

THE BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Official Report of the Fiftieth Meeting

Monday 23 February 2015

The Assembly met at 9.15 am.

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS AND CO-CHAIRS' INTRODUCTION

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I call Members to order. The Assembly is now in public session. First, I would like to remind everyone present to please turn off their mobile phones and other electronic devices while they are in the Chamber. Secondly, I wish to advise Members that, as well as the normal audio recording of the proceedings, both today's and tomorrow's sessions are being web streamed on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly website, which is *www.britishirish.org*. Thirdly, could I ask Members, when they are invited to contribute from the floor, if they could first stand up and clearly state their name and legislature? They should remain standing while they make their contributions, as, otherwise, the sound system will be unable to record contributions. Finally, may I remind Members that the proceedings of this Assembly do not attract parliamentary privilege?

Before we move on to the formal business of the session, I would like to say a few brief words on a couple of matters. First, it was deemed appropriate and fitting to hold this plenary in the Irish Parliament and specifically in the Seanad Chamber in the year of the 25th anniversary of the Assembly. The Seanad Chamber has held many illustrious debates since its inception, and I hope our Assembly will follow in this honourable tradition. Later today, we will move north of the Liffey to the Garden of Remembrance and then Croke Park, both also iconic institutions that are symbolic of the shared traditions and the complex history of this country. These visits will continue the trend that has emerged of the Assembly following in the footsteps of Queen Elizabeth II during her state visit here in 2011. It is in Croke Park, the

bastion of Irish sport, that we will hold our panel discussions this afternoon on the importance of sport in our shared heritage.

I would also like to ask Members that, in future, if they cannot attend the full plenary, they ask the relevant Associate Member to attend instead. It is really important that we have the maximum attendance throughout the plenary, particularly as it is anticipated that we will continue having keynote addresses and debates on the Tuesday of the plenary. Tomorrow, for instance, we will have the keynote address on the Stormont House Agreement by the Minister of State, Sean Sherlock, and would ask that every effort is made to ensure everyone is present for what should be a lively and thought-provoking session. I will now pass over to my colleague and Co-Chairman, Laurence Robertson MP.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Good morning. I have to inform the Assembly 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 whole of this session: Mr Sammy Douglas MLA, Rt Hon Baroness Corston, and Rt Hon Lord Shutt of Greetland. There are a few apologies from Joe Benton, Conor Burns, Paul Flynn, Jack Lopresti, Paul Murphy, Mark Pritchard, John Robertson, Andrew Rosindell, Baroness Blood, Baroness Doocey, Lord Mawhinney, Lord Rogan, Lord Skelmersdale, Deputy John Lyons and Senator Paschal Mooney.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Also, I might add Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

Members will have received a copy of the proposed Programme of Business. As usual, I ask for your co-operation in getting through what is a very full schedule. The dual themes of this session are the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Assembly and the importance of sport in cultural and community development. We have also allocated ample time for the Assembly to consider the recently signed Stormont House Agreement, and we have a strong panel of speakers over the next day and a half, including the Taoiseach, Government Ministers, Ministers of State, and pillars of our sporting community, among others—all of whom, I am sure, will have interesting and stimulating, perhaps challenging, things to say about the Assembly as it reaches its 25th anniversary milestone and about the importance of sport in our shared culture.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally introduce the new BIPA co-clerk to the Assembly, Ms Tara Kelly, who has very ably assumed the position and, within a remarkably short space of time, has got to grips with the BIPA architecture and organised a special plenary while putting up with a relatively new Irish Co-Chairman. Thank you. You are very welcome, Tara. You are no stranger to BIPA and so I should say, ‘Welcome back, Tara’. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Hear, hear. I would like to thank Co-Chairman Frank Feighan for his opening remarks and thank the Irish Members, once again, for hosting us here today in this august Chamber. It is good to be back in the Houses of the Oireachtas and fitting that we should be here on the occasion of our 25th anniversary, as the inaugural meeting of the Assembly was in Westminster 25 years ago, almost to the day. The inaugural meeting was held on 26 and 27 February 1990. I would particularly like to thank the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad for allowing us the use of this special Chamber on this very special occasion. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I now move formally that the adoption of the proposed Programme of Business as amended be agreed to. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Programme of Business agreed.

