



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

THIRTY-FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

5 and 6 March March 2007

Castleknock Hotel, Dublin

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

In Attendance

Co-Chairman

Mr Pat Carey T.D.
Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP

Members and Associate Members

Mr John Austin MP
Mr Tony Baldry MP
The Baroness Blood MBE
Senator Paul Bradford
Mr Johnny Brady TD
Rt Hon the Lord Brooke of Sutton
Mandeville CH PC
Ms Joan Burton T.D.
Mr Alun Cairns AM
Mr John Carty TD
Mr Paudge Connolly T.D.
Mr Seymour Crawford TD
Mr Quentin Davies MP
Dr Jimmy Devins TD
Mr Jim Dobbin MP
The Lord Dubs
Ms Helen Eadie MSP
Mr John Ellis TD
Mr Damien English TD
Mr Jeff Ennis MP
Mr Paul Flynn MP
Mr Jim Glennon TD
The Lord Glentoran CBE DL
Lord Gordon
Mr Dominic Grieve MP
Mr John Griffiths AM
Senator Brian Hayes
Baroness Harris
Ms Meg Hillier MP
Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD
Mr Séamus Kirk TD
Dr Dai Lloyd AM
Mr Elfyn Llwyd MP
Mrs Rosemary McKenna CBE MP
Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP
Mr David McLetchie MSP
Rt. Hon. Michael Mates MP
Senator Martin Mansergh
Dr John Marek AM
Senator Paschal Mooney
Mr Arthur Morgan TD
Connetable Daniel Murphy
Senator Francie O'Brien
Ms Liz O'Donnell TD
Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD
Senator Mary O'Rourke
Mr Séamus Pattison TD
Ms Jenny Randerson AM

The Hon. Steve Rodan SHK
Mr Chris Ruane MP
Mr Joe Sherlock TD
The Lord Smith of Clifton
Mr Iain Smith MSP
Mr Robert Walter MP
Senator Diarmuid Wilson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (FOR ALL OR PART OF PROCEEDINGS)

The Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern TD
Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children;
Justice Equality and Law Reform and the Department of
Education and Science (with special responsibility for
Children) Mr Brian Lenihan TD

STEERING COMMITTEE

Co-Chairmen Mr Pat Carey TD
Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Members Deputy Alan Breckon
Mr Seymour Crawford TD
The Lord Dubs
Mr Séamus Kirk TD
Mr Dai Lloyd AM
Rt Hon Michael Mates MP
Mr Murray Tosh MSP

OFFICIALS

Joint Clerks

Ms Alda Barry, British Clerk
Mr Eoin Faherty, Irish Clerk

Irish Policy Advisor

Ms Máire Flanagan

Delegation Clerks

Mr Sean Wixted (*Scotland*)
Mr Peter Kellam (*Wales*)
Ms Tara Wharton (*Ireland*)

Committee Clerks to the Body

Committee A: Sovereign Matters

Ms Máire Flanagan
Ms Nerys Welfoot

Committee B: European Affairs

Mr Mike Clark
Ms Elaine Hollowed

Committee C: Economic

Ms Elaine Hollowed
Ms Tracey Garratty

Committee D: Environmental and Social

Ms Audrey Nelson
Ms Elaine Hollowed

Secretariat

Mrs Veronica Carr
Sir Michael Davies KCB
Mrs Amanda Healy

Support Staff

Mr Harry Lester
Ms Sarah Muldoon

British–Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association

Reporting team for 34th Plenary Meeting

Mr Brendan Doherty
Mr Jim Donohue
Mr Ross Gunby
Mr Meinir Harris
Mr Fergus Hurley
Mr Rob Littlejohn

Monday 5 March 2007

The Body met at 9.34 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Good morning, everybody. The British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body (BIIPB) is now in public session. The Co-Chairman, Paul Murphy, and I are delighted to welcome you to this part of Dublin. I hope that you have had a pleasant stay to date, and we look forward to a productive couple of days. I must make a number of preliminary announcements before proceeding with the agenda. All Members — including me — must switch off their pagers, beepers, BlackBerrys and mobile phones. It is not sufficient to turn them to silent; they must be switched off completely. Otherwise, they will interfere with the transmission system. I also remind Members that the proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

NEW MEMBERS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Since the previous plenary, there has been a change in membership. Steve Rodan from the Isle of Man Government has replaced the Hon Tony Brown. We congratulate Tony on his appointment as Chief Minister of the Isle of Man Government.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): It is onwards and upwards for everybody here.
[Laughter.]

Three Members of the Body will not be seeking re-election. Séamus Pattison TD has been a Member of Dáil Éireann since October 1961 and is known here as the Father of the House. He has been a Member of the Body since its inception, apart from the period 1997-2002, when he was Ceann Comhairle in the Dáil. Deputies Jim Glennon and Joe Sherlock will also not be seeking re-election. We wish each of them the best in the future. *[Applause.]*

Speaking of elections, we wish everybody in all jurisdictions the very best in whatever elections are being fought. There are elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly on 3 May 2007. There will be an election here —

Senator Mary O'Rourke: Tell us when. *[Laughter.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): It will be some time before 4 July, and there are other changes imminent, I suppose.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I must inform the Body that, 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 entire sitting: Quentin Davies MP; Jim Dobbin MP; Baroness Harris of Richmond; John Austin MP; Lord Gordon of Strathblane; Connetable Daniel Murphy from the States of Jersey; Jenny Randerson AM; Alun Cairns AM; Michael McMahon MSP; Helen Eadie MSP; Joan Burton TD; and Paudge Connolly TD.

I should also inform Members that at 3.30 pm, following Ms Lesley Irving's address to the Body on the Scottish experience of racism and sectarianism, a group photograph will be taken, either indoors or outdoors, depending on the weather.

The Steering Committee has suggested that, owing to the tight timeframe, the usual 11.30 am coffee break should not be taken — coffee is available outside the room, and Members can come in and out as they need to — because the scheduled debate on recent political developments may take more time than we had originally allowed for it.

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Members will have received a copy of the proposed Programme of Business. I move that the proposed order of business be adopted. Are there any objections?

Programme of Business agreed.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Those Members who wish to contribute to the debate on recent political developments, and who have not already given their names to the Clerks, should do so as soon as possible.

The Steering Committee proposes to limit speeches to three minutes, with five minutes for the opening and winding-up speeches. I am anxious to adhere to that timeframe in order that all Members who wish to do so can have their say.

The Lord Dubs: If I may, I would like, from the British side, to congratulate Ireland on certain events on Saturday 24 February at Croke Park. Most of us were delighted not only with the outcome but with the way in which it happened. It was a tremendous political, as well as a sporting, success. Congratulations. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Thank you very much. We stole the previous one as well, but we will not talk about that. The Clerk tells me that Ireland won the parliamentary contest by 17 points to 12 points. I am not sure whether any Members present can claim any credit for that result.

Before we move on to debate the motion, I will say a brief word, and Paul Murphy will also have a word or two to say.

Yet again the Body, and politics on this island, has entered an important period. Elections will take place in Northern Ireland on Wednesday, and that is all part of the outworking of the St Andrews Agreement and the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. Some significant events have already taken place, including the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis, at which the party leadership's recommendation to support the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the rule of law received the endorsement of its members.

The other important event that has probably gone unnoticed — apart from what Lord Dubs has said — has been the fact that discussions around the election campaign have been focused on economic and social issues. That is something that the Body can claim some credit for, in that Members highlighted the need for that kind of approach to be taken in Northern Ireland. It is heartening to see that issues such as rural planning, water rates and early school leaving are being debated. We look forward to the period between Wednesday and 26 March, when we hope to see a functioning Assembly and Executive set up. Let us hope that we will be able to look forward to interacting with the Executive through the Body and that everyone on that Executive will play his or her part. We will encourage that and do our best to encourage the fullest possible participation in the Body, and if that requires addressing the name of the Body, or whatever, we will not be found wanting.

Some Members may have noticed that one of the newspapers today reports that British and Irish officials will meet later this week to discuss an economic package for Northern Ireland, and we all welcome that. The National Development Plan (NDP) that the Irish Government published contains a significant all-island dimension. We hope all that can help to bring peace, stability and economic growth to Northern Ireland.

I will leave my opening remarks at that and invite Paul Murphy to say a few words.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Pat. Good morning to you all, and I thank you, and everyone involved, for making this a very interesting and useful session.

I echo Mr Carey's words about this week. We are two days away from elections in Northern Ireland, and Pat rightly said that discussion has been about domestic issues in Northern Ireland, rather than about what we used to term the constitutional issue.

9.45 am

The morning session of the Body will discuss racism and sectarianism, and later in the afternoon we will discuss the Scottish experience of racism and sectarianism. It is interesting and important for all of us to understand that what we agreed in Belfast in 1998, and what was agreed at St Andrews, and why it is that Northern Ireland, and the relationship between North and South, is as it is, is that the scope of those agreements was very wide.

I hope that we will see a devolved Assembly back in Belfast, but there are issues that still need to be resolved. Racism and sectarianism, which is still an issue there, is a particularly difficult one. The peace process is virtually finished, and the political process is almost finished. When the Body met in Belfast, I said that continued direct rule in Northern Ireland is an affront to democracy in that part of this island; however, because politicians from the different parties in Northern Ireland are not governing that place together, it also means that there is a huge gap in the agreement and in the way forward.

The actual business of governing — matters such as those on the list of questions for oral answer, which include North/South issues, the Health Service, schools, planning and the environment — must be carried out by people who are elected in Northern Ireland. That is the key to the success of the political process. The Body can take some credit for pushing that process forward. In the autumn, when the Body next meets — in England, as it happens — I hope that representatives from all the political parties in Northern Ireland will be present, and that, as it should, that country will be governing itself.

I look forward to an interesting couple of days with the Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): We shall proceed to the motion on recent political developments. I call Mr Seymour Crawford to move the motion formally and to open the debate. I remind Members that those who wish to speak will each be allocated a maximum of three minutes.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I beg to move:

That the Body reiterates its welcome for the St Andrews Agreement of 13 October last and commends the two Governments and the political parties for their efforts to restore the political institutions and restore devolution for the people of Northern Ireland; welcomes the decision by Sinn Féin to join with the other political parties in supporting policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland; notes that elections in Northern Ireland

are to be held on Wednesday 7 March, and reiterates the importance of this opportunity to establish a devolved power-sharing government for the benefit of the whole community; encourages the parties to work after the election period towards the establishment of devolved government by 26 March 2007 in accordance with the St Andrews Agreement; and resolves that upon restoration of devolved government, it will initiate consultations with the newly elected Northern Ireland Assembly to agree an inclusive East-West inter-parliamentary framework which will embrace all interests, as envisaged in that agreement.

Co-Chairmen, I wish to refer to some of the major improvements that have taken place, which you have already mentioned.

Last Sunday, I travelled to Donegal from my constituency of Cavan-Monaghan. The journey reminded me of the dramatic changes that have occurred in the northern part of our country. I travelled up through Aughnacloy, into Lifford and down towards Ballybofey. I did not see a single PSNI officer, Army soldier or checkpoint, or any ramps or sheds for checking vehicles. I compare that journey with others that I made as a member of farmers' organisations during the early 1980s, when one would have to stop at many checkpoints.

On one particular night, I addressed a farmers' meeting in Raphoe, which is not far from Ballybofey. I rose to speak at 8.00 pm. At 8.30 pm, a reporter advised me that my return journey through Northern Ireland would not happen that night, because, since I had arrived, which was a matter of only two hours before, both possible routes home — through Strabane or through Clady — were closed off due to bomb blasts, and that bombs were going off all over Northern Ireland.

People say that there are still many problems to overcome. Although problems still exist, the present situation must be put into context. Those problems must be dealt with under the terms of the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements. The peace process has come a long way. That must be recognised.

It is vital that all parties in Northern Ireland accept and support the structures of law and order. In that context, I too welcome the decision of the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis. However, words are not enough — we need total commitment to, and involvement in, policing. To that end, I welcome the commitments that have already been made. However, resolutions to matters that the Body has previously discussed, such as the McCartney sisters' request for information regarding their brother Robert's murder, and other such incidents — on both sides of the divide — are important to show that commitments are more than skin-deep.

I listened with interest to recent statements from representatives of hard-line loyalist groups on why they were not standing in the election. However, they emphasised their view that democracy is the only way forward, and I believe that even they are moving in the right direction.

I recently attended the funeral of David Ervine in Belfast. He was a brilliant example of how one man from a difficult background could make a great impact. The fact that people of all political affiliations and none attended his funeral and paid their respects to him proves what one individual can do.

The next few days will see major changes in Northern Ireland. We can only hope that people will take the opportunity to vote. It is clear that the feedback on the doorsteps is not about the constitutional issues, but, as the Co-Chairman said, the bread-and-butter issues, such as infrastructure, education, planning and all the other normal issues that people worry about in everyday life. It is time for elected representatives in Northern Ireland to take their situation seriously and to go into Government to deal with matters in

their own way. That is clearly in the best interests not only of the people of Northern Ireland but of this island as a whole.

Funding from Westminster and Dublin is an equally important matter, and I urge all concerned to use upcoming meetings to spell out what they are prepared to do. I welcome the Taoiseach's commitment to provide funding. In the past, funding was provided through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and from European peace and reconciliation funds. Thankfully, due to the Celtic tiger economy and the economic progress that we have made, there is no reason why we cannot provide some funds ourselves. However, it is important that we make it clear where that money will be spent.

Derry is the fourth largest city on the island, and it is vital that roads such as the M2 and A5 form part of a better infrastructure that allows for better business prospects, more tourism, and so on. I cannot help but mention, as I have probably done before, my welcome for the Taoiseach's commitment to the Ulster Canal restoration project. We want to see that commitment in hard print and the work going ahead. As I have often said, that is a truly cross-border, cross-community project that will bring everyone together.

The motion covers the main issues of note, but I want to finish by saying that, during the recent British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIC) in Dundalk, both Governments examined the progress that has been made, and they admitted that there is still an assessment that some dissident republican groups — although small, isolated and fragmented — continue to prepare for, and to engage in, paramilitary activity, and that loyalist groups, although moving in the right direction, are still engaging in violent and criminal actions. That spells out the need for everyone who cares about democracy to be totally involved in the policing and law-and-order structures. That will bring true peace to Northern Ireland.

I urge everybody in the next few days, and particularly in the next three weeks to 26 March, to work towards a single end, which is to get the Assembly up and running and to provide a Government in Northern Ireland, and, through those, the cross-border linkage that is set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: I join other Members in acknowledging that what happened in Croke Park two Saturdays ago was one of the single most significant acts of reconciliation that could have been offered to the people of Ireland and, indeed, these islands. Everyone involved, including our friends in the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), is to be commended. Although the GAA will have further decisions to make, it was nevertheless a generous and sensible act on its part to make Croke Park — which is, in many respects, Ireland's national stadium — available for the Six Nations.

On considering the motion, it occurred to me that much work is still to be done on promoting opportunities for people from the Republic to travel to Northern Ireland, and vice versa, because too few people are experiencing and enjoying the island of Ireland. The Governments should be trying to develop programmes and schemes that ensure that a high proportion of schoolchildren from Northern Ireland and the Republic travel to the other jurisdiction.

The concession that will enable retired people to travel throughout the island of Ireland, North and South, is sensible and fair. It has many welcome attributes, such as maximising the use of the public transport system, and so forth. In order to cement that in the long term, young people of school age from Northern Ireland should be travelling to Dublin, other cities and to the countryside of the Republic, and vice versa.

I hope that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) will focus on its Dublin office,

which looks rather poverty-stricken. The office is in Nassau Street, opposite Trinity College, and people are more likely to walk past rather than notice it, because it has such a minimal impact. An immediate effort must be made to increase the currently insufficient promotion of Northern Ireland in the Republic.

Finally, some UK Departments need to be brought up with a jolt so that they do not forget about their responsibilities to Northern Ireland. In important negotiations in the European Union in the past two or three years, the fisheries industry in Northern Ireland has been forgotten. Indeed, to its credit, the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, which has responsibility for fisheries in the Irish Republic, has provided the greatest advocacy.

It is indicative of the fact that the British Government sometimes forget about Northern Ireland that they have scheduled important constitutional votes for Wednesday evening — the very day on which most of Northern Ireland's MPs are standing as candidates in the Northern Ireland Assembly election. The Government would not schedule such important votes for the first Thursday in May. Peter Hain and Jack Straw have large secretariats, and someone should have tapped them on the shoulder and told them that votes on the future of the upper House should not have been scheduled for this Wednesday evening.

The unionist parties and the SDLP would have a vested interest in being present for votes on the future of the upper House: the SDLP cannot and will not nominate to the House of Lords; and unionists will have an opportunity to have elected representatives in the upper House who can minimise the existing deficit. Unionists who live in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone are represented by Members of Parliament who are not only of a different political persuasion but are abstentionists. An element of election to the upper House in the United Kingdom would provide cover for unionists in constituencies that are currently represented by Sinn Féin MPs.

10.00 am

Senator Martin Mansergh: Members welcome the progress, even though it has been slow and tortuous, that has been made over the past eight years and how certain obstacles have been cleared out of the way. It has been a punishing process for the parties that took an early lead and set the agenda for the progress that Members are now witnessing.

Like Deputy Seymour Crawford, I hope that the next month will bring the peace process, which has lasted for the best part of 20 years, to a successful conclusion and that we achieve near normality, even if, as has been predicted, there may be "a battle a day". The only point of holding the election in two days' time is to result in a devolved Assembly and Executive. I accept that deeds must follow words; however, the playing field is almost level with regard to respect for the rule of law and democracy.

Like Seymour Crawford, I was also in Donegal in February, for the launch of a commemorative stamp in Letterkenny to mark the Flight of the Earls in 1607. That event took place 400 years ago, coinciding with the start of the plantation of Ulster. For the first time in those 400 years, the playing field between the two communities is almost level and is no longer dominated by conquest and a desire to maintain hegemony. Therefore, the future will be more fruitful and constructive. That is vital for the economy, because if Northern Ireland cannot convey confidence in its ability to work the shared institutions, nobody supposes that the Northern Ireland economy can flourish. I am sure that both Governments will play their part in underpinning that economic progress.

The Lord Smith: I am sure that all Members welcome this week's potential for a

restoration of devolved Government. We should recall and record the concerted efforts that have been made by three heads of Government; namely, A, B and C — Ahern, Blair and Clinton — who got the momentum going. The role of the United States is often criticised in world affairs, but its influence in Northern Ireland has been benign. I agree with Co-Chairman Murphy and hope the next time that the Body meets that representatives from the DUP and other parties will be present so that we can hear their contributions and perspectives in an informal setting, as we did when DUP colleagues attended the BIIPB meeting in Killarney in April 2006.

In anticipation of Deputy Cecilia Keaveney's question this afternoon, and because of my own background, I hope that, after the restoration of Stormont, there will be greater collaboration on this island among the institutes of higher education. The island of Ireland has a relatively small population, and the current level of co-operation on issues such as research and development must be extended. There are good examples of cooperation on the issue of nutrition among University College Cork, the University of Ulster and Trinity College, Dublin.

Such co-operation should be expanded to include many other disciplines so that the advantages of the economies of scale that will surely come can be reaped. There is a problem because universities in the North are now fee-paying, and fees have been abolished in the South. That is a difficult area, but I hope that finding a solution to that problem is not beyond the imagination of humankind on this island.

Even if Stormont is restored by the end of the month, it will still be fragile. We cannot take our eye off the ball. Stormont will need to be nurtured with a great deal of sympathy if it is to become a fully operating legislative Assembly.

On a lighter note, as a democratic devolutionist, I look forward to devolution occurring also for Munster, Leinster and Connacht.

Senator Mary O'Rourke: I am glad to have the opportunity say a few words, and I hope to be able to stick to my allotted three minutes.

I was struck by Paul Murphy saying in his opening remarks:

"direct rule ... is an affront to democracy".

That is, of course, exactly what it is. We are all here as a result of the democratic process. People always seem to be able to use that process and to have it answer to them, no matter how faltering or weak it is. Democracy means that politicians are elected to represent people's points of view.

On that note, I am glad to see that the debate in the North has taken on an economic tinge. I never thought that I would hear a particular gentleman say that the deciding factor for him would be water rates. That is a prosaic and ordinary matter with which we all deal every day. Politicians make appeals on behalf of people about rates, or we prevail on them to pay their rates. Therefore, that comment was stunning in its implications because it meant that the people had their say when the representatives-to-be knocked on their door. People said that they wanted to know about the rates and asked how they would be able to pay £800 or £1,000, or whatever. That debate stirred the pot of democracy. That is how it should be, and we look forward very much to that continuing.

The Body always seems to be on the cusp of witnessing huge, important events. However, on this occasion we are witnessing such an event, given that the elections will take place on Wednesday. I do not think that we have ever been as near the threshold as we are today. We all hope that people will turn out to vote and that there will be a

huge outpouring of democracy.

However, that is not in any way to denigrate the importance of the Body. Firm friends have been made at its meetings, and the process of making friends breaks down barriers. People come to like one another, and they realise that they are all normal folk with normal aspirations. We have been very lucky that the Body's various Co-Chairmen have allowed those bonds of friendship to strengthen and that the social toing and froing between Members has its own ripple effect. That has helped the process.

I take up what Andrew Mackinlay said. We were delighted to welcome him to the Seanad a couple of weeks ago. I thought that our ability to look up and see him in the Seanad Gallery was further evidence of friendship. He talked about how people go to and fro, and how there should be much more of that. The all-Ireland welfare benefit, which has now come about, will help the travel benefit. There should, however, be more of what we call ordinary toing and froing between the North and the South; for example, women travelling up and down to shop. That should become an everyday fact of life. Other areas can be developed, such as tourism. I agree that the NITB office in Dublin has a wretched front, which I hope will be changed.

Therefore, we are again on the cusp — to give it a lovely, grand title — of an event occurring in two days' time. It is the wish of all of us here that the steps taken on Wednesday will result in a final resolution.

The realisation that decisions will be based on who can manage the ordinary bread-and-butter issues and not on who has guns or on who did what, where and when, was pivotal for me. Nothing can beat the person who has been directly elected for managing those bread-and-butter issues — vox populi must have its way.

Mr Robert Walter MP: I wish to make three relatively brief points. The first concerns making law. For a number of years, the separate legislative provisions for Northern Ireland have meant that a great deal of time has been spent in the House of Commons enacting primary and secondary legislation that was specifically for Northern Ireland and that did not relate to the rest of the United Kingdom. That was time taken up legislating for one small part of the UK. I have a particular interest in that because, on Friday of this week, I hope to get a Second Reading of a private Member's Bill — the House of Commons (Participation) Bill — that will provide for English Members of Parliament to deliberate on English legislation in the House of Commons without the interference of Northern Ireland, Scottish and, sometimes, Welsh Members of Parliament.

That issue came home to me because my postbag is full these days with letters from constituents who are concerned with what some people may think of as obscure sexual orientation regulations — The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 — that have been imposed on Northern Ireland by ministerial diktat. The regulations allow gay couples to adopt, and they force religious adoption agencies, particularly Catholic and Protestant ones, to provide for gay adoption, which is against the teaching of both Churches. I suspect that if Stormont were up and running those regulations would have made no headway in Northern Ireland.

My second point concerns the observance of law. The motion states:

"welcomes the decision by Sinn Féin to join with the other political parties in supporting policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland".

That is absolutely right, but it is appalling that that should have to be included in the motion. It should have been part of the original agreement that all parties support policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

That was brought home to me this morning while I was watching the Northern Ireland opt-out on the BBC news, on which we seem to hear about shootings, attacks and murders. I reflected that the local opt-out in my region, the south of England, usually has an item about a cat up a tree. It would be nice if we could now move to a situation in which paramilitarism did not degenerate into organised crime and the normalcy of life were restored, so that BBC Northern Ireland could carry reports about cats up trees rather than about shootings and murders. That is one of my wishes for the future.

10.15 am

Thirdly, it has already been mentioned that we have felt as close as this before with regard to what is happening in Northern Ireland this week; however, we have not had as many of the pieces in place before. It would seem rather trite to say that one hopes now that men of goodwill can come together to make the Assembly work, but I sincerely hope that men and women who believe in human rights, the rule of law and democracy will make it work.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD: I am grateful for the opportunity to add briefly to the discussion. I join other Members in welcoming the steady progress that has been made since the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement — the process of bringing political normality to the Six Counties.

The fact that the elections are about conventional economic and social issues gives a strong indication of the steady movement that there has been away from the more intense political debate. That is to be welcomed, and, with the passage of time and the establishment of a strong Assembly and Executive, we should not underestimate the challenge that there will be to maintain stability.

Gerry Adams said that an Executive dominated by the DUP and Sinn Féin would result in “a battle a day”. Although that may have been a throwaway political remark, it may set the template for the days ahead in getting a working arrangement in place in the Executive and the Assembly. I hope that every conceivable segment and grouping in the population of the North of Ireland will be represented in the Assembly, because, as the BIIPB has demonstrated, it is important that every conceivable opinion be involved and contributing in order to get on to a positive wavelength.

The plaudits are being handed out this morning for the steady progress that has been made, and the role and significance that the Body has had in promoting a wider and deeper understanding of the issues that afflicted and affected the North of Ireland should not be underestimated. I have been a Member of the Body for a while, but there are some Members present who will vouch for the fact that the earlier days of the Body’s existence were particularly difficult and, in many ways, mirrored the sort of problems that existed at that time. However, it is important that the role that the Body has played be recognised. Its role could easily be underestimated.

It is good that both Governments are discussing an economic package that will, I hope, regenerate the economy in the Six Counties. That package will be vital. The conventional economic environment as a function and an entity has some distance to go, but the importance of having a good, strategic plan for the investment decisions and the co-ordination of infrastructural decisions will be an integral requirement for that strategic regeneration.

I will explain that with a couple of examples. Everyone along the east coast is delighted to have the road from Dundalk to Newry. That is a very good flagship project. It is ahead of schedule and, hopefully, it will open later in 2007. Motorists travelling from Dublin to Belfast will have an easier journey, and the road will do much to break down the barriers that exist.

For some time, I have advocated the need to look at the road network into Crossmaglen, which was at the epicentre of the troubles for 30-plus years, and to ensure that it becomes a vital part of the infrastructural plans. There are other crossborder roads from Louth right across to Donegal and Derry that must be developed and upgraded. Their development would contribute enormously to the local economies on both sides of the border.

There are different reports in today's newspapers, but one commentator states that apathy about the election campaign in the North is prevalent. That is surprising to learn. It may simply be one person's judgement on the mood and on the general organisation of the respective parties' election campaigns, but the election is vital, and it would be disappointing to think that people were apathetic about it. I hope that, when the election is over and the results are in, we will be set fair for the establishment of a stable Assembly and a workmanlike Executive for years to come.

