issues — and to save lives under the penalty points system if the regulations South of the border and the UK regulations can be worked together. This Body should move to ensure that the penalty points system can work across the border.

Yesterday I was driving to the airport at slightly over 60 mph when a vehicle passed me on a double white line, and I did not have to look twice at the registration plate. There is no awareness that the police force either North or South can deal with people from either area.

It also saddens me that Northern Ireland's devolved institutions had to be suspended. The two Governments are moving to press ahead with all aspects of the peace process: can others not do the same? Stopping children getting to their schools, stopping people from going to their place of worship, or so-called Protestants murdering Protestants in power struggles do not lead to peace or inspire confidence. Punishment beatings continue. The Colombian training and funding and other issues also raise major questions, and only recently there was a case in Bray in which a van was found that contained balaclavas, walkie-talkies, garda uniforms and sledgehammers. Democrats do not use those articles.

The hard line Protestant and Republican groups must decide whether they will accept democratic means as the only way forward. All their prisoners are free as part of the Good Friday Agreement: why not get rid of all the arms, as was also agreed under that agreement? Why not join the Policing Board? Young Catholics have shown their willingness to join the force, and Members who have spoken previously pointed that out. Why does Sinn Féin not take its place on the Policing Board, as it has done with other bodies?

David Trimble, Mark Durkan and others have bent over backwards to keep the agreement in place. However, elections must take place next year, and it is not in Sinn Féin's long-term interest to force the middle ground out of the Assembly. The present vacuum is not to anyone's benefit and, unfortunately, it will take massive commitment and goodwill to make progress. However, I doubt whether that goodwill exists.

I implore those involved in or who have control over hard line groups to take action at this late stage. Anyone who lives as close to the border as I do and who has as many contacts as I have, North and South of the border, realises the benefits of the past five years. Those benefits could have been much greater — commercially and otherwise — if the hard line groups had not continued. However, we have one last opportunity, and I urge that that be taken quickly.

The people who are here for the first time might not realise that Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly attended BIIPB meetings when the Assembly existed. That shows what the vacuum can do. As the Assembly is in suspension, Members of that Assembly no longer attend those meetings. Indeed, no Unionists ever attended those meetings. There have always been people in the Body with strong Unionist thinking, especially those from the Conservative Party, and that has helped the balance. However, it is a pity that Unionists do not take their place here or in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. I urge them to do so, because that is in everyone's interests.

Mr Grievé MP: I want to echo some of what Mr Crawford said. The absence of Unionist input in the Body that allows them to explain some of the things that they feel deeply about, appears to be a problem. I can only repeat what I pick up, partly because I find myself philosophically sympathetic to their views.

The Good Friday Agreement has brought many benefits, and the Conservative Party supports it and believes that it must be made to work. This morning's discussion covered all sorts of topics that range from penalty points to wind farms, and that is the stuff of which ordinary politics is made. If I may say to Cecilia Keaveney, there is an active group in the UK that is concerned about the environmental downsides of wind farms, and I shall give her its contact details at the end of the session.

However, the Good Friday Agreement sets up structures that are, by democratic standards, extremely bizarre. They may be the best that we can get, and they may be fully justified — and I have no difficulty in justifying them — but they are bizarre for two reasons.

First, they are not what we normally understand to be democratic. If someone were to suggest those structures for England and Wales, people would be up in arms and would complain. Secondly, the problem with the structures is that they required a leap of faith. One moderate Unionist businessman, who was not involved in politics and who supported the agreement, told me that he regarded the agreement as an immoral document. We cannot get away from that. Someone rather sadly pointed out that 54% of the people of Northern Ireland do not want power sharing. That may be a misunderstanding; it is possible to support power sharing without wanting it. That is an adjustment that had to be made through the peace process. That is one reason that I find the present

situation extremely unsatisfactory, because in order to work, power sharing had to confer those benefits.

As we have seen this morning, we are in danger of becoming bogged down in fundamental issues. Those fundamental issues can be characterised by the fact that there are still groups, including Sinn Féin/IRA, who justifiably claim to represent a substantial proportion of the Northern Ireland electorate, and who have not subscribed fully to the agreement and, indeed, appear to defy the peace process. That is what has brought us to the current pass. It is unacceptable for a party to participate in a democracy when it appears to receive a substantial part of its funding from drug cartel activities in South America. That simply cannot work. It poisons the environment, and until that poison is removed, the structures of the Good Friday Agreement will never work — and I want them to work.

Everything that I have seen in Northern Ireland and have gleaned from speaking to Unionists reflects deep disillusionment with the way in which the process has evolved. The solution lies primarily with Sinn Féin. Fortunately, Loyalist paramilitaries do not pretend to command such a substantial tranche of electoral support as does Sinn Féin. If Sinn Féin wants the agreement to work — which I believe it does — it must change in order to provide reassurance. In the meantime, I am rather pessimistic about whether the Assembly will be up and running again next year.

I support Lord Glentoran's comment that it might have been more politic for the Government to grasp the nettle and say that the real problem was Sinn Féin's unsuitability to be part of the power-sharing Executive. We have already discussed the fact that in that respect Sinn Féin's acceptability in the South is zero. I do not mind which way it is. I would like Sinn Féin to participate in the work of the Assembly, the power-sharing Executive and the Policing Board. I would also real progress to be made on the nitty-gritty issues of politics that can transform people's lives wherever they live.

The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body must urgently send out the signal that it wants to involve Unionists. I will certainly continue to do my best to work towards that. If the Assembly is to work, those organisations that flirt, or are involved, with paramilitarism must get away from it and decide what they want.

Mr Morgan TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. I want to express my thanks to the management for making me feel at home, with no expense spared. When I went to breakfast shortly before 7.00 am, the place was covered with police. For a moment I thought that I must be in the Sinn Féin office at Stormont. I am grateful to the management for its endeavours.

There is an irony in the fact that I agree with one small part of Lord Glentoran's contribution, insofar as he said that we were

“saddened at the suspension of the devolved institutions”

in the North. I am prepared to live with that wording, but, like Lord Glentoran, I would have preferred the wording to be stronger. I will also — albeit somewhat tongue in cheek — agree with the motion, which

“welcomes the determination of the two Governments to press ahead with all aspects of the agreement”.

I have not seen that determination recently, nor have I seen it for a long time.

12.00

Therefore, I support that part of the motion somewhat tongue-in-cheek. I shall stop short of moving an amendment because of the Body’s consensual nature. However, I would have liked the wording of the motion to include a reference to the full implementation of the agreement. Whatever differences there are here, most people will agree that if everybody involved had made greater efforts to implement the agreement, we might perhaps have made more progress.

Having said that, I have just had what sounded at times like a lecture on democracy. The institutions have been brought down. Who brought them down? It was not Sinn Féin: the IRA did not declare that the institutions in the North were suspended. It was the Prime Minister of Britain’s representative in Ireland who declared that. I wonder how well based that declaration was in law, given that what he was dealing with was an international agreement between two sovereign states. Had the Irish Government played a stronger role in objecting to that, would the British representative in Ireland have been in a position to suspend the institutions?

On the subject of democracy, I note that some people are talking about Sinn Féin’s unsuitability. I remember a time in the early 1970s when Sinn Féin boycotted elections in the North because they were British elections. I remember politicians, not unlike those present today, lecturing my party and me. They said, “Why don’t you go forward, get your mandate and then we shall listen to you”. Now, what do we have? Those same politicians lecture us about our suitability.

When Tony Blair was in Belfast recently he made a lengthy statement. Of course, the media picked up on only one point in that statement — his call for the IRA to disband. The media forgot to mention that he admitted that the British Government had not been implementing the agreement in the way that they should have been. The media forgot to mention that Tony Blair said that the people of Short Strand and other Nationalist enclaves were not seeing the benefit of the Good Friday Agreement. I know that he could have gone on and said that there were many Unionist and Protestant communities that have not seen that benefit either. I wonder why that is. Is it because all of us have not been implementing the agreement in the way that we should have been? I contend

that the agreement was never marketed. If it were a tube of toothpaste or a packet of washing powder, it would sit on the shelves for ever because nobody would lift it. It has never been sold to the people — certainly not those in the North.

What do we have, not only in this forum, but all around us in the past few weeks? We have this frenzy for IRA disbandment. All the rest does not matter that much. There is only one big bogey out there, and that is the IRA. If the IRA were to “melt away” or “disappear”, as has been said today, there would not be any problems. We would all move on and live happily ever after. Would the people who are saying that, for goodness’ sake, get real and catch themselves on?

The IRA has already, on several occasions, made significant moves that gave momentum to the process. It has continually said that it is no threat to the process. I do not speak for the IRA. I am analysing the situation from the Sinn Féin perspective. [*Laughter*]. I have a mandate to be here, so giggle away.

What contribution has the IRA made? There was the cessation in September 1994. There have been a couple of acts of decommissioning.

The IRA has made several public statements, including one a couple of weeks ago that reaffirmed its commitment to the process, and suddenly, yet again, the IRA is the big problem. I suggest that the people who continually peddle that line have so much political baggage that it is too heavy for them — they need to broaden their view.

At the same time, the British Army is remilitarising all over south Armagh and in many parts of Tyrone. Earlier, a member said that when you drive through the North today, you would not see British soldiers. I regularly drive through south Armagh, and I encounter them frequently. I see them stopping motorists at checkpoints, and I see the other shenanigans that the force of occupation is engaged in.

People should reflect on the two sections in the Good Friday Agreement that caused particular difficulty — decommissioning and policing. Those could not be sorted out at the time of negotiations, so it was agreed to set up the international body headed by John de Chastelain to deal with decommissioning. The issue was dealt with, although not as quickly and perhaps not as comprehensively as people would have liked.

A commission, headed by Chris Patten, was set up to deal with policing. Again, after the Patten Report was published, the important issue of human rights and a whole host of other features contained in it were shelved. However, we are still expected to accept that the significant number of — to call a spade a spade — human rights abusers, particularly in the Special Branch and RUC, were moved en bloc into the new Police Service. I do not know how anyone can be reasonably expected to see

that as a fundamental change to policing. I certainly do not, I do not think my constituency does, and I hope that the amending legislation, soon to be introduced, will fully recognise that.

Two communities suffer most from the lack of a proper Police Service. Some people may know that, but I will say it for the purpose of the broader context. The working-class Nationalist community and the working-class Unionist community both suffer enormously as a result of not having a proper Police Service. Sometimes we wonder if it happens only on the Catholic or Nationalist side, and of course it does not. Loyalist people have told me they know that the RUC is allowing drug runners and drug pushers to continue. They give the police information, and the police allow them to operate. That is not a feature of the ordinary bobby on the beat; it is a feature of the activities of the Special Branch. It must be dealt with and curtailed.

Punishment beatings occur because people cannot, or refuse to, use the Police Service. The beatings are abhorrent, dreadful and inhumane, and they should stop. That is my personal view; it is also my party's view.

Sinn Féin is committed 100% to the peace process. It is also totally committed to the Good Friday Agreement. It is just as committed to a non-renegotiation of the Good Friday Agreement because if people had their wish list fulfilled and suddenly the IRA disappeared in a puff of smoke — which is dubious as in each generation for the past two centuries there has been a violent uprising against British occupation in Ireland — its disappearance would be short-lived. How is that to be prevented? It can be prevented by the implementation of the agreement, which offers the best opportunity in centuries to settle this age-old problem, once and for all. I look forward to continuing the debate with Members in private afterwards. Go raith maith agat.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I allowed Mr Morgan to continue longer as he represents his party's point of view, and we would do that too for people from the Unionist parties if, as we all wish, they were present. That is only right and proper.

Time is short, which may be due to a weakness of mine — I did not limit Colleagues' contributions to four minutes. Perhaps, however, Members will keep their contributions brief.

Mr McNamara MP: I welcome all the new Members, and I also welcome the appointment of the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He has an important role to play as he has knowledge of the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement and showed subtlety of mind and an ability to get the legislation through the House of Commons in the face of great difficulty.

I will take on board some of the points Lord Glentoran made. His statement that the Unionists will walk out is a problem that we have been suffering from during the past two or three years in the House of Commons. Every time a crisis arose, Mr Trimble threatened to resign "or I will be overthrown in my council meeting", and the Government proceeded to save Private Trimble. They did that by emasculating the Police Bill and the Justice Bill through amendments introduced in the House of Lords, amendments which, because of the application of the guillotine, were never discussed on Report or Third Reading in the House of Commons. Therefore, two things happened. The first was that in trying to save Private Trimble, the ground was cut from under the constitutional Nationalists, the SDLP, which had joined the Police Board on the basis of promises made and undertakings given on the legislation which appeared on the face of the Bill, only to be removed in the House of Lords, without the House of Commons having a say. Then members of the SDLP were being asked why they had joined the Police Board when promises to them were not being kept.

My second point is that it was Unionist policy to break the consensus between Sinn Féin and the SDLP in the Assembly. The Unionists knew well that if they had their way in a vote, as they sought to isolate Sinn Féin, they would isolate one part of the community upon which the consensus was based. We must take on board the fact that the SDLP was not falling for that.

Elections are approaching, and no matter how much we want people to think strategically about them, they are not going to do so. There is a fight among the Unionist parties over which of them is taking the hardest line.

12.15 pm

One of the most significant things that has happened — and the press has not taken much notice of it — has been that Mr Burnside and Mr Donaldson have been allowed to stand for election to the Assembly. The position had always been that only the Ulster Unionist Party leader and the deputy leader could do that. The result is that two hard-line opponents of the agreement, who seek to rewrite it, will most likely be elected to the Assembly. They will be engaged in a contest with the DUP for the majority of votes in the Unionist community. The DUP feels confident that it will be in that position. There will be a fight over the hard-line position, and there will not be a great deal of strategic thinking.

Similarly in the Nationalist community, there will be a fight between Sinn Féin and the SDLP. That will be the focus. It would be wrong to expect a lot of constructive, strategic thinking — a compromise here and forward thinking elsewhere — between now and the election. That will not happen until after the election, when the parties have regrouped and seen where their support lies and how matters stand.

That is not an excuse for postponing the election. It is vital that it takes place and that there be elected representatives. If there is a political vacuum, and if the elected representatives — wherever they come from — are seen to have no clout, the void will be filled by those paramilitaries who are not prepared to accept what is going on.

We talk a lot about the IRA. Let us look at where it is coming from. It regards itself as a proper army that is on ceasefire — whether we regard it that way or not. It has not surrendered, and it has not been beaten: it has called a ceasefire. Every time a Unionist politician, a British Prime Minister, a Conservative or Labour Party member, or whoever, says that the IRA must disarm and disband now, its actions will be contrary to that. It cannot be seen to be giving way to that sort of pressure.

Equally, the IRA can, and should, be encouraged to decommission as soon as possible. We can achieve that only by changing the nature of the language we use when we talk about that particular phenomenon that we all want to see go away. The interesting thing about the election will be what comes out of the census. I could go on for another five minutes on that subject, but I will not.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Members should be aware that if I hold my pen up it means that time is up; I will not be doing it just for fun. I apologise to those who are going to be speaking later. One or two may say that I should have applied a strict limit at the beginning, but, as there did not seem to be such a long list, I decided not to.

Senator Mansergh: I am privileged to be a member of this Body. I have had the pleasure of assisting once or twice in the background. I am pleased to meet old friends and be in the company of people such as Kevin McNamara, Peter Brooke, and John Hume, who made a historic contribution, as well as all those who have laboured in the vineyard.

This Body needs Unionist membership, and they should be reminded that its origins go back to the early 1980s, not to the Good Friday Agreement. We are seeking acts of completion, and we should try to get rid of the boycotts, including the boycott of this Body.

It may be that a breather was needed. However, we must remind ourselves — as John Hume emphasised — that the agreement is a new political dispensation: it is the foundation of constitutionality in Northern Ireland, therefore it cannot be renegotiated. The Taoiseach said that it was possible to negotiate forwards, but not backwards. Inclusiveness is also fundamental.

In response to Arthur Morgan who described visions of future generations, this is the first fully democratic dispensation in Ireland for 200 years. Therefore, paramilitarism is unnecessary. Policing is vital to solving the problem of paramilitarism, and I hope that when the

legislation is published and put into practice, it will be possible for people to come on board.

Paramilitarism means an abuse of human rights. We hear about human rights abuses by Governments, but equally, paramilitaries can abuse human rights. I was glad to hear the condemnation from a member who spoke earlier, and I do not doubt that condemnation. However, ways and means must be found to bring paramilitarism to a halt.

Loyalist paramilitarism also matters; it is not just a question of participation in the political institutions. The Unionist leadership often advances ideals of a pluralist, multicultural Northern Ireland. The Protestant community talks a great deal about civil and religious liberty and the British way of life. Loyalist activity makes a complete nonsense of that; it undermines those ideals and the Unionist position. It is up to those with influence to stop that. The Irish Government has made a big effort to sit on dissident paramilitaries.

We must not lose sight of economic factors. The absence of the institutions is damaging to Northern Ireland's economy and to investment. All businessmen in Northern Ireland would say that it is vital to get the institutions back.

I welcome the strong and determined leadership of the two Governments and the support of the US Administration. The electorate has a regrettable tendency to elect people whom it thinks will drive the hardest possible bargain, rather than those who are committed to making co-operation work. I agree that elections are an important discipline, and we should be slow to move away from that. However, the question is bound to be asked: "Elections to what?"

I agree with Brian Hayes that the British-Irish Council should be accountable. However, it covers only a limited area of our discussions. There is also the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, and we must deal with the full spectrum.

The Lord Brooke: It is a privilege to speak after Senator Mansergh, given his distinguished role in the narrative of recent decades. The great Edmund Burke once took a Bill through the House of Commons to establish a penalty for forging the Paymaster General's signature, which was to be death without benefit of clergy. As I look at my nameplate, which reads 'Lord Brooke MP', I must thank the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for re-electing me to the House of Commons without benefit of popular vote. *[Laughter]*.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That just shows what powers we have. *[Laughter]*.

The Lord Brooke: I assure the Body that I am not suffering from an identity crisis. It is a great pleasure to have heard Jim O'Keeffe move the motion. Jim and I have known each other for 15 years; we met when we were both Ministers on the European Union Budget

Council. The Budget Council is only capable of making a mature decision at 6:00 am. Jim O’Keeffe used to argue on behalf of the Irish Government at 4:00 am that unless the 11 remaining Ministers conceded another million ecu to the Irish Government, Irish popular opinion would not stand for the outcome. The 11 of us thought that that was a rather optimistic view; it was none the worse for that — I am also an optimist.

I once told the following story to one of the Dimpleby brothers on television. If I have told it in this setting, I apologise. My late first wife and I went in 1966 to visit the village in which my family lived for 150 years between 1650 and 1800. As we approached it, my wife said that we must look out for the oldest inhabitant. I said that I thought that a little unrealistic, since we had left in 1800. We entered the village on a Sunday and saw an old man in the street. My wife stopped the car, wound down the window and asked if he knew of a house called Rantavan in that neighbourhood, saying that it was of great interest to her husband’s family. The old man did not ask any questions, and she did not vouchsafe any further information. He simply walked round to my side of the car, as I opened the window, and said “You must be one of the Brookes.” That story would be inconceivable in rural England — that 170 years after a family had left, the mere name of a house should cause someone to say that he knew exactly who you were. So, I learned, 23 years before I went to Northern Ireland, that in Ireland it is sensible to take a long view.

I hope, in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, that the British Government will not be too busy. It always seemed to me that the parties in Northern Ireland were to some degree using the Governments of both main parties between 1975 and 1990 as a crutch and an alibi for not moving from their positions, so I hope that the British Government will not be too busy.

I am an optimist, however, and John Hume and Brian Mawhinney will recall an episode during the talks in 1991 when the leaders of the four delegations came to me saying that it would be foolish for me to go on messing around and that, if they were allowed half an hour in a private room, they would find a way out of the impasse that we faced. I also remember John Hume leading the delegations back in after half an hour with Ian Paisley towering above him. As they came in, and before John had a chance to say anything, Ian Paisley said “We have a Pope. We have a Pope.”

I shall not rehearse all the things that have been said about Sinn Féin, except to say that it seems to me that the ball is now in Sinn Féin’s court. I shall not give advice to Sinn Féin, not least for the reasons that I have mentioned to do with the actions of the British in Northern Ireland affairs, but also because of the view of that great Ulsterman, C S Lewis, to the effect that, if you hear of someone going around doing good to others, you can always tell the others by their hunted look.

My experience is that Sinn Féin/IRA has a capacity for realism. After the assassination of Lord Mountbatten and on the much more recent occasion when all the editorials of the whole world came down on them on the subject of decommissioning, they learned from their mistake and acted. Perhaps I might take this to its logical conclusion: if there are elections and the DUP wins, that party also has a capacity for realism. It will be as good a test as any of the Belfast Agreement. It is bound to happen sooner or later, and in my view, the sooner it happens, the better the agreement will be tested.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Of course, Peter is Lord Brooke and has been since 1997.

The Lord Brooke: The year was 2001.