ADDRESS BY AN TAOISEACH

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I am pleased now to invite our first guest speaker today, An Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny, who is also a founding Member of the Assembly. Two other former Taoisigh also formed part of the inaugural Irish delegation, Dr Garret FitzGerald and Mr Brian Cowen, although, sadly, no future British Prime Minister is named among the founding Members. I think it is a tribute to the longevity and the continued purpose and relevance of the Assembly that An Taoiseach has agreed to open the 50th plenary today. I now call on An Taoiseach to give his opening address.

Senator Paul Coghlan: We might be a bit early, Co-Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): It is a bit like *The Sound of Music* with the von Trapps. [*Laughter.*] We will suspend for eight minutes, so you can get to know one another. Thank you.

The sitting was suspended at 9.22 am and resumed at 9.29 am.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Colleagues, I now call the Taoiseach to give his opening address. The floor is yours, Taoiseach.

9.30 am.

The Taoiseach (Mr Enda Kenny TD): Go raibh maith agat. Let me first of all welcome you here to Seanad Éireann. Tá fáilte roimh gach duine anseo. Níl mé chun a labhairt as Gaeilge an t-am ar fad. Is dócha nach dtuigfeadh sibh céard atá á rá agam. Let me extend to you a very warm welcome here on the special occasion of the 50th British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly plenary. We are also very pleased that this plenary is taking place here in Dublin. As somebody who was previously a Member of the association, I know well the impact that this Assembly has had in bringing parliamentarians from all different backgrounds and parties together on issues of common interest. That is why it was set up. I know from my previous direct experience that we have found more that we could agree on than we have disagreed on, and that we have found many great new friends in the process.

Let me first of all thank you for the hard work and the dedication that you have shown, not just over the last year, but over the many years that numbers of you have served on this association, and have made the Assembly into the vibrant body it is today.

The Co-Chairmen, as ever, are important leaders in this work. On the Irish side, I want to congratulate you, Deputy Frank Feighan, on taking up the Co-Chairmanship from Deputy Joe

McHugh, who now occupies a Minister of State position. I want to wish you and Laurence all the best as you take the association into the start of the next 25 years.

I know that you lost a long-standing Member of the Assembly last year in Jim Dobbin MP, and I would like to extend my sympathies to his friends and his colleagues here.

I have been told about Northern Ireland Minister Jim Wells's farewell remarks at the October plenary in Kent. I think his sentiments there captured the value of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly perfectly: building friendships, forging collaboration and lifting the British-Irish relationship to the heights that we see today.

So, your plenary here is both about commemorating 25 years and about current business, but you are also considering, I know, the role of sport in promoting cultural and community development. You will also hear from the various sectoral committees on issues as diverse and as important as cross-Border police co-operation, the Irish diaspora in Scotland, and the work of the European Investment Bank. These are all obviously fundamentally important issues.

When the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was concluded, it was described as the historic template for the mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands. Looking back over that intervening period, I think it is fair to say that it has contributed enormously to a genuine transformation in relationships between the two great traditions on this island. That agreement opened up opportunities for us North and South, east and west, to get to know one another in very different and new ways. Our commitment to that agreement, and to partnership, to equality, to mutual respect, stands more firm today than ever. So, on this occasion, you have the opportunity to take stock of the transformation of British-Irish relations over the past 25 years.

It is fair to remember that the successful visit of President Higgins to the UK last year, together with Her Majesty's historic visit here to Ireland in 2011, are hugely positive landmarks in the intertwined and interconnected journey of our two nations. Those sitting in this Chamber can be very proud of their role in ensuring that, today, British-Irish relations remain close and cordial, extending right across Governments, right across business and throughout cultural activity.