The Baroness Blood: Many Members have mentioned the changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland. Those changes are stark: if one goes across Northern Ireland, one will find that it does not bear any resemblance to how it was 10 years ago. During this election campaign, I have been amazed that no flags are to be seen across Northern Ireland. That may not be recognised as a big step forward in constituencies in other parts of the country, but it is in Northern Ireland. The changes that there have been in Northern Ireland have been coming for a long time, and although — rightly — we talk a lot about the political situation, much work has been done on the ground. I heard someone say the other night that power sharing had been happening at grassroots level for a long time, and that is true. It has happened in communities through, dare I say, integrated education, which is no longer a voodoo phrase. Nowadays, everyone talks about integration and sharing. That is a big step forward for Northern Ireland. The changes have been immense; I hope that, come the election on Wednesday, we will have a good turnout.

Mr Kirk talked about voter apathy. I am not so sure; as I travel around, interest varies. The people of Northern Ireland are weary of politics because they have not seen it work for a long time. Who wants to back a loser? However, we might be surprised by the turnout on Wednesday and also by Thursday's results.

Lord Smith talked about a new set of problems in Northern Ireland. If we get through the election and have the prospect of our own Assembly, Northern Ireland will have a completely new set of problems. The review of public administration, as well as various education and health Orders, will be implemented in the next four or five years. We can solve those problems together, because we have come through a horrific 30 years in which grass-roots communities held themselves together. I suppose that the story of the people at that level who kept the thing going, as we say in Northern Ireland, will never be told.

I understand Andrew Mackinlay's point about the Wednesday night debate in the Commons. It vindicates my feeling that there should be no double jobbing. Either you represent people in Parliament or you represent them in the Assembly. One should have no bearing on the other; that is something that we should examine.

Robert Walter talked about The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006. It is well known that I was the only Northern Ireland peer to vote in favour of those regulations, purely from an equality point of view. Whatever problems those regulations might throw up for people in different constituencies, we simply cannot refuse everyone the same equality. That is from where I was coming when I voted in favour of their being introduced.

I look forward to our new Northern Ireland on Thursday and to how we might move forward. It is great to see that Sinn Féin has come on board on policing and that our politicians are beginning to talk to one another. It is interesting to note that a little event at Lagan College in Belfast for first-time voters was very well attended.

I watch our politicians on the television, and, as Senator O'Rourke said, they are now being asked about domestic rates, education and health. I do not mean to be derogatory, but some of them are really struggling when asked about those matters. They have never been asked real political questions before. *[Laughter.]*

I hope that we will enter a new era on Thursday. The Body can take much credit for pushing things forward and for backing people in difficult circumstances at one time or another. Of course, my dream is that in the new Northern Ireland, integrated education will become a true reality.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I must begin by thanking the Lord Dubs for his commendation of all those involved in the events at Croke Park on Saturday 24 February. Their actions encapsulated a great deal. We can imagine, if the Northern Ireland Assembly had been put in charge of that day, how long it would have taken to decide what songs could be sung or not sung. The fact that we got over that day and managed to sing all the songs was quite an achievement.

I hope that Members will not mind me being a bit sacrilegious, but I had a debate with a taxi driver before the game, who said:

"They're on about the Queen, and they're going to play 'The Queen' at the weekend. I don't know what the craic is about this. She's 82; she's not going to score that many points."

[Laughter.]

Some people said that they did not know whether they would get into more bother for singing 'God Save the Queen', 'Ireland's Call', or the Irish national anthem. The complexities of that day were stated, understated and overstated all in the one go, but it worked out well, and I was glad to be present to witness the event.

Some Members remarked earlier that Donegal is more accessible than ever before. If I could make just one point, it would be about how, for me, the borders that are blurring more and more are leading to a more normal life for people such as my constituents. There will be an election in the Six Counties this week, and there will be one in the Twenty-six Counties in May, between now and the next meeting of the Body.

Cross-border co-operation is already happening on health issues, with two pilot projects, involving weekend on-call doctors and an after-hours system. If someone in my area finds it easier to access services in Derry, he or she can go to Derry to see an on-call doctor. The system works reciprocally in the Aghnacloy and Monaghan areas. The ear, nose and throat (ENT) and dermatology services are reciprocal.

Last Monday, Committee C visited Derry and found that that city even accepts sludge from Donegal. Derry City Council must grapple with the same problems of raw sewage going into rivers, and, as with councils in the South, it must find ways in which to deal with those types of problems. During its visit, Committee C found that common solutions to such problems could be achieved.

The issue of a car ferry for Lough Foyle is proceeding, and the City of Derry airport is being extended, with the Governments from both sides of the border investing money in the project. The offer of free travel has been taken up. Lord Smith mentioned my

question for oral answer, which will be dealt with later. We are considering the development of a medical school at the University of Ulster's Magee campus, and there is also the potential for music therapy to be included in that co-operative venture. Those issues blur the border in a practical and real way, and improve the quality of life for the people whom I represent.

10.30 am

I will give Members some idea of how blurred the border is. On Friday and Saturday, while out canvassing, I met a guy with two Northern-registered cars parked outside his house. He told me that he wanted to hear my views on water rates. I told him I thought that he was thinking of the wrong election. He knew that he had been caught out, but he said that he still wanted to hear my views, so I told him them. I did not want to tell him that, given that he said that he had lived in the Republic for two years, he should not still have Northern-registered cars. However, apart from that example, we have had great discussions about real issues in our area because the border has blurred considerably.

I want the issue of student fees to be resolved. I want Donegal students to be able to go to college in Derry; I do not want them to be discriminated against, and have to go to Dublin, Cork or Galway. At present, Donegal students are barred from receiving bursaries from, or scholarships to, the University of Ulster, and that is unnecessary discrimination. I do not think the same applies the other way around.

I look forward to the rising tide of stability yielding action on the infrastructure of the area. I am glad that our Government are prepared to put their money where their mouth is. I have heard people in my area — those with a republican background — giving off that our Government are going to pay for "that crowd in there". However, what is their long-term goal if it is not to have ease of access, improved infrastructure, a more attractive area and better employment potential?

To heck with what is happening on Wednesday. I would like to be at the next plenary sitting to find out what went on. I hope that rather than being at the cusp of action we find ourselves in the middle of some success.

All the Irish Members of the Body will face hurdles of their own between now and the next plenary sitting.

The Lord Brooke: It is now four centuries since my family came — or went — from Cheshire to County Cavan. To avoid alarm, I shall fast-forward to 1990 when, at the Body's first conference dinner, which took place in my constituency, I spoke as the local Member of Parliament. It is 15 years — give or take a month — since I gave up being Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; it is 10 years since I joined the Body as a full Member; and it is six years since I gave up the chairmanship of the House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. I have now given up full-time membership of the House of Lords, and, this weekend, I entered my seventy-fourth year. Therefore, this is a suitable moment at which to stand down from the Body. It is better to go before people start asking why one does not. I am happy that, since the Taoiseach will address the Body today, this is an historic meeting.

As Members have said, political developments are also at an historic stage, and that warms those of us who have been part of the pilgrimage — at least for the past 18 years. I am delighted that my colleague from Cavan-Monaghan Seymour Crawford moved the motion, not least because he moved the same motion when the Body met in March 2005 in County Donegal, where I also have family roots. It is very pleasant to follow on from the Deputy from County Donegal. When the Body met in Donegal, I had the privilege of winding up the debate in Michael Mates's absence.

Given that my forebear, Henry Brooke, wrote a pamphlet on Irish canals in 1759 — the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of which I shall now miss on the Body — I am delighted that one of Seymour Crawford's priorities is the Ulster Canal project. I shall watch its progress from afar.

To conclude, and to keep within my allotted three minutes, I shall simply wind up my remarks by quoting to a larger audience the sentences with which I wound up my Adjournment motion last year, namely those of a padre to a departing battalion during the First World War who said:

"God go with you everywhere. I can only come as far as the station."

[Applause.]

Ms Liz O'Donnell TD: I recognise and acknowledge the work and intellectual investment that Lord Brooke has put into the welfare of the people of Northern Ireland and, indeed, the people of both islands during the past 18 years. I, too, welcome the progress that has been made since the Body last met, particularly the notable and historic decision, in its own terms, by Sinn Féin, to embrace policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland. That decision has removed the paralysis and untied the knot that caused the DUP to feel unable to share power. I hope that that has truly been achieved.

As Senator O'Rourke has mentioned, the process, full of false dawns and disappointments, has not been for the faint-hearted. It has taken many protracted efforts by the two Governments, the parties and, indeed, the citizens of Northern Ireland to get it to its present point. I look forward to the elections later this week and to the normalisation of politics in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the fact that so many women are putting themselves forward for the Assembly elections in Northern Ireland. I understand that a third of the SDLP's candidates are women. In the context of an optimistic future for Northern Ireland, there has never been a more important time for women to get involved in elected office. For too long, women resiled from what passed for politics in Northern Ireland — name calling and bigotry — and from a situation that was paralysed by a lack of progressive thinking. As well as the normalisation of politics, I hope that we can also look forward to the increasing feminisation of politics. As those who work on the ground know, many women have been to the fore at community level in keeping society together through tough times in Northern Ireland, have borne the brunt of bereavement and the care of those who were injured or sick. On both sides of the conflict, many women have lost husbands and loved ones.

There have been many positive outcomes since the Good Friday Agreement was signed, not least the removal of violence and of the horrible insecurity and fear that people lived under in Northern Ireland. However, one of the greatest disappointments since that agreement has been people's apathy towards the Executive and the Assembly because they have operated only fitfully. It is not just a matter of there being a lack of accountable government, which had been the vision for Northern Ireland — those forums were to be the arenas in which the two communities, in all of their diversity, could see their leaders working together. The executive and the Assembly were to represent a strong example of reconciliation and progress, which has not been seen to date. I look forward to that scenario being played out, so that the people can see their elected leaders working together to solve the problems of modern Northern Ireland. There are many economic challenges, which the Body's various Committees have discussed, such as unemployment and a scarcity of indigenous enterprise.

The North/South bodies have also only been operating fitfully, because of the lack of an Assembly or an Executive. They have been run in care-and-maintenance mode for some time. I look forward to their functioning properly. That will breathe life into the North/South bodies, which were such an important part of the all-Ireland context of the agreement on the political settlement.

The unity, reconciliation and optimism that we as Irish, in all our diversity, felt at the rugby match on Saturday week ago will be replicated if there is a properly functioning Government delivering results and solutions for the people of Northern Ireland, as we too enter a new phase of the relationship between the two islands. I commend the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister and their staff and officials on their efforts and for their ongoing resilience and patience with this protracted process.

Mr Quentin Davies MP: It is a great pleasure and privilege to participate again in the meetings of the Body, to which I was kindly invited as a guest on several occasions when I was shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We may be on the eve of an historic, exciting and encouraging development if successful devolved Government follows Wednesday's election.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the awfulness of the present system of direct rule. I have seen it at close quarters for a number of years. It is even worse than the system that was used to govern Ireland during the nineteenth century. In those days, at least legislation was discussed and openly debated in the House of Commons, and it caused great controversy at the time. Now, however, legislative decisions are taken in a little hole in a corner of a Committee Room by English MPs who have no knowledge of, and even less interest in, Northern Ireland and who have been press-ganged on to the Committee in order to push through laws. I never want to go back to that system of governing Northern Ireland.

As everyone has said, the economy is one of the exciting challenges. There is no inherent reason why Northern Ireland should not be as prosperous as the remaining twenty-six counties have been in recent years. However, there are several obstacles and difficulties that must be focused on. The first of two problems that I have identified, and this has already been mentioned, concerns infrastructure. Both problems that I shall highlight are policy-related, and something can be done about them. A proper motorway connection all the way between Dublin and Belfast is required. Furthermore, a proper motorway system throughout Northern Ireland is needed. The motorway between Dublin and Belfast should continue through to Larne, Londonderry and Letterkenny. That would be enormously important in linking the economies of the different parts of Ireland.

The second problem is tax, which is an issue that no one mentions but one that is easily resolved. We should not forget about tax, because it would be irresponsible and unrealistic to do so. It is difficult to see why, given the choice and all else being equal, any entrepreneur, international or multinational company or anyone who might invest in the island of Ireland would want to invest in Northern Ireland, where the corporation-tax rate is 30%, rather than in the Republic, where it is 12.5%. There would have to be other, very unequal factors for someone to choose to invest in Northern Ireland in those circumstances, because there is a hell of a gap in the rate of corporation tax.

Sadly, for us, I do not think that Gordon Brown will reduce the UK corporation-tax rate from 30% in the Budget later this month. Nevertheless, as long as that enormous discrepancy exists, it must be realised that it is a tremendous handicap on the economy of Northern Ireland, and no degree of artificial subsidy will undo the damage that that anomaly creates.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: First, I must inform the Body that I will not be continuing as a

Member of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, because I will be sidelined at the next election. I am sorry to be losing that contact with the Body.

The Body should send out a clear message of its wholehearted support, which is clear from the comments that have been made, for the timetable for the re-establishment of the institutions in Northern Ireland after the election. I hope that there will be no question of moving to plan B. Regardless of what is happening on the unionist side, I listened to the leader of Sinn Féin over the weekend, and I do not see any problems coming from his party.

Looking at recent events, I sense great support for the institutions in Northern Ireland among the people in this part of the island. The process, therefore, must move on. As has been stated, the work has begun, and the political institutions must be established in the interests of all of the people of this island.

The Lord Glentoran: Croke Park was fantastic. In my maiden speech in the House of Lords, I warned colleagues that wherever Ireland were playing — despite the fact that I have worn a Union Jack on my chest on several occasions — I would be seen carrying a tricolour. I am an all-Ireland sportsman.

That said, the events at Croke Park were as much about politics as sport. The authorities in Ireland, including the President, the Taoiseach, and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána deserve our congratulations on the way in which the whole event was managed. From the public relations to the physical side of policing and general management, it was brilliant.

My Lords —
[Laughter.]

10.45 am

I apologise, Co-Chairmen. I also sincerely hope that devolution will soon be restored. I agree with most of what May Blood said, and I identify with what Quentin Davies said about democratic processes in Northern Ireland. I have spent eight years trying to provide some form of democratic opposition to the governance of Northern Ireland, which has 11 Departments.

I have been working with Trevor Smith and, at times, it has been nightmarish to be faced with statutory instruments that are about the same size as two large Bills or to be faced with budgets that are the size of national budgets, with little support. Trying to carry out any form of democratic examination or to challenge a Government who wish to force things through in a hurry has been extremely difficult. I sincerely hope that that situation is coming to an end.

I know that I always offer a warning and a little pessimism. Nine Conservative candidates are standing in the Assembly election. It is the first time that my party has put forward anything like that number of candidates in Northern Ireland — in fact, it is the first time that more than two or three candidates have stood. I sincerely hope that at least one will be elected.

However, the feedback from our candidates and from unionist friends is that there is a seriously low level of interest in the election. People are talking about domestic matters, and that is very good, but they are not talking about cross-border politics. By and large, people are fed up with politicians and elections. My concern is that there will be a very low turnout. I do not know exactly how that will translate into the number of seats that each party wins in the Assembly.

However, I am sure that both major parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, have different problems with their relationships with each other and over policing and criminal-justice matters. My warning is that no one should lose his or her nerve if it appears that the 26 March deadline will not be met. I am as certain as I can be that both of those parties, and everyone in Northern Ireland, want the Assembly to be reinstated, as does everyone here.

However, Peter Hain has been highly dogmatic and bullish about the 26 March deadline. He, the Prime Ministers concerned and others must not lose their nerve or their patience. They must be prepared to continue negotiations in some form and to offer encouragement for a little longer.

Finally, I will miss Peter Brooke greatly, as I am sure will all Members.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Lord Glentoran: My colleagues and I are most grateful for his anecdotal style, his wisdom and his work for the Body and for Northern Ireland as a whole over many years.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: I begin by commending whoever is responsible for reducing the amount of paper that Members have before them.

Not wishing to damage Robert Walter politically, I commend his initiative on English laws. Many Members, myself included, would love it if that Parliament dealt only with English laws. *[Laughter.]* Far be it from me to intervene in the internal affairs of a foreign country.

Given that humour is on my side at the moment, I wish all those Members present the best of luck in the election. As they say in Irish, “Go n-éirí an bóthar leat” — “May the road rise with you.” I wish all those Members well.

Seymour Crawford began his contribution well this morning by giving an accurate outline of the situation as it was 15 or 20 years ago. Seymour is a man who has lived through that situation, has experienced it first hand and has an intimate knowledge of what violent conflict is about. I share his sentiment up to that point; unfortunately, towards the end of his contribution he slipped into DUP mode with a bit of finger wagging and lecturing of Sinn Féin. I know that that is not Seymour’s wont; I have no doubt that that came from the Fine Gael back room and not Seymour himself. I do not want to praise him too much because I could damage him electorally as well.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD: Keep going.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: A constituency colleague advises me to keep going. Members know that Sinn Féin held its special Ard-Fheis on policing, and they know the outcome of that. If Members do not know, they should be aware that Sinn Féin is doing the business where it counts — on the ground. Sinn Féin is coming off the back of political policing, which involved collusion with unionist paramilitaries. If people have doubts about that, Nuala O’Loan’s report of a few weeks ago should demonstrate clearly what was involved. That report dealt only with a small part of the geography of the place. People need to be aware of what Sinn Féin’s concerns were.

The DUP is the party that wanted the election. It now has its election. I hope that the word “democratic” in its name is lived up to and that it respects the outcome of Wednesday’s election when the votes are counted. I also hope that it will make restoration happen on 26 March. There is no reason in the world why that should not happen; indeed, there is no reason why all the issues that Members raised this morning should not be worked on.

This is dangerous territory, but I agree with Quentin Davies's comments on infrastructure. Without infrastructure, development cannot occur, particularly on the western seaboard. Therefore, an infrastructure needs to be delivered.

Corporation tax has contributed to the economic boom that has been experienced in this state. That tax should be introduced on an all-Ireland basis because, as Members know, the Northern economy is a basket case that needs developing.

As far as the economic dividend is concerned, there are huge opportunities in tourism. People outside the Body and this island probably do not appreciate the full natural beauty of the country, particularly that of the six north-eastern counties. I hope that any economic dividend will provide funding for development of that important sector. In conclusion, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh, I look forward to the Body's next meeting.

However, I must be elected to attend, and like many other colleagues here today, I might not get elected. In the event that I retain my seat, I am looking forward to the next session. I hope that at that point unionist colleagues will be present, and, of course, a Sinn Féin colleague as well. Two Sinn Féin delegates versus the rest — that would make it even odds, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh.

The Lord Dubs: I agree with what Arthur Morgan has just said. I hope that politicians from Stormont will soon attend meetings of the Body and that all the main parties from Stormont will be represented.

That would strengthen the Body and would be important symbolically, provided that there is a successful outcome in the next few weeks.

I want to add my own words to what has already been said about Peter Brooke. I am sorry that Peter has decided to leave the Body, because it will not be the same without him. We shall miss him desperately. Not one Member has ever thought that he should leave; everyone says that he should stay. I am not sure whether he is open to persuasion, but he has enlightened our deliberations and made them more interesting. His insights are penetrating, and if he decides to leave the Body, we shall miss him enormously.

I could become emotional about everything that has happened in recent years. In the early days of Mo Mowlam's tenure as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when she was my boss, and Paul Murphy's for a time, she said that Stormont had to be opened up to ordinary people and that that could be done by holding a pop concert in the grounds. Elton John brought people in from everywhere — Derry, Dublin, Cork and Belfast. As we listened to pop music, there was a real sense of integration. Some people thought that that was not right for Stormont, but, my goodness me, it was a symbolic gesture of what could be done and of how to move forward.

For a long time, I have thought that people in Northern Ireland were ahead of the politicians, and that has been demonstrated by Members' comments. I hope that the politicians will learn to catch up quickly. I am concerned that people are inclined to sneer at politicians in Northern Ireland and denigrate them. That is a pity, not because politicians should say that all politicians are wonderful human beings, but because it is sad for democracy when people are scathing about their politicians. I hope that Wednesday's elections, and events thereafter, will allow politicians to earn more respect. In order for democracy to function, politicians require a certain amount of respect.

In recent years, there has been one large difference between Ireland, North and South, and that is the contrast between the self-confidence in the South and the lack of selfconfidence

that pervades the North generally. That lack of self-confidence is diminishing, and I hope that that trend continues, because it is needed for the economy and for social and political life.

I also pay tribute to May Blood. She does not know what I am about to say, but she has demonstrated in the UK Parliament what an enormous contribution politicians from the North can make and what an enormous contribution she makes through her personal experience. Long may she continue to do so. I agree with May Blood's sentiments about integrated education. I hope that more parents in Northern Ireland will be given the choice of sending their children to an integrated or a non-integrated school. I agree with Quentin Davies's point about corporation tax. There must be some way in which to encourage more inward investment; a differential in the rate of corporation tax between 12.5% in the South and 30% in the North creates a barrier.

Liz O'Donnell spoke about the role of women, and Northern Ireland was certainly a male-dominated society when I had some influence on decisions about appointments. Aideen McGinley is a former chief executive of Fermanagh District Council, and the first woman in Northern Ireland to hold such a position. We put her on many committees, and she once said to me that she ticked all our boxes: she was a woman, was a Catholic, came from west of the Bann and, because of the way in which we were treating her, she would soon be disabled. *[Laughter.]*

I have enormous hopes for what is about to happen in Northern Ireland. If everything works out, I shall feel very emotional indeed, because it will represent a new era for the people of Ireland and, indeed, the people of Britain.

The Baroness Harris: I agree with almost everything that has been said, and I especially agree with Alf Dubs's remarks. Of course, I do not agree with Robert Walter's remarks on sexual orientation. We recently had a good debate on that issue in the House of Lords.

I thank Liz O'Donnell for raising the issue of women and the difficulties that women face in Northern Ireland. There is no better advocate for women than May Blood. I echo everything that Alf has said. She is such an advocate for Northern Ireland and for women in Northern Ireland, and we are fortunate to have her in the UK Parliament. I thank May for everything that she does for us.

When I started to speak on Northern Ireland matters two or three years ago, I was struck by the male-orientated style of politics. My background is in policing and police authorities in England, on which I have worked for 20-odd years, so I have been used to the male-orientated style of Northern Ireland politicians in the House of Lords. It is time that more women were in there to soften it up a little.

11.00 am

Lord Smith and Lord Glentoran spoke about the lack of time that we have to talk about Northern Ireland matters. A couple of weeks ago, we spent about two hours discussing a budget of more than £11 billion for Northern Ireland. That situation cannot continue. Let us hope that, come 26 March, it will be completely outside the UK Government's power to spend that amount of time or money talking about issues that rightly should be the purview of local politicians dealing with local matters in the Northern Ireland Government.

To reiterate — Lord Glentoran touched on this — the Secretary of State clearly told us that there would be no plan B after 26 March. If the Assembly does not come together and an Executive not formed, it is direct rule for Northern Ireland. Nobody can countenance that — least of all the people of Northern Ireland. It is absolutely essential

that the politicians there get together and work together, however hard that may be. I do not minimise the difficulties ahead for all of them, but they must keep at it. They will get all the support and help that any of us can give them, but there is no plan B. Stability is the key, and we all trust that that can be achieved.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: We do indeed live in momentous times. Who would have thought 10 years ago that the IRA would give up its arms, Sinn Féin would agree to policing in Northern Ireland and the GAA would allow 'God Save the Queen' to be sung at Croke Park? Moreover, within a month, it is to be hoped that Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams will be sitting in an Executive. Those are fantastic steps.

Tribute has been paid to ABC — Ahern, Blair and Clinton. Other people should also be recognised, however, not least to Peter, Paul and Mo: Peter Hain; Paul Murphy, who was there from the beginning as Mo Mowlam's Minister; and Mo Mowlam, who was probably the chief architect of the success that we have seen over the past 10 years. We should also pay tribute to the political parties in Northern Ireland. The finger has been pointed at each one in turn to say that they have not moved fast enough, but each one has been looking after its own community and bringing it along with it. That is thanks to the leadership of Sinn Féin; of the SDLP and John Hume; of David Trimble who took a political hit at the previous Assembly election and at the general election for the role that he played; and — dare I say it, as the grandson of a 1916 man — of Ian Paisley. Credit should be given to him. He will hopefully deliver what will be a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Members have noted the importance of infrastructure, and I share that view. Infrastructure can open up Northern Ireland economically, socially and politically. We must concentrate on road, rail, air and port facilities there.

On my visits to Northern Ireland, I have witnessed the insularity and isolation that extends to street level, where a worker will not go beyond his street or will only do so in one particular direction, because he fears for his safety. We need to break down that insularity and isolation through travel, and if the state can intervene through providing all-island passes for pensioners or, as Andrew Mackinlay suggested, through school swaps for children, it should. Travel broadens the mind.

Lord Smith made a special plea for all-Ireland co-operation and investment in higher education. That is great, but, in the North, investment should be made in the early years of education. Fifty per cent of what one learns is learned by the age of five, and one's language and thought processes are developed by the age of two. As the Jesuit saying goes:

"Give me the child when he is seven, and I will show you the man."

Therefore, I make a special plea for early-years investment in the North when the new institutions are established.

I hope that the Body and its Members will use their personal and political influence on the politicians in the North to join the BIIPB and to experience the camaraderie and friendship that I have experienced over the past six or seven years. Breaking down barriers at any level is a good thing, and the Body has a powerful role to play in doing that.

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I do not know what has happened to the Body. Eighteen Members have spoken, they were asked to limit their contributions to three minutes, and no one has gone over that limit. The Co-Chairmen have not once had to say, "Come on, finish what you are saying." Everyone has done as they were told. That is the atmosphere that now exists. There has been hardly anything in those 18 contributions

with which one would disagree.

There are three main themes that I wish to mention. First, I want to mention what happened at Croke Park. I was watching on the television at home, and, because of all the hype beforehand, I knew what would happen. I knew, for instance, that there might be protests or silence. However, suddenly I heard that singing, and — because of how the sound was working in that huge ground — for a moment I thought that it was the British contingent, but then it was absolutely clear that it was not that. Although I agree with Lord Glentoran that thanks are due to those who organised the event, it is the 81,000 people who were there that one wants to thank. One must realise that that is the change that has happened. The thanks are due to those thousands of people who made it happen and not to the leadership who wanted it to happen. I found the occasion very moving indeed.

It is a sad occasion here because we have got departers — Séamus Pattison and Joe Sherlock. They are old friends and sparring partners, and they both — in their own way — have contributed a great deal to the Body. I also deeply regret the unenforced and, to me, completely surprising departure of Peter Brooke. He said that he was present at the Body's first conference dinner in 1990 as the local Member of Parliament. The roof will fall in on me if I am wrong, but I think that I am the only person who was there then and who has been here ever since. If there is someone else, I apologise most humbly. The change that has come over the Body in 17 years — to say nothing of what has been going on outside — is enormous and palpable. Although some of today's remarks have sounded like those that would be made at a wake for the Body, I take exactly the opposite view. Yes, the Body has done a great deal of good work behind the scenes, at the margins and in learning to understand one other. However, this is a new era, and, if all goes well, the Body will be refreshed by a bunch of people who will come here next time and not understand what we are about or what we have been doing. They will not know us, and, therefore, the whole business that was started so well in 1990 and that has continued can be repeated.