Mr Stone MSP: Colleagues may wonder what on earth an associate member from the Scottish Parliament can say about Northern Ireland, especially since I represent Caithness and Sutherland. However, I should like to make two brief points. I should point out is that my wife comes from Armagh, for which reason I have known the city and county of Armagh for a long time — since the mid to late 1970s. As other speakers have said, the situation has been transformed. I remember Armagh when it was bombed to bits and dangerous to walk into one part of the town rather than another, depending on “which foot you kicked with”. As Seymour Crawford has said, there has been a very great change.

One hears talk of 54% of the Protestant community wishing that the agreement had never been made and not liking power sharing. That is not quite the story that I hear from ordinary people in County Armagh, both Unionist and Republican. There is a real sense that life has changed very much for the better. People in the street girm, but if you push them, they say, “No. It is a good thing.” For that reason, I apply salt to figures such as 54%. I believe that ordinary people — those who matter in a county such as Armagh — welcome the agreement and seek the reinstatement of the Northern Ireland Assembly. My first point is, therefore, that one should not be fooled by statistics.

It would be unfair to name names, but a Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly came over to the Scottish Parliament. We had a joint meeting. What happened afterwards was quite interesting. We have pub in Edinburgh called Deacon Brodie’s, which is very near our offices. It was fun having a drink with the Committee members, and it was amazing how well they all got on behind the scenes: Sinn Féin, the DUP and the UUP were having a grand time. I felt that the dialogue between us, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly, was useful.

My second point comes forward in my question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland this afternoon: how can we increase links between the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly? There is no doubt

that those of us of all political persuasions, from Murray Tosh, my Conservative friend, to Shona Robison, my SNP friend, embraced devolution in Scotland. To roll back on devolution would be inconceivable, so I believe that with such support and enthusiasm we can infect the Northern Ireland Assembly when it comes into being again — and pray God that it comes soon. The dialogue is useful, and it can strengthen the institutions and empower the peace process.

12.30 pm

Senator McHugh: I am delighted to be here. It is my first time, so I am a little nervous. I come from a part of Ireland — Donegal — that is geographically north, yet I live in the political South. Where I live is actually geographically more northerly than Northern Ireland. I am saddened by the dissolution of the institutions, but I am not surprised because the physical ill in Northern Ireland is sectarianism, and we have to focus on that.

Prior to the Good Friday Agreement, various institutions — social, economic and political — North and South, were working together. I make special reference to INTERREG, Co-operation North, the International Fund for Ireland, and the peace and reconciliation programmes. The understanding of, and mutual respect for, different communities and people from different religious backgrounds underpinned those institutions, and that good work is ongoing.

The Peace II programme has taken a different twist to the Peace I programme, because it is trying to address the legacy of the conflict through mutual co-operation. We can take an example from that programme because, as national parliamentarians, we often bypass the legacy of the conflict and the history of what has happened in Northern Ireland. We should do justice to both communities in Northern Ireland and try our best to understand and appreciate where people are coming from. Senator Mooney referred to the fact that there is a historical dimension to Northern Ireland. On both sides of the water, we should try to understand the situation, because the language that we use is important — we could make comments in Britain, the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland that would add fuel to sectarianism.

I take solace from Lord Smith's comments. He said that there has to be community leadership in Northern Ireland. We also have to show leadership outside Northern Ireland, and we can do that through this forum. We can foster understanding and encourage mutual co-operation. We should not just allow local organisations to facilitate co-operation — we should call for politicians to come together, and we should try to bring communities together. People from England, Scotland and Wales should come to Northern Ireland to see how people live and what they have to live through. The majority of people in Cork, Kerry and Tipperary in the Republic of Ireland have never been to Northern Ireland. There is ignorance

and a lack of awareness, and we have to address that. We have the opportunity to do that through this Body.

Credit must be given to a certain Gentleman present in this room — John Hume. He was the first person to start talking about mutual co-operation and mutual understanding and respect for every community, and he should be commended.

Mr Sherlock TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. Ar an gcéad dul síos, ba mhaith liom a rá go bhfuil ard-áthas ar fad orm a bheith ag an gcuinniú seo ag comhlacht idir pharlaiminteach na Breataine agus na hÉireann, agus ba mhaith liom comhghairdeas a dhéanamh le Breandán Smith fosta.

The Good Friday Agreement is welcomed in Ireland, North and South. It brought peace to Ireland, and it is disappointing that the institutions were suspended. One can clearly see that the British and Irish Governments are making efforts to resolve matters. Examples are changes to the policing Bill and initiatives on tourism. Many efforts have been made in that regard, and people are being involved through local groups. However, a major point is that Unionists do not trust Sinn Féin in relation to support for militarist involvement.

The British Government and the Assembly should have accepted Sinn Féin's commitment. The paramilitary groups that exist in the North of Ireland mean that it would be better to resume power sharing.

There are differences between Unionist groups in the North — everybody knows that. That is part of the problem, and it must be recognised. We must not have any doubt about that. It would have been best if the Assembly had not been suspended, and the sooner that it is resumed the better for everybody on this island. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Killeen TD: I support the motion. I am glad that it reaffirms support for the Good Friday Agreement and that it welcomes the determination of the two Governments. There is a reasonable expectation that the Assembly and the Executive will get on with their own business, but that expectation is not always realised. Many speakers have referred to the need for the various parties in Northern Ireland to confront some of their more extreme supporters. Those parties have sometimes used the intervention of the two Governments as a crutch — or the possibility of that intervention — in failing to confront their supporters. It does no harm to remind those parties that an electoral mandate brings with it responsibilities as well as rights, and no electoral mandate is permanent, particularly if those who choose the democratic way continue to have a foot in two or three camps or occupy some intermediate ground. That is certainly said about Sinn Féin's relationship to the IRA, but it is also true of some of the Unionist parties. Although those links may be less direct and less tangible, there is no doubt that

Unionist politicians have frequently pandered to the more extreme forces on their side.

Ultimately, the political movements will suffer if those people continue to try to occupy that intermediate ground. Policing is undoubtedly very important, as Jim O’Keeffe said. All of us must face down our supporters occasionally to back unpopular policing decisions or to urge harder policing on some issues. It is a great pity that Sinn Féin has so far not taken its place on the Policing Board. In common with Lord Dubs, on my visits I have been impressed by what those involved in the police academy and the Policing Board have been trying to do. There is a genuine commitment to providing ordinary policing in a very difficult situation.

The political parties on both sides of the spectrum must accept that whatever idealism may once have held sway among the paramilitary bodies has long since been replaced by an ethos of criminality. Democratic political parties must be as distant from and as ready to address that as their equivalents in other jurisdictions.

Mr Ellis TD: None of us want to drag today’s proceedings on too long, but a few matters must be examined. We must review our progress. When I first joined BIIPB over 10 years ago, talking about Sinn Féin or various other groups being represented on the Body was seen almost as heresy; they would never become involved in the democratic process. All paramilitaries in Northern Ireland must be given recognition for the fact that they entered the democratic process by various manner and means, and they must be encouraged to stay in that process. Although none of us agree with the suspension of the Assembly, it was one of the few remaining options because without it there would have been breakdown and chaos.

That would not have been in the long-term interests of the people of Northern Ireland, whether Nationalist or Unionist. It is imperative that elections take place in May. However, I hope that the Assembly can be brought back into operation before that date, because that is needed.

There is also a responsibility on elected representatives from all sides to make the Assembly work properly. It is unfair that DUP Ministers do not play a full role, because that polarises Unionism in the run-up to the elections. I agree with Tony Killeen and others who have said that electoral power brings responsibility. Elected representatives must put down markers, state where they stand and lead their people. They have been elected to lead, not to be led, which is a problem within Unionism. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin has made a better effort than Unionism to lead its electorate.

The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body has a role to play: it should support the Assembly and ensure that people who felt marginalised are now given the opportunity to become involved in democratic politics. Those people have seen that the military way does not work for either

side, and it will not work for either Government. They have also seen that people who are engaged in democratic politics can achieve much more for their communities than can be achieved through militarism. That is the way to convince people who have doubts — communities are better off, Northern Ireland is a much safer place than it was 10 or 15 years ago, and people can now go about their business in peace, free from worry. A clear message should be sent out that if the progress of the past few years is to continue, the Assembly and the Executive should resume as soon as possible, and under no circumstances should the May elections be postponed.

Mr Pattison TD: I will be extremely brief. I wish to thank the Co-Chairman for the kind words with which he welcomed me back to the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body after my enforced five-year absence. Even though I was in political exile for those five years, I followed the work and the progress of the Body closely. I want to compliment him for his stewardship in those years.

It is important to emphasise the fact that the Good Friday Agreement is here to stay. The agreement could not have been reached in a more democratic way. I fully support the motion proposed by Deputy Jim O’Keeffe. However, I would have liked the motion to reaffirm the BIIPB’s support for the Good Friday Agreement, in recognition that full compliance with the terms of the agreement is the only way forward. In view of what other contributors to the debate have said, and even though it is late in the day, I believe that that recognition should be included in the motion.

Mr Mates MP: I am acutely aware that once again I am all that stands between Members of the Body and their pre-lunch drinks. I will try to be brief. However, it is difficult to sum up a debate in which 26 Members have participated. It has been a remarkable morning.

Like all politicians, I accept compliments from wherever they might come. Therefore, the backhanded compliment from my good friend Conor Lenihan is as welcome as any others that I have received — he says that I entertain him. He must realise that I have had two missions during the many years that I have known him and been a friend: one, to entertain him, and two, to educate him. I am particularly glad, therefore, that he has admitted that I have half succeeded. I shall press on with the second half of the mission.

Led by John Hume, many Members who contributed to the debate got straight to the point: wherever we are and whatever position we hold, we must try to reflect the will of the people of Northern Ireland, which is to move away from confrontation towards some form of consensus. Led by Cecilia Keaveney, another raft of Members spoke about the domestic issues that will be hindered by the suspension of the Assembly.

The Body has Committees that can examine those domestic matters about which Members feel strongly. Perhaps they can provide some constructive input. For my part, I hope that Jim O’Keeffe, the new Chairman of Committee A, will accept a proposal from me tomorrow on penalty points and police — a matter that involves some sharing of sovereignty. I see no reason why those people who want to see the Body reformed cannot use it better in the meantime to raise and discuss those domestic points that matter to citizens in Northern Ireland and in the Republic.

Several subjects were mentioned. Séamus Kirk spoke about waste and animal health. Tourism was mentioned, as was fisheries. None of those matters are the stuff of Unionist/Nationalist controversy. They are the stuff of great difficulty between Governments, and the stuff of European difficulties, such as difficulties over common fishery policies. However, they are matters that the Body could get its teeth into.

Inevitably, the Body has not been as effective over the past 18 months as it should have been. First we had a British general election, then an Irish general election. There had to be a pause after each to allow for new people to be nominated. It now looks as if we shall have at least three years of settled Government at Westminster and in Dublin. The BIIPB has a three-year opportunity to get to work on issues that are not necessarily the ones about which the strategic politicians will be arguing. Let us examine some of those nuts-and-bolts issues and come up with something useful. In that way, we shall enhance the respect in which, I believe, we are already held.

Twenty-six speakers have reached a consensus. Nuances have been made here and there, as well as there being one remarkable speech, largely of dissent, to which I shall return. The two chief issues of concern to Members were, first, the new way forward for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Policing Board and, secondly, the question of the Assembly elections. I shall cover both of those matters briefly.

Alf Dubs recalled Committee A’s visit to the police training college in Belfast nearly a year ago. I visited it a month ago with the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, which I chair, to see the start of the second course. Recruits from the first course recently graduated. The way that everybody is setting about starting on a completely new track is quite remarkable and very commendable.

However, difficulties still remain. Several Roman Catholic trainees have had to move home for safety reasons. We know that a bomb was planted under a trainee’s car, which, mercifully, did not go off. There is still an undercurrent among members of the Nationalist community that is against joining the new police force. We shall not get a new police force until such time as it represents the community that it tries to serve. Therefore, the message for everybody is, “For goodness’ sake, put

aside your policy objections and let us get the people on the ground to represent the people in the various parts of Northern Ireland. From that will come a different attitude to policing”. I shall return to that when I refer to Arthur Morgan’s remarks.

There will be many views in the room about next May’s Assembly elections. I have always longed for the day when elections would take place in Northern Ireland and the citizens would vote about the way that they had been served by their politicians, whether they agreed with this or that policy and whether they felt that the economy was better or worse.

Martin Mansergh made a remarkable comment about the regrettable tendency of electorates to elect the wrong people. There speaks a long-time civil servant who has been inconvenienced by that time and time again. However, now that he has entered the democratic process, he must accept that there are regrettable tendencies to elect representatives whom he may think are the wrong people — I am suffering from that in my country at the moment — but we must accept the voice of the electorate when it speaks.

If we have an election next May, it cannot be about how the Assembly has handled its domestic policies or the projects that it has introduced. It can only be back to the tribal polarisation that we had before. Someone said that that would be a good thing — let us get the boil lanced. In everything I have had to do in Northern Ireland, I have always felt that once you get both sides out of their trenches, you must do everything possible to stop them going back in.

I agree with Lord Smith that the suspension is more likely to be longer rather than shorter. Therefore if we were to have an election to a non-Assembly, an Assembly that did not exist, I am not sure that that would be a good thing. However, there will be much debate about that later.

I want to comment on Arthur Morgan’s remarks, and without wishing to be patronising, I have to say that it was a remarkable contribution, much more so than any made by his predecessor on the Body. Mr Morgan was trying hard to be constructive as well as to put a view with which many in this room do not agree. I point him to a perceptive remark made by Paschal Mooney who recalled de Valera’s courage in turning away absolutely from the IRA. I also believe that Gerry Adams wants to put violence behind him. I believe he is sincere when he says that we must go down the political road. However, I regret that Gerry Adams has not taken the steps that de Valera took to put violence behind him. If he could bring himself to say that he did not want the IRA’s help any more, that he would prefer that it went away completely, and if he would condemn the things that it continues to do, that would cut the ground from under the feet of extreme Unionists, who feed on every incidence of violence or on any undemocratic occurrence that is

not condemned by him. If Gerry Adams would show the courage that his predecessor in kind showed all those years ago, we could move the process much further forward.

The question of the police will continue to vex us all. In a way, I understand what Arthur Morgan said. However, does he not understand that there will be no progress made by sitting on the fence on that issue and saying that Sinn Féin will not move until it gets everything it wants? He is quite right that the IRA has moved a little, and late, as he acknowledged. His party needs to move now with regard to the Policing Board and to the membership of the PSNI. Again, if Sinn Féin were to do that, it would cut the ground from under the feet of extreme Unionists, and I want to see that happen as much as I want to see it cut from under the feet of extreme Nationalists. It is not helpful to continue to say, until we get every dot and comma that we want, we will have nothing to do with it and neither will our community. That will extend the paramilitary violence, which Mr Morgan condemned. We will not escape that cycle until someone leads the way, and, as many Members have said, the ball is in Sinn Féin's court.

This has been a remarkably good debate. If we go back, as Séamus Kirk did, to the first debate of this Body, the hostility was electric in the room where we met in Westminster. We have come a long way, and we have a long way to go, but I believe, as does Peter Brooke, in taking the long and optimistic view of our way forward.

Resolved:

That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement; is saddened at the suspension of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland; welcomes the determination of the two Governments to press ahead with all aspects of the agreement; calls on all political parties to redouble their efforts towards the restoration of the institutions which have benefited all the people of these islands; and urges all involved parties to continue their efforts to secure an early resumption of the Northern Ireland institutions.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you for your attention, and for the manner in which the debate has been conducted.

The sitting was suspended at 12.56.

The sitting resumed at 2.35 pm.

THE JOINT BID TO HOST THE EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS 2008

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the responses of governments and executives to the debate on the motion on the joint Scottish-Irish bid for the European Championships 2008.

Ms Robison MSP: I am in the strange position of being expected to speak on behalf of the Government of Scotland in moving this motion. As I am an Opposition Member, that is something that will probably not happen often.

However, the bid to host Euro 2008 is an issue on which all of the Scottish parties are agreed, so perhaps I could speak on behalf of the Scottish Parliament in saying that the Parliament and the Executive are very much behind the joint bid. That has been demonstrated by the actions of everyone involved. Recent high-profile events involving our Ministers and Members have shown how much support Scotland is giving to the bid.

Yesterday, an important event took place: an inter-parliamentary football match between teams from the Scottish Parliament and the Dáil. It is good that everyone is sitting down, because it might come as a shock that — contrary to custom and practice — Scotland won that match 3-2. According to a reliable source, the Irish team had at least four training sessions. I can only assume that the training sessions involved team members exercising their right arms rather than their feet, given the superb victory of the Scottish Parliament's team.

That game provided a good opportunity to gain high-profile publicity for the bid, and it attracted substantial media interest. Both our populations hold "the beautiful game" dear, and their support strengthens the Scottish-Irish bid.

I am pleased to have been asked to move the motion, but I have a distinct feeling of déjà vu because at my first meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, I moved a motion in support of the bid to host Euro 2008. However, it is so important that we cannot talk about it too often. I am still optimistic about the decision on the bid that will be made by UEFA on 12 December.

It represents an important opportunity for Scotland and Ireland to host the world's third biggest sporting event, and both nations are fighting hard to win the bid. We have a great deal going for us. Our fans travel the world, are renowned for their friendliness and enjoy a good reputation. Our bid's chances of success were enhanced in May, when the Champions League Final was played at Hampden Park in Glasgow. That provided an opportunity

to showcase Scotland's ability to host such a big event without any difficulty.

The bid has not been without its challenges, such as those associated with the building of Stadium Ireland. That is progressing, albeit through private finance, but perhaps the source of the finance does not matter if the stadium is completed. In Scotland, the location of stadiums is still under debate, and small local difficulties have arisen. Despite those problems, the enthusiasm and the positive attitude of those involved, together with populations who are right behind the bid, will overcome any issues that remain to be resolved. Both nations will benefit in tourism and in the creation of short-term jobs in the construction of the stadium. Moreover, it is hoped that long-term employment will reap dividends.

We await with trepidation the decision on 12 December 2002. I hope that political issues will not come into play and that the decision will be made solely on the strength of the bid. In that case, the Scottish-Irish bid for Euro 2008 will take some beating. I am happy to introduce the motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Following your earlier remarks about the Dáil, I have no alternative but to ask my good friend to take over the Co-Chair.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): I thank Ms Robison for her positive introduction to the debate. I ask other Members to indicate if they wish to contribute.

Ms Keaveney TD: Given that today's debate is on soccer, it is important that women lead it. Donegal gave Packie Bonner to Scotland and the rest of Ulster gave Martin O'Neill to Scotland. That gave you a false sense of security at Sunday's match, so be careful at the replay. The boys are training at the moment and may be missing for the next couple of minutes. To be honest, they are still recovering.

As Chair of the Sports Committee in the Dáil, and personally, I welcome the joint bid. The many historical links between Scotland and Ireland have become even stronger, due in part to the new situation under the Good Friday Agreement. We face many challenges in overcoming the small difficulties, but it can be done.

Several local clubs want their grounds to be developed. I have been asked to convey to the Taoiseach that, should there be an argument about one particular ground, Inishowen grounds are offered as alternatives. That introduces a real Celtic league element, and demonstrates the huge significance of the bid.

It is important that our bid is successful, and it is in the interests of all of us to encourage positive interaction at every level. Sport, above all, can unite people. We spoke earlier today about the many difficulties in Scotland and Ireland. Art and sport are elements that could play a positive role in bringing people closer together, and I support the motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): I am not surprised that Packie Bonner and Donegal got a mention in Cecilia's contribution.

2.45 pm

Mr Öpik MP: There is a serious omission from the bid — Wales. The Welsh football team has done exceptionally well, most recently against Azerbaijan, and it has grown powerful in European football. Some of you may be aware that I ran a three-year campaign to have the results of Welsh football matches broadcast on the BBC's Grandstand every Saturday. I finally achieved that two weeks ago.

I will make a demand and I will make you an offer. The demand is that Members should take Welsh football seriously as part of any Celtic league that is set up. The offer is that, in exchange, Ireland and Scotland will be more than welcome to use our Millennium Stadium.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Is that the end of your press release?

Mr Öpik MP: I have not yet written a press release, but I am sure that I will. The offer is that Ireland and Scotland get to use the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, which has been the scene of many successful matches recently.

There is probably an opportunity to set up a friendly league between the nations of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. I support that.

Mr Robertson MP: I am a first-time visitor to this august body, and I thank everyone for the welcome that they gave me last night and today.

The English have been spreading a rumour that Scotland could only qualify for the European Championships by hosting them. That is false. The well-known Scotsman, Berti Vogts, will make sure that Scotland qualifies.