In March 2012, at Downing Street, Prime Minister Cameron and I signed a joint statement, which sought to take our relationship further by setting out a vision of what closer co-operation might look like over the next decade. It also mapped out a unique and structured

process of engagement, of activity and of outcomes between our two Governments, including annual review summits by both of us, underpinned by a programme of engagement by our most senior civil servants, which, as you know, continues on a regular basis. So, all of these elements of work and ongoing close relationships really do matter very deeply. So, beyond producing practical outcomes, they can benefit both jurisdictions as they help to build trust and understanding between all our peoples.

Members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and of the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association, are also helping to build trust and to rebuild trust by continuing to promote and to nurture co-operation in the British-Irish and North-South relations for the benefit of the two peoples of the islands. Business and trading relationships, as you know, between the UK and Ireland amount to more than €1 billion a week, but we can do even better than that and, hopefully, within the time ahead.

It goes without saying that much of this business is done within the positive framework of common membership of the European Union single market, the underlying principles for which Britain and Ireland are champions. It is in that context and others, including the importance of the EU's role in Northern Ireland, that Ireland's view—well known to this audience already—is that the United Kingdom should stay within the European Union. We have been very strongly supportive of British interests and of European interests in keeping the UK as a strong and foremost member of the European Union. Obviously, that is something that is of intense interest to us, to Europeans, and to the importance and influence of Britain in the time ahead.

Since we met last March, it has been an interesting time, and I know that some of you here are facing elections in the coming months. Certainly, Scotland's September 2014 referendum provided, if you like, an inspiring example of democracy in practice. Scots young and old participated to an extraordinary degree in the excitement of a real challenge, and they turned out in huge numbers, demonstrating a really positive level of political activism that politicians of all persuasions simply have to recognise and simply have to welcome. The Scottish people have moved forward with confidence and with vision.

So, we are now in the fourth year of the decade of centenaries, during which we are commemorating the events of 100 years ago, which had such a significant impact upon the history and the development of this country. While history can be a very divisive subject, I am struck by the commemorations, in the way that they can unify and reconcile, particularly

in the context of Ireland's relationship with Britain. Commemorations provide us with the opportunities to remember, to reflect and, sadly, to mourn together. This was particularly apparent during remembrance events last year that marked the centenary of the start of the World War One. Together with Prime Minister Cameron and other EU leaders, I participated in a profoundly moving ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres in June. I understand that Members of the Assembly here travelled to visit that sombre place later in the year during the last plenary. In fact, you should know that, travelling through to the memorials in Flanders with the Prime Minister, local people were evident along those routes with two flags—the Union Jack and the Tricolour—welcoming this unity of visit, if you like, and under the peace tower at Messines, built by tradesmen North and South as a measure of both our history in terms of its structure, but also symbolically for what it means.

When the local school came to the place where the Allied Forces and the Germans on Christmas day had a truce and sang 'Stille Nacht', it was evocative of the power and the emotion at the time, and, indeed, of the futility of war. So, that was something I think was reflected upon by the Prime Minister when he signed the book at the grave of Willie Redmond, who had been an MP for 32 years before joining the Allied Forces on the basis that winning that war would result in Home Rule. Others fought for the freedom of small nations or for king and country, and all over the Republic, from every county, you had thousands of young Irish men—mostly young Irish men—who joined the Allied Forces, who were not forgiven by their Governments when they returned home. Only in the last few years have we issued a formal recognition of the part they played in fighting for the allies in what was a futile war. Many schools in the Republic here are now travelling to Flanders to understand just what happened and how devastating the human slaughter was on that front over those years.

This year, we also remember those who lost their lives in Gallipoli, and in 2016, we mark the anniversary of the battle of the Somme, an event that had a particular significance for those from the Unionist tradition, but which saw the tragic loss of life from all parts and all traditions of the island of Ireland. The year 2016, of course, also recalls the centenary of the Easter Rising, one of the formative movements of Ireland's path to independence, and, as such, is a centrepiece of the Irish Government and its decade of commemorative events. So, the Government's plan here, involving everybody, for the Ireland 2016 commemoration envisages an occasion that will allow us to remember that pivotal moment of our history, to reflect on the past 100 years, and to welcome the peace and the prosperity that has been

achieved on this island, and to reimagine our futures, building on a new legacy of hope, of possibility, and of confidence.