If I may so without being impertinent, the same thing will happen at Stormont if an Executive is formed. There again, people who for years have not known each other, or not known what makes each other tick, will have to come together to work, sometimes in Committees, to discuss rather boring and tedious things. That is when they go out for a cup of coffee and get to know someone who was once their enemy. We are not there yet, but the way in which that arrangement has worked in the Body is a model for everyone else.

Many Members have talked about the next two days. I take a slightly different view. It is not about what happens in the next two days, which can more or less be predicted, but about what happens in the following three weeks. That is the crunch. There will be people, even at this stage, who will not want devolution to happen. We may well have some violence or a terrible incident. I hope that we will not, but there are people out there who are still absolutely opposed to what the majority of people in Northern Ireland are trying to do. I hope that should that happen, we all keep our nerve and not let it distract us.

The Government are right to have set a deadline and to say that there is no plan B. I do not necessarily think that it is true that there is no plan B, but they are right to say that, because minds must be concentrated. I hope that the leadership that has been shown throughout this long and tortuous process will stay with us to the end and that the leaders concerned will eventually produce the solution that we all want.

Talking of leadership, Lord Smith mentioned three, and Chris Ruane mentioned three more. I wish to mention one more from each side, because, although I salute what Tony Blair has done, John Major started the process. He was the first Prime Minister to

take a personal interest in the matter and to put his personal imprimatur on it. It was he and Albert Reynolds who produced the Downing Street Declaration, which was the first brick out of the wall. I take nothing away from Lord Smith's and Chris Ruane's credit to the others, but John Major should be mentioned in that context.

If we get an Executive at Stormont, we will have to do what we can, in our own legislatures, and in the Body when the time comes, to nurture that Executive along and to advise and help, because most of us have been there before in one form or another. Many of those who will be elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly will not have been in that situation before. The best thing that we can do is to ensure that their way is made as smooth as possible, because there will be some rough edges. There will be some difficult decisions that anyone involved in running a Government, an Assembly, or a devolved Administration has to face. There will be unpopularity over things that need to be done and things that have been wrong for so long.

The particular difficulty that will arise when one is talking to elected rather than appointed people will centre on the cross-border institutions. That has become much easier because of the work that has been done in the various bodies since the Good Friday Agreement and the agreements that were made before that. However, when we are talking, as some Members have today, about taxation and investment, it would not be me if I did not take one little swipe at Arthur Morgan when he asks the English not to interfere in our affairs, yet says, "Can we have some more money?" *[Laughter.]*

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: You owe it to us. *[Laughter.]*

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: That is the statutory swipe, Arthur; I shall say no more. All those matters must be discussed, I hope, with the same goodwill that we have shown around this table. I hope that I speak for everyone when I say that the great thing about today is that we are nearly there. Let us all hope that we can take the final step.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Thank you very much, Michael. Indeed, thanks to all who have spoken. It has been a very useful debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body reiterates its welcome for the St Andrews Agreement of 13 October last and commends the two Governments and the political parties for their efforts to restore the political institutions and restore devolution for the people of Northern Ireland; welcomes the decision by Sinn Féin to join with the other political parties in supporting policing and the rule of law in Northern Ireland; notes that elections in Northern Ireland are to be held on Wednesday 7 March, and reiterates the importance of this opportunity to establish a devolved power-sharing government for the benefit of the whole community; encourages the parties to work after the election period towards the establishment of devolved government by 26 March 2007 in accordance with the St Andrews Agreement; and resolves that upon restoration of devolved government, it will initiate consultations with the newly elected Northern Ireland Assembly to agree an inclusive East-West inter-parliamentary framework which will embrace all interests, as envisaged in that agreement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I said at the outset that we might not be able to take a break. However, we can now break until 11.30 am.

The sitting was suspended at 11.13 am.

The sitting resumed at 11.42 am.

RACISM AND SECTARIANISM: EQUALITY IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): There may be a few stragglers, still having tea or coffee, but I think we ought to start. We have an interesting session ahead of us for the remainder of the morning. I am very pleased to welcome Denis Bradley, an old friend of mine and former vice-chairman of the Northern Ireland Policing Board, Gerry Carson, who was the vice-chair, and Mr Nick Harkness, who is the director of the Participation Unit of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. They have kindly agreed to address us today. They will speak for about 10 or 15 minutes each and then members will have an opportunity to put questions to them before lunch at 1.00 pm.

Before I ask Denis to speak I shall tell a little story which he may find entertaining. On one occasion, when I was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, there was a disagreement between Dr Paisley and Denis about—I cannot even remember what it was so it could not have been that important; but at the time it seemed important. Dr Paisley wanted to meet me about it. I agreed. He came in and I said, “Good Morning Ian, how are you? What’s this about Denis Bradley?” He said, “Well, you’re a papal knight—I said “I am”—so get out your sword and arrest him”. I never did and that was it after that. It is a great pleasure to welcome Denis. He did a great job as vice-chairman of the Policing Board.

Mr Denis Bradley: Thank you, Paul. To be arrested by a papal knight would be some honour; to be arrested by a Welsh papal knight might be an even greater honour.

It was Pat Carey who asked me to talk on this subject except I do not think I had the wit at the time to ask him what I was supposed to say.

Sectarianism and racism is probably the biggest subject, philosophically, theologically, and politically, one could address. To do it in 10 minutes is some feat but I intend to do it.

The Churches in this country have addressed the issue to some degree, at least at a theoretical level. There have been a number of good reports which are both substantive in their research and changing in their aspirations. Some members may have heard of the Hard Gospel, an initiative of the Church of Ireland. Other reports have been produced under the auspices of the Irish School of Ecumenics, a very advanced and progressive body of people, which has its headquarters in this city but works a lot in the North.

11.45 am

According to a definition given by the Church of Ireland, sectarianism is a “complex of attitudes, a complex of beliefs, behaviours and structures, in which religion is a significant component and which, one, directly or indirectly, infringes the rights of individuals or groups, and are, two, influences or causes situations of disruptive conflict”.

That is a reasonably comprehensive definition of sectarianism. Racism is probably easier to define. It is a belief in the superiority of a particular race or it could be that human abilities are determined by race and by colour

and other sub-divisions of the human condition.

It might be argued that sectarianism has its roots in religion and that racism has its roots in politics, but that is far too simplistic, particularly within a Christian context. Ever since Constantine converted to Christianity—I was going to say “Catholicism” but that is the influence of papal knights on my left—and Christianity moved from the margins into the mainstream, it is probably true that religion and politics have been reasonably well bonded together, sometimes fortunately but quite often unfortunately.

Coming back to our society, in this deep-rooted, complex and difficult area of sectarianism and racism, can anything be changed in the short term? Can anything be achieved that pulls out some of the roots from that which is deeply embedded within mental attitudes, within history and within the human condition? The best I can offer is a number of examples that have had influence in various areas and in various positions, from the individual through to the structural, from the religious through to the political. You can see, in the context of Ireland or Northern Ireland, some very good examples that have brought about change. The biggest example, and the one for which you should take some credit—perhaps not you individually although some of you will have been involved in it—is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. In my opinion, the biggest change mechanism within these islands is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It is the foundation on which all else is built. As I walked through the door late, I heard Michael Mates ask whether there is a role for this body in the future. You would be foolish to drop the role of this body in the future because you might be dropping it for too long, given that we have had 800 years of disagreement. To drop it after 11 years could be an act of folly, which politicians perhaps might be accused of being up for. In this case, I hope that you are not.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement put functionality into that which was dysfunctional. It must not be forgotten and it must never be put aside. All the rest is built on that agreement. Whether it came into being by accident, or as a reaction to an unfortunate set of circumstances, is not pertinent at this moment. What is pertinent is that it contains and supplies stability to all else that has happened on this island. It set down the pathway for the Good Friday Agreement and all that came out of that.

When the Good Friday Agreement came about, we had a police service which for historical reasons was 90 per cent Protestant and 10 per cent Catholic. Chris Patten and the members of his commission came along and said, “We have to find a mechanism to undo that. Whatever the rights and wrongs, what is important is the future. We have to create a police service that is reflective of the broad diversity within society”. He got the British Parliament to go to Europe to get a derogation from labour merit legislation. We created what is known as 50:50. Chris Patten also had the wisdom to say that this was a derogation and that when 30 per cent came from the Catholic community and 70 per cent came from the Protestant community, the merit principle must come back into being based on the human rights aspect—that human rights are more important than history, but history needs to be attended to. Legislation was used on that occasion to bring about the change that was necessary to bring stability into a difficult political situation. We have seen the outworkings of that. I do not say that the stability and the creation of the police service are based on 50:50, but the police service is 80:20 and heading upwards towards 70:30. It will be at 70:30 within a few years if it keeps going in the same direction because the 50:50 principle is still there. But it was put there for a specific

reason and for a targeted purpose. When that is achieved, it will have to go because it is not based on human rights. One of the difficulties we will face in the future in Northern Ireland is the institutionalisation of sectarianism. That must be avoided at all costs. Human rights were at the centre of the Patten Report and human rights should be at the centre of all politics and all structures.

Those are some of the big issues, but they are not the only ones. Sport is a big issue. The rugby match has already been referred to this morning. I had the privilege of being there. I was invited by the Taoiseach's office and the Department of Foreign Affairs. It was a magnificent day. However, other things are happening positively about sectarianism in this country. Tonight, there is a football match between Linfield and Glentoran under the auspices of the Setanta Cup. Last week, Derry City played Glentoran. Some of the biggest changes I have seen on the streets of Northern Ireland have come about because of the Setanta Cup. Linfield came to the Brandywell. The Brandywell is in the heart of the Bogside. It was one of the most enjoyable nights I have ever experienced. It happened last year and it will happen this year. It was not even a news story that Derry were in Glentoran last week. The Setanta Cup is an all-Ireland football competition. The truth is that rugby players and GAA players are the civilised people when it comes to sport and we soccer people are utterly uncivilised. We are the real sectarian bigots.

The Setanta Cup is a wonderful institution. It came about for two reasons. The clubs were going down the tubes and an all-Ireland league was probably a step too far. So Setanta Sports came up with the bright idea of televising most of the matches at an off-peak time—Monday night—and have four clubs from the North and four clubs from the South. It has worked incredibly well. It has brought about real friendships within difficult areas. Sport can play its part, should play its part and will play its part. Protestant people, particularly those from working class communities, sometimes rightly say that the British and Irish Governments bent over backwards to accommodate Sinn Féin and the IRA—there is a point in that—but so they should have and it was correct to have done so. But some of them say, “What about us?” They said that until they met Áine De Baróid, who works for Martin McAleese, the husband of the President of Ireland, and then they said, “But those are good people. They have stayed with us during the hard days”. To be very fair to the British Government and the Northern Ireland Office, they have put their money where their mouth is. What am I referring to? I am referring to the wonderful work done by the Department of Foreign Affairs, mainly through Áine De Baróid. They have sat for hours, days, weeks and months with difficult people who other politicians would not touch, people who were seen as the nasties of Northern Ireland society, particularly the UDA, who were beyond the beyond—the drug dealers and the sectarian raiders of Catholic homes. Áine De Baróid and Martin McAleese sat with those people and cajoled and coaxed. They have won a wonderful victory. There are so many people within that community who now feel strong enough to come out and say, “We will not be fighting if Sinn Féin go into government. We will be supporting that move forward”. That has been hard work, dedicated work and transforming work. Much of it was based on an obscure and distorted vision of history and some of it was based on a twisted type of religious loyalty. However, it has found its way into a more equal, wholesome and sane place. If there is trouble on the streets of Northern Ireland in the next couple of weeks—I do not think there will be—it will not come from the UDA. That is down to the work of a small group of people, who have

transformed the situation.

One of the great debates in Northern Ireland was whether this was a political problem or a religious problem. As I said earlier, no one has a full answer to that because both are obscured in the day to day, year to year, century to century integration of both of those situations. There are no obvious religious leaders here to tackle some of the theological questions that lie at the heart of some of our problems. When we have people who say, "Your Church is not a Christian Church" or who say, "Your Church may be a Christian Church but it is not in full communion with God or with Christ", we begin the arguments that are pertinent to the foundations of disunity and disorder. They exist not only in Ireland. One of the fierce debates going on in England at the moment is not between Hindu, Jew and Muslim but between believers and non-believers. The biggest hard-cover best-seller in Ireland at the moment is a book about atheism and the horrors of religion. That argument will not go away. Unfortunately, ecumenism within the Churches has fallen on hard days. The coffee mornings have almost disappeared. They have brought about little or no transformation anyway—nor should they have. Christian Churches must theologise together. If we were ever to have something that was utterly transforming, it would be an ecumenical council of the nature of the Second Vatican Council, except that it would include all Christian Churches. That is what we really need internationally. The possibility of that happening at the moment is almost zero.

What do we do in the meantime? We do what our president did. We commune in each other's Churches. Those of us who have no intention of leaving our own Churches should be the first into the Church next door that is not of our denomination—to commune and eucharise with them. That is what, individually, we should be doing in the absence of the Churches coming together and having proper theological dialogue.

12.00 noon

One of the things in the North that is difficult to get our minds around is the past. The past has also been sectarianised. When we do a job, we do it well. We have sectarianised the past in the sense that we almost have people who represent Protestant dead and people who represent Catholic dead. It is not as crude as that, but it is not a million miles from that. Last week, the chairman of the Policing Board, Sir Desmond Rea, called for a commission to deal with the past. Two years ago, he and I supported each other in going to Paul Murphy to propound that idea. It would not be so much a commission, although that word could be used, as a study group. All of Northern Ireland needs to examine and face up to the past in a proper and honest manner. At the moment, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is taking the full and complete burden of the past. I have not at times been the easiest on the RUC but it was not responsible for everything that happened in our past. If we are going to face the past in a way that will allow us to walk from it, through it, past it and into the future, we need collectively and communally to face up to some hard issues. By the way, I do not think the Irish can walk away from it either. I do not think the Irish Government can say, "That's all their problem up there". The Irish have an important part to play in that whole process.

Things have changed enormously in the North of Ireland. I have not even gone into the racism issue, but I think that the police are much more capable at the moment of communicating with ethnic groups. It is also not

unsymbolic that, in the last round of applications to join the Police Service of Northern Ireland, 900 people from the Polish community applied. The British Government are very generous. We pay our police officers very well. No one knows that better than someone who comes from eastern Europe.

Northern Ireland is unrecognisable. I agree with Michael Mates when he says that it is not this Wednesday that is important; it is the next three weeks. It is not even the next three weeks. There is no going back. The people are not for turning. The people have come through and they are not going back. They are telling their politicians that. If their politicians refuse to make deals, if they refuse to bring this to political closure in the sense that they give us 10, 20, 40 or 50 years of freedom from turmoil, the people are not going back. That is the greatest movement away from sectarianism that I have witnessed in my lifetime.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Denis, thank you very much for an extremely interesting and thoughtful presentation to us. Members will have the opportunity later, if they wish, to put some points and questions to you. We move now to Gerry Carson, the vice-chairman of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. The issue of sport—we have touched on it once or twice this morning—is hugely significant in bringing people together and in healing. I saw it many times and still see it. We very much look forward to Gerry's address to us.

Mr Gerry Carson: Good morning and thank you Secretary of State—it is difficult to stop referring to you as Secretary of State—Co-Chairman and members for the invitation to be here. Denis referred a few minutes ago to the football match tonight. I was in West Belfast on Friday night at the headquarters of Donegal Celtic, a soccer club modelled on the old Belfast Celtic. One of the events was an acknowledgement to Linfield. One of the representatives of Linfield Supporters Club was given a standing ovation. Denis is quite right. We have moved on apace and sport is playing its role in trying to re-establish that degree of normality and stability that will enable our country to go forward and catch up with the Celtic tiger.

Our presence today is a recognition that sport is important in its own intrinsic right but also in that it can influence positively on many other factors of life. Can sport contribute to the solution of eliminating racism and sectarianism in our communities? Yes it can, even though in some respects I acknowledge that it can also contribute to racism and sectarianism.

Our vision in the Sports Council is simple:

“Through sport, to contribute to an inclusive, creative, competent, informed and physically active society”.

A society in which there is no place for racism or sectarianism. Zero tolerance!

Sport has the potential to play a major role in promoting the inclusion of all groups in society, because it plays a part in forming our community, our culture and our society. We believe that sport can develop through communities and communities can develop through sport. Inequalities, of course, have traditionally existed within sport, particularly in relation to gender, religion, ethnic minorities and disability.

Northern Ireland, I remind members, is the land where traditionally it has not just been the sport one plays that most often indicated one's religion, gender, age and social class. The name of the primary school spelt out religion; indeed it was long claimed that the pronunciation of the letter H, either as haitch or aitch, also denoted religion. The previous speaker, Denis Bradley, according to one community, comes from Londonderry, while those of a different community believe he comes from Derry.

In the North, sport, inevitably, has not escaped the difficulty of operating in a divided society, a society where not so long ago football games and their associated followers invariably produced scenes resembling action replays of the Battle of the Boyne, rather than sporting occasions. Thankfully, in more recent times, there have been dramatic improvements in behaviour and shortly my colleague, Nick Harkness, will refer to some of these models of good practice. He will emphasise that sport has a role—a major role—to play in creating a more peaceful and stable society.

Just look at that recent historic game in Croke Park—it has been referred to four times this morning—and I said game deliberately. I was going to say match, but with a scoreline of 40-13 that would hardly have been accurate.

In the Sports Council, staff has been at the forefront of working to improve community relations in and through sport in Northern Ireland for more than 10 years. In 1997, the council appointed its first community relations development officer—the first such post in the United Kingdom—to raise the profile of these issues and initiate actions to tackle longstanding challenges. The council's equity training programme, launched in 1999, is widely used throughout Northern Ireland by both sporting and non-sporting organisations. It broaches issues of diversity and difference and also informed and shaped the development of the UK Equality Standard, which has been rolled out through the four home country Sports Councils. For more than a decade the council has continued to develop and evolve its role in improving good relations within a variety of diversity settings—disability, minority ethnic groups and cross-community; Catholics and Protestants. The council's equity policy embeds achievable actions designed to resolve the underlying causes of division and inequality and of which sectarianism and racism are two strands, within its core activities. I spoke to Jim Gracey, the sports editor of Belfast newspaper the *Sunday Life*, just last week. We were talking about unacceptable behaviour on the sports field or on the terraces. He said that we are simply seeing a reflection of the society in which people live. A crucial part of the way forward, he believes, is through education, both in the strict sense and in enhanced practices within sport. Those are sentiments with which we must all agree. The better co-ordination of these two elements of education will go a long way towards healing our racism and sectarianism. In the North, the old style of the latter is passing, but I have a personal worry that the regrettable undoubted rise of racism is in effect sectarianism under a new guise.

The majority of our new communities, vital to our health service and improving economy, comprise people from the Philippines and Poland. It is they who are victims of current acts of racism. That activity is inspired, I feel, by the perceived religion of these new northern Irish residents. These new citizens must be protected and sport can play its part in so doing. Sport, I stress, can enable improved lifestyles, give better health and

wellbeing, enrich education, aid community cohesion, and contribute to a more vibrant economy. Within these activities we can and must ensure that racism and sectarianism are relegated to a history which should never be repeated. In Northern Ireland there are 100 sporting organisations, some 5,000 clubs and tens of thousands of volunteers. That is some strength which we must use to show that sport can indeed contribute to the solution to overcoming racism and sectarianism.

I have a closing plea before I hand over to Nick Harkness. In the United Kingdom almost £900 per person is allocated by government to the health service annually, while sport receives roughly £1 per person. On Wednesday Northern Ireland goes to the polls, with a hoped for outcome of a return to devolved government. To those who will be successful I say take just £5 per person off that health budget, give it to sport and we will show between now and the 2012 Olympics the differences that sport can bring to communities.

I now hand over to my colleague, Nick Harkness, the director of the Participation Unit at the Sports Council for Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Gerry. We now look forward to Nick continuing on this very interesting question of sport and how it can heal.

Mr Nick Harkness: Thank you Co-Chairman, thank you Gerry, and thank you all for the invitation to speak here today. There is little doubt that sectarianism has existed in Northern Ireland for decades and continues to exist. Racism is sadly on the increase, with the arrival of migrant workers, who are so important to our society, as was referred to earlier. Today, I want to talk about how the Sports Council for Northern Ireland can make a contribution to solving those problems in our society. We believe that sport is part of the solution, but it has also suffered from the difficulties. There is much evidence to suggest that because of the religious and political problems in Northern Ireland over recent decades, sports development and sports facilities are less developed in Northern Ireland than they are in other regions of these islands.

The Policy Action Team 10 report commissioned by the Government into social exclusion concluded:

“Sport can contribute to neighbourhood renewal by improving communities’ performance on four key indicators—health, crime, employment and education”.

All those are normalising factors in our society, and by sport making a contribution to those factors and normalising our society, we can, we hope, overcome the difficulties of sectarianism and racism and increase equality in our society. Sport is also well recognised as contributing to social capital in our society in three ways: bonding capital, bridging capital and linking capital. In bonding capital in communities that support a particular sport, successes in that sport can help the community to come together and create a glue in that community. However, the downside is that for neighbouring communities that perhaps do not have a similar sporting interest, the bonding that goes on with one can create divisions from its neighbouring communities. However, with more broadly supported sports, bridging capital is possible, where sports that are jointly supported across the divide can act as a bridge between communities. Earlier, we heard

about how the Setanta Cup is contributing to that.

12.15 pm

Sport at a community level can contribute to linking capital, where leaders in sport in communities are brought closer to the structures of power and the structures of local government, enabling society and communities to influence more their own futures. Sport and physical recreation can promote important cultural values that contribute to normalising our society, such as honesty, fair play, respect, tolerance and team work, which are all qualities that come from a commitment to fair play in sport. However, sport has suffered, as have many areas of life in Northern Ireland, from zero-sum politics, where a gain for one side is often seen as a loss for the other. That has resulted, over the decades, in sports facilities and programmes being created in our communities to mirror one another, possibly where a mirror is not required. That is not addressing the needs of communities. We can all think of examples of sports facilities and leisure centres in places where they are not needed because there is a facility just across a divide.

From a policy perspective, there is the overarching policy driver in government in Northern Ireland of "A Shared Future". Everyone will be familiar with that. The overarching objective of "A Shared Future" is the elimination of sectarianism, racism and all forms of prejudice, to enable people to live without fear of intimidation or harassment. We believe that sport has a contribution to make to that objective. "A Shared Future" advocates the shaping of policies, practices and institutions to enable trust and good relations to grow. That should happen both in sport and in community organisations that use sport as a tool for community development. "A Shared Future" also identifies that an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, and that has to include sport.

What is the future? How can sport make that contribution? An important aspect is shared spaces for sport. Historically, too many of our sports facilities and activities have been seen as belonging to one side or the other. Effective community planning is being promoted through the Review of Public Administration and the new local government structures that will emerge over the coming years in Northern Ireland. Sports facilities and sports provision, through effective community planning, need to be of the community and come from the ideas of the community. They need to serve specific community needs, and to some extent they also need to be done by the community. That is the linking relationship that needs to be created between local government and the communities in terms of many services, but in particular, from our perspective, for the role of sport. There is the prospect of a multi-sport stadium in Northern Ireland in the coming years and, irrespective of the political debate about its final location, there is obviously the potential for it to be an iconic feature of the future of sports provision in Northern Ireland, and a shared space within which all the community can celebrate sport and celebrate their growing confidence. The Sports Council currently prioritises applications for funding and takes account of cross-community dimensions and applications that demonstrate a genuine commitment to promoting good relations. It would be difficult for a sporting project that does not support such principles to be supported by the Sports Council. We have examples of Gaelic clubs and rugby clubs throughout Northern Ireland that are going out of their way to attract non-traditional members. Those are the sorts of

projects that we want to be associated with.

Capital projects are just one part of the picture. Too often, there has been an approach of, “Throw some money at some sports facilities and the community will love them, and they will get on really well together as a result of those facilities, and everything will be better”. We have been plagued by that in recent decades. It is what goes on in the facilities that makes the difference. We in the Sports Council are about developing sport in communities and developing communities through sport. It is the often difficult task for organisations like us and organisations on the ground to convince the Government that investing in facilities is great, and we support that, but investing in people is equally important and is often more difficult to achieve.

Professor Bain recently undertook research into the school estate in Northern Ireland and whether that is fit for purpose for a new environment, in particular a new education environment. Professor Bain drew conclusions on a number of areas that are specific to our topic for today. He supported the view that facilities, including sports facilities, should be shared between education and the community. No longer should we see the domain of schools as being only for education, and council or community facilities being only for the community. We are talking about the same young people, irrespective of whether they are in school from nine to half-past three during the day or in a community facility in the evening.

Bain supported the sharing of facilities between communities. Schools and their facilities should no longer be seen as simply being for one community or the other. He proposes strategic planning on a regional basis with regard to the facilities associated with schools and the opportunity for strategic planning to support communities, irrespective of which side of the divide they are from. He supported the provision of facilities that are of a suitable standard both for school and community use. For example—it is surprising, I know—in Belfast there are still schools being built with shale football pitches, 10 years after they should have stopped being used. Bain also supported the concept of the extended school; the school as a hub within the community, not just as an educational facility, but a facility where children can go to before school and after school and engage in worthwhile activities that are not simply focused on their academic development. There has been a cost to segregation over the decades. I have some examples of that segregation today, where there has been a financial cost, a facility cost and a social cost. On average in Northern Ireland, we spend 25 per cent more per head of population on education compared with other regions or home countries. Yet we still have in some areas significantly lower levels of attainment, we have more empty school desks and we have less time allocated to PE and sport in and around schools.

In today's edition of *The Irish Times*, there is an article that refers to research that concludes that Great Britain and Ireland are at the bottom of the pile in Europe for protected time for primary age children's participation in sport and physical recreation. We know that Northern Ireland is behind Great Britain. Over 30 years of double provision in some parts—the zerosum politics that I talked about earlier—has resulted in our much-needed resources being invested in facilities that are not the facilities that we need. Some research that we have undertaken in the Sports Council has identified that in per capita terms we have significant shortages of some types of facilities, including swimming pools, artificial pitches and playing

fields. We have a long way to go to bring our facilities up to a similar standard as exists in Scotland, England and Wales per head of population. There has also been a social cost to living separately. Sport provides numerous opportunities to improve understanding, trust, and respect for others. We are working with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to develop a new strategy for sport and physical recreation to plan where we hope sport will be in 10 years' time, from 2007 to 2017. That was supposed to be launched recently for final public consultation, but that fell foul of the purdah regulations in the run-up to the election. We hope that will be launched soon after the election. During the consultation, it became apparent that people in Northern Ireland overwhelmingly value sport and physical recreation as an important dimension of their culture. More than 85 per cent of people in Northern Ireland believe that sports events project a positive image of the region as a society that is flourishing and proud of its cultural identity; or should that be identities?