I think it is important that we forge a successful Scottish-Irish bid. Scotland and Ireland have been friends for many years. As a Glasgow MP — I will not tell you which team I support, but it has nothing to do with Packie Bonner — I can assure you that the Irish will receive a warm welcome in Glasgow. The stadiums that we have built in Scotland will be improved. Scotland will be a marvellous place to visit — it will certainly be a friendly place. Both Ireland and Scotland have reputations for being friendly, so those European Championships would be the friendliest yet. We certainly want to build on the very successful tournament hosted by England in 1996. Scotland and Ireland can use this opportunity to forge a closer relationship between our two nations, and to ensure that we host a successful competition.

My only fear is the one expressed by Shona Robison — that the winning bid will not be decided on an even playing field. Let us hope that when the bids are examined, there is no doubt that the Scottish-Irish bid is judged as the best one. It will allow for more spectators

to attend the games; the scenery is a lot better, and the people are a lot better. I hope that the bid is successful on 12 December.

Mr Mackinley MP: I support the motion, but I hope that those preparing the bid do not forget about Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, there are no football grounds of sufficient quality or capacity in Northern Ireland to be part of the bid. I am not suggesting that if the bid were to be successful, European Championship games could be played in Northern Ireland. However, bearing in mind the multi-million pound spin-offs from these festivals of sport, there is potential for Northern Ireland to benefit from the package. It might be possible to include a proposal in the bid that subsidiary competitions be held in Northern Ireland, or that reserve teams could play in some of the Northern Ireland stadiums during — or before — the main competition. That could be promoted as a part of cross-community arrangements.

Having stayed in Northern Ireland and immersed myself for what amounted to several weeks in Unionist areas, I was impressed with the support and enthusiasm for the Irish Republic's football team in the World Cup. Although that was not universal and many people rooted for teams other than the Irish Republic, a significant number were proud that Ireland competed despite the difficulties. That could be built upon.

I regret that officialdom has not recognised that, for an entire season, Ards Football Club, which is in the Irish League Premier Division, had to share a ground with Cliftonville Football Club — to the horror of the then RUC, who were concerned that it bore all the chemistry for conflict, given Cliftonville's location in a predominantly Nationalist area of Belfast. However, the arrangement proceeded without incident, and Ards, which is overwhelmingly a Unionist area, has now built up a strong relationship with the community in and around Cliftonville, although they no longer share grounds. That shows that soccer can be a vehicle for cross-community relations.

I hope that this bid will not only bring the competition to Scotland and Ireland but that it will provide an opportunity to involve young soccer enthusiasts in Northern Ireland. Perhaps it will bring about discussions between the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Football Association (IFA), which, in the long-term, may lead to the creation of one national team comparable to that which exists for rugby union.

Mr I Smith MSP: There is no doubt that benefits that can come to local communities from a successful international sporting event. The Commonwealth Games, which took place in Manchester in the summer, were a great success — despite my getting soaked at the closing ceremony. The success of a major sporting event is that the local community becomes involved. Scotland and Ireland together can do likewise, if our European bid is successful.

The bid creates great opportunities for the game of football in both nations. Let us face it — Scotland could do with developing the game, because our recent record is not one to be proud of. There is the potential for major spin-offs that could benefit Scottish football in the long-term, particularly at grass roots level. The new stadiums that must be built will contain community elements. It is important that those benefits are spread throughout Scotland — not least, as I said before, because some of the teams staying in the tournament might stay in some of the excellent hotels in my constituency of North-East Fife, particularly in the St Andrew's area. Although my area will not have one of the stadiums, I am keen to present and promote its facilities. To some extent that answers Andrew's point — there will be an opportunity to promote Northern Ireland's facilities among the teams that play in the tournament.

Although there will be obvious economic benefits for Scotland and Ireland, there are important political and social issues. We cannot, and should not, forget that sectarianism is still a major problem in the game in Scotland. The bid provides an opportunity for Ireland and Scotland to tackle that issue head-on. We all regret and condemn the fact that Neil Lennon had to retire from international football because he happens to play for the “wrong team” in Glasgow and, therefore, was under threat from Loyalists. That is something we do not want to see again. Bill Shankly once said that football is more important than life and death. It is not; it is only a game. We must ensure that we put an end to sectarianism in Scotland and in Northern Ireland.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): As we have only five minutes left and we have four speakers, I ask for the contributions to be brief.

Mr O'Brien MP: I shall be brief. I support the motion. We should strengthen the motion because it directs us merely to take note of the responses of the Governments. Instead, we should reaffirm our support for the Scottish-Irish bid to host the European Championships.

According to the report, UEFA officials who inspected the Scottish and Irish facilities went away with a favourable impression of our countries and of the quality and strength of the joint bid. However, there could be some problems with the infrastructure around the venues. I would hate to think that the bid failed because we did not pay sufficient attention to infrastructure. Therefore, I appeal to both countries to examine that situation to ensure that it does not present an obstacle to obtaining UEFA's approval.

We should reaffirm our support for the Scottish-Irish bid, instead of merely noting the responses of the Governments.

Mr English TD: As a new Member of Dáil Éireann, I am delighted to be here and to be part of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. It has been a learning

experience for me, and I hope that I will gain something from the experience. I would like to support Mr O'Brien's words on reaffirming our support and showing stronger support for the joint bid.

When it was first announced, many people laughed at the bid, but it has turned into a realistic opportunity, and we are close to the deal being closed. We have a great chance. As a body, we should do anything that we can to help get the ball across the line, as they say in soccer.

A successful bid would be of great benefit to us, especially to Ireland and Scotland. Sport is a great way to develop our cultures, and it is great advertising for our countries. I would like to see us do everything that we can do to help. If the bid is successful, it will prove what countries can achieve when they work together, and it could set an example for the future. I hope that it will be successful, as long as no one minds when Ireland wins the championship.

The Lord Glentoran: I support what William O'Brien said, and I strongly recommend that the venture should go ahead. I wish everyone involved the best possible luck for the success of the bid. However, I am bitterly disappointed that Northern Ireland is not involved. I believe that it is probably down to the failure of Irish Football Association (IFA) to knock on doors and ask to be involved. If I am wrong, my apologies, but that is what I understand to be the case.

Now that Northern Ireland is under direct rule, I ask Her Majesty's Government to take positive action and try to get Northern Ireland in on the act, because it would complete the bid very nicely.

I hear what people are saying about stadiums, but they cannot be the be all and end all. The Millennium Stadium in Cardiff was built for £155 million.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): The final Member to speak on the topic is Jim Glennon, who has represented Ireland in a different code of football. I ask Jim to share his expertise.

Mr Glennon TD: Go raibh maith agat. I am delighted to be here.

3.00 pm

Having watched from afar as the Body has evolved and, as a first-time TD and attendee, it is an honour for me to share a forum with men and women who, in time to come, will be paid due tribute by history for their role in the marvellous advances that have been achieved in Ireland and, in a wider context, in these islands, particularly over the last 10 years. I wish to thank them, particularly the Body's founder members and all of our predecessors. It is an honour to follow in their footsteps.

There was talk today of a renewal of this Body. As a first-time attendee it is not for me to comment on that, but new Members certainly have a hard act to follow in

continuing the tremendous work that has been achieved. I express sincere regret, as did other speakers, at the absence of a Northern Ireland delegation, with the honourable exception of John Hume. Many people have said that if the Body is to move forward, that matter must be addressed as a matter of urgency. It will require significant imagination and flair. I hope that it can be achieved, because it would be a positive development.

Furthermore, I agree with Lord Glentoran and earlier speakers that the absence of Northern Ireland's participation in the joint bid to stage this major sporting event is a matter of very deep regret. It is difficult to include Northern Ireland in the primary presentation; nevertheless, should the fringe benefits materialise as anticipated, it will be a sad day if Northern Ireland is left out of such an event, particularly since much of the travelling between Ireland and Scotland will be through Northern Ireland. That should, and I hope will, be addressed after the bid's success is announced in a few weeks' time.

I wish to deal with a few of the points that were raised during the debate. Shona Robison made a reference to yesterday's game in Dublin. Having seen the state of some of my colleagues who participated in the game, as they crawled into the hotel earlier this morning, I look forward to the day when both Parliaments can field women's teams. That would be an interesting test.

Cecilia Keaveney referred to the role of sport in our lives. In my experience, sport is a huge element in the day-to-day life of the people of Scotland and Ireland. It is a positive and bonding influence for good. The possibility of staging the biggest sporting event in the world in 2008 can only be positive for the organisations involved and for business and political interests throughout Britain and Ireland. I have seen the spin-offs that have arisen in other parts of the world, particularly from the staging of soccer events. My own background is in rugby and, in comparison with soccer, we are only in the halfpenny seats. Whether it is the beautiful game is a topic for another discussion. The massive influence and impact that a World Cup or a European Championships can have on the countries in which they are staged — and on all the participating countries — is a sight to behold. That is something that should be encouraged and fostered at every possible opportunity.

Damien English referred to the fact that, when the bid was first announced, it was treated — certainly in Ireland — as something of an Irish joke. That was until people realised that it was a serious commercial bid with a real prospect of success. As the deadline for UEFA's decision approaches, it is encouraging to hear comments from Members that justify continued optimism.

In Ireland, we have had difficulties with the provision of facilities. Without going into detail, I simply state that I have no doubt that, when the bid is successful, we will have not one, but probably two stadiums that will be the

envy of many countries. I have been to Scotland and found that it already has a number of excellent stadiums in place. Ireland is not at that stage yet, but I have no doubt that, when the time comes, provision of facilities will have long since ceased to be an issue.

I agree that the absence of Northern Ireland is something that has to be addressed. The spin-offs and the benefits that will arise from a successful bid will be immense.

The role of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in fostering the bid should not be forgotten. Ten years ago, we could not have imagined that we would be sitting here discussing such a bid. That also applies to our discussions this morning. The role of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body in fostering a spirit of co-operation at the highest political levels should not be underestimated. As a new delegate to this Body, I pay tribute to all our predecessors.

Hopefully, 13 December 2002 will not be unlucky 13 for Ireland and Scotland, and we will be awarded the event. I look forward to working more closely with my colleagues from across the Irish Sea in staging a showcase event that we can all be proud of and from which we can all benefit greatly. Go raibh maith agat.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): Before I put the question, Mr John Hume MP would like to make a brief intervention.

Mr Hume MP: I would greatly like to see Unionist MPs attending this Body, and I regret that they are not here. May I suggest a reason that the Co-Chairmen might give to Unionists to make it easier for them to attend? They could be asked why — since they sit in the European Parliament with representatives from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Spain, among others — they do not come and sit in a body made up of representatives from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the responses of governments and executives to the debate on the motion on the joint Scottish-Irish bid for the European Championships 2008.

THE NORDIC COUNCIL

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): We come the motion regarding the Nordic Council, which has been proposed by Scotland. I welcome Mr Asmund Kristoffersen of Norway. Mr Kristoffersen represents the Nordic Council, and is the Chair of its Committee for the Environment.

Mr Tosh MSP: I beg to move

That the Body congratulates the Nordic Council on its 50th anniversary; notes the benefit that the Council has brought to the peoples, regions and nations of the Nordic area in terms of social, political and economic co-operation; and believes that links between the Body and the Nordic Council should be developed.

I have tabled the motion to enable the Body to congratulate the Nordic Council on its fiftieth anniversary as well as to reflect on its influence and achievements and — more importantly — on the lessons and opportunities that the Nordic Council presents for the work and direction of the BIIPB.

In its 50 years, the Nordic Council has brought the peoples of those countries tremendous benefits, particularly in respect of culture and environment, across their national boundaries. We in this Body can learn lessons in co-operation and interaction from them.

There are obvious ways in which the Nordic Council could serve as a model for the development of both the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and the British-Irish Council. The Nordic Council shows us that real progress can be made by inter-parliamentary and inter-governmental co-operation.

The Nordic Council has enjoyed marked success in strengthening co-operation at political, social, and economic levels. Member countries have fostered better relations in a range of subjects — law, the economy, fisheries, education, culture and transport. They have made the step forward that several earlier speakers suggested that we should try to make in our own work.

Like the BIIPB, the Nordic Council operates largely on its committee structure. The Culture and Education and Training Committee has a responsibility for research in those topics; the Citizens' and Consumer Rights Committee deals with issues concerning the rights of individual citizens and consumers as well as with the broader matters of democracy, such as human rights and equality. The Environment and Natural Resources Committee deals with questions concerning the environment, such as land use and management, and energy. The Welfare Committee's name speaks for itself; and a Business and Industry Committee deals with the economy, production and trade, including freedom of the labour markets.

I am sure that all of our committees could readily identify areas of crossover with those Nordic Committees and the motion seeks to promote co-operation between their committees and ours.

In the Scottish Parliament, we have started to develop our relationships with the Nordic countries. In October, we had a members' business debate on Scotland's relations with the Nordic countries, and we tapped and identified much enthusiasm across our Parliament for closer working with the Nordic Council. There was clear recognition that regional approaches can develop a deeper understanding of common problems, leading to the identification in some areas of common policy options and potential solutions.

That was followed last week by a seminar in the Scottish Parliament for colleagues and friends from the Nordic Council countries. It was clear from discussions that we see future possibilities for work with the Nordic Council countries, as well as areas in which similar progress could be made in the workings of our own bodies.

The seminar prompted thoughts about how we might go forward practically, and we are considering sending parliamentary officials to scope on practical co-operation issues. I suggest that, although there would be no remit to speak or act on behalf of the BIIPB, nonetheless any official we send could prepare a report with any pertinent recommendations on the possibilities for future engagement between the Nordic countries and ourselves.

I am pleased that the Nordic Council is represented today, and I look forward to hearing what Mr Kristoffersen has to say. There is scope for a long series of ongoing and fruitful discussions between the BIIPB and the Nordic Council. Although I appreciate that our resources are limited, there are ways in which communications could be promoted. Our Committee reports could easily be forwarded to them for information and to note the content and direction of our work, and there is scope for movement in the opposite direction.

Next month, the Nordic Council of Ministers will meet to discuss proposals for increased co-operation with Scotland. The Chairman of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Sven Ludvigsen, attended a seminar held in Scotland last week. Mr Ludvigsen identified four areas in which he hoped to see greater co-operation. He mentioned cultural links — a large number of which already exist — which would encompass Scotland, the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. He identified educational exchanges, which are extremely important. Mr Ludvigsen also noted the opportunity that exists to learn from one another in the area of good governance. The Scottish Parliament is proud of the work that it is doing to promote openness and accountability, to engage citizens in governance, and, in particular, to utilise information technology in tackling that work. Those are areas in which we share much common ground with our Nordic friends. Finally, Mr Ludvigsen identified the need for practical inter-regional co-operation in the West Norden area, particularly in terms of fishing and environmental issues.

3.15 pm

Mr Ludvigsen suggested that parliamentarians must play a bigger role in monitoring and taking forward

governmental initiatives. That is a theme that we have discussed here — our relationship to the Governments with which this Body is associated.

The motion is intended to make it clear that we in the Scottish Parliament are determined to explore the benefits of working with the Nordic Council, and to develop dialogue. The motion is also intended to create a greater awareness of the Nordic Council throughout the British Isles, and to help the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body develop constructive and productive links with the Nordic zone.

A start was made when this Body was represented at the fiftieth anniversary of the Nordic Council in Helsinki. Unfortunately, I was not able to be there because it happened on the same day that I chaired a debate in the Scottish Parliament that congratulated the Nordic Council on its 50 years of service. Earlier this year, the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body was represented at a meeting of the Nordic Council in Reykjavik.

The Scottish Parliament is developing links with the Nordic Council. Our chief executive has met his counterparts in Denmark, Finland and Sweden to discuss best practice in parliamentary procedures. Our Presiding Officer and several MSPs represented the Scottish Parliament at 'Scotland in Sweden' — a four-day series of cultural, political and life science events. Held earlier in the autumn, the purpose of that event was to provide a showcase for positive aspects of Scottish life to the Swedish delegates, and to learn from what we in Scotland regard as a successful European partner. The meeting was worthwhile, and I hope that a good deal of business, tourism, political contact, and co-operation will result from it. Many of our parliamentary Committees have looked to Nordic countries for ideas in areas such as transport, energy, marine pollution, fish farming, and fisheries management.

The face of Europe will change as membership of the European Union is extended to the accession states. Europe is reinventing itself, and closer links across the entire continent are in prospect. As Europe's centre of gravity changes, it may become essential for those of us who are on the geographical periphery to promote our common interests by regional involvement in decision-making

In Scotland, we know that the primary focus for our work is, inevitably, in the islands that we share with our closely related neighbours. However, the Nordic countries have provided us with a wider vision in two ways.

First, they have provided a basic model for the development of relations between countries, and for the building of peace and co-operation among the people of the British Isles. I hope that we can develop this Body's work in that respect through co-operation with the Nordic Council.

Secondly, in Scotland, we are increasingly aware that we have other potential partners in other geographical

areas — particularly among the Nordic countries. We hope that, while we work together, we will be able to look forward to a more prosperous future.

This motion marks the start that we have made in our determined efforts to build ever-closer links with our Nordic neighbours. In fishing, agriculture, energy, the environment, sustainable development, tourism, and transport, there are many opportunities for us to learn from each other, to discuss practical issues of mutual interest, and, perhaps, to find a common voice on some of those issues in a wider European context. In the Scottish Parliament, we are ready to look ahead and to consider carefully all the practical ways in which we can ensure that our shared aspirations are identified and promoted. I hope that this Body shares that view and supports this motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): As a representative of the host nations, I have much pleasure in inviting Mr Kristoffersen of the Nordic Council to address the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. My colleagues will note that I pronounced his name correctly. *[Applause]*.

Mr Kristoffersen: On behalf of the Nordic Council, it is a great pleasure for me to address the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. It is the first time that a representative of the Nordic Council has taken part in one of your plenary sessions. It is a great honour for me to speak to you at such an event, and I am grateful for your invitation, which will strengthen the links between our two inter-parliamentary bodies.

Like the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, the Nordic Council is a council of parliamentarians who represent different national parliaments and political groups. The mission of both bodies is to discuss common problems and to seek wise solutions together. In that respect, the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body is a sister to the Nordic Council.

I thank Members of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for the interest that they have shown in the work of the Nordic Council. Our formal contacts were established last April, so they are still new. We were happy to have discussions with representatives of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, both earlier in the year at our thematic meeting on democracy in Reykjavik, Iceland, and at our fiftieth anniversary plenary session, which was held last month in Helsinki, Finland.

We were honoured to learn that, last month, the Scottish Parliament debated a motion on the Nordic Council, which saw it as a model for the peoples, regions and nations of the islands of Britain and Ireland. The motion expressed the wish to develop closer political ties and links with the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

There have also been recent contacts, at governmental level, between the Nordic countries and one of your Members — Scotland. Only one week ago, a seminar on co-operation in the West Nordic sphere took place in Edinburgh. We are happy that so many Scottish parlia-

mentarians, as well as representatives of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, attended the seminar.

We appreciate the warm congratulations that you sent to us on the occasion of our fiftieth anniversary. The Nordic Council welcomes continued collaboration and increased interaction in the future. We will all benefit from a sharing of views and co-operation on shared problems.

I see obvious possibilities for co-operation and closer, project-based dialogues on matters such as culture, environment, renewable resources, renewable energy production, fisheries, tourism, and sustainable development, to name but a few.

Closer co-operation between the two bodies is facilitated by the fact that most of our organisational structures are similar. Like the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, the Nordic Council also has Committees that constitute the backbone of the political work. I am Chairman of one of those Committees, the Environment and Natural Resources Committee. I am happy to announce that we have already had our first discussions on issues of common interest with members of the corresponding British-Irish Committee. Those contacts should be strengthened, and I recommend that other Committees engage in project-based, ad hoc co-operation on important issues with the corresponding Committees of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body.

In the Nordic Council, one of the major points under discussion is the future role of the regions in an ever-growing and more closely integrated Europe. A European Community that is close to significant enlargement towards the east and the south is a challenge for us all. The opinion in the Nordic sphere is that a strong regional capability to agree and to make progress is of the utmost importance in solving important regional problems. For example, the Nordic Council has considerable experience of regional co-operation on problems in the Baltic Sea region, as well as in the Arctic.

I wish the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body all the best in coping with the challenges that face it in the Irish and British islands. I hope that stronger Irish-British-Nordic co-operation will be built on shared goals and that it will develop, progress and prosper.

I will be informal as I near the end of what I have to say. On my arrival, I heard that you were discussing sports issues. It is rather special for me to be in Manchester because a football player from my home town, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, is, as I understand it, an outstanding player for Manchester United.

Mr Griffiths AM: The National Assembly for Wales, and the Welsh generally, are keen on developing closer international links. That is one reason why we are enthusiastic about our membership of this Body and also keen on this motion to forge closer links between the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and the Nordic Council.

One of my colleagues, Brian Gibbons AM, attended the Nordic Council in plenary session in Helsinki from 29 to 31 October, and reported back to the Assembly. He was impressed by what he heard and saw and he gave a very positive report. For that reason, I am pleased to offer enthusiastic support for this motion. It is clear that the Nordic Council is a well-respected and established body for improving cross-border relations between the member countries and territories. We are keen, as an Assembly, to engage with the Nordic Council, both directly and through this Body, in recognition of that importance and significance.