The last time this association met in plenary format, last October, political talks in Belfast had just commenced. The British and the Irish Governments had come to the joint conclusion that the political impasse in Northern Ireland was such that our immediate involvement was required to break that logjam, and we were invited to participate as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, to work with the parties in the Assembly to attempt to break that logjam. So, while respecting the devolved power-sharing institutions in Belfast, both Governments were determined to fulfil their roles and their responsibilities as co-guarantors, motivators, encouragers, and to assist, where we could. Eleven weeks of intense engagement followed. There were discussions and issues that cut to the heart of how to deliver a truly reconciled and prosperous society. These were sometimes challenging, but were always concluded in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

I saw this at first hand myself when I participated with Prime Minister Cameron last December in these talks. On 23 December, the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive parties achieved what they had set out to do with the Stormont House Agreement. That agreement, as you are aware, provides for a more responsive, accountable and better-resourced framework for dealing with the sensitive legacy of the past. It also charts and points a way forward on other challenging issues, including the sensitivity around flags, identity, culture and tradition.

9.45 am.

Parades are included in that, as are advancing practical North-South co-operation on the island of Ireland and the outstanding commitments that remain from the previous agreements. So, as part of the agreement, the British Government and the Northern Ireland parties also agreed a plan for financial and budgetary reform, and a programme of institutional reform at Stormont.

Surrounded as you are here in Seanad Éireann, in the Irish Senate, by people who, collectively, represent many years of experience as public representatives, I do not need to explain the importance of the public having a sense of faith and trust in the political system. The people of Northern Ireland demanded a way forward on a set of entirely complex and sensitive issues, and the Stormont House Agreement goes some way and goes some distance to answering that call.

Of course, there remains a whole range of challenges up ahead. The legacy of the Stormont House Agreement will be measured by effective implementation. I have every confidence that the two Governments and the Northern Ireland parties, working together, will achieve the goals that have been agreed, that have been set out, and that, clearly, require careful consideration so that they become a reality.

The Government I have the honour to lead is committed to North-South and all-island economic co-operation; that is also a priority for us. Economic and budgetary issues in both jurisdictions are a key area of discussion when I meet with First Minister Robinson and Deputy First Minister McGuinness. When we met last December, our discussions included the need to attract external investment while also encouraging indigenous companies. So, I really want to welcome the recent announcement on corporation tax powers for Northern Ireland, which will, I believe, be very helpful in allowing Northern Ireland to develop its economy, which, in turn, will help the prospects for everyone on the island.

Last year, I informed you that we had agreed with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive to spend 2014 looking at priorities that would help economic recovery, job creation, the better use of public funds, and the most effective delivery of services on this island. I think it is particularly important to note that the Stormont House Agreement includes the decision that these new sectoral priorities for North-South co-operation will be reported upon at the North-South Ministerial Council before the end of this month. Examples of that kind of co-operation already being taken forward, which make good business sense, include the holding of joint trade missions involving UK, Irish and Northern Ireland trade Ministers.

The first one of these took place last year at the Singapore Airshow, with the latest having taken place last month at the Arab health conference in Dubai. I have spoken to the Prime Minister about this. These joint missions arose out of my agreement with him in 2012 to further strengthen the bilateral relationship both North and South, and east to west. They are good examples of where co-operation between Dublin, London and Belfast makes good business sense. May I point out to you as well that, during the course of Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, we had personnel from Northern Ireland based with the Permanent Representation in Brussels? They were fully acquainted with all of the issues that were beginning to evolve and that were being discussed within the framework of the presidency, with particular reference to trade, to business, to the development of the common agricultural policy, and from our perspective here, along with the Executive in Northern Ireland, in terms of the island entity and the island economic development that we would see.