The new draft of the strategy proposes a number of high level targets, one of which, in the strategy for the development of sport, aims to maximise the contribution that sport can make to "A Shared Future". There are some examples of good practice. Northern Ireland is striving to improve its image at home and abroad to reflect a new image of a more sustainable, cohesive and prosperous society. Sport has a role to play in that. Sport has demonstrated that it can contribute to those aspirations, and many of my examples have been quoted already today. There was the scrapping of rule 21 in the Gaelic Athletic Association, and Croke Park being used for other codes. In rugby, recently Ulster's Heineken Cup victory was celebrated throughout society, and rugby is making inroads into nontraditional settings and non-traditional schools, taking advantage of the fact that it uses many of the same skills as Gaelic sport, but operates in different seasons. In soccer, we have the "Football for All" campaign, which is both anti-sectarian and anti-racist. At a local level, there is Irvinestown tennis club, in a relatively divided society that has come together around tennis; the honorary presidents represent both the main denominations in the area. Ice hockey at the Odyssey Arena in Belfast attracts spectators and support from right across our society. The Youth Sport programme, introduced by the Sports Council and rolled out through our education boards, introduces in many primary schools in Northern Ireland non-traditional sports that young people would not normally be exposed to.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you, Nick and Gerry, for an excellent presentation on the sports situation in Northern Ireland and how it does great work. We have some time for questions to our three speakers.

Mrs Rosemary McKenna MP: Thank you very much for those three very inspiring presentations. Everyone would agree that we cannot believe how far we have come. There are still small groups of communities where there is evidence of bright young people being afraid to leave those communities in Belfast, for example, to go to college. They still want to stay within their own communities, and there is still a fear factor. Great work is being done at a certain level, but in the community there is evidence of young people finding that difficult. No one mentioned London 2012. Do the sports people think that it will be a positive thing for sport in Northern Ireland?

Mr Gerry Carson: We are in a position in Northern Ireland where there is less of the problem of people moving across from their own areas to move

into higher education. I assume we are talking about higher education. In a previous life, I worked at the University of Ulster. Traditionally, we found it difficult to attract people from certain areas. As a result of going out and trying to establish relationships in the areas from which we were not getting people, over a number of years the situation has changed quite dramatically. People are now more willing to move outside their areas for education. In terms of the strict primary school scene, particularly in Belfast, we have so many unfilled seats as a result of the duplication necessary because of the conflict in communities that the only way forward is for the communities to come together to agree on how we might go forward. Baroness Blood is here, and she is an expert on the problems associated with primary school education.

I briefly mentioned London 2012. I said that if there is some more money, we will show some major differences between now and 2012, but realistically if we were given heaps of money today it would make very little difference in medal potential. We need at least a 10-year run-in to see a difference. I had the honour of representing Northern Ireland on the nations and regions group, which was the support body for the London 2012 bid. Because of the work that we were able to do in Northern Ireland, public support for the 2012 bid was highest in Northern Ireland out of all the UK. That was because people on both sides of the community realised the benefits that would come, not just in terms of legacy but working towards 2012 in all manner of ways, ranging from volunteering to the possibility of firms getting involved with the staging of the Games.

12.30 pm

I would like to think that we would have more people on both the Great Britain and the Irish teams in London 2012, but sadly, unless we started four years ago with the intention of making 2012, for the athletes who we are currently investing money in, it will be after 2012 before we see the gold medals. I confess that I do not see the gold medals that Britain expects coming in 2012, because it takes a long time to raise people up to the standard.

Mr Nick Harkness: On the 2012 question, the Sports Council has recently been provided by the Government with up to £53 million to invest in capital facilities in Northern Ireland. For example, we do not have a 50 metre pool; Ireland as a whole does not have a cycling velodrome or a national sailing facility. We are currently running a competition to build those sorts of facilities. However, that takes time, and the likelihood of those facilities impacting on performances in 2012 is very small. What could make a difference is investment in the revenue side, in coaches, and in the professionalisation of the athlete development side which, because of the scale of Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole, tends to be on an amateur basis.

Mr Gerry Carson: I will come in on that briefly. I should have mentioned that the Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland have been working together very closely over the past couple of years on all-island planning to capitalise on the resources that we both have, so that we are not duplicating each other. We are trying to complement our activities. There is great progress with the Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland working not just towards London 2012, but beyond.

Mr Denis Bradley: Can I try to address a question which I do not know how to address because I do not know whether anyone has successfully addressed it? I am talking about the working-class Loyalist communities and the education standards within them. The late lamented Davy Ervine put this into very pithy and important language, which defined it for people outside those communities, and May Blood has done enormously important work in those areas. Those who know more about this should correct me if I am wrong but if you put money too directly into areas, they become part of a dependency culture which creates further dependencies. But if you do not put money in, how do you get people out of dependency? That is a stark, difficult economic equation.

In working-class communities, particularly Protestant ones, which are perhaps more dysfunctional than the traditional Catholic ones—May Blood would tell you that there are something like 30 churches in the Shankill Road—churches split into fractions, with difficult community infrastructures. That is not quite as apparent in the working-class Catholic, Republican, Nationalist communities, although it does exist. How to manage that is a hard call. Some people say we should put the money into the infrastructure and let people get it directly from jobs and, over the generations, work themselves out of their problems. Others say that we are not helping unless we give them a hand up, particularly regarding education.

Traditionally, Catholic mothers and fathers would walk over you to get education for their children, and pull out your eyes if you got in the way. That remains true to this day. I do not think that that is always the case in other working-class areas that were more attached to apprenticeships. It is a very difficult question and there are no simple answers. But it is a very good question which should be kept on the table so we can keep an eye on it.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We have nine speakers, so I will take three at a time. If everyone makes a note of that, we can probably get through everyone by lunchtime. I will start with Martin Mansergh, followed by David McLetchie and John Griffiths.

Senator Martin Mansergh: I have two questions. One of our besetting sins generally is to want to put all traditions into sealed, watertight compartments. In relation to Gaelic games, it is well known that certain Protestant Nationalists like Sam Maguire were involved. But how well is it known that as a young lad, Edward Carson spent summers with his uncle, the rector of Ardmayle in Tipperary, and played hurling with his neighbours? He is credited with being the first person to have written down rules for hurling when he attended Trinity College Dublin, although I cannot verify that claim.

I am sorry to keep mentioning Tipperary, but Webb Ellis, who founded the rules of rugby, was supposedly inspired by watching Gaelic football, again in the said county of Tipperary. It was good to see two traditions, with some roots in common, coming together in Croke Park two Saturdays ago. We have to get away from this sort of rigid classification.

I have a question for Denis Bradley. We have spent a lot of time this morning and will do in the future discussing problems of sectarianism. He made a very interesting remark about the difference between believers and unbelievers. A serious issue which has preoccupied the British political

system and is also an issue in our jurisdiction is the relationship between equality and religious freedom. In the case of adoption agencies in Britain and pregnancy counselling in Ireland, I would represent the view that there should be a plurality of ethos rather than one rule imposed on all, forcing certain religion-based organisations to act against their ethos or else go out of business.

Mr David McLetchie MP: I was very interested in the observation or perception that racism in Northern Ireland was on the increase, the exemplification being the attacks on and harassment of migrant workers from eastern Europe. I suggest that that is an error in classification for the obvious reason that we and the Poles are of the same race. By definition, and without being unduly semantic, that cannot be racist conduct. That is important not just as a semantic point; how you classify that conduct is important in determining the policy to address it. As someone suggested, it might well be sectarianism in disguise, because Poles are predominantly Roman Catholic, in which case it should be addressed in that context rather than a racist context. Or it might be xenophobia, pure and simple, because they are strangers from another land who have come in large numbers to settle in ours. I suggest that to pin a racist label on what is manifestly not racist is an error in classification that we should be concerned about because it deflects attention from how we should be dealing with the different elements of unacceptable behaviour in our society.

Mr John Griffiths AM: I am a big believer in the power of sport, which delivers cross-cutting benefits in many important ways. The plea for extra funding and the link with the health budget is a case well made. One of the strong cross-cutting benefits of sport is to do with health—the connection between physical exercise, good health and a good preventive policy. On the benefit that sport can have regarding racism, the Show Racism the Red Card campaign in Britain shows powerfully what that sort of campaign can do by distributing videos to schools, having a co-ordinated infrastructure and getting star players to sign up. They have a powerful impact on young people when they front TV campaigns and say things before and after football matches. An awful lot can be done around sport. I want to ask about the wider equality of opportunities agenda in Northern Ireland. We see tremendous change in Northern Ireland, as in many other parts of the world, because of migrant workers, EU enlargement, and refugee and asylum-seeker issues. It is becoming much more diverse, which brings a whole new set of challenges. It is awful to think that some of those issues are being fitted into the sectarian divide, because there could be very positive benefits.

There is a wider equality of opportunities agenda around race and ethnic and cultural diversity, including strands with which we are not so familiar under the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, covering race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief and age. If communities, politicians at all levels and agencies in Northern Ireland have to think increasingly about these things and develop policies, thoughts and actions around them, it might help normalise politics in Northern Ireland and have an effect on the sectarian divide. Are there any signs that people are getting to grips with the new emphasis—the new urgency—around greater diversity in Northern Ireland and the developing wider equality of opportunities agenda? Is that having a positive effect on sectarian politics in Northern Ireland?

Mr Denis Bradley: There is always a danger, which frightens me slightly, of turning Northern Ireland into a freak show. We are not a freak show. Northern Ireland is, outside of the politics, one of the most law-abiding places on earth, certainly in Europe. We have had a bad history of sectarianism, that was mainly—not wholly—the result of getting left behind by bad politics. All of us in this room who are in public life should take more responsibility than we do for the bad politics we played upon the people of Northern Ireland. It is not that we are a rare breed that cannot get past things. Give us the opportunities and the structures and we will get past them as quickly as anybody else. We got bogged down in a European conflict—I say that deliberately—that other people got free of but which had to deposit itself somewhere and it deposited itself in Anglo-Irish relationships, specifically in the north-eastern part of this island. We are getting past this because of good politics. The theology is also changing; I am not saying that we have yet come up with good theology, because I do not think we have, but it is changing. The Churches are being forced into some kind of engagement with each other, even if they do not welcome that.

12.45 pm

Another thing is happening. The Celtic Tiger happened in this part of this island and then visualised itself in the North. People began to see people coming from other places, and pluralism set in. Economic borders do not exist on this island at any real level outside of formal structures of revenue, and so forth. Portuguese people came in initially, followed quickly by Polish people.

Then new myths began to build up; some were helpful, some were not. One was that the Polish are wonderful workers, so everybody looked for Polish people, particularly on construction sites. Another myth was that Latvians are not quite as good workers as Poles. We are already beginning to create definitions. The other thing—I do not know whether it is true—is that they are all terrible drivers.

These things are also growing up in Burnley, London, New York and in a lot of other places. We may deal with some of this stuff better than people in England, because we are deeply interested in religion. We have language and interests, and we have people who know the language of religion. So when people with strong religious convictions come among us, we are not so frightened because we understand that from our own culture. Perhaps your country, which described itself recently, as post-Christian, does not have as much insight or deep knowledge of some of the language to do with religion as this island has.

I think I am waffling, but only because some of the questions were so large and all-embracing that I did not know how to pin them down. So let me hand over to my colleagues.

Mr Gerry Carson: I will make a couple of comments and then pass over to John Hughes, who has been very quiet. He is our expert on equality of opportunity.

Martin referred to the history of sports; he also referred to one of my ancestors, Edward Carson, and asked whether I knew that he played David Gillick. No, I did not know—perhaps I should have.

I think we are breaking down the sealed, watertight compartments of sport in many respects. I see much more crossover from one sport to another.

Nick referred earlier to Gaelic soccer and rugby and the crossover there.

You can add athletics to that. David Gillick, who won the 400 metres superbly for Ireland at the European Championships, could equally have been a top-class Gaelic player. In my time as a competitor, five organisations organised athletics in the island of Ireland. I think that there are only two now and hope that we can look forward to having only one in the future, which would make sense.

In terms of the semantics, I accept the point about the statistics regarding the rise of racism in Northern Ireland. The statistics I referred to are supplied by the Police Service of Northern Ireland; they make it clear which sections of the community are being attacked under the term of racism. Perhaps we need to be more careful about how we describe that. On equality of opportunity, I will pass you over to John.

Mr John Hughes: I am from the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. The last question was about equality of opportunity. As a non-departmental public body, the Sports Council has a legislative duty under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 75, as it is known, places a duty on us to look at nine dimensions of equality and to equality-proof every policy and programme we put in place. So this notion of embedding equality in everything the Government and the public sector do is well established in Northern Ireland. You have only to look at the annual reports from the Equality Commission Northern Ireland in terms of the progress that has been made in the public sector in particular, at local as well as central government level, where equality of opportunity is embedded.

It has to be said that nine or 10 years ago, when the duty was first placed, it was seen as a bolt-on. It was seen as another piece of bureaucracy, another box that has to be ticked. I come from a camp that thinks that what section 75 espoused was good practice. It was common sense; it was about talking to the people whom the policies were designed to impact on, whether they were men or women, people with or without a disability, people of all ages and the various ethnic minorities and groups that were to be involved in sport, or whatever the setting was.

The section 75 duty has embedded a lot of good practice. The equality training pack that Gerry referred to and a lot of the work that Nick mentioned during his presentation grew out of the section 75 duty that was placed on the Sports Council. That work was driven by economic reality.

Sport “employs” the largest volunteer group in the UK. If it was not for volunteers, sport would not be able to function. So why would we restrict ourselves to less than 50 per cent of the population? Why would we not make sure that there is equality of opportunity for women? Why would we exclude 20 per cent of the population who have a disability? Why would we exclude a growing volunteer section of migrant workers and ethnic minorities who are moving increasingly to Northern Ireland?

The point was also made about sport’s economic benefits and the link to health. It is a point well made. We have attempted to put a cost on the implementation over the next 10 years of the new draft strategy for sport and physical recreation. It is fair to say that the cost is telephone figures.

But if it is seen in the context that by 2014, the NHS in the UK will be spending up to 14 per cent of GDP on treating the causes of public ill health rather than public health compared with the 7 per cent that it currently spends, an additional £20 million per annum put into sport and physical recreation starts to seem like a good investment. We will save ourselves five hundreds of millions of pounds per annum.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We will have to quicken and shorten the pace to get everyone in. The next three speakers are Paul Bradford, Jeff Ennis and Alf Dubs. I think Alf has gone, so Paul can speak.

Senator Paul Bradford: I will be very brief. I have a question for Denis Bradley. Thanks for your contribution, Denis. You referred to what you termed the burden of the past and said that there would need to be a collective response or a collective dealing with it. In a way, we have been trying to examine the history of the conflict. What concerns me is that the people who want to open the history books do not seem to want to read all the pages. How do we move on to that phase? Will we have to have a truth and reconciliation commission? What do you feel we should do to deal with what you termed the burden of the past?

Mr Jeff Ennis MP: We have concentrated, quite rightly, on the positive role that sport can play in Northern Ireland in reducing sectarianism. Another movement that can play a very positive role in this regard is the trade union movement in Northern Ireland. Does Denis feel that we are fully exploiting the potential and the positive role model that trade unions can provide in improving the situation?

Ms Jenny Randerson AM: You have talked about the amount of money to be invested in sport in Northern Ireland. In the rest of the UK, the concern is that 2012 will draw lottery money away from many good causes, including the sports lottery. Do you feel that this investment will enable you to buck that trend? In Wales, we rely considerably on lottery money for part of our investment in sport. I was interested in how much you rely on lottery money for sport and whether you feel you will buck the trend that exists in the rest of the UK for lottery money?

My second, very specific, question relates to the programmes for young people to address sectarianism in sport. Is there any difference in your approach to boys and girls, men and women? Has there been any difference in the success of boys and girls?

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you. I ask our speakers to be reasonably brief so that we can get everyone in. There are still four more.

Mr Denis Bradley: I will address the burden of the past first. When we talk about it, we fall into the trap of thinking that either we do not have to deal with it at all or we have to deal with it through a truth and reconciliation process. Every time a commission is talked about, people imagine the truth and reconciliation format they had in South Africa, or something similar. I do not think that that is the reality. There are many more options. This is a difficult, sensitive area, which all Governments have handled badly. When you are faced with a grieving family, the issue is not as objective as it appeared the day before. In the midst of that high emotion, Governments quite often give way to things that they may be unsure about later. The Corry report said that there would be five inquiries of various

natures. People ask, "Why just five. Why not 505?" It is because a Canadian judge said five. Since the Police Ombudsman's report of about three weeks ago into collusion in the past, there have been calls for another five or eight inquiries. That is above and beyond the ombudsman's recommendation that a certain number of murders be reinvestigated. This is difficult territory.

No one has asked people how to handle the past. The Government, all the political parties and the various groups which describe themselves as victims should all be asked. We should ask even more groups, such as academics. When you are asked about how to handle the past and you come up with an answer, if your answer is pertinent only to yourself, your family or your tribe, the next question is, "That handles your side, but how do we handle the other side?" No one has asked those questions, from the top to the bottom. I do not have the answers, but I would love somebody to ask the questions. Otherwise, it becomes more difficult to put the past behind us. It has not been put behind us; people are not letting go. If they were, it would be a different reality.

What was said about using trade unions as a model is always true. My perception is that trade unions were unfortunately sidelined to some degree in the swirl of the northern Troubles. They tried manfully to have a central role and to give good guidance on a number of issues. Trade unions and universities are the two institutions that were perhaps ignored or swept aside and were not as prominent in the Troubles. I would love to see them taken greater store of.

I am aware of the anti-sectarian campaign the trade unions ran in the north of Ireland. Whether it was as effective as it might have been is another question. The politics made that very unlikely, because at that stage, we were barely talking to each other and negotiations were not as in-depth as they later became. So perhaps the trade unions were ahead of themselves and before their time, which made it more difficult. If that is unfair to the trade union movement, I do not mean it to be.

1.0 pm

Mr Gerry Carson: On London 2012, the Sports Council and the majority of people in Northern Ireland supported the London bid. We welcomed it, and we want to see London 2012 being the success that it can and should be. We do not want to see the money that might be spent on elite athletes being spent to the detriment of grass roots sport, which is the lifeblood of all our sports. I have much sympathy with Seb Coe when he talks about the legacy that the Olympics should leave behind. We cannot risk ruining what we have established by concentrating too much on the elite.

We referred to the £51 million that we have been promised by HM Government to upgrade some of our facilities. If London had not been in the running for 2012, Northern Ireland would still be looking for a national stadium, a 50 metre swimming pool and a velodrome. The fact that London 2012 is there has given us the carrot to keep going and to get the facilities up to the level of the rest of the island, not even the rest of the UK. When we compare our facilities—Nick is the expert on this—with the rest of the UK, we are in Joe Soap's land. We do not compare. Forget the Olympics; we want £51 million spent on our stadium, on a velodrome and on a 50 metre pool. In the build-up to London 2012, we want to raise the profile of sport. We want to see more people involved, and we want to see the

benefits of sport being emphasised through involvement with London 2012. Through the success of some of our athletes, the performance levels will come up, and we want to see that involvement become lifelong in the lifestyles of our communities.

Mr John Hughes: One of the speakers asked about the differences in participation between men and women and boys and girls. The latest figures that we have for participation show that there is still a 13 per cent gap between male and female participation in sport in Northern Ireland. The biggest drop-off point for girls playing sport—which is true not only for Northern Ireland—is around those early teen years of 12, 13 and 14 yearolds. A speaker this morning made the point about the importance of early years and the importance of establishing lifestyles and practices in those early years. A lot of our investment at the minute is in children and young people to try to give them life skills and fundamental movement skills—the ability to run, jump, throw, catch, skip, hop—which will take them into any sport and help them to sustain an involvement in sport and recreation on a lifelong basis. To do that they need role models. That is one of the areas in which sport can help to break the glass ceiling for women in sport and in boardrooms. A lot of our investment in community sport is grass roots investment.

There is a project that one of the Members will be familiar with, which is Women in Sport and Physical Activity, which is a programme on the Shankill Road in Belfast. That project started out as a programme that was parachuted in by the local sports development officer, who wanted to run a women-only physical activity session. As a result, the women who presented themselves on that occasion have gone on, over the past eight to 10 years, and established their own committee. They represent their area, and they are a voice for positive change on the Shankill Road and in Belfast as a whole. That has provided the means for them to make their voice heard beyond the Shankill Road and to make sure that the needs of their children are represented and heard.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We are into our lunchtime, so I urge the four remaining questioners and answerers to be as short as they can. We will start with Jim.

Mr Jim Dobbin MP: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I refer to the contribution from Denis Bradley, who advocated that the Christian Churches should be more in communion with each other, which is something that we can all support, and I am linking that into sport. There is an event this Sunday in Glasgow, which mirrors the religious divide in Northern Ireland. The First Minister has invited the Scottish cardinal, the moderator of the Church of Scotland and the leaders of the Muslim, Hindu and other religions to that occasion. Is that public bonding session worth pursuing, or is it just an empty gesture?

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: As chair of the Arts, Sport and Tourism Committee in the Oireachtas, I could probably speak until tomorrow lunchtime on this, but I will not. I wonder about 2012. If we do not invest in mass participation, we do not get the elite athletes, because the elite athletes arise out of the mass participation. But if we do not have elite athletes in 2012, we will have a lost opportunity to sell sport. It is a vicious circle. I understand the concept of an eight-year cycle to create athletes. I will not go down that road. I am going to ask Denis a stupid question. We were talking about the role of sport in reconciliation and crossing divides.

One question was put to me recently. The person could not understand that as a Taig I would laugh at “Father Ted”. I could not understand how they found “Give My Head Peace” funny, because I thought that everyone was so warped in their roles. Is there a role for the arts and such programmes to make people look at themselves and laugh at themselves and the stupidity, in some respects, of the stances that they take?

Mr Dominic Grieve MP: I was pleased to hear Denis Bradley’s comments on racism, because his definition of racism was so precise that it was clear that it falls into a slightly separate category. No logical person can possibly countenance racism, because it is a totally illogical thought process. I want to move on to sectarianism. I was pleased to hear the presentations. Sport is a classic area where sectarianism should not apply. I have a slight fear, which I share with Martin Mansergh—I was interested to hear Martin’s comments—that I detect signs that we may be gently creeping away from the idea that we should be encouraging tolerance as the absolute underpinning of liberal democracy and moving towards a new orthodoxy; a new secular orthodoxy, which may turn out to be every bit as intolerant as what it has replaced. That troubles me very much as diversity spokesman for my party in Britain, where we are beginning to have to face up to this on quite a regular basis. I wonder whether Denis or any of the others have any comment about that and whether they see any danger of the one lapsing into the other. Or perhaps they think that is the correct way things should be going?

Mr Seamus Kirk TD: I have two brief questions. Perhaps Denis Bradley will tell us about the gender balance recruitment policy for the PSNI. Secondly, I know there is provision in the legislative exchange for the gardaí to participate at management level in the PSNI. Has there been any progress or movement in that regard?

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Over to the panel.

Mr Denis Bradley: If my colleague takes the sports question, I will deal with the rest of them fast. There were a lot coming in my direction that time—I am getting worried.

Mr Gerry Carson: I am not sure if I followed the line of thought on the tolerance point. To the lady from Donegal, I thought that “Give My Head Peace” was a documentary.

Mr Denis Bradley: Let me take a number of these questions. Gestures are vacuous unless they are heartfelt—there is no way around that. In other words, a handshake can mean nothing or it can mean a lot. There is no legislative or organisational way to change that. It is good that the leaders of the Churches in Scotland should go in coherency. There is a quieter sectarianism in Scotland—we have a noisier sectarianism than you. But that is not for me to judge, it is just how it appears to me, having been reared among Glasgow people. I come from a part of Donegal that used to be fed by the Glasgow boat every summer. I was reared among Paisleyites, Glaswegians, people from Lanark who came on their ferries. People in the south would not have known much about that, because you did not come down here as much as you came up to us, particularly to Donegal.

Gestures are like apologies. In politics, we are apologising for slavery and other things. The police services have learnt to say sorry about mistakes

made. Critical incident training for police services about big issues includes how police apologise for mistakes. It always comes down to that—gestures can be vacuous and empty or they can be incredibly meaningful. It is better to have them than not to have them, but it is preferable that they be sincere and well meant.

The new orthodoxy of secularism has come up a couple of times. That is certainly happening, and there is a big debate about it in Britain. It will no doubt shortly become a debate in Northern Ireland; I cannot see the DUP and Sinn Féin sitting in the same room for too long without a religious conscience issue entering the room. It will happen. There will be a debate, an argument and a falling out about religious conscience.

It is too close to lunch for me to break into a theological debate, but bad theology has separated secularism from religion. It has separated the secular from the sacred and the sacred from the secular. I do not understand that separation. However, I understand that there are those who believe in the existence of God and those who do not, those who believe in an afterlife and those who do not and those who believe in the revelation of that God through various prophetic figures who have existed in the history of this one earth that we know. The only place that we know of is this one earth, apart from the moon, the stars, and so forth, which are beyond us. We have created a false division for historical reasons because we probably borrowed from Greek philosophy which, unbeknownst even to the Greeks, had created a type of dualism which resulted in the separation of matter and form, and all kinds of difficulties which the Christian Churches then borrowed and then we created these divisions.

I am not going past that point, other than to say that one of the big debates of modern civilisation is how we handle an aggressive secularism, as it has been described, and its relationship with other issues. It will not just affect Northern Ireland and Ireland. One of the big issues will be faith schools; another is creationism in American terms. Two and a half million children in America do not attend school because they do not agree with the Darwinian theory of evolution, and their parents keep them home. These issues will not go away and they will be quite fascinating in their own right, but discussing them is for a time that is not so close to lunch. I half missed the end of the question. Recruitment to the PSNI is done by an independent agency overseen by the Policing Board.

Mr Seamus Kirk TD: Is there a policy on the gender balance?

Mr Denis Bradley: We are up to 33 per cent of female members—at least, the PSNI is up to 33 per cent. I should stop saying “we”, as I am not there any more. It is a matter of encouragement not discrimination.

Mr Seamus Kirk TD: Are the gardaí participating in the management of the PSNI?

1.15 pm

Mr Denis Bradley: Now that I am free of the burden of responsibility, I can say that one of my major disappointments, which I tried hard to circumvent, was that during my term, not one garda applied for senior positions in the PSNI, despite the fact that we bent every Unionist’s arm to make sure that that could happen. They were quite happy to have their arms bent, but it

never happened. It was put down to a pension issue which the legislature here could not sort out. As far as I know, either it has been sorted out recently or it has still not been sorted out. That was a disappointment because the Unionist party tolerantly agreed to bend the rules to sort the applications from the gardaí.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much indeed. We thank our panel for a very interesting session. Thank you all, too, for your contributions—a good number asked questions. We next meet at half-past two, when we will be looking at racism and sectarianism in the Scottish experience. Have a good lunch. Order, order.

The sitting was suspended at 1.17 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.36 pm.