Brian Gibbons, in reporting back, mentioned many matters of mutual interest for Wales and the Nordic Council — too many to cover now in this brief contribution. One example of these mutual interests is Sellafield, and the question of nuclear waste that is associated with it. That has raised considerable concern in Wales and has featured in Assembly debates. I know that it causes concern to others present here today.

3.30 pm

He was interested to note what was said about Sellafield at the Nordic Council meeting, and he reported to us on that. That is one example of direct and mutual concern for the Nordic Council and Wales, and I am sure that other Members share that concern.

As Murray Tosh did earlier from a Scottish perspective, I propose to highlight certain matters of mutual interest and common ground between Wales and the member countries of the Nordic Council, some of which are inter-parliamentary matters.

The Welsh Assembly prides itself on its openness and accessibility, as does the Scottish Parliament. Those are perceived as real gains from devolution in the UK. The Welsh Assembly believes that, in that regard, it has much to learn from Nordic countries. Though major strides have been taken in Wales, I hope that the Assembly will continue to improve by learning from Nordic Council members.

Much has already been learnt about Assembly composition in respect of the representation of women. Figures show that in Nordic Council parliaments and assemblies there is a 45% representation of women in Sweden and a 37% representation in Finland. The figure in Wales is 43%, where the majority of the Cabinet is female. Those, therefore, are areas in which there are major similarities and common interests.

Under the Government of Wales Act (1998), the Welsh Assembly has a statutory commitment to sustainable development, and we can learn much from the Nordic countries as far as environmental gains and policies are concerned.

As Murray Tosh mentioned, our Committees have been active in developing links with the Nordic countries. Recently, I was part of an Economic Development Com-

mittee delegation that visited Vastra Gotaland in Sweden, where there is an impressive rate of broadband penetration and general ICT policy achievement. The Committee discussed those matters, learnt much from their practices and brought that knowledge back to Wales.

Co-Chairman, you are holding up a pen, illustrating that I have little time left, so I shall close by mentioning some geographical affinities, as mentioned earlier by others. In Wales, we are concerned that we occupy a fairly marginal position in relation to the European hub, which Mr Kristoffersen mentioned. That will become even more of a factor with the enlargement of the European Union and the subsequent shift of focus eastward. With its long coastline and large rural interior, Wales shares many geographical similarities with the Nordic countries.

Given the many issues of common interest and concern, together with common ground, the Welsh Assembly is committed to taking the relationship forward, both in respect of links between the BIIPB and the Nordic Council and of more direct links between the Nordic Council and the Welsh Assembly, which enthusiastically supports the motion and is pleased to back it to the hilt.

Mr McNamara MP: Along with our former Irish Co-Chairman, Mr Michael Kennedy, and on behalf of the Steering Committee and this Committee, I had the honour of attending the Reykjavik meeting in Iceland — you would expect it to be in Iceland if it was in Reykjavik. That was our first engagement at an event organised by the Nordic Council, and we were most hospitably and generously received. Not only were we happy about the warmth of the welcome, but about how much we learnt of the possibility for different countries, with different languages but a shared heritage of relationships over the centuries, to work and act together for common interests.

It is interesting that the former leader of the Ulster Vanguard movement, Mr Bill Craig — during the time that Mr Trimble and Mr Burnside were two of his motorcycle outriders — spoke warmly of the Nordic Council as the type of institution on which the relationship within the British and Irish islands could be based and modelled.

The model of the Nordic Council is reflected in the Good Friday Agreement. You also find that model reflected here, in the membership of the devolved parliaments and assemblies, and among the representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

The ability of the Members of the Nordic Council to co-operate has greatly impressed us. I hope that, when we consider the reform of our own Committees and policies, we will bear in mind the model of the Nordic Council.

There are a number of differences between the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and the Nordic Council. The most outstanding of those are: the amount of money

that the Nordic Council has at its disposal; its ability to request expert opinion; its ability to commission research; and various other resources that we do not have but hope to acquire. However, the Nordic Council presents a model to which we should aspire, not simply out of envy of its resources and expertise, but because of its ability to attract the interest of its member countries and their populations. It is an example to the rest of the world of how small countries can — to use Douglas Hurd's phrase — “punch above their weight”, because of what they offer in co-operation, forward thinking, and positive working models.

On behalf of the Steering Committee, I warmly endorse the motion proposed by our Scottish colleagues. I think that it is timely. We can all learn something from the Nordic Council, and I trust that the Nordic countries will have a further 50 years of prosperous co-operation, and, I hope, 50 years of co-operating with this Body and its constituent parts.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body congratulates the Nordic Council on its 50th anniversary; notes the benefit that the Council has brought to the peoples, regions and nations of the Nordic area in terms of social, political and economic co-operation; and believes that links between the Body and the Nordic Council should be developed.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): Last night, the Steering Committee recommended that Committee Chairpersons should meet as soon as possible to discuss respective orders of reference. We will make a meeting room available after the close of this afternoon's business, at 5.30 pm. The sitting will resume at 4.00 pm, and we will now have a group photograph taken in front of the hotel.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): When we resume, the Secretary of State will begin his speech. I hope that everyone will return by 4.00 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 3.40 pm.

Resumed at 4.07 pm

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON PAUL MURPHY MP

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I have much pleasure in welcoming the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Paul Murphy. We have all heard of his contribution to the Good Friday Agreement, when he very ably assisted the then Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam. He is now in the Cabinet, and has also been Secretary of State for Wales.

We are delighted that you could come, Mr Murphy, and we are also delighted that it is your birthday. In case you did not know, you were born on a Thursday — a bit of comeuppance — you can check that when you go back.

Mr Mates MP: He has far to go.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): You will know that our British and Irish colleagues are very keen to have the opportunity of putting questions to you, and we will try to use the time as best we can. Obviously, in the present political situation, active parliamentarians from both Parliaments are concerned about Northern Ireland, and I am sure that you will want to address their concerns and anxieties.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Murphy): Mr Winnick and friends, thank you for those kind words. Thank you also for the black pudding birthday cake that I had earlier. I have never seen a black pudding birthday cake before. Someone said to Clement Attlee many years ago when he was in his early 80s, “Well, Lord Attlee, how does it feel to be 83?” He said, “Better than the alternative.” [*Laughter*]. I feel the same at 54.

I am delighted to be here today. It is not the first time that I have spoken to the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. The last time was in Dublin during the talks, not long after the Good Friday Agreement. Since then, the Body has considerably increased its membership. I am delighted to see that, like the British-Irish Council, the Body has representatives from Wales, Scotland, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man — and, interestingly, a guest from the Nordic Council. All those various representatives and delegates make the Body extremely important, and they have influence in their respective jurisdictions to ensure that relations between our two countries are at their very best.

What struck me during the two years when I was Minister of State responsible for political development in Northern Ireland, and during the few weeks that I have been doing my current job, was the remarkable

relationship — when one looks back in historical terms — between the British and Irish Governments.

The agreement simply would not have happened were it not for the strong working relationship between the two Governments, which were working towards the same end. We are in a difficult situation, but there is no question that that excellent relationship means that we will go forwards rather than backwards.

I also wish Members the best of luck in securing the bid to jointly host the European Championships. What better place to discuss that than in the city that did such a splendid job of hosting the Commonwealth Games earlier this year. These islands have a proud sporting heritage, and I have no doubt that, together, Scotland and Ireland will do the European Championships justice. It makes me wish that Wales were also in on the deal, especially given our current form in Europe.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I also wish to congratulate the members of the Nordic Council.

I am aware of the sentiments expressed in the opening debate on the restoration of the institutions. I want to put on record the British Government's serious and public commitment to that end, and I thank you as a Body for helping to bring peace, political stability and prosperity to Northern Ireland.

The trouble is that when our situation seems difficult and serious, as it does at present, we forget all too easily the achievements in Ireland generally, but particularly in Northern Ireland, over the past number of years. We have made great strides forward on security normalisation. Troop levels have been halved since the worst days of the troubles; there are fewer soldiers on the streets; observation towers have been dismantled; checkpoints have been removed; and holding centres have been closed. There has been a dramatic reduction in the level and threat of violence. In the past couple of years, we have witnessed the IRA's unprecedented actions of opening arms dumps for independent inspection, and two acts of decommissioning.

The most significant issue is the reduction in the number of people each year who tragically lose their lives. The number of deaths has fallen from 497 in 1972 to 10 this year. However, that is 10 too many, and it still represents a dreadful and shocking waste of life. We must add thousands of people who were injured mentally and physically to the figure of more than 3,000 people who perished during the 30 years of trouble. Given that there are one and a half million people in Northern Ireland, it struck me that if one were to transpose those figures to Great Britain and consider them proportionately, it is the equivalent of every man, woman and child in my south Wales constituency of 100,000 people perishing during those 30 years.

That is the measure of the seriousness that political leaders in Northern Ireland have placed on these issues over the past few years. We introduced new safeguards for human rights and equality, and brought about major reform of the criminal justice system. We have carried out the most fundamental review of policing anywhere in the Western World this century. For the first time in more than 30 years, Northern Ireland has a police force that is supported by both sides of the community.

The number of young Catholics who want to join the police is one of the most positive signs that attitudes are changing in Northern Ireland that I could imagine. The Policing Board has repaid our confidence in it by conducting itself in a constructive and positive manner, agreeing on several difficult and sensitive issues. The recent successes of the PSNI in tackling terrorism, antisocial behaviour, organised crime and sectarianism have been remarkable.

Returning to Northern Ireland after a period of three years as Secretary of State for Wales, one of the two things that occurred in my absence that most impressed me was the change in policing. There is now a new badge, a new uniform and a new Chief Constable; both sides are on the Policing Board; and Catholics are becoming policemen and policewomen. That is an enormous change, which would have been unthinkable even when I became Minister of State in 1997.

You will see over the next few days, as I announced an hour and a quarter ago by way of a ministerial statement in the House of Commons, that we are introducing legislation in Parliament in December to implement the Weston Park agreement. The proposals are in the Libraries of two Houses of Parliament and are available for consideration by the political parties in Northern Ireland.

4.15 pm

All that has ushered in a new era of North/South and British-Irish co-operation, with bodies such as the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council, which I attended in New Lanark last Friday. I spent months and months in the strand-three talks, which I chaired with Liz O'Donnell from the Irish Government, so attending my first real meeting of the Council, where real issues from all the different jurisdictions were discussed, was extremely moving.

In addition, stability and improvements in the security situation have led to increased confidence in the Northern Ireland economy. Investment has come from all quarters. Vibrant, confident communities can be found in almost any area of Northern Ireland, where, at last, young people are staying at home rather searching for jobs abroad. None of that would have been possible without the Good Friday Agreement. Speaking as someone who was there throughout the negotiations, I can think of no way in which the needs, aspirations and the wishes of all sides of the community could have been brought together

other than through the Good Friday Agreement. It was not reached in a haphazard or slapdash way — it took years of intensive negotiations — and it represents the best efforts of democrats to deal with a divided people.

We have come a long way. However, as this Body discussed this morning, we are not there yet. For over a year the people of Northern Ireland have enjoyed the varied benefits of devolution. Their interests have been represented by locally elected politicians, dedicated men and women who have worked hard for their constituents, whether Unionists, Loyalists, Republicans or Nationalists. That has been a success. When I talked to all the parties in the week after I was appointed to my job, I got no sense of recrimination or bitterness, but I did get a sense of sadness that devolution had to come to an end, however temporarily.

I want to pay genuine tribute to my predecessor, John Reid, who did so much to keep the process on track. I too could see no alternative but to suspend devolution under the circumstances, but I know that he did that with enormous regret. My four Ministers and I are trying to ensure that the Budget and some 22 Bills, which the Executive and the Assembly were putting into operation, will be put through Westminster as though they were going through the Northern Ireland Assembly.

No matter how hard we work, no matter how much we care, we will never be able to offer the same benefit as our most recent predecessors: people from Northern Ireland governing all the people in Northern Ireland. I cannot do that, no matter how benign a direct ruler I might be. It is not the same. I want to give it all back. The politicians in Northern Ireland must take it, because they should be running the show, not the Member of Parliament for Torfaen in south Wales. I do not want to run the show. I want the people in Northern Ireland to govern themselves in the same way that people in Scotland and Wales do, and, who knows, that may happen in some of the English regions as well.

I want my part in dealing with education, hospitals, local government, the environment and all the rest of it to be in the hands of locally accountable and accessible politicians in Northern Ireland. The Government and I are completely committed to returning devolution as soon as possible. However, the time has not come for that yet. It is up to the two Governments to lead the way with the parties in bringing people together to resolve the current difficulties, and we started doing that last week.

We met last week in Parliament Buildings and had discussions for over four hours. I have experienced plenty of bitterness and recrimination during my time in Northern Ireland, but I did not see any evidence of that during last week's talks. There was a genuine desire to discuss the issues that were so crucial and which led eventually to the suspension of the Assembly and the institutions.

Some of those present today were also present during the talks process, and they know that there is a funda-

mental principle involved. However much the British and Irish Governments lay down blueprints, put down plans and make suggestions and proposals, none of it matters unless the political parties in Northern Ireland agree. Clever people in Governments, in the Civil Service, and in officialdom generally, could have written three quarters of the Belfast Agreement years ago, but if we had imposed that on the political parties in Northern Ireland, it would have failed miserably and dramatically. The agreement had to be something that parties across the community owned, prepared and made themselves. The Good Friday Agreement was made by the parties. The two Governments have, of course, an enormous role to play in the agreement's continuance and in the fact that the institutions can come back to life. However, it must still mean that the parties — certainly the pro-agreement parties in the talks — will be able to put that together. The talks will be held again this week.

I do not think that the parties are as far apart as they may sometimes seem. I am in no doubt about all the pro-agreement parties' commitment to the agreement, and I have no doubt that they want to see an end to the death and destruction that has marred the lives of so many people in Northern Ireland. However, it is what the parties do next that counts. They can continue to be bound by the prejudices of the past or they can acknowledge that the political context has changed and move on.

The Prime Minister, in his speech in Belfast, said that we have now reached the fork in the road. It is time for the parties to set out their stalls and to commit themselves once again, and for all, to the complete implementation of the agreement. It will not be done in small incremental steps as happened during the talks process. They inched forward — not day by day or even month by month, but year by year — before we got to the agreement. It was important at that stage for the talks to be slow and steady because people were coming together in a way that they had never done before. However, they have been together since 1998, so the timescale has to be different.

Following the revelations of continuing Republican paramilitary activity since the summer, and the violent clashes in Belfast between Loyalists and Republicans, it is clear that the process can no longer be sustained without a complete and total cessation of violence across the board. It is not only wrong that such activity should continue but it is counterproductive to the aims of those who are perpetrating it. It is the single most effective tool of those who are anti-agreement, and I fear that it is turning many moderate Unionists who voted "Yes" in 1998 against the agreement. For as long as Republicans and Loyalists refuse to give up the use and threat of force, they will simply act as a brake on progress.

Equally, how can I responsibly devolve law and order functions — which all parties are in favour of — when some organisations, and even some parties, refuse to

condemn the use of alternative forms of so-called justice? Instead of supporting the policing and criminal justice systems that we have in place, there are parallel processes that reject human rights and the due process of law in favour of summary justice and the most appalling and vicious punishment. When I returned to Northern Ireland, I was saddened to find that such violence had not gone away.

In the past couple of weeks, I have seen some terrible things, such as the crucifixion of a young lad. The fact that that type of violence is still possible turned all our stomachs. It has to end. Violence and the threat of violence are a major contributory factor to the current stalemate, because we are operating in a democratic arena, and it is in that arena that business is done.

However, that is not the whole story. We cannot proceed while there are still suspicions that one side of the community is not wholly wedded to the principles of equality and inclusivity. A belief remains among Nationalists and Republicans that Unionists will never willingly share power with them and that they resent the agreement for putting rights and equality centre stage. I do not share that analysis, but I know that it is a perception. It does nothing to acknowledge the commitment that the Unionist community and Unionist leaders made to the agreement. However, that perception has gained credence because of the regularity with which Unionists can apparently threaten or even bring down devolution. Ultimately, the progress that has been made through the implementation of the agreement has come about because the measures in that document were agreed to voluntarily and democratically through discussion, debate and compromise. The agreement is not up for re-negotiation.

What part does the British Government play in that process? The Prime Minister said that if the IRA makes an unequivocal commitment to peace, we will respond in kind. We will proceed with normalisation. We will resolve all other outstanding matters in one go, with no delays, no strings, and no excuses. An end to paramilitary violence and targeting will also remove the justifiable hurdle that Unionists face to support a final push to implement the agreement in full. That is what the Prime Minister meant by the phrase "acts of completion". I believe that that is the only way forward.

The arguments about the border and national identity may never truly go away. However, there are now democratic channels through which such arguments can be made. Now is the time for politics in Northern Ireland to focus on delivery of public services, prosperity, social development, and putting the needs and wishes of ordinary people going about their day-to-day lives first. What we are asking for is not new or radical. We are asking for no more than the agreement that was promised and for which 70% of the people of Northern Ireland and 90% of the people of the Republic of Ireland voted. We have come so close. It would be a terrible tragedy if

we threw away everything that has been achieved in recent years. It would be a betrayal of the people who have put their trust in us and in the agreement. Currently, everyone stands to lose something. Seeing the final phase through would make winners of all of us.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you, Secretary of State, for that interesting and inspiring address. It will, undoubtedly, lead to several questions being asked.

Oral Answers to Questions

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The questions have been balloted for, which is similar to the procedure in both Houses. Some people are lucky to be near the top of the list, and some are unfortunate to be near the bottom. However, that is not unknown to politicians. The first question, which is on the Order Paper, is from Senator McHugh.

1. **Senator McHugh** asked the Secretary of State to list the cross-border initiatives in the area of policing in the Donegal, Derry and Tyrone regions, and elsewhere; what assessment he has made of the level of co-operation between the existing PSNI and the Garda Síochána; what plans he has made to build on the existing levels of co-operation; and if he will he make a statement

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: This is good practice for Northern Ireland Question Time.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That is why we prepare these questions.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: In April, Mr John Reid and Mr John O'Donoghue signed an inter-governmental agreement on North/South co-operation on policing, and that laid the groundwork on which the PSNI and the Garda Síochána could build on the excellent co-operation that already existed between them. That agreement forms the basis for the creation of more formalised links between the two police forces in a range of areas: short-term secondments between training staff; necessary legislative changes to enable reciprocal long-term secondments with policing powers; and opportunities for officers to compete for permanent positions.

Routine close personal contact is maintained between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána at district command unit (DCU) level, and that cascades down through the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), criminal intelligence officers, and the border stations where specific issues such as drugs, fuel smuggling, counterfeit goods, crime investigations, and so on are investigated. In addition, there are quarterly cross-border meetings at command level, and district command level meetings, chaired by the Border Superintendent, are held every six to 10 weeks on operational and crime matters. There are also monthly crime management meetings at DCU level in Foyle, Strabane and Fermanagh as well as an annual major incident planning meeting.

4.30 pm

Furthermore, the two police forces are planning a joint traffic branch initiative that will focus on road safety. In short, the two police forces, North and South of the border, are co-operating very well.

Senator McHugh: I appreciate the Secretary of State's response. County Donegal has 144km of border straddling

Northern Ireland, but only 7km with the Republic, so there was a geographical dimension that led to my question. I welcome the work that is being done.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: We can all agree with those comments.

2. **Mr Barnes MP** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he pursues in seeking to persuade paramilitary organisations to remove their threats against citizens of Northern Ireland whom they have forced into exile?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I utterly condemn any activity by groups on either side of the community aimed at intimidating people into leaving the Province. Police investigations of such offences are hampered when victims generally decline to make a formal complaint. It is, therefore, important that Members of communities, within which these attacks take place, pass to police any relevant information. They may do so in strict confidence using the Crimestoppers line.

Mr Barnes MP: Surely the "on-the-runs" we should be concerned about are the 3,000 or so people who have been forced into exile by the paramilitaries. That is a similar figure for those who have been killed over the past 30 years. We cannot bring back the dead, but we can bring back the living. Would paramilitaries not help their associated political parties greatly by moving to end all exile orders and enter into the process?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That would be a huge step forward. It would help the current difficulties that we face over the suspension of the Assembly and the restoration of the democratic institutions. Not only would such a move be enormously helpful but it would be a confidence-building measure. Maranatha and the Legacy Project deal specifically with those issues.

Mr Mates MP: Secretary of State, when you ask the leaders of Sinn Féin why they do not comply with such measures, what do they say to you?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is an interesting question for 4.30 on a Monday afternoon. I do pose such issues to them in a general way, but it would not be right to detail individual discussions and dialogue. In the past the difficulty has been that political leaders often deny that there is any relationship between them and the paramilitaries, even though we know that there is a relationship. Fortunately, that happens less frequently now than it used to. This issue and others will be addressed when we hold discussions over the next couple of weeks. It will help to build confidence on both sides, Nationalist and Unionist.