A new priority that clearly offers great potential is the joint bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. I was Minister for Tourism and Trade when the Canary Wharf bomb went off, and we were to hold the big tourism fair in Earls Court two or three days later. Baroness Denton, God be good to her, was the Northern Ireland Minister dealing with tourism. For years, you had the spectacle of two separate entities promoting two separate parts of the one island. You had the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and you had Bórd Fáilte. Many people, at that time, said, 'You have to just withdraw from this process completely', but, instead of that, for the first time ever, we actually put both promoters on the one stand. It became the Ireland stand, in the context of that bomb, and you could see in the faces of those people the pride in promoting the tourism potential of the island of Ireland. Out of that has grown a much closer relationship, and I have to say that it was a privilege to go to the Royal School in Armagh, along with First Minister Robinson and Deputy First Minister McGuinness, to launch the attempt from the island of Ireland for the opportunity to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. I actually believe we will win this right. I think it is a real opportunity for a real island response, in a sporting nation, to demonstrate the opportunity that we can do that.

We have co-operated before with the Northern Ireland Executive on cross-Border sporting events like last year's highly successful start to the Giro d'Italia, and I also firmly believe that we can do the same with the Rugby World Cup. We had co-operation in respect of a very successful Olympics held in London, with the torch passing through Northern Ireland and down here to Dublin, with schoolchildren and everybody involved, showing the importance, the unity and the unifying potential of sport. So, we intend to work very closely with our northern counterparts, and British counterparts indeed, to win that right for 2023.

Another key part of the Stormont House Agreement from a North-South point of view is the decision to hold a meeting of relevant Ministers from North and South in the north-west to consider strategic approaches to the development of that particular region. A renewed and strengthened focus endorsed by both Governments will, I believe, be both welcome and attractive in terms of development in the north-west. Under the agreement, the Government here is also committed to a number of measures that will contribute to economic renewal in Northern Ireland as well as being beneficial to the all-island economy. These include £50 million sterling in financial support towards the A5 project in the north-west. The Government remains committed to the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge and to developing the Ulster Canal; that is actually part of the decision process that the Government has to consider at the Cabinet in the next short period.

We will continue to have our close engagement with the British Government, both to promote and to develop our wider bilateral interests, but also to pursue our common custodianship and our co-guarantorship of the agreements in support of the Northern Ireland peace process and, above all, in the interests of a peaceful, prosperous and harmonious future of the peoples of the island.

I have read your programme, and you have a number of interesting issues to deal with here. I know you had an occasion with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade yesterday, but you have three sectoral committee reports here: cross-Border police co-operation with Senator Coghlan; the EIB with Robert Walter; and the Irish communities in Scotland with Lord Dubs. These are important elements for consideration. I might point out to you that the Government here launched the strategic banking corporation investment fund just last weekend, which includes the European Investment Bank, which is, after all, the European people's bank, and there are real opportunities here if they are followed through carefully. I look forward, as I have stated to Members, to hearing your considered analysis of these sub-committee reports, some of which are fundamental to the smooth running of the economies North and South. I hope that you get a sense of how the Government here are open and approach the great potential of our political, historical, cultural and business links. It has been a year of progress and of results. From our perspective here, political stability is an important element in being able to be decisive in the context of the development of the economy. As I say, from a European point of view, I hope that the United Kingdom can continue to be a strong, foremost and influential member of the European Union.

So, it has been a very productive year for the Assembly since I met you in March, and I wish you the best for the coming year and the start of the next 25 years. I look forward to hearing your considered views on the committee reports that you have. Thank you, Co-Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, An Taoiseach. I now invite comments from the floor. I call on Bob Walter.

Mr Robert Walter MP: Taoiseach, thank you very much. You referred to our common membership of the European Union. You also referred to the hundreds of thousands of young men 100 years ago who gave their lives in the defence of European nations to co-exist peacefully. European solidarity is being tested in a number of areas at the moment. The

situation in Greece, I think, can be solved without any loss of life. However, with regard to the situation in Ukraine, I have noticed that a number of your European colleagues have fêted President Putin in Vienna and Budapest. Do you believe that European solidarity can hold in terms of facing up to Russia's military intervention, annexation and occupation of another sovereign state?