RACISM AND SECTARIANISM: THE SCOTTISH EXPERIENCE

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Good afternoon. This afternoon's session opens with an address on the Scottish experience of racism and sectarianism. I am very pleased to welcome Ms Lesley Irving from the race, religion and refugee team of the Scottish Executive Development Department, who will talk to us about racism and sectarianism. Racism is her area of expertise, but I understand that she is more than happy to make some comments on sectarianism as well. Of course, as we did this morning, before we break at 3.30, we will take the opportunity to ask questions.

Thank you very much for coming along, Ms Irving. We look forward to hearing from you.

Ms Lesley Irving (Race, Religion and Refugee Integration Team, Development Department, Scottish Executive): Thank you very much for inviting me to address this afternoon's meeting. This is a great pleasure. It is always nice to be back in this fair city, and I have enjoyed being able to spend some time rediscovering old haunts and finding some new ones.

The post-lunch slot is always challenging, and after that magnificent lunch I would not be surprised to hear some gentle snores from the audience. I will not take offence at that at all—as long as they are not coming from me, of course.

The brief of talking to the meeting about the Scottish experience of racism and sectarianism is an interesting one. One of our best-kent Scottish crime writers, Ian Rankin, who writes excellent books set in Edinburgh—I warmly commend his work to everyone—said that in Scotland we used to think that we did not have racism because we were all so busy being sectarian. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We have racism and sectarianism in Scotland, and the Scottish Executive is taking action to tackle both blights on our society.

This audience will not need to be reminded that equal opportunities legislation is reserved to the Westminster Parliament. However, the Scotland Act 1998 provides us with the power to promote equal opportunities in Scotland and to pass some secondary—not primary—legislation.

One of the founding principles of our Scottish Parliament is equality, and one of our standing committees is the Equal Opportunities Committee, so we will always have an Equal Opportunities Committee. The equality unit, in which I am based, was established in 1999 when the Executive came into being. Therefore, equality work across all the strands has always been, and will continue to be, an important aspect of our work. Very shortly after the setting up of the Executive, we established the race equality

advisory forum, which was a group of stakeholders that worked for a few years to produce for us a large number of recommendations on how to progress race equality across all aspects of the Executive's work. That was followed, in 2000, by the publication of our equality strategy, which called for the mainstreaming of equality work—race equality, along with the other five equality strands in Scotland—into everything that we did as an Executive.

In the equality unit, we focus on the different strands. My team works on race equality, faith and refugee integration issues. Other teams work on gender, age, violence against women, disability and sexual orientation. So far, our work has continued to be organised according to those strands, but as I am sure that you are aware, we are moving towards the formation of a single equality body in the United Kingdom, the work of which will impact on Scotland. When the Commission for Equality and Human Rights comes into being in October of this year, the way in which we perceive and work on equality issues is likely to change—in future, it is likely that we will work in horizontal layers rather than vertically down through each of the strands, as we do at the moment.

The work that we have done on tackling racism and trying to achieve race equality is most obviously exemplified by our One Scotland, Many Cultures advertising campaign. When it was launched in September 2002, it was—and remains—the only UK Government advertising campaign to tackle issues around racism, so it is important and ground breaking.

The campaign's genesis was interesting. In around 2000, we started to consider racism in Scotland. We examined what people felt about Scotland and what kind of country they thought it should be. From that research, we found that although people did not identify themselves as being racist, they could identify racist behaviour in others. They wanted Scotland to be a welcoming country, to which people from all over the world could come and live happily and harmoniously and where they could participate and get the benefits of living there. That is something that we would all want, wherever we live. When we dug down a little deeper beneath that benign vision, it was clear that people had racist attitudes and that they would resist being challenged about them overtly. In the One Scotland, Many Cultures campaign, we decided to take an approach that combined two linked themes. The first was the harm that racism does to Scotland—to individuals, to our society and to our image abroad. The second was the benefits of diversity—the good things that come from having in Scotland people from a variety of different backgrounds and which make us a stronger nation.

When one develops policy, one sometimes encounters the unexpected. We had done all our research, had talked to people and had decided on our approach when 9/11 happened. That made us pause and reflect on whether we could proceed with the campaign as we had envisaged it or whether we needed to go back to do further research on people's attitudes to others in the aftermath of that cataclysmic event. We did that—we carried out more research. The campaign is quite unusual, in that it has been researched twice. We wanted to ensure that it was fit for purpose and was what Scotland needed. We eventually launched it in September 2002.

We have been running the campaign ever since and have undertaken a variety of activities, including television, radio and cinema adverts. Most recently, we have used enormous, 96-sheet—believe me, that is enormous—outdoor billboards to advertise and have developed the campaign as a brand rather than as a one-off activity. It is longterm work, which we are nowhere near the end of, but we research and evaluate every phase of the campaign. From that work, we know that some changes in attitudes have been achieved—although they have not always been in the direction that we had hoped for. Advertising is a fickle medium, and global and national events affect people's views. Therefore, when an attempt is made to take a snapshot of people's views after a campaign, the views that are picked up may have been affected by those issues and

events as well as by the campaign. We have had some wobbles back and forward, but generally the trends have been positive.

2.45 pm

We do a lot of supporting work around the campaign. For example, we fund a number of projects that work with young people and with people in the workplace, as both those areas were identified by stakeholders as important areas to target. We fund the One Workplace, Equal Rights campaign, which is run for us by the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We have a website on the Young Scot portal, which is a national information website for young people. In addition, we do a lot of work on sport in schools through organisations such as Show Racism the Red Card, which is a charity that is based in the north-east of England. We fund the charity's Scottish development officer, who has done a lot of interesting and successful work, especially in primary schools, throughout Scotland.

Like all public bodies in the UK, we are subject to the duties imposed by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. We published our own race equality scheme both in 2002 and 2005. Again, like all other public bodies in Scotland and the UK, we are liable to be monitored for compliance with the 2000 act by the Commission for Racial Equality. Our compliance is sometimes more patchy than we would like it to be, but we are working to improve that. Within the equality unit, we work to support our colleagues across the Executive to ensure that race equality is embedded in, and is at the heart of, everything that we do.

As part of that work, we wanted to ensure that our strategy was still fit for purpose in a rapidly changing Scotland, where our demographics are changing at a great rate. I think that the rate of change might be equalled only by Ireland. Our population is changing in two directions. We are becoming older and less able to work and there are fewer and fewer of us, but we are also increasingly seeing new communities arrive on our shores. That is a result both of the dispersal of asylum seekers to Glasgow, which started in April 2000, and of the accession of the A8 states in May 2004, thanks to which many Polish people now have homes in and around Scotland.

We were aware that those population changes meant that the traditional view that racism and racial discrimination are about skin colour was perhaps changing. We wanted to see whether our strategy was the best possible strategy for Scotland's changing population, so we started to review our race equality work, including not only the work that is done by the Executive but that which is undertaken by local authorities, other public bodies and the voluntary sector. That review was carried out from 2004 to 2005, and we published an interim report of our findings in November 2005. Since then, we have been moving to produce a national strategy and action plan on race equality, which we hope to publish in the summer of this year.

We also established a new fund—the race equality, integration and community support fund—as an outcome of the review because, as is always the case, funding was the first thing that most people mentioned when we interviewed them as part of the review. For the two years 2006 to 2008, the fund was given £2 million, which doubled at one stroke the amount of ring-fenced funding that the Executive provides for race equality work in Scotland.

As part of the work of producing the national strategy, four strategic working groups were set up to examine the four distinct areas that the review said required further detailed attention. Those four areas were: ethnic minorities and the labour market; issues for Gypsies and Travellers; issues for minority ethnic communities in rural areas; and issues for asylum seekers and refugees. The four working groups have met and have produced reports that include recommended actions. That material will be used to

inform the publication of our final national strategy and action plan.

I mentioned our changing demographics. One response to that change in Scotland has been the fresh talent initiative, which presents Scotland as a good place to come to live, work and study. It aims to attract not only people from abroad but people from other parts of the United Kingdom and to encourage some of the Scottish diaspora to return to home shores.

We have a different perspective on immigration and bringing people to Scotland from that which may exist in other parts of the UK. The environment is much more positive, and the message is much more one that people are welcome to come to Scotland, but we also have issues around the dispersal of asylum seekers.

As I mentioned, we have a large number of asylum seekers in Glasgow—around 6,000—who have come through the Home Office dispersal contract. That brought some significant new challenges to us in Glasgow and the wider Scottish community, in that people came to us from parts of the world that are different from those that we had been used to people coming from. People also came in larger numbers than we had been used to in the past. That meant that there were new language needs and new community cohesion issues that we had not previously experienced.

In light of that, the Executive established a Scottish refugee integration forum, which published an action plan in February 2003. We have been implementing that action plan until now, but we now have the new strategic group's action plan to take forward. We also have a dedicated fund for projects that are working on refugee and asylum seeker integration. The fund contains around £500,000 to £600,000 per annum and has been running since 2003. We will announce the latest recipients of funding shortly.

As I mentioned before, the new migrants from the A8 accession countries are creating interesting challenges in parts of Scotland that have not been used to immigration from the traditional migrant countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, which, up to now, have provided the largest immigrant populations in Scotland. Parts of the Highlands and rural areas in the south of Scotland are experiencing rapid population change. New communities, mainly from Poland, but also from other A8 countries, are arriving in increasing numbers and sometimes not settling but staying for the season. As you know, many of them come from other parts of Ireland and Britain for seasonal agricultural work—they will be there for the berry picking season and then will move off again once the season is over. Those issues are new to many communities, and part of our race equality integration and community support fund goes to projects that are supporting communities to integrate new arrivals where they can.

We are also engaged in work around the ethnicity classifications for the 2011 census. The work on that in Scotland is in advance of that which is taking place in the rest of the UK. There was disquiet among some minority communities on the categories that were used in the 2001 census. Therefore, our race equality advisory forum, which I mentioned earlier, undertook to look at the ethnicity classifications and see whether it could come up with more accurate descriptors of the communities from which people come and the ways that they like to describe themselves. Such descriptors must also provide the information that we need to get from the census to enable us to be aware of service needs and, most important of all, monitor where discrimination is happening. Our ministers agreed to that interesting and challenging piece of work, which is under way at the moment. We are also working closely with colleagues in the Office for National Statistics in England to ensure that there is some harmonisation between the censuses in the different countries.

The coming of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights is a great challenge for us in our work as we look forward to taking equality to the next stage down the road. We

will all have to think carefully about the way that we work and the way that we conceive of equality. That will be as important for us in the Scottish Executive as it will be for our stakeholders and projects.

At the moment, we are funding quite isolated work in one strand or another, but we will look at encouraging the people with whom we work to think more laterally about life experiences, rather than continuing to think vertically about the different equality strands. I am sure that that change will challenge all of us. It will be interesting to see where Scotland and the rest of the UK are with equalities issues in a year or two. That is a brief summary of what we are doing about racism—I was told that I had to be fairly quick. An official who used to work for me but who now heads up our work on sectarianism has provided me with speaking notes on sectarianism. Religious matters come within my field of responsibilities, but a ministerial reshuffle a couple of years ago moved responsibility for sectarian matters back to the Justice Department. My colleagues in that department therefore now deal with such matters under the Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson.

Tackling sectarianism and all forms of discrimination is central to achieving the Scottish Executive's vision of a truly multifaith and multicultural society. I have talked about our anti-racism advertising campaign not being called the One Scotland, Many Cultures campaign by accident. We want to emphasise that, wherever people come from, they are welcome in the new Scotland and can contribute to and share the good things that result from being Scottish and living in Scotland.

Sectarianism is, of course, a deep-rooted problem. It has been a significant issue in Scotland for many years. In 2004, the First Minister, Jack McConnell, decided to take a firm stance against it, speak out against it and initiate work to tackle it. He said that sectarianism had blighted Scotland's communities for far too long and that it was "time to stamp it out."

I have said that people in Scotland can identify racism in others but not in themselves. We are also good at identifying sectarianism in others, but we are not so good at recognising it in ourselves. Many people believe that sectarianism is a west coast issue—that it is an issue only for Rangers and Celtic supporters in the west of Scotland or that it is shown only at Orange and Republican marches there—but that is not an accurate picture. Sectarianism manifests itself in many different ways in many areas of Scottish life, and we were aware of the need to reflect that in our work.

In February 2005, the First Minister held the first summit on sectarianism. That summit brought together 40 key individuals from influential organisations to discuss sectarian issues that affect Scotland. The attendees included march organisers, church leaders and representatives of football clubs, supporters groups, governing bodies, local government, the media, industry, the trade unions, educational bodies and, of course, the police. Some of those organisations' representatives had never sat around the same table with representatives of some of the other organisations. The summit was therefore an extremely important, significant and historic event for Scotland. It was successful in achieving broad agreement on the need to tackle sectarianism holistically, and it confirmed what we all recognise—that there is no quick fix or magic bullet that will solve sectarian or racist problems.

There were four central themes at the summit: education, sport, faith, and marches and parades. Obviously, it was recognised that we must look beyond those themes, but they formed the foundation of the work. It was thought that positive interventions in those areas could help to address tensions.

It was agreed that work on tackling sectarianism in Scotland should focus, at least initially, on addressing the tensions between the Christian communities—between

Protestants and Catholics. That was quite a controversial matter for various communities. Obviously, there are other forms of religious intolerance in Scotland— Islamophobia, for example, is increasingly an issue in Scotland, as it is in many other places, and there is still anti-Semitism. However, it was decided that, because the Protestant-Catholic issues are the most obvious issues experienced by large numbers of people, those should be the focus of the work on sectarianism. Other forms of religious intolerance such as Islamophobia are, however, included within my team's remit.

3 pm

In December of last year, we reconvened the summit on sectarianism, to which we invited the same participants who had attended the first summit. The aim was to reflect on the progress that had been made and to determine where we needed to go in future. Under the four themes that I mentioned, we now have a long list of initiatives that we are taking forward so I will cherry pick just some of those for the benefit of members. In March 2005, we launched an education resource called Sectarianism: Don't Give It. Don't Take It. The resource is funded by the Executive and is delivered by a partnership group that is led by the centre for education for racial equality in Scotland. The resource, which is web-based, raises young people's awareness of the issue and helps to tackle attitudes that are associated with sectarianism. The resource is freely available and can be adapted for use with different age groups and in different teaching environments.

We are looking at how schools can help to build and strengthen friendships between different communities. We have published a guide to twinning denominational and nondenominational schools. We have also worked with the National Union of Students Scotland, which is running a Stamp Out Sectarianism campaign to spread the antisectarian message throughout campuses.

We have been very active in sport. In addition to Rangers and Celtic, a number of clubs around Scotland recognise that they have a sectarian element in their fan base. Along with the Scottish Football Association and sportscotland, we produced the report "Calling Full Time on Sectarianism", which highlights eight key actions that will be taken forward. We have also provided funding to a new charity called Football for All, which will work with clubs and fans to raise awareness of sectarianism and to tackle the associated attitudes. In the longer term, Football for All intends to encompass all the equality strands underneath its umbrella and will work to tackle other forms of discrimination as it rolls forward.

We have introduced football banning orders, which have given the police and courts powers to prevent the most serious and persistent troublemakers from going to football grounds and other places, such as bars or town centres, where they are known to cause violence and disorder. Those are fairly new penalties, but they have already been applied for and used by the courts. A football banning order can be used by the courts if a person is convicted of a football-related offence or if the police make a summary application to a civil court because they think that there is a risk of football-related violence or disorder. The banning order can last for up to 10 years. I understand that our orders are a mirror image of those that have been in place in England for some time.

We work to bring together the faith groups and Government through a number of different routes. Action of Churches Together in Scotland has an annual meeting with the First Minister, which is an important vehicle for raising issues of concern. We have a faith liaison advisory group, which includes representatives both of the major Christian churches and of minority faiths. The advisory group provides an interface between faith groups and Government. The churches have developed a charter on the principles of

religious freedom, which has a very strong anti-sectarian message.

We have done a lot of work on marches and parades. In 2004, Sir John Orr, who is a former chief constable of Strathclyde police, undertook a review of marches and parades in Scotland. In January 2005, we published the report and recommendations of that review, which was the first review of the issue in 20 years. The review considered the matter holistically by seeking the views of not only those who wish to march but the communities that are affected by marches as well as the local authorities, which have responsibility for public order.

The main thrust of the recommendations was about professionalising the way in which marches and parades are organised and run. Central to the recommendations was the need to strike the right balance between the rights of those who wish to march and the rights of the communities affected by marches.

New procedures on marches and parades came into force on 1 April of last year, and we have issued guidance to Scottish local authorities on how they will work. In essence, we are asking local authorities to ensure that their communities are engaged in a continuing dialogue on the issue and to take more factors into consideration when they decide whether to restrict, reroute or prohibit a march. For example, they can consider the disruption that a march is likely to cause to the life of the community, whether it would place an excessive burden on the police and whether there is a risk of public disorder.

Last May, we joined march organisers—which include the Orange Order, Cairde na hÉireann and the Scottish Trades Union Congress—local authorities and the police to sign a joint statement on tackling abusive behaviour at marches and parades. All parties recognise that any problems are not necessarily to do with the marches themselves and that many people will latch on to marches and use them as an excuse for intolerable behaviour.

It is not simply a question of what the Government or established organisations can do; it is also about what individuals throughout Scottish society can do to tackle a problem that affects us all. We must address sectarianism together, not as members of society's constituent groups. As is necessary with all our work to tackle racism or any form of discrimination or inequality, we must question our own attitudes, behaviours and views, which we may have held for many years or inherited from our families.

Of the work to tackle sectarianism, the First Minister has said:

“This is a national effort, and we all have a part to play. But it is ordinary Scots who can make the biggest difference. It is in Scotland's communities that bigoted attitudes are born and nurtured. And it is in Scotland's communities that these attitudes can be wiped out for good.”

We realised early on that the Executive does not hold all the answers, so we have consistently sought to bring on board as many partners as possible. That has often involved bringing together people who have never sat round the same table.

There is a long way to go on tackling sectarianism, as there is with our work on racism. We do not pretend that the problem has been dealt with; we have started on the journey, but it will be a long one and we have many miles to go. However, we are fully committed to taking action to tackle sectarianism, racism and other blights on Scottish society that prevent people from achieving their full potential and from integrating fully into harmonious communities. We look forward to the good times ahead, when we can all benefit from what each of us brings to the new Scotland.

We believe that the partnership approach is the right way to tackle racism and sectarianism, even though the partnerships can sometimes be difficult and challenging and it can be quite a struggle to bring people to a shared position. However, we think that that is the best way to go about achieving change and we will continue to work on that basis. Now that we have started on our journey, we have no intention of deviating from that path and we will continue our work until we have produced a Scotland that is truly One Scotland, Many Cultures, as our award-winning advertising campaign says.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): I thank Lesley Irving for that very thoughtful and interesting presentation. We now have just over 20 minutes to ask questions of Lesley. At 3.30, we need to go and have our photograph taken. Who would like to start?

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I want to take up the key point about One Scotland, Many Cultures. From an Irish perspective, it could be said that the Irish language has been sectarianised in some areas. In the Gaeltacht areas, the use of the Irish language is accepted but, in other places, for right or for wrong—usually for wrong—when people use the Irish language, they are sometimes perceived to be wrapping the flag around themselves and making themselves different from others, which militates against the general evolution of the language.

Is that an issue in Scotland with Scots Gaelic? You talk about many cultures, but is sectarianism an issue when it comes to language? Is the basic Scots culture still there? Does the issue extend to Scottish music, Scottish dancing and so on? Is a person wrapping a flag around themselves to exclude others if they are an exponent of those things? I am sure that the same question could be asked about Wales

Ms Lesley Irving: It is an interesting question. The position of Scots Gaelic is different from that of Irish. In Scotland, the use of Gaelic is much more isolated—it is largely restricted to the Highlands and Islands. We have a national language strategy, which has been published and is about preserving Gaelic and Scots as the traditional forms of language expression in Scotland. However, it also emphasises the need for us to be aware that Scotland is now a place in which many languages are spoken. We have to perform a difficult balancing act between those two concerns.

Some people think that there is too much emphasis on Gaelic. There are those who say that it is ridiculous that all the signage in the Scottish Parliament is in Gaelic and English, because very few people in Edinburgh, where the Parliament meets, speak Gaelic. However, from early on the Parliament took the view that there was a need to save Gaelic as Scotland's indigenous language, as it was on the verge of dying out. At the same time, there is a strong call for Scotland's new languages to be given a place and to be acknowledged. One interesting factor is the rapid change in demographics. Two or three years ago we would not have thought of translating material into Polish, for example, but now we would. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion has been set up in England and will make recommendations on issues related to those subjects. It will have quite a lot to say about language and translation—whether we should translate material into minority languages and whether people should have to learn to speak English in order to get benefits and so on. There are issues for us in Scotland around language and Gaelic, but there are not the racist and sectarian elements to which Ms Keaveney has referred.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): I will take questions in twos rather than threes, so that we can get through all of them.

Mr Tony Baldry MP: What does one put down on one's census form if one has an English father and a Scots mother? That is a serious point, because a large number of us in the United Kingdom are part English and part Scottish. Some of the noises that we

hear from the Scottish Nationalists in our Parliament are not particularly encouraging when it comes to integration.

I am not quite sure how to put this courteously, but practically everything that you said was very statist and top down. You spoke a lot about national strategies—it was very national this, national that. What about local communities? Surely this is an area in which we must work from the grass roots up—from each constituency and member of Parliament, and from the churches and mosques in each area.

I tried to relate your description of life in Scotland to my constituency, in which every secondary school is twinned with a school in a developing country. When the Kashmir earthquake happened, the town as a whole raised sufficient money to build a new school in the earthquake-stricken zone.

Four thousand Poles have come into Banbury and no great drama has occurred. Churches that have been built in housing estates are shared by Catholics and the Church of England. That has all happened from the bottom up. Apart from the national framework of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, we have not needed any great national strategies to dictate to us what to do. I do not believe that the situation is different in communities in Scotland.

The Lord Gordon: I will start with a comment. First, we need to differentiate indigenous Scottish sectarianism. I am not trying to pretend that none existed, but it is patchy. In some parts of Scotland, Catholics and Protestants have lived in harmony—the reformation was a minor blip for about 20 years and that was all.

As for sectarianism that is not indigenous but imported, it is worth recalling that Irish immigration into Scotland was entirely from the north of Ireland, by which I mean the geographical north, including Donegal, from which half of Glasgow came, as far as I can see. Like all expats, those who have settled in Scotland are less willing to talk to one another than are their counterparts in Northern Ireland, as we heard encouragingly this morning.

The positive point in Scotland's favour has been that, with a few exceptions, where people live has not been zoned according to religion, so people have lived and worked much more side by side. The degree of intermarriage is huge, which has lessened the problem.

A vital factor in all this is the media. I am slightly concerned about how it has played the issue. At the height of the troubles, because everyone in the west of Scotland knew that half Glasgow's population had very close relatives in Northern Ireland, media sensitivity was heightened to avoid reporting anything that might inflame religious tension in the west of Scotland. In a funny way, now that things have settled down, the press are becoming rather more irresponsible. If Neil Lennon receives a death threat, they will really make an issue of it. They forget that the sectarian tendencies are below the surface and can be easily reawakened. What are you doing to bring media coverage of such issues into line?

3.15 pm

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): I will add one more question, because of the numbers.

Mr Paul Flynn MP: How do you reduce Islamophobia? If you reduced it, how would you know?

Ms Lesley Irving: I will answer the questions in the order in which they were asked.

The census form contains a box that I think is called mixed or other, so a person could write in their background or tick both relevant boxes and allow the compilers of the information to have a nervous breakdown about what that meant. The census form should contain sufficient boxes to reflect how someone wishes to describe their background.

As for communities, of course it is important to work from the bottom up. It is interesting that the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, which I mentioned, will report with a set of recommendations in June. I think that it will suggest that one size does not fit all and that solutions must be found at a neighbourhood level—for small local areas—because our communities are different and because that is where solutions are most likely to be found.

The race equality, integration and community support fund, which I mentioned, supports local, community-based and often very small projects. For instance, we gave money to Hawick church hall, which is in a small place in the Borders, to do work with the Polish community there. We are working at several levels—nationally and locally in small communities.

If we could control the media, we would be in a very different country. That is a huge issue that it is difficult to do much about. The First Minister involved the media in both his anti-sectarianism summits. He meets editors in Scotland regularly to try to persuade them to report more responsibly, as the Lord Gordon suggested, to avoid inflaming situations. However, that is a difficult act to pull off.

Most people to whom I speak in the equality field say that, if only the media behaved differently, we would not have this, that or the other issue. People who work with asylum seekers and refugees say that, as do people who work on race issues and, in particular, those who work on Gypsy Traveller issues. It is also an issue for those who work on sectarianism. We are aware of the issue and we are trying to work carefully with the relevant people.

There can be examples of good reporting as well as bad. Recently, there was an incident in Edinburgh in which a young Sikh boy had apparently been attacked and had his hair cut off. Every media report that I saw about the case, whether it was in the press—the tabloids as well as the broadsheets—on the radio or on the television, mentioned what a terrible outrage that was for Sikhs and how it was the most awful thing that could happen. In that instance, it turned out that the young man had done it himself and was going through a personal crisis. It was a real tragedy, but the reporting of it was highly responsible, both when it appeared to have been an attack and when it subsequently came to light that it was not. A lot could have been made of that and a lot of awkward reporting could have come of it, but that did not happen. The media can be responsible as well as irresponsible.

I was asked how we tackle Islamophobia and how we will know when we have been successful. With anything that we do, we would research the matter, get a baseline position, do some work and then revisit the issue to find out whether attitudes had changed. We know that we are having some success in changing attitudes around racism because we have a baseline of attitudes against which we can measure our success and we research every phase of our campaign. That is how we would know whether we were being successful.

Tackling Islamophobia is a long-term task with many different aspects, such as education—for example, informing young people about the realities of what it means to be a Muslim—and countering some of the more dangerous and unhelpful media expressions. We include those issues in our One Scotland, Many Cultures advertising campaign—for example, we have a radio advert with a personal testimony from a

Muslim man.

We would tackle Islamophobia across a range of different activities and we would know whether we had been successful because we would take a baseline measurement and revisit it.

Joan Burton TD: As the member for Dublin West, I welcome everybody here. I think that this is the first event of its kind in the constituency.

The constituency is growing rapidly; in fact, its population growth is explosive. It has experienced an increase in population of about 24% over the past seven years and is probably now the most ethnically diverse constituency in the Republic, so I am interested to hear of the Scottish experience.

There are two really big difficulties for the constituency. One relates to education and concerns newcomer children accessing schools: we now have some schools in which 80% or more of the children from junior infants to first class are newcomer, international children. We also have some estates on which there is a lot of landlordism—landlord investors letting out houses and people coming and going.

I do not know whether Scotland has had either of those experiences. From my experience as a TD, it seems to me that the capacity to speak English is the critical step for integration. In the rapid growth of the past seven years, we have had children going to school whose parents, particularly the mothers, do not have much English language. That is fatal culturally and for integration.

In relation to education policies, do you go for a positive mix, or does the situation just sort itself out? People might be interested to know that the area in which we are meeting included a lot of the farmlands that were owned historically by the Guinness family. Religiously, it has always been a tremendously diverse part of the greater Dublin area. We have had active not just Catholic but Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist communities in the area from the 19th century onwards because there was a lot of industrial employment.