3. **Mr Smith MSP** asked what the UK Government are doing to support the joint bid by Scotland and Ireland to host the 2008 European Football Championships?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Department of Culture, Media and Sport was pleased to

provide the official expression of central UK Government support for the bid in May. The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell, has confirmed that her Department will provide support to the bid. Officials from the Executive have worked closely with colleagues in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and other central Departments on the Government guarantee process.

Mr Smith MSP: I welcome the support of the UK Government for the joint bid, which is particularly important in these last few crucial weeks before the decision is taken. During this afternoon's debate, several Members spoke of the need to involve Northern Ireland in the tournament in some way if the bid is successful. What do the UK Government propose to do to ensure that Northern Ireland gains some of the spin-off benefits from a successful Scottish/Irish Euro 2008 tournament?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: UK Sport has given £320,000, which is a significant contribution towards the total bid cost of £1.6 million.

It is a matter for the SFA to decide whom to invite to join it in the bidding process. The IFA has been approached by the SFA, but the IFA has always made it clear that it considered the prospect of participating in a joint bid to be impractical from a Northern Ireland perspective because of the lack of appropriate facilities.

The UEFA requirements for hosting the championships are eight stadiums with seating capacities of at least 30,000. Scotland will provide six of those and the other two will be the responsibility of the joint bidder. Therefore, if Northern Ireland had been joint host with Scotland, two 30,000-seater stadiums would have been required, and that would be over-providing for a country the size of Northern Ireland. A preliminary investigation indicated that one 30,000-seater stadium would cost £60 million, plus the cost of the site, site works, car park et cetera, and that is impractical.

The Lord Glentoran: I feel strongly that Northern Ireland could be involved in some way. I suggested earlier that the Government could get Northern Ireland in on the act, even in a secondary role.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I shall take that message back to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Belfast, Angela Smith, because, other than building stadiums, the support from Northern Ireland for the principle of the joint venture would be important.

Senator Mooney: In the context of the earlier debate, every sports-loving person would actively encourage the IFA's involvement in that bid.

Does the new Secretary of State envisage taking any initiatives that would bring together soccer organisations on the island of Ireland? As he is aware, it is a major sport that has riven communities since the foundation of the Irish Free State. Bearing in mind that, in the past few

days, an all-island rugby team that represented both communities and both parts of the island defeated Argentina at Lansdowne Road. As we speak, the Irish hockey team is participating in the Women's Hockey World Cup in Australia. Again, the team is comprised of representatives from both parts of the island and, I presume, from both traditions. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is sad that soccer, which is enjoyed by many people and is seen as a majority sport, is riven by sectarianism and that it would be helpful were he to introduce an initiative to bring the two sides together?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree that it is important to try to do that, as we all must welcome anything that attacks sectarianism. My knowledge of soccer is limited, but I understand the importance of sport as a way to bring people together. However, I have more knowledge of the real football game — rugby. *[Laughter]*.

Senator Mooney: I take that as a "no".

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: We all know that rugby is an all-island game, which, in itself is important. However, my first public engagement when I took up the post of Secretary of State was at Parliament Buildings to take part in a reception for the GAA successes of Armagh and Derry. The fact that that took place in Parliament Buildings with the statue of Lord Craigavon looking at us was an important development. Moreover, it was important that the people who attended the reception came from different parts of the community. If that can happen with the GAA, it can also happen with soccer. In our own ways, we are all experts on, at least, the principle of sport, culture and music bringing people together, as well as separating them. We must do our utmost to do away with sectarianism in sport.

4. **Mr Devins TD** asked what assessment the Secretary of State has made of the prospects for greater levels of co-operation in the development of alternate sources of energy in the whole Island; and whether he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: There is already substantial North/South co-operation across the whole energy spectrum. Energy officials and regulators meet on a regular basis. Electricity interconnection between the two markets has been significantly enhanced, and the major gas project approved by the Northern Ireland Executive in September 2001 aims to connect the two gas markets.

During 2001, a major joint study was undertaken of the two energy markets to identify opportunities for convergence. That co-operation is also evident in the sponsorship of research into offshore wind energy in Ireland. The development of sustainable energy has to happen on an all-Ireland basis, and that is why it is important to consider energy from South and North, together.

Mr Devins TD: I am interested in the large gas find off the north-west coast and the provision of that gas to my own constituency and to Fermanagh and Tyrone. I would encourage further discussions about the provision of a North/South interconnector.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is something I remember dealing with when I was in the job earlier on. It is an important issue for people in the geographical north of Ireland. I will ensure that those points are taken back to the relevant Minister.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Question 5 is off the agenda as our Colleague could not be present.

6. **Mr Stone MSP** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how he will encourage a reconvened Northern Ireland Assembly to develop links with other devolved legislatures.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Links between legislatures, like those between different Administrations, can be beneficial. However, the question of particular links between the Northern Ireland Assembly and other legislative bodies has to be a matter for the parties that constitute the Assembly.

Having said that, this Body, the Joint Ministerial Committees, the British-Irish Council, the parliamentary forum and interdepartmental groups all go towards enhancing our understanding of each other.

Mr Stone MSP: As we have heard some words in Irish from our Colleagues from across the Irish Sea, I put to you the Gaelic expression “Togar càrn mòr de chlachan beaga”, which translates as “The great cairn is built of small stones”. As I represent a Highland constituency, it is only right and proper that I should use our ancient language.

One small step for the Northern Ireland Assembly would be to feed off the success of devolution in Scotland and Wales, which I mentioned this morning. Would the Secretary of State be willing to make encouraging noises to the Speakers and Presiding Officers of the respective Assemblies to encourage links? In the past there have been some links, but they are not as strong as they might have been. Dialogue can only further the peace process, which we are all striving for.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Last week, I went to Scotland, and I felt a bit of a cheat in that I was there in a double capacity. I was representing the devolved Administration, which is suspended, but would have been there anyway as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. That was sad. Everyone in the British-Irish Council, right across the geographical spectrum, expressed the view that the quicker the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive are up and running the better. Physically, that strand three body showed me that we could learn much from one another and that common practice is best practice. In the past, I have dealt with

Ministers from different Administrations and, as the Secretary of State for Wales, I attended a Joint Ministerial Committee on health. It struck me then that I knew more about how health is organised in Scotland after devolution than I did prior to that, even though the Secretary of State for Scotland was part of the same Government. We learned from one another in a special way, and the opportunity for all the different legislatures and Governments to work together, compare notes and gain from one another's practices was one of the finest examples I have seen of governance in these islands for the past 10 to 20 years.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Senator O'Brien is not present to put question 7.

8. **Mr McNamara MP** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the elections planned for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Mr McNamara knows that the date for the next Assembly elections is fixed by law as 1 May 2003. We profoundly hope that it will be possible to resume devolved government well in advance of that.

4.45 pm

Mr McNamara MP: I share the hopeful optimism of the Secretary of State that that will be the case. Will he give an undertaking that those elections will take place even if the devolved Assembly has not been reinstated, so that there will be elected representatives for the people of Northern Ireland who will be able to go forward to get the Executive and agreement wanted, and, more particularly, so that politics will be seen to be working on a limited scale, and no vacuum will be left for others to fill who would try to distort the picture?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: We have no plans to change the date for the election. Several people wanted us to. The DUP met me a fortnight ago. It wanted an election a week next Thursday, but I said that that would not be possible to arrange. However, elections now would be counterproductive. We should be rebuilding confidence and trust between parties, re-establishing the institutions and resolving those points which we all know need to be resolved.

Primary legislation would have to be brought in to change the election date. I cannot do it by an Order. I hope that we will resolve the problems before 1 May 2003, so that people can go out and express their votes for a democratic institution, and I hope that all parties will be able to take part in the election.

Mr Öpik MP: Does the Minister agree that a clear resolve to hold the elections would be of salient benefit in focusing the minds of people in Northern Ireland towards being responsible in their positions? If that is correct, what advice would he give the hardliners such as the DUP, which seems to set its face against aspects of the

Good Friday Agreement, since it will have to produce some kind of manifesto to be taken seriously in May?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The DUP will certainly have to produce a manifesto, but it is for that party to decide whether it thinks that its manifesto is one that the people of Northern Ireland will find attractive. The DUP is profoundly committed to devolution, and, from the accounts that I have received, its Ministers did a very good job in the Executive in governing the Departments they were responsible for.

I met members of the DUP a couple of weeks ago, and I am meeting them tomorrow morning, when, I am sure, they will repeat their commitment to devolution. They have a point of view, which they have a right to express: they do not agree with the Good Friday Agreement. I do not agree with them on that, but, in a democratic society, they can express that view.

I hope that they will understand that if devolution in Wales, Scotland, London, and English regions to follow, is here to stay, they also have a part to play to ensure that it is successful in Northern Ireland. They must realise — like everybody else — that the way in which devolution succeeds in Northern Ireland is to attract the support of all sides of the community. We will not, and cannot, have devolution unless we adhere to that principle.

Mr Mackay MP: I support what Kevin McNamara said. Initially, when the Secretary of State's predecessor suspended the Assembly, I felt that it might be inappropriate to have elections in May. However, I hope that the Secretary of State shares my view that in a western democracy suspending elections is not something that we should do lightly, or at all.

Does he share my view that if, unfortunately, an agreement is not reached, and devolved government is not resumed before May 2003, it will concentrate the minds of the elected politicians in Northern Ireland to have been re-elected to the Assembly, and they will not be looking over their shoulders to a future vote?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: There is a problem as we get closer to elections — we are all politicians. We are all concerned, not just with our own seats, but with the success and failure of our party. That is part of our make-up. However, Mr Mackay is right in stressing the way in which elections can have a beneficial effect in concentrating politicians' minds. In 1998, George Mitchell said that if an agreement was not reached by Good Friday, he was going back to America. That concentrated the minds of politicians then, and I hope that something similar could happen now.

In the same way, people understand that 1 May is a significant democratic landmark because elections will be held on that day. As I said earlier, we do not want to take months and months over this. This is not "the talks mark II". The issues are much more precise and defined.

People frankly do not want things to drift in Northern Ireland; they want a resolution of the difficulties that we are facing. The quicker we can tackle and resolve those issues and get the institutions operating again so that I am not running the show anymore, the better for everybody.

Mr Lenihan TD: Is it the Secretary of State's view that there should be a formal requirement for people seeking election on 1 May to operate fully all aspects of the agreement, including a formal ban on non-participation in particular aspects such as the North/South bodies?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That requirement already exists in the sense that anyone who signed up to the Good Friday Agreement must adhere to those principles. That should be obvious to those who will vote in the May elections. However, it is extremely important that when people mark their voting papers with ones and twos, they understand where the politicians they are voting for stand.

To repeat the point I made earlier, the politicians in the Northern Ireland Assembly who belong to the parties that attended the talks with me last week are absolutely committed to the Belfast Agreement. I am convinced of that. They do not for one second want to see the agreement fail. However, people outside must be given sufficient confidence that when they vote in the elections, they are voting for people who want to see an end to any link between paramilitary activity and the democratic process. We cannot carry on like that. The transition has lasted from 1998 to now, which is quite a long time in modern political history. We must resolve the issues before us. I repeat that the will exists to do so, but, as with everything else in Northern Ireland politics, it will not be easy.

9. **Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what contacts a) have already taken place and b) are planned with the Irish Government in relation to the development of a wind farm on the Tunes Plateau at the mouth of the river Foyle; what are the implications of the Law of the Sea Convention under which are two jurisdictions involved in the area for which this project is tabled; and what expressions of concern has he received from North West about the possible ramifications of such a development for the existing high-level and variety of maritime activity both on and under the Foyle surface.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is a specific question, which I was not familiar with until some time ago. The Crown Estate granted a 12-month licence to a private sector consortium to enable technical, environmental and financial assessments of the Tunes Plateau site to be completed. I understand that this is the equivalent of a foreshore licence in the South and does not provide the consent necessary to enable the project to commence. However, I want to stress that any subsequent application to build a wind farm will be the subject

of widespread consultation including the Government in the Republic.

To date, contact has been through officials in the relevant Departments, North and South, who have focused particularly on agreeing the scope of the environmental impact assessment for the project. The results of the various assessments will be made available to the Government of the Republic.

I am aware of the various issues surrounding jurisdiction of the Tunes Plateau site. Those are currently being considered by officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland and the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources in the Republic together with the Crown Estate.

Ms Keaveney TD: Go raibh maith agat. I hope that you will not be a benign direct ruler on this particular matter; perhaps you will keep an eye on it.

The environmental impact assessment is due to be completed in April, despite the fact that smolts do not leave the Foyle until the end of April. Therefore, they are not really looking at the fishery. They are advocating the fact that the 85, 30-storey turbines will create a sanctuary effect. We are going to have a situation where our smolts will be the victims of larger predatory fish. We could end up with no salmon fishery, and thus the very role of the Loughs Agency is being challenged. Therefore, a public inquiry into the project is vital.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Government will not consider consent until the potential impact of the project on the marine ecology, the visual amenity, tourism and the livelihoods of the affected communities has been fully determined and reduced to the minimum level practicable. That process will include consultation with the Irish Government. Officials remain in contact with the consortium to ensure that any environmental studies undertaken consider marine environment issues. Full consultation will take place before decisions on consent are taken. There are various ways of ensuring effective consultation, one of which is a public inquiry. All the options will be considered when an application for consent is received.

Mr Hume MP: Given that the waters relating to this proposal are totally and absolutely cross border, and given that the only two industries in the area represented by Cecilia Keaveney are tourism and fisheries, do you not think that there is an absolute and total need for a public inquiry to ensure that no damage is done?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: It is important for the Government to have proper consultation, and one way of doing that is through a public inquiry. It would be useful if Mr Hume and Ms Keaveney were to write to me personally on the issue, and I will make sure that those points are seriously considered. I cannot go any further because I may have to take a final

decision on the matter. However, it is obviously an important issue for that part of Northern Ireland.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): If the letter were addressed to the House of Commons, would it be delivered directly to you or to your civil servants?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The letter would come to me in my ministerial capacity, and I would then ensure that officials would consider it.

10. **The Lord Dubs** asked if the Secretary of State will report on progress in giving full effect to those parts of the Belfast Agreement that are not dependent on devolved rule.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Although devolved Government is at present suspended, the peace process and the agreement are not, and we are continuing to press forward with those elements of the agreement that are within our power to implement — for example, criminal justice and policing reform. However, full implementation of the agreement can only happen if trust among the parties can be re-established on the commitment to exclusively peaceful means and to making the institutions work.

The Lord Dubs: I am grateful to my hon Friend for his reply. At a time when some voices are tending to blame the British Government, and perhaps also the Irish Government, for the reintroduction of direct rule, does he agree that it is important that all the people in Ireland are aware not only of the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement to date but of the total commitment of both Governments to proceed with further implementation of all parts of the agreement? That has to be made known so that the voices that are blaming the Government do not become too influential.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree. As you were a ministerial Colleague in Northern Ireland, you can understand that whatever the Governments do, the parties in the Assembly cannot be forced to work together. No one can force politicians to sit beside each other and work together. In a way, both sides have a veto, and they can veto each other out of the process. They would end up nowhere, but they have that opportunity. Unless both the Unionist and Nationalist sides agree on something, we cannot have effective devolution in Northern Ireland or an effective political process. People across the island of Ireland understand that very well, and they also understand that the two Governments, working together, have nothing to gain other than to talk to the parties about re-establishing trust. Unless that trust is re-established, we will not see a restoration of the Assembly institutions, but I believe that that will happen.

Senator Mansergh: In one non-institutional area of the agreement — the Human Rights Commission — there have been a couple of resignations in recent months. It would be worthwhile for you, as the new Secretary of State,

to take a close look at the commission to ensure that it is functioning properly, because it is a very important body.

5.00 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: It is an important issue and I am fully aware of it. Martin Mansergh and I worked closely together during the talks, especially on the issues of human rights and equality. He and Kevin McNamara will remember that we spent months working on the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to ensure that we got it right with regard to human rights and equality issues. I have spoken to Des Browne, who is the Minister responsible for human rights and equality. Indeed, the issue was raised last week at the talks, and will undoubtedly be on the agenda when it is set this week.

Mr Crawford TD: I wish to refer to comments that were made by the Secretary of State with regard to decommissioning, and to the fact that two efforts have been made to show goodwill. In the light of the fact that the then Minister, Martin McGuinness, said that his personal war was over, is there any further indication of Sinn Féin/IRA's genuineness to finalise this issue? It must be finalised if the towers in south Armagh are to be taken down, and many other issues dealt with. The prisoners have been released, and many other terms of the agreement have been met. However, the serious issue of decommissioning is still hanging over the whole structure.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The most difficult parts of the Good Friday Agreement were those that dealt with prisoner releases and decommissioning. Those issues went to the heart of the difficulties among parties and people in the community. Decommissioning is an important issue, but it is not the only answer that will determine whether the war is over. There is no question that Martin McGuinness's comments about the war being over and Gerry Adams's speech are extremely helpful. I believe that the leadership of Sinn Féin is committed to the Good Friday Agreement and to the political process. However, the "three Cs" — Colombia, Castlereagh and Castle Buildings — do not instil confidence. That type of activity must be addressed, and we are in the process of doing that in the talks. Until then, we will not reach our desired destination. Although it is a difficult process, we cannot run away from it. We must address it.

Ms Keaveney TD: Will the Secretary of State continue to progress Bills of importance in the absence of devolved government, given that the updating the Foyle Fisheries Act 1952 has been pending for six or seven years? Although it would be more pleasant to pass legislation through the devolved Assembly, the need for aquaculture licensing is such that it needs to be progressed as soon as possible.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree, both in principle and in pragmatic terms, with what Ms

Keaveney has said about ensuring that Westminster tries to finish legislation that started in the Assembly. Last week I announced that 22 Bills that were to be progressed through the Assembly will now be transferred to Westminster to be dealt with by Orders in Council. Scrutiny of those Bills will not be as thorough as it would have been in the Assembly. However, the Bills will go through. The Commissioner for Children and Young People's Bill is especially important to me. Welsh Colleagues will confirm the importance of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 in Westminster for Wales. The Northern Ireland Bill is at the top of my list of priorities.

The Order in Council system is deeply unsatisfactory. However, it is better to avail of it than to let those 22 Bills fall, which I am not prepared to do.

11. **Mr Pattison TD** asked the Secretary of State whether the investigation into the recent incident in which a nuclear submarine ran aground on the Isle of Skye has been concluded; whether the report will be made public; what the implications are for nuclear or radiological safety; whether the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland will be fully briefed on the outcome of the investigation; whether he will list all such incidents that have occurred in the past 10 years; and whether he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: A full investigation into the incident is ongoing and will be concluded shortly. Reports into those types of incidents are not normally published. The principle of confidentiality is designed to encourage the provision of forthright evidence. There are no implications for nuclear or radiological safety, and hence no need to brief the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland. There would be a disproportionate cost in providing a list of similar incidents over the past 10 years.

Mr Pattison TD: When the report is available it will not be made public. How will the public be able to comment on the report if that is to be the case? Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern throughout Ireland about incidents of that kind? There is a need to reassure people, particularly those who are already concerned about Sellafield, that they are in no danger as a result of accidents. If the report is not published, how are the public to know that no danger exists?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree with Mr Pattison about the importance of reassurance. I can reassure him that I shall write to him on that issue with more information on the points that he has raised.

Mr O'Keeffe TD: I am not totally reassured by the Secretary of State's response to the last part of the question, which was to list all such incidents over the past 10 years. He mentioned that there would be a disproportionate cost. Does that mean that there have been a huge number of such incidents over the past 10 years?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is a very clever parliamentary tactic. I shall not fall into the trap. Mr O’Keeffe can also rest assured that I shall have another look at the issue and write to him about the points that he has made.

Senator Hayes: On a similar matter, why do the British Government refuse to allow the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) to have the same status on the Sellafield site as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is automatically entitled to be there and to report what it sees? Surely if the British Government accept the right of the IAEA to be at Sellafield, given the interest that Ireland has in that issue, our statutory agency, the RPII, should automatically be there also.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I understand the importance of those issues to the people of Ireland and elsewhere. I am satisfied that there is no danger. I am also satisfied that there must be a facility that is able to deal with the issues of nuclear waste. Senator Hayes will understand also that the past three-and-a-half weeks in my job have been concentrated on trying to restore peace to Northern Ireland. As important as those issues are, I have not bent my mind to all the details that he describes. I shall enter letter-writing mode next week, and I assure the Senator that he too will receive a letter from me.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Some interesting letters will be going out.

Dr Marek AM: Can it be arranged that we can all receive those letters of reassurance?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Dr Marek can have one as well.