The Taoiseach: Do you want to take a few questions together?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Yes. Barry McElduff is next.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: Thank you, Co-Chairman. Can I welcome this opportunity to ask a question about the A5? The A5 is the transportation corridor to the north-west. On the island of Ireland, we do not have real infrastructure in the north-west of Ireland. There is, obviously, a strong interest in retaining the Executive at Stormont's commitment and the Irish Government's commitment. I do welcome to date the Taoiseach's involvement in making such commitments. I would like an assurance that this project is really going to be delivered, because of anxiety on the part of people in Donegal, Tyrone, Derry—that whole north-west belt. It is a really crucial project for us to be included in with regard to opportunities for the future. So, essentially, my question seeks a recommitment to the A5 infrastructural project.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Barry. I call on Seán Rogers.

Mr Seán Rogers MLA: Thank you, Co-Chairman. Taoiseach, I am very happy to hear about your commitment to the Narrow Water Bridge in terms of economic revival, particularly in that part of the world. I can assure you that all sides of the community are very much in favour of opening up that link to develop North-South even more. In terms of economic revival, I think that underpinning this must be greater educational co-operation North and South. Thank you, Co-Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Finally, I call Chris Ruane.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: Thank you, Co-Chair. We hear quite often of the amount of trade between Britain and Ireland, and the Irish Ambassador, Dan Mulhall, quite often quotes the fact that more trade is done between Britain and Ireland than between Britain and Brazil, Russia, India and China put together. The primary port for this, for Irish and British trade, is Holyhead. The British Government and the Welsh Government are looking at improving the rail links between Dublin, Holyhead, London and Europe, and between Dublin, Holyhead, Hull and the Baltic states. Can the Taoiseach and his transport Minister assess the importance of these north Wales, English, European and Irish transport links? It is a trans-European network system—it is on the TENS. So, it is crucially important, we believe, and we would like some support from the Irish Government in making this case to the British Government.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you. An Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: To take Chris's point first of all, this is obviously of crucial importance to the economies, both east and west. You have had improvements on the A5 over the years. I have had occasion to drive that over the years also, and to make the long journey to London, as many Irish people have done for a very long time. I think that it is a case of both Ministers for transport, within the context of Europe's assistance, looking at this. There are 50,000 Irish people on the boards of British companies; there is now an ever closer link in that sense. The quantitative easing decision by the European Central Bank has weakened the euro, therefore there is even greater interest in Ireland in being able to export to Britain and, from a hospitality perspective, of greater opportunities for British visitors to come here and get better value and to sample, for instance, the value of the concept of the Wild Atlantic Way from Donegal right down to east Cork. These are issues that I will raise with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and possibly let them at a sub-committee level talk to his counterparts in Britain to see what assistance within the European framework might be available.

10.00 am.

John mentioned Narrow Water Bridge. There has to be an economic justification for these decisions, but, if it has never been there, it is difficult to judge its potential. I went and looked at the site either side of the lough as to where the bridge might be. Obviously, we had full

support for this, but the tender process was very much out of line with the initial estimates. So, when the original funding had to be allocated, it was moved onto the rail system, so it now becomes part of the application under the new funding regime. This Government remains fully committed to Narrow Water Bridge, but I think it is a case of being able to make the design and the structure conform to the limited extent of funding that is there, but also to clearly be creative and realistic in the context of what it might mean in terms of the economic development North-South.

Let me assure you that the Government remains committed to the A5, that money is in place and, obviously, will be provided whenever the legal difficulties are dealt with and whenever it is required to pay upfront. We are committed to that very strongly for development in the north-west.

Robert asked in respect of the difficulties that arise in Europe at the moment. Let me tell you that this is obviously part of geo-politics that need to be looked at in a different sense. Clearly, the European Council has been very direct in its response in terms of sanctions against the oligarchs of Russia, but, clearly, what is happening in eastern Ukraine, where 1,000 sq km have been, as it were, taken over by so-called separatists, is part of unease and great concern in eastern Europe, and not only in eastern Ukraine now, but you have had the annexation of Crimea and you have difficulties in Azerbaijan, in Moldova, in Armenia and in Georgia. Clearly, countries that were part of the former eastern bloc are very sensitive as to what is happening on their borders, be it the visible evidence of overflights by Russia—we have had some of these outside the territorial airspace here on the west coast. So, these are matters that concern the European Council greatly. Obviously, President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel have spent some considerable time with President Poroshenko and dealing directly with President Putin. It is our hope that the very difficult negotiations leading to the ceasefire will actually be able to hold, but, given past history, these things are very difficult.