Therefore, we are very good on sectarianism, but there is a new and interesting challenge in the huge number of people coming to the country. I would see education and people being able to speak local languages—in this case English—as critical. Do you have anything targeted at not just the children but the adults?

Like us, do you also have an issue with younger people, particularly boys in workingclass areas, dropping out of school early and ending up feeling resentful to newcomers whom they perhaps see as doing better?

Mr John Griffiths AM: These are huge questions. I know that we do not have a great deal of time, so I feel that I should perhaps apologise in advance for my questions. First, when it comes to sectarianism, religion is a significant part of the equation. I suppose that, like many other countries, Scotland is becoming more secular. Is it possible to identify any positive benefits in terms of sectarianism from Scotland becoming more secular?

Secondly, I was brought up in the docks area of Newport, which is multiethnic and multicultural, and personally I thought that it was a positive and enriching experience to be brought up with many cultures, many Muslims and people from all over the world. There is a debate about multiculturalism and integration, and Lesley Irving touched on it when she referred to some of the UK Government initiatives. The One Scotland, Many Cultures strategy would seem to point to the multicultural view. Lesley, could you say a little about what the Scottish Executive thinks about that balance and debate?

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): I call Jenny Randerson and then Steve Rodan. They have to be the last questions, because we are running seriously short of time.

Ms Jenny Randerson AM: I have been sitting here, drawing parallels between Scotland and Wales. I represent Cardiff Central, and Cardiff has the highest percentage of Catholics in the population of mainland Britain outside Liverpool. We have a thriving Catholic school sector, and yet sectarianism just is not an issue. It is not something that has ever crossed my radar in my political and social experience. The Catholic population comes from Irish immigrants, who came into the valleys and into Cardiff to work in the ports, mines and ironworks in the 19th century. It is an old, established population.

I have also been thinking about Islamophobia, because we have a fairly large Muslim community—in fact, Cardiff Central has the largest ethnic minority community in Wales. In Cardiff, we had the first Muslim community in Britain, and the first mosque in Britain is in my constituency, dating back again to the 19th century. In general, although one can certainly never be complacent, the levels of Islamophobia are much lower in Wales than in Britain generally. It is also worth pointing out that the media in Wales have a much less tabloid style in their approach to the issues. I do not know of anywhere in Wales where whole housing estates have become allocated to Muslims or Catholics or to any particular faith groups. We have avoided that problem.

All right, I have done the preamble, now here is the question. We have a thriving Inter-Faith Council for Wales, which was established by the First Minister. The council really takes a lead; do you have something similar in Scotland?

The Hon Steve Rodan SHK: Lesley Irving referred to the One Scotland, Many Cultures campaign. I wondered whether the new education courses, or the questions that have been developed for people to qualify for British citizenship, had been customised in any way for Scottish culture, to assist specifically with integrating in Scotland. It might interest you to know that British citizenship courses devised for the Isle of Man College have been customised to take account of Manx language and Isle of Man history, in the event that somebody would seek British citizenship in the Isle of Man.

3.30 pm

The Co-Chair (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Lesley, I would ask you to be as brief as you can.

Ms Lesley Irving: I will do my best.

The Co-Chair (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We have a prime minister waiting outside.

Ms Lesley Irving: Oh gosh. Okay, I will start from the bottom of my list and work up quickly.

Yes, we have customised, Scottish-based materials for the teaching of English to speakers of other languages, for people who are seeking citizenship. The material actually had pictures of some of you in it, but it has been tartanised, as we say. We have put a kilt on it. Those customised materials are now in use. It is also possible for people to sit the life in the UK test in Welsh or Scots Gaelic, should they wish to do so. We do indeed have a Scottish Inter Faith Council, which meets the First Minister annually. The Scottish Executive provides funding to the council, and I think that it is a similar body to the body in Wales. We also have a faith liaison advisory group, as I mentioned. The Scottish Inter Faith Council makes up half the membership of that

group, with the Christian and Jewish communities making up the other half. That has been an invaluable resource in terms of raising awareness, and it has allowed us to seek guidance from faith communities about how things impact on them.

The question was asked about our view of multiculturalism. Interestingly, Trevor Phillips has made a number of speeches on the argument that multiculturalism is a dead idea whose time has been and gone. That went down very badly with minority ethnic communities in Scotland, which had very much bought into the One Scotland, Many Cultures idea. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion is not going to use the term “multiculturalism”, simply because a lot of baggage goes along with it. The commission will use the term “shared futures” instead. That is an interesting idea and one that we might move towards in Scotland.

The question on the benefits of increased secularism is a hard one to answer in five seconds flat. Although society is becoming more secular, the Christian churches in particular still have a strong grip on Scottish society. We are coming into an election period and I think that some interesting issues will be played out, by the Catholic church in particular, in response to Westminster equality legislation as well as in response to some of our work. I am therefore not quite sure that we can yet talk about the benefits of increased secularism.

It was asked whether younger white men feel alienated. As in other parts of the UK, some serious issues arise in that regard. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion is looking into the alienation of young white men, and Trevor Phillips is interested, too, as chair of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

We are doing work on the census and on ethnicity classification, and one of the largest groups that do not fill in the census is young white men. They do not feel part of society and do not see why they should give up information because they do not feel that they get any benefit from it.

Our work on challenging racism and dealing with sectarianism has to take the majority population into account as well as the minority communities. We have to ensure that everybody feels that they have a stake in society.

I was asked about English for speakers of other languages. We are preparing a national ESOL strategy in Scotland—although I am afraid that that might sound like another topdown approach. The issue is increasingly important in parts of Scotland that have not had to deal with it in the past. Joan Burton mentioned that 80% of children in some schools in her constituency were newcomers. There is a small primary school in the Borders—Duns primary school—which had 80% Portuguese speakers on the roll for a number of months. Their parents had come over for seasonal agricultural work. That small school, which had never before had to provide for English as an additional language, suddenly had an enormous proportion of the school roll that needed language support. The same is true in parts of the Highlands, where they have no experience of having to provide English language support but now have large numbers of Polish young people. The teaching of English, and the reaching out to all communities, will be increasingly important.

I hope that I have more or less answered people’s questions, as quickly as I could.

The Co-Chair (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Lesley, thank you very much indeed. That was quite a marathon and we are very grateful for your presentation and for the expert way in which you answered the questions. [*Applause.*]

For our photograph, we will now repair to the foyer—because it is pouring with rain outside.

The sitting was suspended at 3.35 pm.

The sitting resumed at 4.08 p.m.

ADDRESS BY AN TAOISEACH MR BERTIE AHERN TD

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I am delighted to welcome to our meeting the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern TD. The Taoiseach last addressed the body in Galway in 2000, and we are very honoured that he has taken the time to come to Castleknock this afternoon and give the keynote address to our 34th plenary session. The body has long supported the work of the two Governments and commended them for their sustained efforts in the past few years. On behalf of my Co-Chairman and Members, I would like to acknowledge the Taoiseach's role and steadfast commitment in moving the peace process forward to where we are now.

I would like to tell the Taoiseach that we had an excellent debate on our political motion this morning. We welcomed Sinn Féin's decision on policing at its recent Ard-Fheis and we hope that the elections on Wednesday will result in the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland by the end of the month. I was struck by the number of references to a proposed economic package and the need for investment in infrastructure and services, which of course have been included in the Government's national development plan. These are some of the many challenges ahead, and I want to assure you that you have our full support in the coming weeks and months.

The Taoiseach (Mr Bertie Ahern TD): I thank the Co-Chairmen and Members for giving me the opportunity again to speak at the plenary meeting of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. I thank all of you for your commitment to this body over the years. Many of you have served on it for quite a long time and have given great support to the two Governments and to the peace process. It is very heartening for us to receive that support in so many ways, be it in our Parliaments or parliamentary committees and in general debate across these islands. It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to Dublin for the 34th plenary session. It has been some time since we last met in the capital. I would like to thank the Co-Chairman, Mr. Pat Carey TD, for the invitation to address you this afternoon.

The body continues to play a critical role in the development of mutual understanding and partnership between our Parliaments and our peoples. We have a greater appreciation today of each other's point of view than at any other time in our history. By providing parliamentary colleagues on these islands with the opportunity for contacts, both formal and informal, the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body has over the past 17 years contributed in no small way to the close working relationship that now exists between our two countries, as well as to the transformation that has taken place. Relations between Ireland and Britain are better now than they have ever been. Our two countries now work together as partners in so many different areas - at European level, where we share many common interests; in the international arena in organisations such as the UN and the WTO; as well as in the economic sphere, with such significant levels of bilateral trade and investment, and more potential to be tapped in the future. There are close communications between our agencies, officials, nonstatutory bodies and so on.

Last Saturday week's game in Croke Park gave clear witness to this transformation, although I will not mention the result. It was a great occasion due to its historic importance. We are very pleased that it went off so well. The commemoration last year of the 1916 Rising and of the Battle of the Somme were also very important occasions. We must continue to work together in every way so that we can preserve and build on this extraordinary progress, which we could not have envisaged a few years ago. We

live with the legacy of our complex and interwoven history, but while mindful of the history that has affected and shaped us in so many different ways, we must also work for a future anchored in understanding and mutual respect. We should take nothing about our relationship for granted. Given all that has gone before and all the progress that has since been made, it demands priority treatment and our closest attention. I am proud of the contribution I have been able to make over the past ten years. Working with Prime Minister Blair and our colleagues in Northern Ireland, co-operation and partnership between our Governments has been brought to a new level. This also has to be the way of the future.

This fine body is a key example of our two countries and their representatives working to a common purpose to make a real difference. The St Andrews Agreement envisages an East-West parliamentary framework that represents all the Parliaments and Assemblies from the islands of Ireland and Britain. I welcome this and encourage you in your efforts. The Irish Government is very supportive of this proposal, as it is of a North-South parliamentary forum. I know that you have already begun work on this issue. The body has long sought a dialogue with the Unionist parties in the North. It was significant and welcome that the DUP joined you last year at your session in Killarney. Dialogue is a vital part of developing trust and understanding. I hope that you will be able to have fruitful discussions with all the parties to the newly elected Assembly before too long, so that a strong East-West parliamentary forum can be established.

4.15 p.m.

We are now at a point of reckoning in the political process. This is an important week. I do not wish to say anything other than wish all our colleagues in the North well. They have worked hard during these past weeks on the electoral process. They have engaged with us throughout that process and we welcome all that has happened and hope for a good turn out. Our intensive work in the last year has delivered real results and immediate opportunity. After talks with the parties in October 2006, the two Governments published the St Andrews Agreement. That agreement focused on support for policing and support for power sharing as the two sides of the one road we need to travel to get the institutions up and running again. There has been much debate, but since the agreement people have understood the issues and have been supportive.

We have seen welcome progress on policing. The landmark decision by Sinn Féin opens up for the first time the prospect of inclusive policing across the entire community in Northern Ireland. Nobody should underestimate the significance of this historic step, which the SDLP, with vision and courage, had already taken in 2001. With all-party support for inclusive policing, we also need all-party support for the structures of an inclusive power-sharing government. Wednesday's election is being held for the explicit purpose of endorsing the St Andrews Agreement and of electing an Assembly that will form a power-sharing Executive on 26 March in accordance with that agreement and timeframe. The two Governments are proceeding on the basis that all parties understand and accept this position.

We hear encouraging news from the campaign trail that people on the doorsteps are focussing on "bread and butter" issues, such as water rates, education and health. It is encouraging for the rest of us that the issues are those that we face every day as politicians. What is clearer now more than ever is that the people want their locally elected politicians to sit together in government and take decisions on these issues. Direct rule is not what the people of Ireland, North and South, endorsed in the 1998 referendums. An Executive must be formed on 26 March. This is the end of the line.

The two Governments have made this abundantly clear. We have painstakingly, patiently and honourably followed and delivered on all our commitments, including those

made in the St Andrews Agreement. It would be unconscionable and deeply regrettable if this agreed deadline was missed and if the opportunity to govern was not taken. Patience has already been stretched and I do not believe the people would take kindly to further delay. The war is over. The key issues are sorted. All must take responsibility in government for building and consolidating the peace. The time for taking that responsibility is now.

We stand ready and committed to work with the new Northern Ireland Executive in a partnership which I know can benefit every individual on this island. We offer that partnership without a hidden agenda and in a spirit of deep and genuine friendship and support. We need to make up for time lost. We need to ensure that all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, including the crucial North-South structures, are fully honoured and implemented. Failure to form an Executive as envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement would be a missed opportunity of historic proportions. Such a failure would see the newly elected Assembly dissolved indefinitely. This would be a loss for the people of Northern Ireland, but they know that there would be no alternative. In these circumstances we have said that the two Governments will implement the Good Friday Agreement through new partnership arrangements. We have explained to the parties how we would do that.

However, our focus is on success. There is no good reason we should not be able to complete this historic process. Once the people have spoken on Wednesday, newly elected MLAs and prospective Ministers of the Executive will need to sit together and use their considerable talents to hammer out a credible, viable programme for government. They will be able to do that within the timeframe. As they move to implement agreed policies in the following months, they will face challenges and obstacles along the way, like every other government.

Many of the party manifestos have focused on the economic challenges facing Northern Ireland. At St Andrews, the two Governments committed to working with the parties to establish the most favourable possible financial climate for a newly restored Executive. We are preparing the ground to honour that commitment. For the first time, the new national development plan proposes significant Irish Government investment in projects and initiatives of mutual benefit to both North and South. We were very careful to engage the parties in the North during the preparation and publication of the plan. We were pleased to receive their understanding and support for the initiatives. We want to implement the plan in partnership and in agreement with the British Government and a restored Northern Ireland Executive.

We want to see road links to Derry and Letterkenny that are second to none on the island. We want to build up the capacity of higher education institutions through strategic alliances. The north west is a key example of where this is crucial to prosperity. In the north east, we want to see better links between County Louth and County Down to maximise the enormous tourist potential of the region. We want to see funding available on an all-island basis to the best projects in areas such as science, tourism, regional development and social inclusion. These have been outlined by various organisations, by the political process and by civic society in the North.

Everybody is aware of what we can and cannot do in these areas. There is no political debate about them, as people want to see us implement them. We want to work with the Ministers in the new Executive to ensure that the children of this country grow up in peace and prosperity, with equal opportunity for all. It is in our mutual interest to do so. On restoration, we want to unlock the serious potential of the national development plan in a three-way partnership with the British Government and with the new Northern Ireland Executive. For our part, the Irish Government will spare no effort to bring the St Andrews Agreement to fruition. I will meet Prime Minister Blair later in the week to review the outcome of the election. Together, we will work closely with the parties in the

next few weeks to deal with any remaining issues of concern and to steer a steady course towards restoration on 26 March. I know you will be discussing these issues during the remainder of your plenary session.

I wish to express my appreciation to all of you for your interest, work and support over the years, which have brought us to this important week. I thank my own colleagues in the Oireachtas for being so helpful, and I thank our colleagues from Britain who have done so much work to help out. The body has been supportive in so many ways. It was a place to make contacts at a time when that was difficult and people were not engaging with us as we would have liked. Pat Carey and the Paul Murphy have always been very helpful to me. I worked with Paul Murphy over many years. He supplied me with some of the best meals I have ever received, and he was always very courteous to me, even in difficult times. He was always a friendly and diplomatic person, no matter what channels we had to work through. I hope he feels a sense of satisfaction from seeing the progress that has been made in all his years doing this. Through my fellow parliamentarians, I thank both Paul Murphy and Pat Carey.

A number of my own colleagues from the Oireachtas will be stepping down, as will Peter Brooke. For his years of service, commitment, patience and support, I thank him on behalf of the Irish Government. I will have another chance to thank my own colleagues from the Oireachtas for their commitment and effort.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): With the Taoiseach's agreement, there will be two brief questions from the floor. I call on Michael Mates to address the first question.

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I have not always spoken for everybody in this room, but I am sure I do now when I thank the Taoiseach for honouring us with his presence and for saying what he has said today. I am sure I also speak for everyone when I congratulate unreservedly both you and Prime Minister Blair on the unstinting work that you have done to continue what your two predecessors started, John Major and Albert Reynolds. It has been a long and difficult journey and we are thrilled that you have almost reached the last hurdle.

We all hope that what has been set out will happen and that we can proceed. Should we fall at this last fence, I know the position of the Governments is that there is no plan B. However, they must have looked at the scene that might apply if we cannot get an agreement by 26 March. Can you sketch the options between the Governments on how to handle something that might happen, even though we may wish that it will not?

The Taoiseach: Thank you, Michael, for your kind words. Before the St Andrews Agreement, we had been putting more time and attention into thinking of alternative options. Even though we had worked from January 2006 in meetings in Dublin, Armagh and London and had made a lot of progress, we did not seem to be able to move the parties to the end game until the St Andrews Agreement. It is not too difficult to envisage what we would have to do, but trying to do it would be a very difficult process. The constitutional issue is settled, so that is off the radar. If agreement is not reached by 26 March, it is very clear under the legislation that there would be no assembly or political process in the North. The two Governments would then have to get ahead and implement everything we could from the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. It would not be ideal as we would be doing it almost outside the political process, but we cannot leave a vacuum. If it does not work this time, we do not believe that it will come around again for quite some time. Some people think it may not arise again for five years; others think it may not arise for ten years. Either way, it is a long time. This would be crazy.

There have been many meetings between the two Governments and officials to work out how we would operate. However, neither Government wants to do down that road

as it is not the ideal way. We have built up relationships all of these years with the political parties in the North, so it makes little sense for the Governments and their officials to implement policies in partnership arrangements without those parties. However, if we are forced into that, then we are forced into it.

4.30 p.m.

Since October, we have not put a great amount of thought and effort into it because everything that has been said and done has been about getting it to work, which is a positive agenda. If we were to find ourselves going back over this in a month's time, then it would be a huge disappointment. We would do it and we have a blueprint for that, but it would be an enormous disappointment.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe: I have not always agreed with the Taoiseach on every issue, but I genuinely wish him and all involved every success in the efforts being made to restore the Executive in Northern Ireland.

Does the Taoiseach share my view that a major cross-Border effort will have to be made, on an all-island basis, to target crime and the proceeds of crime? Does he share my concerns that the termination of the Assets Recovery Agency, for whatever reason, will preclude the possibility of further co-operation on an all-Ireland basis between the Criminal Assets Bureau and the ARA, and may therefore limit such co-operative efforts? The ARA is to be absorbed into the London-based Serious Organised Crime Agency. Does he share the concern that this will impact adversely on an-Ireland effort to recover moneys derived from criminal activities by paramilitaries, former paramilitaries and drug barons throughout the island of Ireland?

The Taoiseach: Thank you, Jim, for your support. Any decision to restructure the UK's law enforcement agencies is a matter for the British Government. The Tánaiste has led me to understand that the merger of the Assets Recovery Agency and the Serious Organised Crime Agency will not result in the diminution of the resources available for assets recovery in Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary has assured the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that there will be no reduction in the level and effort of assets recovery in Northern Ireland. That is the stated position.

It is of interest to all that the excellent level of co-operation that currently exists between the CAB and the ARA is maintained and built on. We have built up good relationships in the last number of years, particularly since the PSNI was formed. The British authorities are committed to ensuring that this is the case. Discussions have taken place between the chief bureau officer of the Criminal Assets Bureau and the director and deputy director of the Assets Recovery Agency regarding the proposed merger with the Serious Organised Crime Agency in the UK. CAB officials are confident that existing co-operation will continue in the future. Senior officials from the Serious Organised Crime Agency will be travelling to Dublin in March and I am sure improved co-operation will be on the agenda.

I completely agree with the Deputy's point that we need this. The only way that we can cut out illegal activities is through successful co-operation. The merger of the ARA with the Serious Organised Crimes Agency will cost a lot of resources, but hopefully the joint effort will not take away anything from what we want.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I thank the Taoiseach for his replies and the Members for their co-operation. I now call on Paul Murphy to express the body's appreciation to the Taoiseach.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Michael Mates and Jim O'Keeffe have already mentioned how much they appreciate the Taoiseach's presence. It gives great

weight to this body and it is very good that he could be with us. I also thank the Taoiseach for the personal kindness that he showed me when we worked together over ten years. The detail, the commitment, the dedication and the tenacity which the Taoiseach showed over those ten years has been remarkable. The partnership with my Prime Minister has also been remarkable. There is no question that without Bertie Ahern, there would not have been a peace process.

We wish you well in the next few weeks. I hope there is no need for a plan B and I sure there will not be such need. God speed and good luck in the next few weeks.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): As a very small token of our appreciation, we will now present the Taoiseach with our squadron tie, a prized item among Members. There is also a scarf, but I am sure the Taoiseach will accept the tie.

(Applause).

Sitting suspended at 4.36 p.m and resumed at 4.38 p.m.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I am pleased to welcome the Minister of State, Mr. Brian Lenihan TD, who is a representative of this constituency and Minister of State with special responsibility for children's matters. He sits at the Cabinet table and he has kindly agreed to take questions which have been tabled.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Political Situation in Northern Ireland

1. **Michael Mates MP** asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will make a statement about the peace process.

3. **Jeff Ennis MP** asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform what influence the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach has had on the Northern Ireland peace process.

6. **Joe Sherlock TD** asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform the timetable for the re-establishment of the institutions in Northern Ireland following the outcome of the Assembly elections; when he expects the Assembly next to sit and an Executive to be formed; the contingency plans that are in place should an Assembly not be formed and Executive unable to be constituted; the precise nature, timeframe and details of any plan B; the efforts he will make to ensure the progress on policing that has been made to date will be maintained in that event; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr Brian Lenihan TD): I propose to take Question Nos. 1, 3 and 6 together.

It is fair to say that the question tabled by Jeff Ennis MP was answered in the earlier exchanges. Deputy Sherlock is anxious to explore the timetable for the reestablishment of the institutions in Northern Ireland following the outcome of the Assembly elections. Since the beginning of last year, significant progress has been made towards securing the Government's overriding priority, the restoration of powersharing institutions in Northern Ireland and the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. This progress has been built on many years of sustained commitment by the two Governments to the process.

The St Andrews Agreement, published by the two Governments on 13 October 2006, sets out a clear way forward for all parties to commit to the full operation of stable

power-sharing government in Northern Ireland and to full support for policing and the criminal justice institutions. The timetable culminates with the restoration of the Assembly and formation of an Executive on 26 March 2007.

There has been important progress on all fronts since the Governments met with the parties at St Andrews. Practical changes to the operation of the institutions on restoration have been agreed. Both Governments are working to ensure a favourable financial climate to underpin the restoration and there has been progress across a range of equality, human rights, victims and social exclusion issues. The IMC report published at the end of January confirms that the decision of the Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis on policing on 28 January contains all the necessary elements of support for policing and criminal justice set out in the St Andrews Agreement. That opens up the prospect for the first time of inclusive policing across the entire community. There is every indication that Sinn Féin is taking forward this change of policy on the ground, without further delay or conditionality, and the Government has consistently encouraged that party to continue to do so.

The Government's primary focus now is to ensure that all these positive developments can be built on through the restoration of shared accountable government, consistent with the St Andrews Agreement. The Government is convinced that if implemented in good faith by the parties, the St Andrews Agreement will clear the way for the restoration of the devolved institutions on 26 March 2007. The Assembly election due to be held on 7 March is an integral part of the process and timetable agreed at St Andrews. It is being held for the explicit purpose of endorsing the St Andrews Agreement and of electing an Assembly that will form a power sharing Executive on 26 March in accordance with that timeframe.

In the event the parties fail to agree to share power by that date, the Governments have made it clear that the Assembly will be dissolved and Stormont closed. Consistent with the St Andrews Agreement, new British-Irish partnership arrangements have been prepared jointly with the British Government. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have reviewed developments in recent meetings with Prime Minister Blair and the Secretary of State, Peter Hain MP, such as the meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in Dundalk last week. The partnership arrangements would ensure the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement to the fullest extent possible, including its policing aspects. It would be done in a manner which ensures that the rights and interests of all in Northern Ireland and on these islands are fully protected and respected. This would include advancing North-South co-operation for the benefit of all.

The new partnership arrangements have been prepared in the event they are required. However, both Governments have made clear that this is not the preferred outcome. After four years of suspension, the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to see devolved government restored and their elected representatives working openly for them in a fully restored Assembly and shared Executive.

Mr Jeff Ennis MP: Although some of my thunder has been stolen by earlier events, I would like to thank the Minister of State for his reply. In the UK, mention is often made of the special relationship enjoyed between our Prime Minister and the President of the United States. Does the Minister of State agree with me that the much more positive special relationship is that which has existed between our Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in the last ten years? Does he agree that they have both invested an enormous amount of personal capital into the peace process in Northern Ireland?

I wish the Minister of State, the Taoiseach and all Members of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body who are standing in the forthcoming elections all the very best in Wales, Ireland and Scotland.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: Thank you for your good wishes. I do not think I could have expressed it better myself.

4.45 p.m.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: A timetable for the establishment of the institutions in Northern Ireland is what the Irish people need, both North and South. On two occasions this morning, two people confidently said that there was no plan B. Can the Minister of State clarify that? Hopefully, the Assembly will be established and the progress on policing that has been made will be maintained.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The Government's primary focus is on the plan to secure devolution by the deadline of 26 March. However, should the parties fail to agree to share power by that date, then the new British-Irish partnership arrangements would come into operation. It would be inappropriate for the Governments to go into any detail in describing how those new arrangements would work. They would ensure the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement to the fullest extent possible, including its policing aspects, and in a manner which ensures that the rights and interests of all in Northern Ireland and on these islands are fully protected and respected. The point has been made about how real this deadline is. The Westminster legislation on the St Andrews Agreement is very specific. There is no wriggle room. If devolution does not take place and an Executive is not formed on 26 March, then the Northern Ireland Assembly will be dissolved indefinitely. If that happened, it could not be restored without fresh elections. If, despite the best efforts of the Governments, an Executive is not formed on 26 March, it will be long into the future before the prospect of partnership government can become a reality for the people of Northern Ireland.

Health Services

2. Senator Francis O'Brien asked the Minister of State at the Department Justice, Equality and Law Reform if the Department of Health and Children has explored the possibility of developing cross-Border co-operation in areas such as speech and language therapy, and if he will make a statement in the matter.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: We are working with our Northern counterparts across a range of areas to deliver more effective health services to citizens throughout the island. No specific arrangements are currently in place regarding the provision of speech therapy services. However, we are working with our Northern counterparts to develop a more strategic approach as part of a joint study on health co-operation. This study will identify further areas for mutually beneficial co-operation in the health sector. Speech and language therapy service provision may be considered in the context of this joint study.

Senator Francis O'Brien: Would the Minister of State examine the possibility of broadening cross-Border co-operation in other aspects of health? Health is a critical issue and it is very important that cross-Border co-operation occurs in this area, especially between hospitals on both sides of the Border.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: It is a specific concern of the Minister for Health and Children that there would be closer hospital co-operation and a closer dovetailing of services between Northern Ireland and this State.