12. **Mr Mates MP** asked the Secretary of State to make a statement on progress in the peace process.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The peace process and the Belfast Agreement continue. They represent much the best hope for the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr Mates MP: No one would disagree with that. However, when, rightly, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland talk to those who are part of the roadblock about the fork in the road and the fact that we cannot go on fudging the issue, what does the Secretary of State tell them is the minimum that they must do? There must be a point below which the Secretary of State will not consider — or put to other parties — what we might call progress. I ask the question because, hugely welcome as the first and second acts of decommissioning were, the public do not know what quantity of arms was put out of use and whether, for example, it compares to the amount of arms that was attempted to be purchased in the United States and Colombia. Is there any way in which the Secretary of State can make clear to all parties that there is a

minimum step that has to be taken by paramilitaries before we can get any further? That might clear the air.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is what we are working on. The minimum must be that which will satisfy parties in the Assembly that there is sufficient confidence and trust between them in order to restore the institutions. That is the principle behind it: there has to be enough there to ensure that we can get the Assembly up and running again, together with the Executive and the North/South Ministerial Council. That will mean more than words; that will mean more than decommissioning. Sufficient confidence must be given to people so that they know that paramilitary activity is coming to an end, and that the war is indeed over.

Someone told me the other day that people in Northern Ireland are pretty sophisticated. Whatever decision is taken to define those acts of completion, people in Northern Ireland will realise — possibly in weeks, but certainly in months — if that has happened, and many Members will know what I mean by that. It is not only a question of a sentence, although that is important, but about words and deeds, and it must be sufficient to satisfy the people at the talks, which I chaired last week in Stormont, to give them the confidence to go back.

Mr Brennan MP: I am happy to forgo question 16 now. I welcome the Secretary of State to his new job, since this is the first opportunity I have had to do that formally. I also thank him for his work as Secretary of State for Wales.

Being acutely aware of the origin of the word, will the Secretary of State, when he meets the parties, impress upon them that just as there is no longer any place in Northern Ireland politics for the bullet, so there is no longer any place for the boycott? Will he impress upon the Unionists that their absence from the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and their fruitless, foolish and stupid boycott of it gives a dreadful impression to their fellow Members of the UK Parliament?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I thank Mr Brennan for his kind words. I will certainly raise his last point with the Ulster Unionist Party and other Unionists, because it is important that everyone takes part in this Body.

Mr Brennan made another valid point. The Nationalist community needs reassurance that there will be stability in the institutions when we find a solution that will bring about the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive. They cannot keep coming and going, up and down, and in and out. There must be stability in the institutions that Nationalists can look forward to as well. It is that joint approach that we need to take. I will ensure that that point is made, because I agree with it.

Mr Morgan TD: Do some parties seek to use the current talks process to renegotiate the Good Friday

Agreement? Some parties, particularly the DUP, have stated in public that that is their policy position, and increasingly it seems that the UUP are trying to steal the DUP's clothes. What is the Secretary of State's position if the consequence of that is renegotiation?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The DUP and other anti-agreement parties would like to see an end to the agreement, and they are deeply and fundamentally wrong. As I have said, there is only one way forward, and that is the implementation of the agreement in all its aspects, not only the establishment of the institutions, but all the other matters that we have discussed — human rights, equality, language and other important issues. I am committed to that, and I will continue to tell those who are not that that is the position of the British Government, and also of the Irish Government.

We ignore at our peril the fact that so many people in Ireland voted for the agreement. We did not impose it on them. There was overwhelming support for it from the people of Ireland, including those of Northern Ireland. Having said that, we still have to work to give confidence to both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, because it will not work without that.

Mr Morgan TD: Is the Secretary of State saying that there will be no renegotiations?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Absolutely.

Mr Hume MP: Does the Secretary of State agree that, despite the setbacks, the atmosphere on Northern Ireland's streets has been transformed since the Good Friday Agreement and that that reflects the will of the people, as well as their commitment to the agreement, for which they voted overwhelmingly? For that reason, does he agree that it should be stated clearly to all political parties that it is their duty to implement the will of the people if they regard themselves as democrats?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree, and we all know the enormous role that John Hume played in bringing about the agreement. It is, for example, about being able to walk around the streets of Belfast to do your Christmas shopping. Although there was some difficulty last night, it was resolved.

Mr Hume, you know, more than anyone else in the room, that it was impossible a generation ago to go for a meal, go to the pictures, take a walk in the countryside or by the sea on a Saturday night. When I first involved myself in Northern Ireland politics in the early 1990s it was extremely difficult, even then, to do any of those things. My worry — it is not a fear — is that too many take these situations for granted and say that it was always like this. It was not, and it is the dedication and commitment of Northern Ireland's political leaders, the politicians and, above all else, the people of Northern Ireland that have made all this possible.

5.15 pm

Ms Keaveney TD: Secretary of State, we were talking earlier about the date of 1 May 2003 for the elections. In the context of Mr Hume's question, can you envisage any potential election outcome that would sound a possible end to the peace process? Are the positive momentum and the acceptance of the improved situation strong enough to overcome the difficulties that we face? Whatever the makeup of the next Assembly or Executive, will that be enough to carry the peace process on?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I do not know — none of us does — what the outcome of that election will be. I would not put too much reliance on opinion polls or on the general election results. After all, the general election was fought on a first-past-the-post system, whereas the Assembly elections will be on the single transferable vote system. It could be very different. We have to ensure that when elected to those institutions, people will make them work. We discussed the DUP earlier, and although it does not like the agreement, it is committed to the principle of devolution and, perhaps more than other parties, wants devolution to succeed rather than have a Secretary of State like myself running the show. No one can predict anything.

After the Assembly elections after the referendum, people were claiming that this party would do this and that. As it turned out, some people were shocked by the results. People in Northern Ireland, as generally in all democracies, are cleverer than we think and will vote to ensure that forward-looking policies are put in place rather than look backwards. We will see what happens.

13. **Mr Ellis TD** asked what progress has been made between the British and Irish Governments with regard to the upgrading of the east/west road corridor between Belfast/Sligo/Galway.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: We are going so quickly that my notes say that it is unlikely that this question will be reached.

A significant proportion of the M1/A4 Belfast to the border road along the east/west corridor, is already of motorway or dual carriageway standard. Members may wish to note that in the context of the regional transportation strategy agreed by the Executive and approved by the Northern Ireland Assembly in July 2002, the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service is preparing a programme for major road schemes that are expected to start in the 10-year period of that strategy. That programme includes schemes to upgrade sections of the east/west corridor, which is one of the five key corridors identified in the transport strategy.

Mr Ellis TD: I raised this question because that road serves the west of Ireland through to Larne and is of major economic benefit to Fermanagh, Tyrone and

Connaught. There has been little or no investment in the road from Enniskillen to Ballygawley over the past 20 to 25 years. The motorway stopped at Ballygawley 20 years ago, and the situation remains the same. I hope that the new road programme planned for the next 10 years will include the upgrading of that road to Enniskillen. We will then be able to press Dublin to continue it on to Sligo and Galway, and the road will then act as a link to the North's main port, Larne.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I take your point, Mr Ellis. I will ensure that those points are kept on board.

Ms Keaveney TD: I am sorry to keep on, but my own crowd would shoot me if I went home without mentioning the N2/A5.

There might be a ceasefire, but it does not cross the river.

John Hume mentioned a very important road, but will the Secretary of State keep in mind the Letterkenny to Belfast and the Derry to Dublin A5/N2? We have met most of the Ministers involved, many of whom are in this Body. They must be involved in improving the roads strategy.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Thank you. I will bear that in mind.

Senator Mansergh: The road from Dublin to the border will be up to motorway standard within the next two to three years. It would be great if there was a motorway beyond the 10-mile point south of Belfast so that there would be a completed Dublin-Belfast motorway.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That would be good news for everybody.

14. **Mr Ennis MP** asked the Secretary of State what assessment he has made of progress to date on the implementing of the Patten proposals on policing.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Government remain committed to the new beginning for policing, building on the implementation of the recommendations of the Patten Report. As I said earlier, I have made a written statement to Parliament outlining progress on the review of policing arrangements that was announced by my predecessor earlier this year. Some elements of the review have been completed, and others will follow shortly. We have shared with the political parties some draft clauses that set out how we intend to deliver on our commitments, and my colleague, Jane Kennedy, will be discussing those matters with the parties in the days ahead just as she did today. It remains my intention to introduce legislation to Parliament before Christmas.

Mr Ennis MP: Many of the contributions in this morning's political debate emphasised the need to get policing right in Northern Ireland. That must be central

to resolving all the outstanding issues of the Good Friday Agreement. What are the main stumbling blocks to implementing all the Patten proposals now, and what strategy is the Government pursuing to remove those stumbling blocks?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The stumbling block is one of trust. It is no different for dealing with policing than for other aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. I hope that what Parliament is doing and what has been announced today and what MPs will be dealing with in the months ahead will go some way towards ensuring that we restore trust among the population in Northern Ireland so that the new policing arrangement is accepted.

As I said earlier, the most obvious change that I noticed on returning to Northern Ireland after three years was the change in policing. Substantial numbers of Catholics want to become policemen and policewomen; Nationalists as well as Unionists sit on the Policing Board; there is a new badge, which works, although it was invented by a committee; the issue of flags no longer dominates the agenda; we have a new uniform and a new Chief Constable, who is doing his job very effectively: these are all as important in building confidence in the community as the institutions. I hope that the legislation will go some way towards that.

Mr O'Keeffe TD: I shall not comment on the legislation, which we have not seen yet. As someone who believes absolutely that policing is the main plank in building trust and confidence in the community in Northern Ireland, I support the efforts that have been made to date by the PSNI, the Policing Board and the new Chief Constable. I am delighted with the progress that has been made.

Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the manpower and womanpower, and the financial resources, are adequate to enable the new PSNI to deal with the problems in Northern Ireland, particularly the incidence of punishment beatings, which is of most concern to us?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: As you know, an enormous amount of money is spent on policing in Northern Ireland — huge amounts in proportion to what is spent in other parts of Ireland or the UK. That is necessary because of the problems that we face.

The budget will be announced in detail in the next few weeks. However, I hope that if we make the progress that I described this morning on ensuring that people cease to take justice into their own hands, we will see an end to criminality and gangsterism in Northern Ireland, and that eventually — and I hope it will not be too long — we will reach a situation where policing in Northern Ireland is no different from policing anywhere else. Of course that will take time. It is a question of satisfying not just one side, but both. Members know as well as I do that that can be a difficult balancing act.

However, the agreement and what has followed have done that successfully. People will probably notice in the next couple of days that different parties in Northern Ireland will say different things about the policing legislation. There is nothing unusual about that. However, most of them will find it to be legislation that they can live with, which is hugely important.

Mr McNamara MP: With regard to the role of the police and the use of children as informants, the Secretary of State has placed great emphasis on his insistence that the legislation for a children's commissioner progresses by Order in Council. What is he going to do about policemen who use children as informants, who fail to follow the necessary procedures, and who act without the knowledge of their superiors?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The new Chief Constable will be able to deal with such situations. He has my full confidence. He has not been in his post for much longer than I have been in mine, but he has proven his worth. I hope that he will deal effectively with such problems.

Co-Chairperson (Mr Winnick): Our time is limited, and we must finish at 5.30 pm. We will take one more question, which I am sure can be dealt with briefly.

15. **Mr Crawford TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are to fund and reopen the Ulster Canal; what assessment he has made of the project as a truly cross-border one tending to unite peoples of all political and religious backgrounds; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I understand that consultants were commissioned by Waterways Ireland to prepare an updated feasibility study on the Ulster Canal —

Co-Chairperson (Mr Winnick): I am sorry to interrupt, but there are one or two announcements to be made with regard to this evening, so I request that Members stay until 5.30 pm if possible.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: To return to the matter of the Ulster Canal, several options for restoration were identified and economic appraisals were undertaken. The updated capital costs for the construction works are estimated at £89 million at 2000 prices. That is a significant sum, and no public funding is currently available for a project of such magnitude.

I also understand that the economic appraisal shows that the project is not viable in purely monetary terms. Nevertheless, I recognise that the project could bring significant and social regeneration benefits to a disadvantaged cross-border rural area, as well as forming an important strategic link between waterways north and south of the border. Further consideration of these issues will be required before a definitive decision on the project can be taken.

Mr Crawford TD: I am worried about the type of cost-benefit analysis that has been carried out. A group of people, including me, who are interested in the canal recently considered some of the information, and I question the way in which the matter has been dealt with. If we consider the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal that opened a few years ago, we see that the benefits to the region are massive. A project that has the backing of Sammy Wilson and all the different political and religious groups from Coleraine to Enniskillen should be treated at British, Northern Ireland, Irish and EU levels as a truly cross-border project that can bring back some life to an area that lost so much through 35 years of trouble. I urge the Secretary of State not to be put off by some of the economists who seem to have taken a very blinkered view of the matter.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The key to the future is the co-operation of people from all parties on such matters. The key to the future is always to talk to each other, because that is how we deal with such issues. The sooner the institutions can be restored so that we can deal with these matters, the better.

5.30 pm

The Lord Brooke: I have to declare an interest. My eighteenth-century County Cavan forbear, Henry Brooke, wrote and published a pamphlet in 1759 on canals in Ireland.

Have the returns from the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal, which had to be submitted to the European Commission in order to secure their funding, been audited against the returns that have been secured?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I do not know. However, I will find out and reply in writing.

Senator Mooney: I support my Colleague, Seymour Crawford. I remind Lord Brooke that I was happy to be present on the important day when the historic Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal, now known as the Shannon-Erne Waterway, was reopened. Many of my Colleagues, including the Co-Chairman and Seymour Crawford, were also present.

What Seymour Crawford has related was also said about the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal — it was exactly the same. My Colleague and leader of the Seanad, Mary O'Rourke, would have been in the Cabinet at that time and would have been very familiar with that attitude. The initiative was pushed through by committed civil servants on both sides, and by Charles Haughey, the then Taoiseach, in association with the British Administration. I strongly urge the Secretary of State, if he manages to deal with the matter — I know that he has a long list of priorities — during what I hope will be a short period as Secretary of State under direct rule, to keep the issue on the table. As Mr Crawford has said, the Secretary of State should not listen to the economists. I come from the heart of the Shannon-Erne Waterway in Country

Leitrim, and the benefits that have flown as a result of the canal, including the regeneration of neglected rural areas, have been immense. There does come a time when money is not the sole factor.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I understand that. The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal runs through my constituency, and I understand the tourism, economic, social and sporting potential involved. Indeed, such potential was recognised when Waterways Ireland was set up under the Good Friday Agreement. I understand the importance of the issues involved, and I will take the matter up with the relevant Minister; it is something that unites those areas north and south of the border very effectively.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Mr Murphy, it is our pleasure to present you with the tie of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. *[Applause]*.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Thank you very much indeed.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): When I have worn the BIIPB tie in the Chamber, one or two of my Colleagues have rather sarcastically asked me if it was my old school tie — so be careful. We would be delighted if you would wear it from time to time.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): I, like Lord Brooke, declare a Cavan interest. The answer to his question is in the affirmative.

I join with my Co-Chairman, Mr Winnick, in thanking the Secretary of State for attending this afternoon. In his initial contribution the Secretary of State gave a detailed overview of the current political situation in Northern Ireland and of the challenges and opportunities facing the two Governments and the political parties involved in the multiparty talks. The Body wishes all the participants in those talks an early and successful outcome to ensure that the will of the people of all the island of Ireland, as expressed in the referendums North and South, is fully implemented through the workings of the Good Friday Agreement.

On your birthday, Secretary of State, we, as a Body, wish you success in your stated endeavours to bring about an early restoration of the Northern Ireland institutions. When we meet again we hope to have the pleasure of hearing your report on the benefits that will have accrued to the people from the full implementation of the agreement.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I believe that we have got through more questions than in any previous plenary; that is very good.

The sitting was suspended at 5.34 pm.

26 November 2002

The sitting resumed at 10.07 am

BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

Co-Chairperson (Mr Winnick): We will now have brief business reports from the Committee Chairpersons. Jim O’Keeffe will speak for Committee A.

Report from Committee A (Sovereign Matters)

The Chairman of Committee A (Mr O’Keeffe TD): We had an enthusiastic and successful Committee meeting. Several decisions were made, which I will now outline.

First, we intend to review the record and work of the Committee over the past five years and check what must be revisited during the next five years.

Secondly, we have adopted the proposal that was discussed during yesterday’s plenary sitting concerning the penalty points system, the reciprocal or non-reciprocal arrangements between the different jurisdictions and the sovereign aspects arising from that. We have appointed two rapporteurs, Lord Dubs and Senator Brian Hayes, to progress the issue.

Thirdly, we will examine the current political issues. We will consider the ways in which we can brief ourselves and consider any input we can make to facilitate the objectives outlined in the main motion yesterday.

We are also studying the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, and we have appointed Tony Killeen and Andrew Mackinlay as rapporteurs on that issue. We intend to monitor and track the work of the British-Irish Council and to report to the Body on that. We have appointed Martin Mansergh and Lord Brooke as rapporteurs on that issue.

Report from Committee B (European Affairs)

Transport Links Between Ireland and Britain

The Chairman of Committee B (Sir Brian Mahon MP): The transport issue has been before the Committee for almost three years. Evidence was taken in the earlier part of the Committee, but its work was disrupted by the tragic death of my predecessor, Michael Colvin. We then moved into two sets of elections, and the report, and the work on it, stalled for some time.

In Dublin in March, I was instructed to make one final attempt to persuade the Northern Ireland Assembly’s Committee for Regional Development to give evidence, because, without that, it was extremely difficult to write a report on transport links between the North and South, Great Britain and Europe. I did as I was requested. The Committee Chairperson was sympathetic, but his Committee was not, and, understandably, he was not willing to break with his Committee. Therefore, no evidence was forthcoming from the Assembly. As a consequence, the evidence that has been taken is before the Body. However, it does not form a report in the traditional sense of the word. There are no conclusions and no Executive summary, because there is a gaping hole in the middle of the work. In the light of that, the BIIPB will decide whether it is worth pursuing the motion on the Order Paper.

My Committee, which now comprises only one person who participated in the transport debate, has drawn a line under transport. The evidence is there for those who wish to read it. It has been made available to the House of Commons’ Transport, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee, and I have spoken to its Chairperson, Gwyneth Dunwoody, about it. The equivalent Committee in the Dáil has just been set up, and the evidence should also be presented to it for its consideration. Other than that, Committee B has drawn a line under transport and decided to move on. We decided unanimously, and with a degree of enthusiasm, to respond to yesterday’s debate on the Nordic Council, and to conduct an inquiry into the maximal relations and areas of common interest between the Nordic Council and the BIIPB.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am sure that will be an interesting inquiry. Yesterday, we listened with much interest to the address from our good friend Asmund Kristoffersson. In view of what you have said, and in view of the report, Committee B’s feelings are that no purpose would be served by having a debate on the motion today.

Senator Mooney: I wish to add one brief supplementary to the excellent presentation by the Chairman of the Committee. What he said illustrates yet again the frustration that Members of the Body have had in attempting to complete investigations in which the Northern Ireland Assembly has been involved because of its continuing refusal to participate.

10.15 am

I hope that that frustration will be minuted and that efforts will, yet again, be redoubled, despite the fact that that the Assembly is now in suspension. Life goes on, however, and I hope that there will be a resumption of normal political activity in Northern Ireland and that efforts are redoubled to encompass all of the elected representatives of the islands of Britain and Ireland. Otherwise, our work with regard to completion of reports, and to the wider aspects of expanding relationships between parliamentarians — North and South, east and west, and the islands — will be continually frustrated. It is

time, quite frankly, that elected Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly buried whatever prejudices they have. It is time we stopped being diplomatic and started being proactive. We must actively encourage them.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We do our best. However, that does not mean, as you rightly said, that we should not continue. The Unionist parties will — one obviously and one less obviously — continue to take the line that they have taken from the beginning. We can only do what we can to try to persuade them.

The Lord Brooke: I want to utter a cautionary word in the light of what Senator Mooney said. The consequence of devolution in Scotland and Wales, and, indeed, in Northern Ireland, during the last Parliament of the House of Commons, was that the ability of Select Committees of the House of Commons to investigate matters in the devolved territories was greatly restricted. Therefore there are problems other than purely personal and political ones. There are also constitutional problems.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): If there are no further comments on the report that has been given on Committee B, I will proceed to the chairperson of Committee C, Mr Séamus Kirk.

Report from Committee C (Economic)

The Chairman of Committee C (Mr Kirk TD): Committee C held a meeting earlier today. As Members know, the issue of the tourism sector in Britain and Ireland has been under consideration. For a range of reasons the Committee has been less than active for some time. However, it has decided that it will hold a meeting in January 2003 — the date of which will be decided by members of the secretariat — in order to finalise the report that will be tabled at the plenary in Kilkenny in March.

The Committee gave consideration to other subjects that it might apply its mind to when the report is completed. It has not settled on a particular subject yet. However, it might be able to progress that at its next meeting in January, which will probably be in Dublin. It was suggested that the meeting might be held in Donegal. A decision has not been made on the location.

Mr Mackinlay MP: On a point of order, Mr Co-Chairman. At what point would it be appropriate to discuss the future of the Body?

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): It would be appropriate at this point.