I would say that the opportunity here is for the people in Ukraine to be able to demonstrate, and that their wishes are reflected in their wishing to join with the European Union and do business with the European Union. The council, in response, has been very forthright in the decisions that it has made in terms of trade and opportunities that exist there.

However, in a wider sense, clearly, the implications of what is happening in Syria and other countries, such as Libya, present great difficulties for peace throughout the region. Energy from Russia is an issue that is of such importance, particularly for eastern countries, but here

also in western Europe. When you consider that a million people have left Syria and gone into south Lebanon, where the Irish army supplies troops to the United Nations, and that another million have gone into Jordan, there is not any practical plan laid out to deal with the humanitarian consequences of that. Also, you have the difficulties in Libya. You still have the consequences in terms of Pakistan and Iraq and all of the other matters that are arising with ISIS and the jihadists who are intent on changing life for the worse for so many people. So, from a European Council perspective, let me assure the Assembly here that the Council is very concerned and indeed very active at the very highest level in trying to deal with this. At the other end of the scale, President Putin has got to understand that this is not the way that business is to be conducted, and, within those very difficult negotiations, I hope that the ceasefire can hold and that lives can be saved and killings prevented. So, the question is not one for the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly to be able to decide on, but it is one that it should express interest in because the consequences are for everybody.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, An Taoiseach. I now call Senator Keane.

Senator Cáit Keane: Thank you. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Taoiseach chuig an Seanad arís. Go raibh míle maith agat.

I just have a question on the co-operation between North and South in health matters and drug-related issues. I know there is fantastic co-operation with the police and policing, but this is actually on the treatment. What brings it to mind is that I visited New Hope Residential Centre in Tallaght and there was a man from Belfast there, who said, ‘I wanted to get away from my own community’, and he had thrived and was off drugs. But when I enquired into the actual co-operation funding between North and South, that New Hope resident said, ‘I wish there were’. Now, whether it was the case, I will have to enquire into it further, but it is an area that we should definitely look at when we are co-operating North-South, because we have an awful lot to offer from both sides of the island.

The other thing is the transfer and the fantastic co-operation that is there between the PSNI and the Garda. There have been magnificent transfer co-operations and there have been secondments, and they have worked excellently. As well as working excellently in the transfer of personnel, there is a fantastic working relationship between the Garda and the

PSNI. But, and this is where it comes to a big ‘but’, the short-term exchanges—and I will be bringing this up in more detail, but I wanted to say it when the Taoiseach was here—are working very well, but the powers and responsibility in the Garda and the PSNI on short-term exchanges are very limited. On longer-term exchanges for maybe one or two years, we have had none this year so far and only one last year from the Garda Síochána to the PSNI, and I know there was one PSNI lad trying to come down and it just did not work out for the simple reason that they have to resign their position. It is a huge responsibility, as well as resigning, to get back in again at the same grade or whatever. So, it would be an area to look at. I said that, seeing as this was founded in 2005, 2015 would be a good year to review it to ensure that it works well, so the people who go there really enjoy it from both sides. From here up, that is the way it was, but we have not had one down yet this year. So, Taoiseach, I will be bringing it up. Committee A has done a great report on the co-operation and we will be talking about it again. I just wanted to make the comment now just to put it on the record.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Senator Keane. I understand the Taoiseach will have to leave in a few minutes. I have two more who want to contribute. I call Lord Empey.

The Lord Empey: Taoiseach, in your opening address, you mentioned the UK’s continuing membership of the European Union. For that to maintain itself, I believe there has to be some reform of the European Union institutions. Could the Taoiseach outline any areas where he thinks achievable reform is likely? What areas does he believe those reforms should be directed to?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you. Finally, I call Senator Walsh.