Senator Hayes: Is the Minister of State aware that there are currently 25 unfilled posts for speech and language therapists in Dublin? One hundred young Irish people will graduate this year from four colleges in the Republic, none of whom will be able to take up unemployment with the HSE because they do not have three years of postgraduate

experience. Given that there is such a demand for therapists in Dublin and in other major urban areas, the most rational way to resolve this issue would be for the HSE to establish new junior posts and to allow people from Northern Ireland, from this Republic and elsewhere to take up those posts. Otherwise we will not be able to appoint the people to positions that already exist and are ready to be filled.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The Minister has asked the HSE to try to move that matter forward, but there are complex issues of industrial dialogue involved.

Question No. 3 answered with Question No. 1.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Question No. 4 is from Deputy Kirk, but he is absent so we will move on to the next question.

Economic Development

5. The Lord Smith of Clifton asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform what are the forecasts of the growth in North-South economic activity over the next decade, following the recent announcement of the Republic of Ireland's long-term economic strategy.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: In the new national development plan, the Government sets out a major €184 billion investment blueprint for the next seven years. Developing North-South and all-island economic co-operation is an important horizontal theme of the plan. The two Governments strengthened co-operation in this area last year. Last October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland launched a ground-breaking comprehensive study on the all-island economy.

We agreed a range of important initiatives, such as further collaboration in research and development, maximising access to EU funds and a new targeted approach to enterprise training and identifying labour market needs on an all-island basis. We agreed to pool our resources in trade promotion, including opening up trade missions to businesses across the island and the placing of the overseas offices of Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland at the disposal of companies on both sides of the Border. Last January, the Taoiseach led a very successful trade mission to the Gulf that included over 20 Northern Ireland businesses.

The Government also put forward proposals for significant investment in North-South projects and initiatives for mutual benefit. The Government is proposing joint investment in new strategic projects as well as new all-island competitive funds to support the key drivers of competitiveness in areas such as education, skills, science and innovation. We want to reach early agreement with the British Government and with a restored Northern Ireland Executive on these new proposals. We look forward to working with locally elected Northern Ireland Ministers to deliver the benefits of greater North-South economic co-operation. This economic activity will promote prosperity and high quality public services throughout this island of Ireland, but I regret to tell Lord Smith that there is no Adam Smith in the employment of the Department of Foreign Affairs and that I cannot give him a precise percentage figure for how much additional economic activity we hope to generate.

The Lord Smith of Clifton: I welcome the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the national development plan. I thank the Minister of State for that comprehensive reply and for the acknowledgement that he could not answer the question I asked him. He is refreshingly honest and a very skilled parliamentarian. On behalf of the Smiths of these islands, may I say that it is about time you got yourself an Adam.

Question No. 6 answered with Question No. 1.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Question No. 7 is in the name of Mr. Eddie McGrady MP, who is not here, so we will move on to Question No. 8.

Broadcasting Legislation

8. Senator Paschal Mooney asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, recognising the close co-operation between the British and Irish Governments in advancing the cause of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland and the essential role of communication in creating a better understanding between all traditions on this island, to request the Irish Government to enter into a dialogue with the UK Government to amend the charter of the BBC to permit the transmission of BBC Northern Ireland throughout the island of Ireland, and in return that the UK Government facilitate the transmission of RTE television services in Northern Ireland.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: Television broadcasting services provided by both the BBC and by RTE are available throughout the island of Ireland across different platforms. BBC programming is available throughout Ireland on various cable and satellite subscription platforms. BBC Northern Ireland is also available on direct transmission through overspill in the Border region. RTE services are available in Northern Ireland primarily through overspill, but covering extensive parts of Northern Ireland. Under the Good Friday Agreement, specific provision is made for the transmission of TG4 in Northern Ireland so that it is commonly available.

In recent years, broadcasters throughout the island have had discussions around the possibility of reciprocal provision of broadcasting services between broadcasters in the two jurisdictions. The possibility for reciprocal provision of services particularly in public service broadcasting has been acknowledged by the Governments. The advent of digital terrestrial television holds out possibilities in this regard.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I am grateful to the Minister of State for his reply. The context of this is that the advent of digital broadcasting will mean that the overspill will no longer be available to many people living in the Border counties, specifically in east Leinster.

The platforms to which the Minister of State referred are all subscriber driven. The public broadcaster in this State, RTE, is currently a free-to-air terrestrial service. When it goes digital, it will continue to be free to air. The BBC has introduced its own freeview service in the UK, including Northern Ireland. I ask the Minister of State to engage with his UK colleagues in that context. It would require an amendment to the BBC charter to allow the transmission of BBC Northern Ireland. In return for that concession to the rest of the island of Ireland, RTE could be permitted to broadcast free to air throughout all Northern Ireland. I appreciate that sections of Northern Ireland receive RTE, but I am really thinking about the north east. The context of this question is about reconciliation, and I suggest that there are many in the Unionist community who do not receive RTE television.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: I am sympathetic to the points raised by Senator Mooney. The take-up of broadcasting services in the Irish communications market shows that 29% of Irish television households receive free to air analogue services only, 31% of households now subscribe to satellite services, 22% of households subscribe to analogue cable services, while 19% of Irish TV households subscribe to digital cable services.

The Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2006 seeks to put in place a licensing framework for a national roll-out of digital terrestrial television in the future. The licensing of a national DTT roll-out under this Bill will commence in 2007. RTE will be obliged to

provide public service broadcasting channels on a DTT platform and the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland will licence commercial broadcasters to provide services on the same platform. The Bill includes similar proposals for a licensing framework for digital radio. I will also take up the issue raised by Senator Mooney.

Mr Andrew MacKinlay MP: I support Senator Mooney's representations. It seems to me that this is unfinished business. The former Irish Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Mr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, canvassed this idea a quarter of a century ago. It clearly would have helped a great deal if we had the capacity in those years to receive RTE in Northern Ireland and to receive BBC throughout Ireland. It is time to move this on when the BBC charter is under review. RTE is not extensively available at the moment in Northern Ireland, which is a great loss.

The British-Irish Interparliamentary Body could pursue this, either through our committees or through an *ad hoc* committee. It is a classic case of where we could advance something with our respective Governments and broadcasting organisations in the next six to 12 months.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I am not sure what the question is. It sounds more like a statement than a question.

Mr Andrew MacKinlay MP: Will the Minister of State think about it?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources has had meetings with the terrestrial broadcasters of Ireland, consisting of RTE, TG4, TV3, BBC NI and UTV, which were also attended by the broadcasting regulation bodies and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on the topic of all-island television terrestrial channel transmissions. Clearly, all the players have been brought together under the one roof, but we know that does not guarantee anything. Issues around the reciprocal availability of services have complex histories. The position will change as this State begins to develop DTT and as the UK moves to a full DTT roll-out, with analogue switch-off in Northern Ireland planned for 2012.

Traditionally, there has been significant overspill of Northern Ireland services into the Republic and of Irish services into Northern Ireland. Regulatory authorities on both sides have gone out of their way to accommodate this overspill, to the point where it is taken as a given by viewers in many parts of the island. It is estimated that 15% of Irish households watch UK services on analogue overspill. Significant areas of Northern Ireland have good access to Irish terrestrial broadcasters.

The popularity of UK terrestrial services in Ireland was the driving force behind the creation of Cablelink, the development of other cable networks and the emergence of deflectors, which had a big history in our broadcasting politics. The retransmission of UK services in Ireland has largely been by means of subscription-based services such as NTL, Chorus and Sky.

5.00 p.m.

The UK services have generally received compensation where they are retransmitted in this subscription-based manner.

The Good Friday Agreement facilitated the provision of TG4 in Northern Ireland. For the first time, services from one jurisdiction are available in the other through coordinated transmissions. The UK actually transmits and pays for the transmission of TG4 from Divis Mountain near Belfast. This can be seen as either a precedent for a way forward towards all-island transmissions or as a once-off solution, reflecting the nature of the Agreement.

All the bodies involved are very positive about the possibilities, but BBC Northern Ireland has identified significant legislative and commercial hurdles. The BBC charter does not propose purposeful transmission of BBC channels outside the UK on a free-to-air basis. BBC Worldwide, a commercial company within the BBC, gains revenue from the sale of BBC services to the cable companies for retransmission. These are significant legal and commercial hurdles. That said, with goodwill on all sides we should try to make progress on this.

Mr Robert Walter MP: I want to follow up on that last point. BBC 1 and BBC 2 are available throughout Ireland on satellite. They are part of the Sky package and are also available free to air, but RTE is not available outside the Republic. I can receive Welsh television channels in England without any difficulty, because they are all free to air. I can also receive French, Italian and Spanish television. It would not take a rocket scientist to find a way whereby RTE could be available free to air on satellite throughout the UK. It is already being broadcast on satellite, but it is blocked by RTE. Can the Minister of State take that up with RTE?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: I will take it up with the Minister concerned.
Road Safety

9. **The Lord Dubs** asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform what discussions he has had with the UK government about new initiatives to reduce the rate of road accidents in Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: There has been significant co-operation in recent years between the British and Irish administrations on road safety. The Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland and the National Safety Council have developed a total of nine joint advertising campaigns. These campaigns have targeted speeding, seat-belt wearing, drink-driving, vulnerable road users, motorbike safety, driver and pedestrian inattention and child safety. A joint campaign on child safety and seat-belt wearing was launched in Belfast on 3 October 2006 and a new joint North-South anti-speeding campaign is planned for April 2007.

Other joint initiatives have focused on mutual recognition of driver disqualification, which is being taken forward on an east-west basis. A ministerial meeting of the transport sectoral group of the British-Irish Council took place on 9 February 2006. At that meeting, the Irish Minister for Transport formally agreed with his UK counterpart to enter into bilateral arrangements to recognise mutually driving disqualifications as envisaged in the EU convention. Work to implement this initiative is ongoing.

It was also agreed at the British-Irish Council meeting that officials in both administrations should examine the prospects for greater co-operation in the treatment of road traffic infringements where the penalty falls short of disqualification. Arising from work in this area, the two Ministers agreed on the terms of reference proposed for a study of the feasibility of greater co-operation on lesser road traffic infringements. Officials will undertake a study on this basis and report back to the Ministers during 2007.

The Lord Dubs: I am grateful the Minister of State for his answer. This body has been concerned for a long time about the fact that motorists from one jurisdiction escape all penalty points in the other jurisdiction. Can the Minister confirm the figures in today's *Irish Independent* showing that in the last four years, some 400,000 offences attracting penalty points have been recorded here, but some 90,000 could not be enforced because they involved drivers who had registration plates from outside the Republic, mainly from Northern Ireland?

The Minister of State's answer was positive, but this is taking an awfully long time and after years of effort, the British Government is still talking about feasibility studies. Can the Minister of State press the British Government to get on with this?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The UK Minister of State for Transport recently wrote to the Minister for Transport, advising him that it is now likely to be later than the first half of 2007 when the UK and Northern Ireland authorities will have the necessary legislative and consultative processes complete to enable mutual recognition to be put in place. All parties are anxious to expedite this matter, but this consultation process must take place.

I cannot verify the figures of the *Irish Independent*, although I have no reason to doubt them. It is not necessarily the case that all the vehicles came from Northern Ireland. A large number would come from other parts of the UK and from continental Europe.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: In the past three years on my peninsula, 30 people under the age of 30 were killed in road collisions. The road deaths issue is having a great impact in my constituency. Can the Minister of State pass on to the relevant Minister the desire in my area to see increased co-operation between forensic teams on both sides of the Border? If such a team is not available in Donegal, a team from Derry might work on a cross-Border accident.

There is a big issue with Northern registered cars. If such cars come into Donegal, they have not taken any NCT. More support should be given to customs to ensure that all cars on the road are as safe as they are expected to be in this jurisdiction.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: I will take up those issues with the Minister for Transport.

Mr Jim Dobbin MP: In its efforts to reduce the number of road accidents, possibly through reducing the number of cars, has the Irish Government any plans to introduce road tolls or congestion charges similar to those in the UK?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: There has been a great increase in the number of registered motor cars in the Republic in the last decade. Road tolls are part of the national roads plan, as the construction of the roads is part funded by tolling arrangements. That has happened near Drogheda on the main road between Dublin and Belfast. We have installed a toll near the site of the Battle of the Boyne. Similarly, tolls have been introduced on other roads such as the Dublin port tunnel, which has been opened to connect Dublin Port with the Whitehall area near Dublin Airport. Ireland's most infamous toll is only a few hundred yards from here, namely the toll on the M50 bridge which crosses the River Liffey on the western side of the city and is Dublin's most famous car park. The Government now has plans to remove this toll. Unhappily, it will not happen until after the general election. As a Deputy for this constituency, this is a matter of great regret to me. The plan is to replace it with barrier-free tolling, so the motorist will still be caught but the delay should be eliminated.

With the rapid growth in car numbers, Dublin has developed very serious traffic problems and we are trying to address them through a massive public transport investment programme. The issue of congestion charges has hit the radar for the first time, following its recommendation by some suitable Government quango. It has not evoked any great echo in this intense pre-election period, but it is an issue that will not go away.

We are making a great deal more progress on the construction of our national roads network, linking the principal cities, towns and regions with Dublin and with each other. We have a very ambitious roads programme which will involve linking most of the cities of the State and Dublin with motorway or dual carriageway routes by the end of this

decade.

The issue of road connections between the north west and the rest of the State is very important. It is one of the crucial reasons that influenced us to invest in future capital developments in Northern Ireland. It is very important to us to improve road connections between Donegal and the rest of Ireland.

Mr John Griffiths AM: Is there enough sharing of good practice between Ireland and the UK? A number of initiatives in Wales have been quite successful in reducing deaths and serious injuries on the roads. Examples include 15 mph and 20 mph speed limits in inner-urban areas, imaginative educational measures for younger drivers, safe routes to schools and so on. I was struck by the number of signs on rural Irish roads that pointed out the number of deaths in an area over a particular period. We have problems on our rural roads in Wales, but we do not have those signs. Is there enough communication to share good practice between our two countries?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: It is an area we should examine. Many of our problems are on rural roads and occur late at night. We have a large network of rural roads and it is something on which we could share knowledge.

The issue raised initially by Lord Dubs is valid. The lack of integration of the two sets of road traffic legislation has had very bad consequences. It is an open secret in this part of Ireland that the Northern Ireland driver is a rather notorious creature in terms of his behaviour on Irish roads. Far more people from Northern Ireland visit the Republic than *vice versa*. It may well be the case that those from the Republic would develop a similarly bad reputation if they were let loose in large numbers on the roads in Northern Ireland. This points to the need to improve the integration of the road traffic system and to move bureaucracy forward so that issues like penalty points and mutual recognition of disqualification are addressed. When people realise that this is the case, they will modify their behaviour accordingly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): Question Nos. 10 and 11 have been withdrawn. Deputy Jerry Cowley sent us a message that he is down with the flu, so we send him our best wishes.

Higher Education Grants

12. Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD asked the Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform about the progress made in having equality of choice restored to low income students from the Border counties who wish to avail of local third level education at universities and colleges in Derry, Coleraine, Limavady and Belfast, following the imposition of fees by those institutions that has inhibited the ability of those most in need to avail of higher education, deemed to be central to the development of the north west.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The development of skills and access to education were identified as a key objective of the north west gateway initiative. The British and Irish Governments recently established the cross-Border north-west workforce development forum under that initiative, which brings together education providers and the private sector throughout the region. There was a concern last year that students from the Republic would be charged access fees for further education courses in the North. However, the two Governments came to an arrangement to ensure that this did not happen during the current academic year. Work on the long-term resolution of this issue is ongoing. The two Governments agreed last week to prioritise this work, particularly as students are now beginning to address their options for the next academic year.

Students undertaking approved higher education courses at colleges and universities in the North pay fees like their Northern Ireland counterparts, but they are eligible for maintenance grants from the Department of Education and Science. The two Governments are committed to developing co-operation and enhancing access to education on a cross-Border basis. We are working to identify further areas for mutually beneficial co-operation in the higher education sector.

5.15 p.m.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I thank the Minister of State for his reply. I recognise that there has been significant movement on further education, where Northern Ireland tried to impose fees on students from the Republic, which would have been complete discrimination. However, a Donegal student in the past would have had the choice of going to Derry, Coleraine, Queens or Jordanstown at the same cost as Dublin, Galway, Cork or Limerick. That equality of choice no longer exists. I ask that the Minister of State should convey this to the Minister of Education and Science. Does he agree that it is to the significant detriment of employment opportunity in all of Ulster if there is an impediment to third level education for low-income families?

I have two other specific questions. We can currently get a maintenance grant from the Republic, but we are not eligible for bursaries or scholarships in Northern Ireland universities. The University of Ulster is currently looking at the potential for us to receive scholarships. The Minister of State might be able to work on that with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Education and Science.

Changes in the fee structure this year will mean that the fees are deferred and not paid up front. Instead of paying the fees, an individual now gets a student loan of around £3,000, which is to be paid back once the person is in employment and earning more than £15,000. Will a student from the Republic who studies in the North, avails of deferral of fees and never takes up employment in the UK, ever pay back the fees? Will he or she get caught in some other respect? In other words, is my problem solved or is it not?

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: The Deputy will have to ask Her Majesty's Government about that. A number of heads of universities in this State who bitterly regret the fact that fees were abolished for third level institutions. If a student from this State attends a higher education course in Northern Ireland, he or she pays tuition fees on the same basis as Northern Ireland residents. The free fees initiative in the Republic does not apply outside the State, and there are no plans to extend it. Eligible students attending courses in Northern Ireland can apply for maintenance grants. This includes courses at higher national diploma level which are pursued in colleges approved for the purpose of the higher education grants scheme and the Vocational Education Committees' scholarship scheme. I will certainly raise the issue of bursaries and scholarships with the Minister for Education and Science and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Lord Brooke: These may be the last words I ever utter on the body, and I utter them with the greatest affection for the Deputy from Donegal who asked Question No. 12. I congratulate the Minister of State on having answered with such clarity a question which possessed no main verb, and thus notionally no question mark either.

Mr Brian Lenihan TD: Obscurity is often important in politics.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): That concludes questions to the Minister of State. I thank him on behalf of Members for the manner in which he took the questions, which was of the usual high standard. He mentioned that he was looking for a tie, so as a token of thanks I would like to present him with our own tie.

There are a few short announcements. Committees B and D will now meet in the meeting rooms on the first floor. The bus to Farmleigh will leave at 6.45 p.m. and I advise Members to be in the lobby before then. It is more than a modest jaunt from here to Farmleigh if you miss the bus. There will be a reception when we arrive, while a tour of the house has been organised. Those who have not seen it before will enjoy that. Dinner will be at 8 p.m.

The sitting was suspended at 5.20 p.m.

Tuesday 6 March 2007

The sitting was resumed at 10.05 am

BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Good morning to you all. We had an excellent session yesterday and today's work will be a bit more businesslike.

The first item on the agenda is reports from Committee Chairmen. I remind colleagues that comments on the reports should be very brief and to the point so that we can move on to the substantive debate on the report from Committee A and the Governments responses to previous reports. I call on Michael Mates to report on the business of Committee A.

Report from Committee A (Sovereign Matters)

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: The Committee visited Newry where it spent a very good day. I shall enlarge on that later when we debate the report. Our future programme of work will be difficult with the Irish elections coming up, but we have firms plans to visit Belfast as soon as we are all reconstituted to talk to, hopefully, the restored Assembly and, even more hopefully, to the Executive. However, that depends on the outcome of the elections and the timing of the nominations of the Irish side to the Body.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much. Are there any comments on that? If not, I call Robert Walter to give us the report on the business of Committee B.

Report from Committee B (European Affairs)

Mr Robert Walter MP: Thank you, Co-Chairman. Committee B has had two projects under way since we last met, and both of them have been running for a little while. The first is on economic deprivation in Northern Ireland, and we had useful meetings in Brussels recently with Members of the European Parliament and officials from the European Commission principally about the peace programmes and the move from PEACE II to PEACE III. We plan to conclude the report and have it available in time for the next plenary.

The other report is on the common European defence and foreign policy and it has been ongoing for a little while. We are anxious to conclude our evidence taking in the next few months. Our inquiry again took us to Brussels where we met high-level delegations at both NATO and the European Council as well as at ambassadorial level on the British and Irish side. It was a very high-level briefing and I was pleased that we received it. We plan within the next month or so to try to knock this issue on the head before all the elections get under way. We hope to put this report to bed. When the Committee is reconstituted, we intend to look at the European implications of

immigration and asylum policy.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Robert. Are there any comments on that? If not, I will ask Paul Flynn to report on the business of Committee C.

Report from Committee B (Economic)

Mr Paul Flynn MP: The Committee is considering the issue of renewable energy and we visited Scotland, Donegal and Northern Ireland to examine the practical schemes that are up and running. We visited the site of a wave machine in Scotland that is named after a sea snake. It is working well and we were impressed by the fact that Scotland is aiming for 40 per cent. renewable energy by 2020. We also saw wind turbines in Donegal and visited probably the most impressive thing that we have seen—willow cultivation that is fertilised by sewage sludge. It is a big operation and takes in a quarter of the sewage sludge produced in Northern Ireland. It is an economic operation and could be implemented more widely.

We are conscious of the whole range of sources of renewable energy and of the fact that not enough comes from biomass and certainly not from tidal power, which has enormous possibilities. We hope to investigate biomass sources and tidal power and to complete the report on that for the next meeting of the Committee in the autumn.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Paul. I will now ask Alf Dubs to report on the business of Committee D.

Report from Committee D (Environmental and Social)

The Lord Dubs: Thank you, Co-Chairman. Committee D has been carrying out an inquiry into the Irish community in Britain. Since the last plenary, we have met twice on working visits: we have been to London, Leeds and Manchester. We were ably assisted by the Federation of Irish Societies and by the Irish embassy in London. They helped us to devise our programme, pointed us in the right direction and, indeed, accompanied us on our visits.

In London, we met local and central Government representatives and we visited the London Irish Centre in Camden town. We met other Irish community groups there. We also met Irish community groups in Leeds and Manchester, and we also met representatives and officials from Manchester city council. We have a little more work to do that will be based on the discussion that we had yesterday. We hope our full report will be available for the plenary in the autumn.

The second item to report is that the Committee accepted a long-standing invitation from the Nordic Council. Members from London and Dublin went to Helsinki in January where we attended the full meeting of the council, but perhaps, more importantly, we spent a whole morning with its the Environment Committee and exchanged information. Indeed, we were asked many questions about policies in Ireland and in Britain. The members of the council were very warm and welcoming and are anxious to work closely with us in the future, but we had to point out that we could not do much between now and the autumn because of the elections in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but they very much want to keep in touch with us and exchange views.

My third and last item is simply to say a big “Thank you” to Elaine Hollowed for the work that she has done from the Irish side to assist the Committee. Elaine is off to the Irish embassy in Oslo shortly. We all wish her well and thank her for the work that she has

done in helping the Committee.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Alf. Are there any comments on that? If not, we move to item 2, which is the report from Committee A on “Barriers to Trade”. I now ask Michael Mates to move the motion formally and open the debate.

Report from Committee A: Barriers to Trade

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I beg to move:

That the Body take note of the Report of Committee A entitled 'Barriers to Trade' and the conclusions and recommendations should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations (document no. 124).

We have concluded our report on “Barriers to Trade”. As I said earlier, we had an excellent meeting in Newry in January with *Intertradelreland*, which is one of the six North-South bodies. We learned that one of the key barriers to trade is the lack of knowledge and contact between businessmen on either side of the border. We met the chief executive officer, senior board members and the vice-chair, Barry Fitzsimons. We were most impressed by *Intertradelreland*'s work on trade promotion, graduate programmes and building contacts between both sides. It does excellent work on a very small budget.

We also met senior representatives from the Irish Business and Employers Federation, the Confederation of British Industry and the Joint Business Council. They spoke about the need for liberalisation of the energy market and the necessity for perhaps an all-Ireland body to promote inward investment in both North and South.

Our key recommendations are outlined on page 5 of the report. Above all, we hope that restoration of devolved Government in Northern Ireland will enable an early meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council to take place. Our Chairman, Mr. Jim O’Keeffe subsequently met the head of IBEC, Mr. Maurice Healy, and it was indicated that IBEC, the CBI and the Joint Business Council would be interested in further contact with the body and might address a plenary session at some stage.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you very much, Michael. Does anyone wish to take part in a debate on this issue? I first call Mr. Seymour Crawford, **Mr. Seymour Crawford TD:** Thank you very much, Co-Chairman. I apologise for not studying the report in full, but I wanted to comment on the fact that the one sector that has been able to overcome the barriers to trade is the agri-food sector. Most of the major food companies in the North and South have processing plants in the North and South. Indeed, the Kerry Group, the Goodman Group, the Town of Monaghan Cooperative in my area, Lakeland and others have been able to overcome the barriers and become involved in a big way on an all-Ireland basis. If the Committee has not looked at this issue, it could do so to see how that sector has managed to develop its processes in a meaningful fashion.

I totally agree with the comments of the Vice-Chair of the Committee. Currency and taxation systems are major issues, but we have to remember that trade in the border region—perhaps with the exception of Dundalk and Sligo—has suffered severely. County Monaghan, County Leitrim and Donegal have all faced difficulties in attracting industry to those areas. When the peace process is finalised, I hope that it will eliminate many of the problems and that barriers will fall.

10.15 am

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Michael, did you wish to comment on that?

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I am grateful to Seymour for, as always, his wise remarks. Because we were studying “Barriers to Trade”, we did not study the agricultural sector because there are no such barriers in that sector. It has done so well that it is an example to the rest of the industrial scene on this island. I note what Seymour says and, although it may be difficult to learn lessons to read across because the agriculture sector is so different, we will certainly do so if that is possible.

Mr Elfyn Llywd MP: Last August, I was in Donegal speaking to several people about the economic situation and also taking a holiday. Seymour Crawford is absolutely right. It is difficult to attract industry to Donegal and that part of the west of Ireland, and much of this report will help to address that problem. Committee A makes some important recommendations, but I do not underestimate the task before its members. The recommendations are undoubtedly important, but some of them may be difficult to achieve. However, given the political climate and, hopefully, the reinstatement of the North-South Ministerial Council before long, there could be an impetus to move forward with important recommendations.

Paragraph 9 deals with the astonishing problem of dual visas, and I am pleased that the Committee has highlighted that. Given the common travel area and the ease with which trade is undertaken within the European Union, a resolution to the problem is certainly achievable. It is important to review the matter, as the Committee so rightly says.

I benefited from the differential in fuel costs last summer, but I was astonished by the difference between the price of a gallon of diesel in the Republic and in the North. The issue has been debated many times—in Westminster, this Body and elsewhere—but it is very difficult to deal with because individual Governments decide their fiscal policy. However, an all-Ireland energy market is fundamental to further success in liberalising trade and ensuring that all parts of the island are given the best possible assistance to market their goods.

Yesterday, we heard from Minister Lenihan that 25 companies from the North of Ireland recently went on the Taoiseach’s outward trade delegation. That is very much to be commended and I hope that the Committee’s recommendation about *Intertrade* Ireland’s remit can be followed up by both Governments.