Report from Committee D (Environment and Social)

The Chairman of Committee D (Mr McNamara MP): Committee D had a comprehensive meeting. It decided that the topic of its next meeting will be waste

management, with particular emphasis on its environmental consequences and problems. It will address racism and sectarianism in sport when it has a proper working programme. It will then address minority groups in these islands. Lord Glentoran has much experience in waste management matters. The Committee hopes that he will take the lead and will point it in the right direction with regard to what questions to ask. That would be a fine example of co-operation between Lord Glentoran and myself, given our comments yesterday.

Sellafield, which will be the subject of a later debate, has been an ongoing problem within the Committee. There were reports in 1992, 1994 and 1996. Now there is another one.

It is not a problem that is going to go away. However, as a Committee, we felt that we wanted to keep an eye on the situation and look at other interests. We have appointed a small subcommittee under the chairmanship of the shadow Chairman, Senator O'Rourke, with representatives from each of the sovereign nations and the devolved Assemblies, particularly the Isle of Man, to be a sort of monitoring group to watch what is happening and to report from time to time. Since it will not go away, we thought that, rather than being bogged down, it was better to deal with it separately. We have not parked it, or put it aside; instead, we have appointed a distinguished group of colleagues to report on it from time to time to the Committee and to the Body and to alert us if there are any problems.

Senator O'Rourke: I am in accord with what our distinguished Chairman has said. I raised the issue of Sellafield at the meeting of our group yesterday evening. For many people, it is something that is there and will not go away. Be that as it may, we in Ireland have an abiding and deep-seated interest in the matter, as have many other nations and peoples. I am particularly pleased that we have decided to set up a standing subcommittee, which will take the issue under its wing. I look forward to working on that in a full-hearted way. We have adopted a good programme of issues that we wish to deal with in the hoped-for certainty that we will be around for some time, God willing, and that we will be able to give our time and energy to them.

I want to tell the group that for Irish people Sellafield is an ongoing, abiding and hugely topical matter. We do not intend to let it go. We intend to keep it high on our agenda, and I am glad that we have the opportunity to do so now.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We shall be having a debate on Sellafield in a moment.

Mr Mackinlay MP: Can I come in now?

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Not at the moment. *[Laughter]*. He is as bad in the House of Commons. I slightly misled you, Mr Mackinlay, but certainly not

deliberately. We have had a brief discussion on the platform. We do want to have an internal debate; we do not wish to gag you. We cannot get away with that. However, instead of having it now, we suggest having it on the adjournment, and we shall make sure that we have the time. Is that all right?

Mr Mackinlay MP: Absolutely.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): If it is not all right I am not sure what we can do about it. For the reasons that Sir Brian Mawhinney has given, we are not having, as is on the agenda, a debate on transport links. We shall go straight to the report from Committee D on Sellafield. Mr McNamara MP will open the debate on his report.

SELLAFIELD — REPORT FROM COMMITTEE D: CULTURE, EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Mr McNamara MP: I beg to move

“That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee D: Culture, Education and Environment [Doc No 85] and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations.”

As I said earlier, the question of Sellafield has been before Committee D on numerous occasions over the past decade, indeed since the Body was established, and rightly so, because —

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I apologise to Mr McNamara. Those who want to come into the debate should indicate their wish to do so to the Clerks or myself.

Mr McNamara MP: For some of us this is a case of *déjà-vu*. We have been here before. However, that is not to underestimate or undervalue the importance of Sellafield as an issue, not only to the people of Ireland, but to the people of all our Assemblies and, indeed, to those of the Scandinavian countries as well. It is a problem that is of grave concern, and the committee does not apologise for the amount of attention paid to it.

We say in our report that there are certain irreconcilable differences, particularly between the Irish and British Governments, which have led to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg having to decide on a submission from the Irish Government. In the letter from the Irish Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Members will see the list of concerns that the Irish have about Sellafield, so there is no need for me to repeat those.

In many ways the report hangs in the balance, because when the Irish Government decided to go to Hamburg, we could not come to any specific and direct conclusions about the matters. While the Irish Government has issued its concerns and the British Government has stated — what it regards as — a responsible approach to them, neither Government is going to fully reveal its hand until the matter has been laid before the tribunal. In that respect, we are still hanging in the air. However, that does not mean that valuable work was not done and valuable information was not obtained. If Members look at the conclusions of the report, they will see how we have expressed some of the concerns.

Two important problems affect the future of Sellafield. First is the question of nuclear energy and its market, which has fallen dramatically. The consequential fall in the price of energy has caused enormous problems in the UK and throughout the Western World. Therefore the viability of a nuclear industry in the UK has a few question marks around it. Colleagues will be aware that

subsidies from the UK Government, which are now being challenged by the European Commission, have been used to keep some of the nuclear generation going.

Secondly, a more ongoing problem is the treatment of nuclear waste at Sellafield. The company has contracts both within and without the UK to process and render safe nuclear waste and to reclaim plutonium and uranium from that waste. Some countries have contracted with the UK Government and the Sellafield industrial complex to take back reprocessed waste.

So far, no reprocessed waste has been sent from Sellafield. None of the countries that were supposed to receive it have done so. Both Sellafield and the British Government say that those countries have a contractual obligation to take the reprocessed waste. However, neither has enforced those contracts. There is a real concern that Sellafield is becoming the world's dumping ground for nuclear waste, and that is a grave concern to members of the Assembly and people who live in the UK.

The magnox plant is being taken out of production, and there are plans for the Thorpe plant to go out of production in 2010. Having planned ahead, there are processes to enable Thorpe to be closed, and there will be a clean decommissioning of the plant, whatever that may mean.

10.30 am

Another major problem that was discussed at London and Sellafield was plant security following the events of September 11. Obviously, the security agencies would not tell us the precise details of how they might react to any terrorist threat. However, they did tell us that they were satisfied with the tests, schemes and plans laid down and re-examined after 11 September and that they were as well prepared as anyone could be to meet a terrorist threat by land, sea or air. An air exclusion zone exists, and specific measures have been put in place in the plant, especially for the possibility of land attack. That arose from general defence preparations, problems in Northern Ireland in the past and the possibility that Sellafield might be a suitable target.

The Committee was left up in the air about these matters. If the experts, the defence officials and the home security people said that they were satisfied with the defence arrangements in place, the Committee was unable to challenge that assertion, see the plans nor make decisions.

The report comprises an examination of the problems, the authorities' response to them, an examination by the Committee of its reaction to what it was told, and its general conclusions. One important conclusion was that the Republic of Ireland's agencies should have the same rights as do the United Nations' atomic energy authorities to visit the Sellafield plant. That had the support of all the Committee Members.

The report highlights that there must be more openness about the amount of publicity and information given to the public on matters of concern. Some of the Committee Members were surprised by the degree of information exchanged between the British and Irish Governments, but which was not released to the public. The Irish Government were not taken unaware by leakages; news was not kept from them. An exchange of information took place between appropriate authorities. The Irish Government are given information about the movement of ships in the Irish Sea. More information must be made public — not to downgrade the seriousness of the issue — but to ensure that informed debate takes place. It is important that we debate this matter on established facts agreed by both sides, so that general discussion can ensue.

Other Colleagues raised matters such as the effect on fishing — especially the shellfish industry in the Isle of Man — and the long-term effects of some of the plant's residues.

Replies from the Governments to our debates at our last meeting are included in the report's appendices. They are not replies to the report or to the Committee's recommendations. If the Assembly accepts and notes the report, we hope to receive a more precise and detailed reply to the recommendations from the Governments concerned.

My final point is that much support was received from people who are no longer Members of the Committee. They have either been translated to bigger and better things or have moved to other committees, which can only be a demotion. There has been great support. I would like to single out the former shadow chairperson, Marian McGennis, who lost her seat in Dáil Éireann and is no longer a member of the Body. She is a very feisty lady. She was known for her robust examination of officials and her unwillingness to accept any cant. Those qualities were seen, for example, in relation to Sellafield. Although we very much welcome our new shadow chairperson, we regret Marian's absence from our future discussions. I would not offend anybody by taking that point any further because I might be making a political statement, but we regret her absence.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): It is democracy.

Mr McNamara MP: I know it is democracy, but democracy got it wrong in England for 18 years. However, I am grateful for the support, and, in particular, for the support of the secretariat. It is a difficult subject, and it is not easy to find a path through the woods to try to get to all the important issues and look at them properly, while tempering the obvious emotions that those on both sides of the argument feel. I beg to move the motion.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I am sure that your very informative address will make for an interesting short debate. Several Colleagues would now like to speak.

Mrs Burnham AM: I speak as the environment spokesperson for the Welsh Liberal Democrats. I am fairly new to the Welsh Assembly, to the Body and to politics generally. As an Assembly Member for North Wales, I know that many constituents have grave concerns about the long-term effects of Sellafield on their general health, and the perception is that the plant has become a dumping ground for the world's nuclear waste.

I welcome the report. I joined the committee only in April, if I remember correctly, and the report, in my view, is very well thought out. The chairperson has worked hard and rationally on the matter, because it is a very emotive subject about which we all feel very strongly. I am pleased to be a member of the subgroup that will continue to keep an eye on the issue, because it will not go away. It is incumbent on us to continue to monitor it carefully.

Mr Lenihan TD: I am no longer a member of Committee D, but I found working on the Committee to be a very positive experience. The recommendation that there be an ongoing monitoring of the plant is very good. The committee's visit to Sellafield was one of my most enlightening visits in any committee context, be it with the Irish Parliament or any other body. It is important that that monitoring continues.

I thought that the character Sir Humphrey was fictitious until I met some members of the nuclear inspectorate and the officials responsible for the oversight of Sellafield. I discovered that reprocessed waste is due contractually to return but that there is no timetable for that. There was a touch of Sir Humphrey about those involved in that particular examination. As the chairperson said, Marian McGennis asked them whether it had ever crossed their minds to enforce the contract. It seemed very odd for someone like myself who previously worked in business to be confronted by civil servants who clearly had no intention in the world of enforcing a particular contract, but who had to pretend that, notionally at least, some day that reprocessed waste would find its way home.

For those reasons alone, it is worth continuing to monitor the Sellafield plant. There are worries and concerns in Ireland about the amount of information that emanates from British Nuclear Fuels Ltd and the British authorities on the issue. I suspect that the more clarity that we can bring, the better things will be.

I thank the British Members for being very patient in tolerating some of our outrage on the issue. Some of the solid suggestions that have emerged about more Irish involvement and more information sharing would have positive effects.

Mr Smith MSP: This is my first experience of working with Committee D, and it has been very interesting.

There can be no doubting the strength of feeling on the subject of the nuclear industry in Ireland. After a

meeting in Dublin to finalise the report, as I travelled by taxi to the airport, I listened to a phone-in discussion on the radio on the issue. It clearly attracts considerable concern in Ireland.

I do not hold a candle for the nuclear industry, and I have never supported it. I do not consider it to be the right way to produce energy in the long term. The industry should be wound down. However, we must be realistic. We should do not start from where we want to be; we should start from where we are. Even if the UK Government were to decide tomorrow to close Sellafield, it would take 20, 30 or 40 years to shut down the operation completely.

Some matters must be dealt with: the legacy of nuclear waste must be reprocessed; magnox processing and the Thorpe contracts will take the plant into the next decade before it can even begin to wind down.

I was concerned about Conor Lenihan's remarks about the attitude of the UK Government, which did not propose any clear policy on the long-term future of Sellafield. They did not comment, for example, on whether they would approve any new recycling contracts that BNFL might attract for the MOX plant. It is worrying that the Government will not say whether they will encourage, discourage or refuse any new contracts from BNFL. The Committee must press the British Government on that key issue and get them to clarify their long-term policy on the reprocessing of nuclear waste at Sellafield.

Conor Lenihan also raised concerns about the UK's lack of determination to enforce the terms of the existing contracts, specifically the return of reprocessed waste to its country of origin. Contracts and international agreements on nuclear waste specifically include those terms, yet there seems to be no Government effort to enforce them, which is extremely worrying. I hope that the Body will stress that point when the report is forwarded to the UK Government for their consideration.

I welcome the fact that the UK Government have finally started to address the problem of the long-term liability of nuclear waste by setting up the Liabilities Management Agency. I hope that that agency will help to decommission plants such as Sellafield properly. With regard to Scotland, it is worrying that Dounreay, whose nuclear safety record is not among the best in the world, continues to cause concern. Perhaps the Standing Committee that deals with Sellafield will also examine the situation at Dounreay.

Much work remains to be done. The report contains important recommendations on the exchange of information between the Irish and UK authorities, which I hope that the Governments will pick up on. In particular, I hope that they will allow the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland to inspect Sellafield in the same way as the International Atomic Energy Agency, bearing in mind

that it would merely inspect and gather information but would have no regulatory function.

I hope that the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body will support the Committee's report. It has been an interesting experience, and the report reflects the information that the Committee received.

Senator Hayes: I will be brief. It is highly significant that British and Irish parliamentarians were able to agree on the report's conclusions.

10.45 am

There are 10 significant conclusions. That position could not have been achieved some years earlier because we all had to face the issue against the flag-waving that takes place about Sellafield on both sides of the Irish Sea. To confront the issue means to sort out the politics and the realities.

I now understand that some realities will not go away. First, Sellafield is in a peripheral part of the UK, it is a significant employer; and it is there for the short- to medium-term future. We, as Irish parliamentarians, must face that situation. Secondly, New Labour is committed to a nuclear energy future. New Labour adopted that position some years ago, and there is almost political consensus on the issue of nuclear energy playing a role in the UK's entire energy industry. Nuclear energy will be a significant energy source in the UK. I accept those realities, although I do not necessarily agree with them. We now have more knowledge of the situation than when we began to compile the report.

The Co-Chairman has already referred to the most significant conclusion that was reached. That conclusion relates to the role of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII), which is the Irish statutory agency for the nuclear industry. When I visited Sellafield, I was astounded to discover that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has an automatic right to be at the plant at any time of the year, at any time of the day. It is both logical and essential that that an international agency monitor what goes on, given that significant amounts of very dangerous materials, including uranium and plutonium are involved. If the IAEA can be there as of right, our statutory authorities should be there as of right also, given the Irish people's concern over and interest in Sellafield. Mr Askew, the director of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL) at Sellafield, said that he had no objections to that in principle, but that it was a matter for both Governments to decide.

The significant conclusion to be reached from the report is that a level of agreement should exist on how best to go forward. Whatever BNFL says about safety concerns, the Irish people do not believe it. Equally, they do not believe what the UK regulator says about safety at Sellafield. I do not suggest that, just because the RPII produces a report, people will believe its

findings either. However, there is a greater chance of dissemination of information and proper debate in Ireland if the RPII issues reports to the Irish Government, those reports are publicised, and there is some ongoing monitoring of the facility by our statutory authority. That would be an advance. It is a sensible proposal, and the British Government could move on it in an east-west context, irrespective of the issues of concern raised in other parts of the islands. We could make significant progress if the British Government and our own Government could find some agreement. Irrespective of the legal matters that are being determined outside the Body, Sellafield is a reality that we must face. To ensure that we face that reality together, we need the maximum amount of information, and security on that information. Our proposal that our statutory agency should be at Sellafield permanently would help make some progress.

Senator Mansergh: No issue in today's Anglo-Irish relations is probably as contentious as Sellafield. I welcome the sober report given by Kevin McNamara about the problems associated with it. The threat of catastrophe — a relatively small threat, I hope — hangs over Ireland and these islands, especially Cumbria where I have relatives.

Therefore I would like to see it defused as quickly as possible. During the cold war period, we came close to catastrophe at least once or twice. The maximum life of Sellafield is presumably 30 to 40 years. However long or short its existence, I hope that we will come through it safely because there are few installations, if any, that have the capacity to be the cause of disaster.

I am absolutely astonished by the economic aspect, which is much less a part of the debate. If the Irish Government gave 36 million euros to Aer Lingus, for example, the EU Commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, would pronounce anathemas on us in Brussels. However, a write-off of £36 billion to the Liabilities Management Authority seems to pass entirely without comment. The rules of competition in the energy field seem to be suspended completely where nuclear energy is concerned.

I am not certain that I would interpret the position of the British Government the way that some other Members have done. I have heard Tony Blair speak on the subject, and I sense that he is more concerned about the jobs in Cumbria, of which there are a large number. I saw a trenchant article in 'The Economist' in the last six months, which said essentially that the British Government should get out of Sellafield. If any more £36 billions need to be written off in the future, I imagine that they will want to get out of it as soon as possible.

I am primarily motivated by the safety considerations, but far too few people seem to consider the economic argument.

Mr Morgan TD: Go raibh maith agat, Chomh-Chathaoirigh. I must watch for your pen and not make the same mistake as yesterday.

Committee D had a poisoned chalice in constructing this particular report. Unfortunately, I am unable to agree with it because many of the conclusions are contradictory. I have two brief examples.

In paragraph 37 people will see that we were “pleased to learn” of the safety commissioning. However, the catch is that existing or, worse again, possible future reprocessing contracts have been fulfilled. In paragraph 10, we are told specifically that

“BNFL is actively pursuing more reprocessing contracts”.

I am unable to accept paragraph 37 for that reason. I simply could not be pleased about that.

In fairness, the Chairperson of Committee D has already highlighted my next point, and I accept that. Nevertheless, it is worth considering. Paragraph 38 states that

“There is no guarantee that BNFL will be able to enforce its contracts, and so compel customers to take back this waste.”

Yet we are told in the first line of paragraph 14 that BNFL’s customers are contractually obliged to take back these highly toxic materials. That would increase the risk of Sellafield to terrorist attack or leakage, the consequences of which would affect our island, which is already affected, and your island as well.

The report also states that discharges are reducing, which is correct, but, unfortunately, the waste that is being discharged is more radioactive than ever. Technetium 99 (Tc 99) has increased alarmingly according to reports from the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII). It has a half-life of 214,000 years. Iodine 129 has also increased significantly, and it has a half-life of 16 million years. Caesium 37 is reducing, but it has a half-life of about 99 years. Although the substances are reducing, the dangers posed by them are increasing not only for the Irish people and the people of the Isle of Man but also for the Nordic countries.

It is alarming that studies into cancer rates have not been conducted. However, the Cooley environment and health group in north County Louth, of which I am a member, has conducted studies in conjunction with St Patrick’s College in Maynooth. We have found that over 21 years in County Louth, which is the smallest county in Ireland, an average of 13.7 people die of cancer every month. According to the National Cancer Registry of Ireland, County Louth has the highest rate of cancer outside the major cities. County Louth’s cancer rates are on average 12.5% higher than the rest of the country, and I wonder why that is. No formal studies have ever been conducted, and it is unfortunate that a small voluntary environmental health group has been left to do just that.

I will not support the report because of these contradictions. I acknowledge that it was a poisoned chalice and that it was not going to be easy to draw support across the board. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Sherlock TD: Ireland is strongly against nuclear submarines and Sellafield. Every year, many children come to Ireland from Chernobyl, and that highlights exactly what could happen here. It states in the report that:

“we are fully conscious that more than six months have passed since we met, and that recent developments (including progress in the case before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg, the publication of the United Kingdom Government’s White Paper “Managing the Nuclear Legacy: A Strategy for Action” in July, and the announcement of a draft Bill on the management of nuclear liabilities in the Queen’s speech on 13 November have in some respects overtaken the Report.”

The question that arises is what is the relevance of the report given that all those developments have now taken place?

11.00 am

Mr Glennon TD: At a time when huge progress has been made in generating ever-increasing levels of trust between the peoples of these islands, no other issue has the potential to undermine all of that trust. Sellafield has that potential. Non-Irish colleagues around the table must not be under any illusion as to the gravity and seriousness of the problem in the eyes of the ordinary people of Ireland. There is a huge element of mistrust, which goes to the root of the problem.

At a time when so much good work has been successfully carried out by many different bodies in generating ever-increasing levels of trust, which is necessary for the life and business of these islands to continue, the issue of Sellafield has the potential to undermine that trust. That risk will remain for as long as the current level and quality of information continues. It is a major challenge for us. I am a member of Committee D, and also of the subcommittee that was appointed today. I look forward to working on the issue of Sellafield, which is of huge importance. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Kirk TD: All the different aspects of the issue have been covered, by and large, in the contributions. One might fall into the trap of repetition. However, I want to reiterate that the concern in Ireland is genuine and cannot be over-emphasised. It is particularly great along the populous east coast; it is about the proximity of Sellafield, its dangers and hazards, and the possibility of an accident there that would have catastrophic consequences for the UK and Ireland.

In many ways, this Body — which includes parliamentarians from Westminster, the Oireachtas, and the regional Assemblies — has the ideal opportunity to discuss the issue in a real and meaningful way. I am sure that some delegates will have been taken aback by the economic picture that Martin Mansergh has just painted with regard to Sellafield. It is a significant sum of money. If nuclear energy — in the context of energy needs in Britain — and the reprocessing of waste are economic ends

that must be protected at all costs, it is an expensive exercise.

I reiterate the genuine concern in Ireland, and, I am sure, in Britain. It is important to keep the issue on the agenda, to have a monitoring arrangement — as proposed by Committee B — and to give people a regular opportunity to have their say. Brian Hayes has outlined what the eventual conclusion should be. We may have to set goals with regard to that, even if they might not be achievable. We will be doing our utmost to convince parliamentarians from Westminster and the other Assemblies who might be disposed to be, at best, neutral, or at worst, supportive of operations at Sellafield, of the genuine concern and the implications for the population of nearby areas, and across the UK.

There are several other locations that are not within the catchment of the Body, but not far outside it, that also have serious difficulties with the issue. Those difficulties were raised at either the last plenary or the one before that. The Committee might wish to bear them in mind.

Senator O'Rourke: Go raibh maith agat a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. Sellafield was not a major issue on the agenda of our Steering Committee meeting yesterday evening. However, we spoke about it, and I am glad to say that when the Chairman presented us with the agenda this morning, he had a very good formula worked out whereby we could address that issue.

It is not a flag-waving issue for me, or any of the Irish Members. It may appear like that, because we go on and on about it. However, we do not go on half enough about it. It is not from an atavistic sense that I want to put forward the points that I making now; it is from a genuine sense of disbelief in the British position on Sellafield. It is disbelief at its harshest, and incomprehension of many other points in the report and the whole issue of Sellafield.

I shall pass on to Marian McGennis TD Kevin McNamara's fine comments about her, as Chairman of Committee D. She, and I, and others, were victims of democracy, which we applaud daily — except when it comes to our own door.

I was not a member of the group, and I could not support the report in its temporary final form. It is my job, however, to wind up the debate. I suggest to the Co-Chairmen and the Body that we regard it as an interim statement rather than a report to be accepted or even noted. That is a genuine feeling. There is no fear greater than the fear of the unknown, and people fear that they will become the victims of what would be an unforeseen incident or accident. That is a huge fear in Ireland. It is not up to any of us to reduce that fear or to call it, in any sense, flag-waving or a thing of no importance. It is an issue of huge importance in our country and in other countries as well.

I support what Conor Lenihan, our Chairman, and others have said about the need for more transparency and explanations and for more public information. There is a particular need for the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) to have the right to the necessary information and to be able to enter Sellafield.

Martin Mansergh is correct. Aer Lingus and other state airlines throughout Europe faced an uncertain future after 11 September, and some went to the wall. The Transport Commissioner in Brussels, Loyola de Palacio, was as stern and as rigorous as I have ever seen anybody. Ireland could not give IR£1 to help Aer Lingus. It had to stand or fall on its own merit, which it did. They buckled into it, and we had many stormy debates in which I was bedevilled and beaten over the head, figuratively speaking, because we, the parsimonious Government, would not give money. Europe said, in the cause of competition, that we could not give money to our national airline. We stuck with it, and Aer Lingus are now, thankfully, a modest success. They have turned the corner.

I tell that story because it was a huge issue in Europe. How dare the Irish put their hands up and look for the right to give money? How dare Ireland try to protect its state airline? Of course Sabena could get money under some other heading — some vague, insubstantial way in which they translated themselves from Sabena One to Sabena Two, or something like that. We are faced with an ignoble spectacle. I know that the Chairman said that the matter is being considered by Europe on competition grounds. However, the European authorities do not seem to have any thrust, impetus or compulsion to tell the UK that, because of the competition rules, it cannot give all those billions of pounds in whatever guise — be it loans, deferred loan repayments or whatever. That will not come about. The UK will not be given a reprimand or told to shag off, and that is a serious matter.

There may be a diminution of the amount of emissions, but they are growing in potency, and that is more serious. There are many unanswered questions. I appreciate the Chairman's comments that we would have a dedicated subcommittee on that issue, and that has been established. Brian Hayes spoke the truth when he said that it is there and that we have to work through it. However, if we get information and transparency, we get a proper recognition of our fears — and not the view that those awful Irish people are talking about Sellafield ad nauseam again. It is a serious issue, and, for those reasons, I cannot support the document as a report. I did not have any hand, act or part in it. The Chairman put it to us this morning that he would regard the report as an interim holding statement, and that we could work from it, rather than cheerfully accept it as a full report.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): In view of some of the comments that have been made, and the possible disagreement, I suggest, with Mr McNamara's and Senator

O'Rourke's agreement, that we adopt the following wording for the motion:

"That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee D entitled 'Sellafield: an Update', which should be forwarded to both Governments and the devolved Administrations for their observations."

To meet some of the sharp criticism, we would delete

"and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report."

All that we would be doing is taking note of the report and sending copies to both Governments along with a verbatim account of today's debate.

Mr McNamara MP: Senator O'Rourke and I are happy with that.

Senator O'Rourke: We are not "happy".

Mr McNamara MP: No, but we are agreeable to the proposal.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Everything is relative.

A Member: Shag off. — [*Laughter*].

Mr McNamara MP: I come from a gentler and more modest age; I do not even understand what that means.

However, I suggest that we add the intergovernmental council to the bodies that should consider the report.

A Member: You mean the British-Irish Council.

Mr McNamara MP: Yes.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Leaving aside Kevin McNamara's off-the-cuff remarks, does the Body agree that the motion would be acceptable when we delete the words

"and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report"?

Members indicated assent.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The revised wording would be:

That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee D entitled 'Sellafield: an Update', which should be forwarded to both Governments and the devolved Administrations and the intergovernment council for their observations.

Mr McNamara MP: The British-Irish Council.

Senator Hayes: I understand that the British-Irish Council is looking at the issue.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): We will include that body as well.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the Report of Committee D entitled 'Sellafield: an Update', which should be forwarded to both Governments and the devolved Administrations and the British-Irish Council for their observations.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): A roll call is not necessary; it is enough to take a note of Mr Sherlock's objections.

It seems that Mr McNamara and Senator O'Rourke are exchanging a few friendly remarks. When they are finished, I will again call on Mr McNamara to move the Adjournment.

To prove that we are not out to gag Mr Mackinlay, which would be against all the rules, he will have an opportunity to put his views soon.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Motion made:

That the Body do now adjourn. — [*The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick).*]

Mr McNamara MP: Comrade Colleagues, Sirs, brothers and sisters, this is a happy occasion for me. This meeting in Manchester has been most successful. We have had fine surroundings, helpful and courteous service from the hotel staff, excellent back-up from our secretariat and the welcome help of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association. If I have one regret, it is that very few Members have attended from Manchester's Irish community, which is one of the largest in the country. However, I am happy that some are here and that you have met them.

11.15 am

Some Colleagues were dubious when I urged that the BIIPB should meet in Manchester. However, they can now see that Manchester people are human, they have a reasonable standard of living and they can appreciate the finer things in life. It was not necessary for Members to have their passports stamped to travel north of Watford or through Manchester Airport. When it is suggested that we visit cities in the north of England, I hope that we will give the matter more favourable consideration, because those cities have much to offer. I am delighted with the Lord Mayor's reception and the hospitality shown by the people of Manchester.

The debates over the two days have been some of the liveliest we have had, because most of us feel that our political seats are relatively safe for a few years. We can, therefore, concentrate better on the subject matters than we could on previous occasions, when we wondered what we were doing here and what our opponents were getting up to behind our backs in our constituencies. That situation no longer exists, except for Members of the National Assembly for Wales and Members of the Scottish Parliament. I wish those Members all the best of democratic luck — whatever that may mean.

There was an opportunity to consider the Body's future progress both at the Steering Committee and also at the individual Committees. Some issues emerged that should be examined. Dates of Committee meetings should be fixed well in advance so that the past problem of inquorate meetings will not arise again, which was a particular problem not only at election times but on other occasions. If dates are known and fixed well in advance, specific arrangements can be made.

If Committees are to undertake more work, and working methods are to be changed, the staffs of the Oireachtas and the other Parliaments and Assemblies will have to consider how much back-up support can be provided to our secretariat, how much extra finance will

be available, what expertise can be employed and how far we can travel to the various jurisdictions. The availability of Committee B, chaired by Sir Brian Mawhinney, to travel abroad must also be considered.

The appointment of rapporteurs to take on certain subjects must be considered. Committee D thought it necessary to appoint a subcommittee under the chairmanship of Senator O'Rourke to consider the contentious issue of Sellafield. From what we have seen and heard of Senator O'Rourke today, the British and Irish authorities, and those at Sellafield, will have many questions to answer. That is how a parliamentary body should work: it has a responsibility to the people and should, therefore, be searching in its questions. However, to have separate rapporteurs for separate issues, and to have joint rapporteurs, is also possible. We have heard about that from Committee A. Other Committees could consider the matter seriously, so that at our next meeting in Ireland we shall be able to present a longer-term set of ideas on work over the next two or three years, to consider the appointment of rapporteurs and to gain a knowledge of how we are going work. In that way, Colleagues who are interested in being rapporteurs will have an opportunity to build up their expertise, to see the various parts of the different jurisdictions and to present comprehensive reports.

I hope that that will reduce the amount of work that the secretariat must do. Moreover, the status of Committees will be improved if informed debates can be held by people whom the Committees have appointed directly to take specific responsibility for this work on behalf of them and the Assembly. I look forward to a good six months until our next meeting in Ireland, and to a general discussion about the various points that were raised at the Steering Committee meeting.

Andrew Mackinlay's paper is before us, but it is not for me to trespass on that — I look forward to hearing what he has to say. I thank all concerned for making our visit to Manchester as parliamentarians such an enjoyable and pleasant one.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you for those words, which I am sure that the Body appreciates. This is an opportunity for anyone who wishes to speak on the Adjournment to give his or her point of view.

Mr Mackinlay MP: I have circulated a paper that I banged up overnight. I hope that it will be considered, perhaps with a view to being referred to the Steering Committee. We need to boost the Body's status. Mention has been made of the work of the British-Irish Council. Before each plenary meeting, a report of the British-Irish Council's work should be circulated along with our papers. I commend that idea to Members.

We had an important debate this morning, but no Minister was present to listen. Although papers will be referred, that does not have the same impact. Several

debates would have been worthy of attendance by Ministers from the Republic and from Westminster. It is not unreasonable for the Body to ask both Governments to provide a Minister to attend. That suggestion was mooted the other day, and Colleagues who were in the Chamber will have noticed that Alf Dubs, who is not present, dismissed the idea.

In the House of Lords, in addition to specific Ministers, there are people who work on all government matters on behalf of the Government. Some of today's core issues related to the environment and transport in Northern Ireland. It seems not unreasonable to ask that the junior Minister for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from Westminster attend. If others agree, I shall ask the Steering Committee to pursue the idea of a Dáil Minister and a Westminster Minister attending the meetings. They should be able to respond by giving their initial reactions just before the winding-up speeches. Of course, in many cases Ministers would say "I will take the matter away" or "I hear what the Body is saying". However, that would be a powerful tool to improve the Body's status.

The attendance of Ministers would be in addition to, not instead of, our principal guest. We have enjoyed the presence of the Secretary of State on this occasion, and the Taoiseach on other occasions. If I could leap forward, the Steering Committee should be asked to use the maximum leverage to get Tony Blair to address the Body as soon as possible, as he has not done so yet. I understand that approaches have been made in the past, but I ask the Steering Committee to renew its efforts, and to consider whether there are any other ways to draw attention to the importance that we attach to the Body.

There are always some unanswered questions for oral answer, and if people have gone to the trouble of tabling them, they should be entitled to written replies, which should be circulated to other Members.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): It is the case that that is done already.

Mr Mackinlay MP: I apologise for that. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.*

Mr McNamara MP: *Ego te absolvo.*

Mr Mackinlay MP: A colleague informally raised the point with me that on some occasions we could hold part of a session in Select Committee mode. For example, we may want the federations representing the Police Service of Northern Ireland or the Garda, chief constables or someone dealing with atomic energy to attend. We could then have a question and answer session following the Select Committee rubrics.

I have covered all the points in my paper. Bearing in mind that we must prepare a year or a year and a half in advance, it is now time to make a declaration of intent to hold this plenary in Northern Ireland. I have also discussed that informally. Several points have been

made — there are problems with accommodation, finding suitable hotels, security and so on. However, that is ducking the issue. It would be highly appropriate for a variety of reasons, including the tremendous hospitality there and the fact that it would send a positive message. I hope that during the lifetime of the current UK Parliament and Oireachtas, we will line up at least one plenary in Northern Ireland, not excluding other people from the islands who also may want to host it. It now seems imperative that we decide to meet in Northern Ireland.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you. I should explain that this is a discussion paper. This is not a debate on it as such. The debate is on the Adjournment, but colleagues may wish to refer to the paper.

Mr Mackay MP: I would like to refer to it and to broadly support Andrew Mackinlay. All his points are worthy of serious consideration by your Steering Committee. I agree that no great decisions or detailed discussions should take place during the Adjournment debate this morning. However, I would not want you or your Steering Committee colleagues to think that Andrew Mackinlay's was a lone voice. It would be extremely helpful if we were to get answers on all these points at Kilkenny. I hope that most, if not all, of the answers should be positive.

My final point is in support of Kevin McNamara. Particularly now that there are few elections on the horizon — and those that are coming up are for the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament, which have a fixed date — there seems to be no good reason why we should not have both Committee and plenary dates well in advance. Conflicts easily arise for those of us with constituency and other commitments, which are embarrassing to get out of. The sooner we know the dates of the plenary session back in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the better. It can only be to our advantage to fix Committee dates further ahead. There has been modernisation in our own Parliament in Westminster, which has been broadly welcomed. Robin Cook is now giving dates a long way in advance, which is working to everybody's advantage.

Mr Smith MSP: I am not sure if I will be back at the next plenary because Scotland is one of the areas that has elections coming up next May. I hope to be returned to the Scottish Parliament, but then the Parliament itself will have to determine whether I am reappointed to this Body. If I am not re-elected, I must say that I have enjoyed my time on the Body. It has been an interesting experience, and the Scottish Parliament has enjoyed that.

In considering Andrew Mackinlay's paper, it is important to bear in mind that this is now not just a Body between the sovereign Parliaments of the United Kingdom and Ireland. There are now devolved Assemblies. In some cases the UK Minister in attendance may have

absolutely no jurisdiction over some parts of the United Kingdom in relation to the topics that the Body is discussing. For example, if Committee D considers waste management, that is the responsibility of the Scottish and Welsh Ministers rather than the UK Ministers. It is important to bear in mind that a Minister in attendance may not be able to speak on the UK as a whole but only on part of it.

It is important that the Body looks at the work of the British-Irish Council in more depth. That is the Body's main weakness; it has not overshadowed the work of the British-Irish Council to any extent. None of us really know what the British-Irish Council is doing, except that it meets occasionally; it did so last week in New Lanark. This Body could perhaps pick up on that and start to shadow the work of the British-Irish Council. That would make the British-Irish Council's work more transparent and perhaps a little more known to the public. That is an important suggestion.

It is also important to put dates in diaries as early as possible. If I am reappointed to the Body, I look forward to having the dates of future plenaries in my diary at an early date. Thank you again for the welcome that the Body has given to the Scottish Parliament in our first term, and we hope that we will be back again soon.

11.30 am

The Lord Glentoran: I support most of Mr Mackinlay's paper, particularly the suggestion that the next British plenary should be held in Northern Ireland. All things being well, the time is now right for that to happen. At least two cities, Derry and Belfast, could host the plenary. It would be a fine statement for the Body to make, and it could be a trigger to bring the Northern Ireland parties on board, even if they were only in attendance. I think that only good could come out of it.

The Body could now debate somewhat less anodyne motions than those that we have been accustomed to debating since I became a member of the Body. With a little more thought from the Steering Committee, we could debate motions about real life and real matters which would bring more passion and argument into the room. The Body is now a mature body — we know each other well; we trust each other; and we could produce some positive debate and results from motions that are of a less rubber-stamping nature than previously. I am still liable for cull, so I do not know how much longer I shall be with the Body, but I hope that I shall be with it for some time.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I will try to give you advance warning of the second stage of House of Lords reform.

Mr Barnes MP: Almost more important than Mr Mackinlay's points — including the suggestion that the plenary should be held in Northern Ireland — is the context

in which he suggests that the Steering Committee should have early discussions with the two sovereign Governments with a view to seeking their co-operation to enhance the role and status of the Body. The points and the agenda seek to do that, but it is important that those discussions look to develop a position whereby the Steering Committee could come back to us with a motion that attempts to detach us from any last remnants of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Redefining ourselves in terms of the spirit of the Belfast Agreement seems to be of massive importance, because the possibility of getting Ulster Unionists involved in our work is found down that avenue. When that occurs, matters such as meeting in Northern Ireland will become much easier. Andrew Mackinlay's initial argument at the opening of his discussion paper should be pursued in the type of spirit that I have outlined.

Mr Walter MP: Andrew Mackinlay's discussion paper is excellent, and we should view it in the context of the wider discussion that is taking place about the parliamentary dimension in international and intergovernmental bodies, not least in the European Convention. However, there are also other bodies. For example, I sit on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western European Union, both of which are wrestling with the problem that they are subsidiary to the intergovernmental and ministerial councils that have the executive power on those bodies.

I therefore fully support the attendance of Ministers from both the sovereign Governments and the devolved Governments. They can listen to and comment on our debates, and take back what we say as a matter of course. They might even act on the suggestion for a Select Committee or investigative procedure whereby we could question Ministers on the work of the British-Irish Council or on specific policy areas. That would add to the liveliness of our discussions and to the usefulness of our work.

That would also strengthen the argument regarding our wish to involve Northern Ireland's Unionist parties. If they could see that we were conducting that kind of debate, and questioning Ministers and other officials in open session, they might want to be involved a little more. Ministerial attendance would reflect the fact that the Body had moved on from the original concept that was envisaged under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, perhaps bridging the gap that appeared.

Finally, support for the suggestion that we should meet in Northern Ireland might encourage our Colleagues there to send hosts from across the political spectrum. I suggest a little caution and that we refrain from rushing matters. However, we should perhaps aim to be able to do so in 2004.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Perhaps in Ian Paisley's constituency?

Senator Mansergh: I welcome Andrew Mackinlay's suggestions. The fact that we seem to have decided that

we shall take on the role of monitoring the British-Irish Council — where I have been appointed in Committee A as joint rapporteur with Peter Brooke — should interest Unionists, who always attach particular importance to strand three and the work of the British-Irish Council. I suggest that, if we are to do that, the Co-Chairmen should write to the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly or to the party leaders to say that we shall take on the work of monitoring the British-Irish Council and ask whether the Unionist parties would like to reconsider their position.

It keeps being said that the origin of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That is not accurate, for its origin lies in the joint studies of 1981. It is very unhelpful for Unionists to keep situating it in the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Perhaps we might get them to examine the question. We are talking about acts of completion in the general negotiations, and it would be very nice if Unionists joining the BIIPB, to which they should not have any ideological objection, were included in those acts. I entirely agree with Lord Glentoran: a plan to hold a meeting in Northern Ireland would tend to concentrate minds as to whether people really wanted to continue to boycott the Body.

Senator Mooney: I endorse all the comments that have been made and support Mr Mackinlay's initiative. There might be an impression that Unionists — whether Official Unionists or Democratic Unionists — do not participate in cross-party activities. From a Southern Irish perspective, Official Unionist Party representatives participate in the General Council of County Councils, which is a body in the Republic representing county councillors, the Local Authority Members' Association, and many local representative organisations throughout the island of Ireland regularly attend meetings at local council level.

Sir Brian Mawhinney's presentation persuaded me to comment on redoubling efforts to involve Unionists. Unionists are not ideologically opposed to dealing with the "other side" or those who are opposed to them politically because of an all-island or constitutional dimension. The

Unionist mindset must be shifted. Senator Mansergh made his point well, which is why I suggested a redoubling of efforts to include Unionists. However, I take Lord Brooke's point, and they should not be coerced. As Lord Glentoran correctly said, we have matured as a Body to the point where the Unionists' position of non-participation is no longer acceptable or logical.

I welcome Mr Mackinlay's initiative and hope that it will go some way to breaking the logjam. The points he made will enhance the work of the Body.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I can give you the dates for the next plenary sitting: 29 March to 31 March 2003.

Mr Mackay MP: We have also been given April as a date.

Co-Chairman (Mr Smith): The Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament will have been dissolved by April.

Mr Mackay MP: That is good, because it resolves the conflict that I advised you about. I am obliged.

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): To avoid any misunderstanding, the next plenary sitting is scheduled for Sunday 30 March to Tuesday 1 April 2003 at Kilkenny Castle in Ireland.

This is the first plenary sitting at which Brendan Smith has acted as my Irish Co-Chairman. I am delighted about that because we work well together and have done so on previous occasions when Mr Smith held a different role. At the next meeting of the Body, Mr Smith will do all the hard work and I can simply sit by.

I thank all those who have made our meetings so successful. On the British side of the secretariat, Amanda Hay has done sterling work with Brigadier John Osborne, who, unlike his journalist son, does not like to take the limelight. When the Body meets in Britain, the British secretariat does most of the preparatory work. However, that could not be done successfully without the participation of the Irish secretariat, and we thank them warmly.

Adjourned at 11.45 am.