With those few words, I welcome the report. It makes a very useful contribution to the debate. I hope that both Governments will implement as far as they can the recommendations that have been put in place.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: I will be brief. Michael Mates suggested that there was no policy for agriculture.

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I said no problem.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: Just a moment now. I wanted to point out that this country has lost everything to do with agriculture in places such as Mitchelstown and Mallow. Jobs have gone and they have not been replaced, because of the rise in imports. The only sugar factory that we had in this little country of ours has been closed whereas in the 1930s great people got together to develop and organise the sugar industry. The closure has meant a serious problem in my part of the country.

The Baroness Harris: The inquiry was to identify the barriers to trade and their possible implications on the island of Ireland. Perhaps one of the main barriers to trade—if we can call it such—is the top-heavy reliance on the public sector in Northern

Ireland and the need for a great deal of private investment to redress some of the difficulties that Northern Ireland faces. I do not know whether the Committee examined this issue and whether it identified any means of redressing the balance caused by this inequality.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: The issue of the visa should be pursued with vigour. Not only does it affect business, but it must affect the tourist trade particularly, although not exclusively, in Northern Ireland. Clearly if businessmen and women are coming into the Republic, the fact that they do not have the necessary visa will be an impediment on their going to Northern Ireland. The same is true for law-abiding tourists from those countries that require visas. To be honest, I only became aware of the problem from a person who has long-standing rights of residence in the United Kingdom and who works for the BBC World Service. When my wife and I invited her to Northern Ireland and said that we would take her into the Republic, she pointed out that she required a visa to enter the Republic from Northern Ireland. Frankly, that is potty. We should be able to agree a common regime for businessmen and visitors to Ireland. One visa should be sufficient and if one has permanent leave to reside in the Irish Republic or London, that should be exchangeable across the two jurisdictions.

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: Reciprocal.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: Reciprocal. Thank you very much, my lord. *[Laughter.]*

When his lordship comes to reply, I would like him to tell us whether the Committee paid attention to the still unacceptable situation regarding the transport networks from the United Kingdom to the island of Ireland. The United Kingdom land mass is important as a bridge to continental Europe and if one pauses and thinks, one realises that there is much not competition on some of the routes across the sea. Indeed, there is a semimonopoly. The final 50 miles of the roads in north and south Wales are still in an unacceptable state, while those in Dumfries and Galloway are in a parlous state. In addition, there is an inordinately long wait for vehicles trying to get on to the ferry on the one direct sea route from England to Belfast—from Birkenhead even though it is described as Liverpool.

When I raised the issue with the Northern Ireland Secretary, he said to my irritation and dismay that it was a matter for the private sector. That is an abdication of responsibility by the Government, who should be taking the initiative. They should be seeking competition, improving the road networks and holding discussions between the various Governments that now have jurisdiction over the highways. A lot more could and should be done in the interests of the island of Ireland. The people who lose out are in Northern Ireland and in that part of the Republic in Donegal that is even more northern Ireland. The links are wholly inadequate. If we have not considered the issue, could we not put some energy into doing so and bring some pressure to bear on the Governments involved?

My final point has been alluded to over the past two days. There is a great disparity in commercial costs between Northern Ireland and the Republic. This year, Peter Hain tempered the triggering of the introduction of commercial industrial rates in Northern Ireland, and I understand the compelling political and economic case for doing that.

There is also a wider duty to the United Kingdom taxpayer. However, that decision works against creating a robust economy in Northern Ireland and will probably have long-term consequences. If a European had a small or medium-sized business at Warrenpoint, he would only have to cross the water to find that his industrial and commercial costs would be enormously reduced. The business of the new Executive in Northern Ireland, supported by the other Governments here, is to work towards parity of industrial and commercial costs between Northern Ireland and the Republic. That

simply makes sense. Not to work towards that would mean that what little manufacturing there is in Northern Ireland would haemorrhage away and there would be heavy economic costs and political consequences as a result.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I suppose that every sees the Irish economy as good and strong, and it is. However, the strength of the Celtic tiger means that people tend to travel to where the work is rather finding work in places such as Donegal. The report is therefore of great interest to me. I agree with what Andrew has just said about the private sector doing X, Y and Z without Governments taking conscious decisions to provide specific help.

I also agree that industries now tend to relocate to areas that are cheaper in terms of rates and corporation tax. For example, let us suppose that there is a job announcement of 130 new jobs and X amount of euro being given to support a business in my area. However, when we examine the issue more closely, we wonder whether it really is a new business. The answer is possibly not, but the relocation of an existing business. We do not gain that much and the area that the business has left loses, so it becomes a lose-lose situation in many respects. We must consider how we stop the haemorrhaging of jobs from one area to another if that does not result in a gain to either side.

I would really like the development of cross-border business parks and service sites in my area. If they were there people, people would be attracted to them. The small indigenous groups that already exist are already under pressure from the serious problem in border areas caused by the fact that residential land is now so valuable. To try even to keep land at a value that businesses can move into is almost impossible, because they cannot compete with the hundreds and hundreds of planning applications along the border from people in places such as Derry, where they will have to pay the water rates in April and housing rates. However, they can build a house in Donegal and not pay rates of any description.

The development of service sites would help to overcome the problem of the costs associated with setting up business in the not-so-trendy areas. If such sites were there, these areas could become trendier and, areas such as the Letterkenny-Derry corridor have been earmarked as gateways under the national strategy in the Republic. I agree that transport and access are key issues. The date of 26 March and the days and weeks after that will be crucial to us. The Irish Government have said that they will overcome the problem by providing the money for the access issues to be addressed, but that will not happen if an Executive is not formed.

I welcome the idea of an all-Ireland energy policy. I would like gas to be piped from Belfast to Donegal and not stop in Derry.

I recognise that the Irish Government have done much in terms of research and development. Giving the Letterkenny Institute university status has given those people looking in the feeling that education of some worth takes place there. Education will help trade at every point. If we do not have graduates in an area, we will not be able to attract the larger companies. If I was cheeky, I would refer to the fees issues once again. If we are not prepared to invest in education in an area that has been described as an economic basket case so that access to education is as easy as possible, we will not keep our graduates. One of the country's main attractions is the fact that we have invested in education and have graduates of such a standard that businesses from throughout the world are happy to invest in Ireland. Continuing to do that remains key to the success of Ulster.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you. I now call John Carty to wind up the debate.

10.30 am

Mr John Carty TD: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I second Michael Mates's proposal in moving the report. The meetings in Newry were most interesting and I would like to put on the record our thanks to IntertradeIreland, IBEC and the CBI who met and briefed us on barriers to cross-border trade.

It is evident that the business community on both sides of the political divide have embraced the political process and have dealings with each other. This is good. As a member of the Committee, I hope that the restoration of devolved Government in Northern Ireland will enable an early meeting of the restored North-South Ministerial Council. This is what the people up there seem to want.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): Thank you. Did you, Michael, want to add anything given the remarks that were made in the debate?

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: I want to respond to some of the points that have been made. I am sure that we are all very grateful to Sir Andrew Mackinlay. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP: Blessed.

Rt Hon Michael Mates MP: Do not overdo it. We are grateful to Andrew for his short contribution. He is right about the visa business, and the Committee made its strongest recommendations on that point.

Baroness Harris was absolutely right but Committee did not address the issue that she raised. The fact that the public sector in Northern Ireland is far too large is not a barrier to trade but a problem within Northern Ireland. Whatever happens in the next few months, we hope that steps will be taken to reduce the size of that sector.

We did not consider many other issues relating to cross-border trade, largely because we were conscious that we were encroaching on the work of Committee C. That is not our business. However, in consultation with the Chairman of Committee C, we decided to look at certain aspects of cross-border trade but roads, infrastructure and transport are issues for the Economic Committee. I am sure that it will consider them in due course.

I am grateful to the Members who have contributed to what has been a useful short debate.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): That is absolutely right. I found the debate very interesting.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body take note of the Report of Committee A entitled 'Barriers to Trade' and the conclusions and recommendations should be forwarded to both Governments and devolved administrations for their observations (document no. 124).

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We now come to item 3. I call Lord Dubs to move the motion. I know that he also wants to touch on the response to the report on life chances for young people.

**RESPONSES FROM RELEVANT IRISH AND UK GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS
TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS**

The Lord Dubs: I beg to move:

That the Body takes note of the responses to the following:

3.1. Report of Committee A entitled 'The Implication of the Introduction of British ID Cards for the Common Travel Area' (document no. 122).

3.2. Report of Committee C entitled 'Challenges and Opportunities facing the Small Farm Sector' (document no. 125).

3.3. Report of Committee D entitled 'Life Chances for Young People from the economically deprived areas of Belfast' (document no. 126).

We received some good responses on this occasion. In the past, we have not always had responses and the Steering Committee agrees that, in the future, we should press Governments hard for adequate responses to the Committee reports. I will say more about the Committee D report when we get to it.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): We can deal with the responses altogether. Does anyone wish to say anything before Alf makes his comments on the Committee D report?

Mr Robert Walter MP: I wish to comment on the report of Committee A on the implications of identity cards and the common travel area and on the response from the British Government. I have not seen a response from the Irish Government; I presume that they have not responded.

Paragraph 5 of the British Government's response says:

"A parallel development is the increasingly common requirement for some form of photographic identification for flights within the Common Travel Area, and increased security checks within airports for such flights. Those requirements are ones which are imposed by airlines and airports rather than being requirements of immigration law."

That final sentence is important. The response continues:

"What we are not, however, persuaded of is the proposition that the introduction of ID cards in itself will have an impact on the principle underlying the CTA—namely movement within the area without routine immigration checks."

Paragraph 8 adds:

"The Committee recommended that the British Government...ensure that the integrity of the Common Travel Area is preserved...The Government accepts these recommendations."

At every airport in the United Kingdom, there are separate channels for those arriving from the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and on domestic flights. I travel regularly from places such as Bristol and Southampton and know that even the smallest UK airports have such channels. The larger airports have the system down to a tee by separating arrivals from the Republic from other parts of the UK and the Channel Islands. Similarly in Europe, countries within the Schengen area have separated out Schengen arrivals from non-Schengen arrivals.

It appears to me that the only country that is unable to separate the channels is the Republic of Ireland. As I discovered on Sunday, we have the ridiculous situation of

walking several hundred yards along a corridor marked “UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man arrivals” that then merged just before passport control with the European arrivals. Hence I was asked for my passport, which I refused to give. I gave my driving licence in the spirit of the common travel area.

Could Committee A consider this issue? I know that it has been raised before by me and others on both sides of the Body, but the Government in Ireland seem incapable of upholding the spirit of the common travel area. In fact, it has been suspended as far as arrivals by air to the Republic are concerned.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): That is a very good point. I am sure that Committee A will have a look at it.

Mr Iain Smith MSP: I want to comment briefly on the report from Committee D. However, before doing so, I wish to place on record my thanks to my co-members of the Committee for the work that we have done over the past few years that I have been a Member of this Body. I put that on record in case I am not back after the Scottish elections on 3 May. It remains to be seen whether I will be re-elected or re-appointed. I have certainly enjoyed the work of Committee D. The work of the Committees is a key part of the work of this Body and Committee’s D report on “Life Chances for Young People in the Economically Deprived Areas of Belfast” is one of the most interesting projects that I have undertaken as a parliamentarian in the past eight years. It certainly opened my eyes to many problems and my only regret is that I was not able to participate in the debate at our meeting in Belfast, because I had to leave for business in Scotland.

I thank the UK Government for producing a comprehensive response to the report. I am sure that its Chair, Lord Dubs, will refer to that. It is unusual for the Body to receive a point-by-point response to the recommendations of a Committee and it is helpful to see what the Government are doing in response to the issues that the Committee has raised. It is important that the Committee returns to the issue at some future date to see how the Government—or, hopefully, the Northern Ireland Assembly—have implemented the recommendations.

I am particularly concerned about recommendation 17 on how funding decisions could provide more than short-term solutions; they need to provide long-term funding. That is one of the shortest recommendations and although the Government say that they are committed to long-term funding, they do not say what they will do about sorting out the myriad of badly co-ordinated short-term funding projects, particularly youth projects, in Belfast. It is crucial that there is a proper use strategy in Northern Ireland, but that is completely lacking at the moment. Instead, we have a series of ill-coordinated and illfunded projects that mean that those who are working on them spend most of their time working on how to find the funding needed to continue their work rather than doing the work that they should be doing. That point needs to be addressed by the Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly, and I hope it will be considered carefully in the next few months and that Committee D will be able to return to the issue in a year’s time to see whether progress has been made.

Mr Paul Flynn MP: The report from Committee C on small farms was chaired by Séamus Kirk, with the active participation of Seymour Crawford and John Ellis. Any report with those three behind it will be very well informed.

The report spelt out starkly the central issue. Although the response from Mary Coughlan is a full one on many of the detailed matters and niche issues, it disregards entirely the crisis of subsidies. To spell the problem out simply, the new countries in the EU—Poland and so on—receive subsidies of about 15 per cent. of total income while the established countries receive subsidies of about 32 per cent. Switzerland is the

great exception and the cause of much irritation. It is outside the EU and its subsidies are at 65 per cent and many countries feel that it competes unfairly with its neighbours. However, the report spelt out clearly that subsidies in the Republic are 75 per cent, while those in the North are 125 per cent. Farming in Northern Ireland is effectively bankrupt.

Another way of describing the problem is to refer to subsidies as a farm tax. In the last year in the United Kingdom, the farm tax paid by the average family went up to well over £550 a year. A very substantial sum is being paid. Strains will also come about as a result of the single payment because farmers will be paid not for what they produce, but for owning land. The whole philosophy throughout Europe is to reduce subsidies and that is an overwhelmingly important issue for the future of small farms. However, it is likely to cause great conflict in the future as taxpayers become reluctant to pay increasingly large farm taxes. In addition, there are likely to be conflicts between areas that are competing in the same market but receiving wholly different levels of subsidy. I understand the reluctance to tackle the issue in the current pre-election circumstances, but the response to the report ignores the main issue.

10.45 am

Mr Quentin Davies MP: I wish to return to the report on the common travel area and identity cards and make three points.

First, I had exactly the same experience at the airport on Sunday as Bob Walter. I drew exactly the same conclusions, except that I agreed to show my passport. I totally agree with him. The whole process is obviously an affront to the notion of a common travel area and it is in sharp contrast to the regime that exists in the other common travel area that exists within the EU—the Schengen area. From a security point of view, the process is complete nonsense. Anyone can walk or drive across the border or take a bus, train or Enterprise from Belfast without any identity checks at all. The British Government's response that this is a matter for airlines and airports and nothing to do with Governments is hypocritical. It is clear to me that the person who asked me for my passport on Sunday night was doing so on behalf of the Irish Government. I did not make a fuss at the time, but I did note that it was a strange procedure.

My other two points are about the major lacunae in the potential coverage of ID cards and were spectacularly not addressed in the British Government's response to the report. I do not know whether they will be addressed in the Irish Government's response or even in the original report, as I have not seen either of the documents. The issue will not be dealt with thoroughly until those lacunae are addressed. The first is that the Government's intention is that ID cards will ultimately be made compulsory in the UK. Everybody in the UK will have some form of ID—either an ID card if he or she is British and a subject of Her Majesty or a foreign passport or an ID card if someone is from outside the EU or another EU country. Everyone will be able to identify themselves with a formal document. However, if there is a common travel area and the Irish Republic does not issue ID cards, anybody from Ireland can legitimately wander round the UK without such a form of ID. Quite simply he or she will not have one. It is also clear that anyone who is stopped by the police and asked to identify themselves can always say, "Actually I'm Irish". Although that can be verified through a long procedure, it would involve taking them to a police station and holding them for many hours to see whether what they had said was true. That will be a major flaw and lacuna in the whole system unless the British Government can persuade the Irish Government—I have no idea whether they are trying to do so—to introduce a parallel ID card system in the Republic.

The other lacuna relates to Northern Ireland. Under the Belfast Agreement, anyone can

choose to be Irish or British and cannot be prevented from making that choice. When ID cards become compulsory in the UK, someone will be able to say, "I'm not taking an ID card; I'm Irish." Anybody could do that and it would not make any difference whether they came from the Unionist or the Nationalist community as long as they happened to live in Northern Ireland. It therefore follows that many people who are resident or domiciled in the UK and who would always have been considered as citizens of the UK may, for this purpose, say that they are not citizens of the UK. They could therefore resist being given a compulsory ID card. Many people could do that because they object to the introduction of ID cards and not through any sense of identity or nationality. I have described two major gaping holes in the whole project and answers are required on how they will be addressed.

The Baroness Blood: I wish to make three quick comments. I welcome the report from Committee D. It is one of the fullest reports that I have seen, but I am a bit worried about the reliance on Sure Start. I agree that it should be expanded throughout Northern Ireland but it will not receive the same amount of money. I am therefore worried that the programme might be narrowed a bit.

Secondly, one of the recommendations is that adolescent in-patient mental health should be based in north and west Belfast where the real need is, but the report says that it will be in Foster Green. Anyone who lives in Belfast knows that Foster Green is not the most accessible place to reach.

Thirdly, the Committee recommended that governors of schools should include business people. That is vital. Certainly boards of governors in Protestant areas do not have business expertise.

The Lord Dubs: I agree very much with what May Blood and Iain Smith have said. As the Body knows, May Blood has been extremely helpful to Committee D in all its work. We are enormously grateful to her for that. I very much agree with her about child psychiatric units. Given the high suicide rates and the dangers associated with that, we urge that such units should be in the areas of deprivation. If a lengthy journey to south Belfast is required, the units will not work so well and visitors will find it more difficult to reach them.

On Sure Start, we have put a great deal of emphasis on support for pre-schooling. If the Government do not put enough help in, that will negate one of our main recommendations. On paper, the Government have said that there will be an expansion of provision next month, but I take May Blood's point that if the expansion is not large enough, the system will not do what we recommend, which is to start early with young people so that they have a chance to get out of deprivation. We were concerned about the need for school closures. The prospect of closure of schools that are half empty hanging over the heads of the teachers and children has a depressing effect on their morale. Things should happen quickly. The Government have accepted many of our recommendations, but the question is how long they will take to implement them.

The Government also fully accepted a point that came out of the discussion with head teachers and others. Schools can be a focus in the community for a wide range of support and provision and not just the actual teaching within school hours. Although the Government accepted that point, we will wait to see whether they give effect to the recommendation. They said that they started in January to provide an alcohol and drug treatment service for young people up to the age of 18. That is very welcome, but we would have wanted it to happen a long time ago. Better late than never. We can also encourage the sharing of best practice. There is an interesting schools completion programme in Ireland. I recently spoke at some length on the phone to the person in charge of it and we used some of the information that we obtained. We hope

that the Northern Ireland Office or Education Department will look at the schools completion programme in the Republic to see what we can learn and whether it is possible to replicate some of its important features.

We received a response from the Scottish Executive and from the Irish Government, who announced a funding package for the under-fives co-funded with The Atlantic Philanthropies.

The British Government produced a lengthy and detailed response and answered the report point by point. To that extent, we can be quite flattered that they have taken the report seriously. We had a meeting with David Hanson, the Minister, in the middle of the investigation and he was keen on the report. I hope that it will be helpful and will assist the Education Department when a new Executive are formed. I agree that it is appropriate for Committee D to keep the issue under review and to go back to the recommendations to see to what extent they have been implemented and whether what I hope will be the new Administration in Belfast need a further push.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: Baroness Blood took us to the communities that she grew up and worked in and the first-hand contact with those communities was very rewarding for our Committee.

Brian Lenihan, in his response, mentioned the poor co-ordination and the need to maximise the impact of collective resources. Many departments are putting money into the poor communities, but it remains to be seen whether they are co-operating. That point needs to be taken into account.

After our visit to Belfast that May Blood organised, I tabled about 100 parliamentary questions; I was so angered by the injustice out there. The key statistic that stuck in my mind is that 2 per cent. of the kids from the Shankill go to university compared to 70 per cent. from North Down. We will not have a functioning society while there is that degree of disparity. The new Executive will have to take tough decisions if they get up and running in three or four weeks' time. However, we do not want pork-barrel politics with people saying, "I want this for my community, because they got this for their community." There must be a general recognition from all politicians in Northern Ireland that finances and resources have to go to the areas that were denied them in the past. The school closure programme is not easy but such tough decisions have to be taken so that we can, guided by the statistics, target the resources for education specifically at the poorer communities. Leadership is an issue in those communities and there must be financial incentives to get the brightest and best school heads to apply for positions in the tough neighbourhoods.

The other issue that I would like to focus on is the tapering that offers people a reward for coming off benefits. With the Welsh Affairs Select Committee, I visited a number of projects in Ireland about eight years ago that used tapering. At last in the UK, we have latched on to that. In south Wales, Pathways to Work and the "Want2Work" initiative offer financial incentives of up to £40 a week, with perhaps £1,000 on top of that, so that they overcome the barriers to coming off benefits. In areas of Belfast, the take-up is up to 30 per cent. but the scheme needs to be rolled out across the city so that the cycle of deprivation and poverty that is fed from one generation to another is broken. Tapering has a big role to play in that.

As I said yesterday, early intervention is the key. As May Blood said, Sure Start needs to be rolled out to every poor community. If we can put the resources in place, we can release the potential and break down poverty in those communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the responses to the following:

3.1. Report of Committee A entitled 'The Implication of the Introduction of British ID Cards for the Common Travel Area' (document no. 122).

3.2. Report of Committee C entitled 'Challenges and Opportunities facing the Small Farm Sector' (document no. 125).

3.3. Report of Committee D entitled 'Life Chances for Young People from the economically deprived areas of Belfast' (document no. 126).

ELEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

The Co-Chairman (Mr. Pat Carey TD): I beg to move:

That the Body takes note of the Eleventh Annual Report of the Body (Doc. 123). You will recall that we met in Belfast last October shortly after the St Andrews Agreement was published. I have looked through the minutes and seen the comments from Michael Mates about the two challenges that we face. The first is the commitment to policing and the rule of law and the other is real and meaningful devolved power sharing. We are still talking about them and are working on them. We are within 48 hours of the elections in Northern Ireland and this Body has played its part in helping to move everybody forward.

11.00 am

In Belfast, we heard a presentation from Sir George Quigley and from Peter Bunting of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. It is interesting that many of the comments this morning on barriers to trade, life chances and other issues are closely linked to what they said and to what Peter Kingon said when we were in Edinburgh. We heard from Michael Wardlow of the Integrated Education Movement, Patricia McKeown and Duncan Morrow on the issue of building up community relations, multiculturalism, sectarianism and racism. It is interesting that the presentations yesterday developed those issues further.

In Belfast, Peter Hain gave a comprehensive address to the Body, and the commitment of both Governments to seeing through all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement is evident. The Taoiseach's address yesterday made it clear that there is unprecedented close co-operation between the two Governments.

All the people of Northern Ireland and these islands will benefit when, hopefully, there is full restoration of the institutions in Northern Ireland and of democracy in all its manifestations.

The tasks ahead are significant but we are all hearing that bread-and-butter issues are the ones that are being talked about on the doorsteps. As I said yesterday, it makes a pleasant change when water rates, rural planning and environmental issues are talked about rather than the constitutional issues that some Members have suggested have been resolved.

I want to pay tribute all the Members of the Body and especially to the Chairs of the four Committees. The Committees do enormously beneficial work, and their agenda is clear and developing. They are tracking what is happening in the broader political world, and we should continue to ensure that that happens. Every Committee is a good as its Chair and its Chair is as good as the secretariat that backs him up. I place on

record our thanks to all the Committee Clerks and other members who provide secretarial services to the Chairs and other Members.

We discussed in the Steering Committee the difficulty of getting Members to participate in the work of the Committees when they face elections and we will probably have to look at that issue. There will never be a time when there are not elections in some part of the areas that we cover, so we will look at that.

Arising from last year's plenary is the need for the Body to engage with others to see how we can best progress a new east-west assembly that will have the participation of all the representatives from all the Parliaments and Assemblies represented here. I certainly look forward to that.

I thank everyone who has been responsible for the work of the Body in the past year or two and thank my co-Chairman, Paul Murphy, for the enormous help that he has given me and the wise insights that he always provides.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP): I echo entirely the points you make, Pat. I agree with you in thanking everybody involved in our proceedings—the secretariat, the Chairs of the Committees, and all the Members. As we said last night, we wish everyone the best in the coming months.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the Eleventh Annual Report of the Body (Doc. 123).

CHANGE OF RULES

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): We now come to item 5. I beg to move

That the body resolves to amend Rule 8 to reflect the decision of the Steering Committee that the Chairmen of Committees A, B, C and D should become members of the Steering Committee (document no. 127)

This is a procedural and technical motion that will allow with immediate effect the Chairmen of Committees A, B, C and D who are not Vice-Chairmen of the Body to attend and participate as full members of the Steering Committee. At present, Jim O'Keefe, the Chairman of Committee A, and Robert Walter, the Chairman of Committee B, are not Vice-Chairmen, and this change was agreed by the Steering Committee at its meeting in January 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Pat Carey TD): I call Lord Dubs to move the Adjournment.

The Lord Dubs: I beg to move

That the Body do now adjourn.

It is a rather sad and poignant moment. I speak as someone who has lost an election and I know what it is like. I hope that that fate will not befall anyone here even though I am perhaps the living embodiment of life after political death. However, other countries do not have a House of Lords to afford that opportunity, and I hope that we will not have such a House of Lords for that much longer either. Key votes will take place in the

Commons this week and the Lords next week to see whether we can give the Lords a more democratic aspect. However, that is a domestic British issue.

I wish good luck to all colleagues who are fighting elections in Ireland, Scotland or Wales. In particular, I hope that the members of Committee D are all back in the autumn so that we can get on with our work. The Committee has been great in the way that it has approached its business and put a lot of time into it. I appreciate that for busy parliamentarians putting time into some of our Committees involves adjusting timetables and schedules. I am grateful for all that has been done.

I give a vote of thanks to all the staff, but also to Paul Murphy and Pat Carey for their work and the way that they have chaired this and previous meetings.

On elections, I am conscious that there are three options. Members can be thrown out entirely, they may come back here or they may become more senior in their country and therefore too senior to be Members of this Body. Three options are open and I wish you good luck in obtaining one of the two good ones and not the one about the electorate not liking you as much they did as in the past.

I express my personal thanks to everybody for making us all feel welcome when we come here. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr. Pat Carey TD): Thank you very much, Alf. He reminded me over breakfast that we were wishing each other the best of luck when what we really meant was that the status quo would remain in place.

I conclude by thanking the people in the hotel. They have been excellent in the way that they have extended their hospitality to us. I thank Jack Koers, the Deputy General Manager, and Alan Freer and Briain Scannell who have been at the front of house while we have been here. I also thank the staff at Farmleigh for the way in which they hosted us last night. It was a real pleasure.

On that note, I declare closed the thirty-fourth plenary session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. We shall meet again in plenary session on Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 November in the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned at 11.08 am.