Senator Jim Walsh: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Cuirim fáilte roimh an Taoiseach. Gabhaim buíochas leis gur tháinig sé anseo ar maidin. You alluded in your few words to us to the work of the committees and the reports that are coming before us. My question is to do with organised crime of a serious nature cross-Border and, in particular, the level of that crime and the purpose to which the proceeds of those crimes may be applied and

also the huge environmental damage that is being done and to ask you whether this is a priority area at North-South Ministerial Council level. If so, can we anticipate any renewed emphasis and initiatives being taken in order to tackle this particularly pervasive and very damaging level of activity that is going on at present and that has been going on for quite some time now?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Senator Walsh, and finally finally, Senator Moran.

Senator Mary Moran: Thank you. I would like to welcome the Taoiseach back to the house again today. I will be very brief. I would like to fully support the comments made by Mr Rogers MLA in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge. I am delighted that you have included and you have mentioned and referred to Narrow Water Bridge today.

I think it is, perhaps, appropriate, when you mention how both North and South of the island came together following the Canary Wharf bombing, and I think the Narrow Water Bridge would certainly be a symbol of how North and South can come together. Also, I think, the economic feasibility and the economic stability would be there and the economic positive side of it will be shown, as well as the tourism side.

I would just ask you, Taoiseach, if you would perhaps give us a definite view on how feasible it is or whether you think this will actually come to pass. We have had a huge disappointment in the area with the ongoing planning and so on, so far, but, in your estimation, do you think this is viable? Do you think that it is going to come to pass?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Senator Moran. An Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: Thank you, Deputy. Let me tell you that when I went into a coffee shop on the northern side, the man said to me, 'You're here about the bridge'. Clearly, this will be the first physical point of contact across the lough. It is for engineers to decide the structure, the scale and the design of that bridge, and for the local authorities and transport departments to assess the run-in to the point of crossing—the improvement on the roads on either side. So, we are serious about it. Obviously, the new application for the new funds will include this. It

is how feasible you make it afterwards to make it happen is the pointed issue. We are certainly very much committed to it and favour it.

In respect of Senator Walsh's valid comment about organised crime, it is only valuable if it generates proceeds for those who are involved in crime. That is why you will need close co-operation between revenue, customs, the Garda and the PSNI, which you have. Obviously, changes in differences in currency values lead to organised crime and many of these things, because, as I said, it only becomes more prevalent if it generates proceeds for those involved. So, this was discussed at the last meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council and will continue to be on the agenda for the different meetings, both at the committees and at the plenary session. I will host the next one down here in June and it will be on the agenda for that, also.

In respect of Lord Empey's comments, you know yourself the point that has been made about the elimination of red tape, about the conclusion of the single market and the implications for the digital market. There are so many areas here where Europe can actually improve. The new college of Commissioners contains five former prime ministers. The concept here is that, when political decisions are made, they should be implemented and not get strangled in forests of bureaucracy. Now, Prime Minister Cameron has been very forthright since the original letter that he wrote to the previous Presidency and the Commission, that there are a whole range of areas where things could be improved in terms of eliminating red tape. In other words, if you have eliminated the borders from one country to another in terms of doing business, you still have not eliminated the digital borders and the single market is not the way that it should be.

Given the fact that we are involved in the transatlantic trade and investment partnership trade relationship talks with the United States, the two most developed trading blocs on the planet not only have the potential for several million jobs either side of the Atlantic, but also to set down the standard for world trade for the next 50 years. No politician—no leader—in a European context, can be happy with the scale of unemployment right across Europe, with particular reference to young people where, in some countries, it is over 50%, and you are well aware that if you do not provide opportunity, hope and aspiration for young people, then frustration, disillusionment, anger, rage and extremism take their place. That is a matter for politicians to deal with. We like to think that, in this small island here, despite the economic catastrophe, our country is making very steady progress, now, with the fastest growth rate in

Europe, but it means the opportunity to create jobs and political stability in all of these countries is so important.

So, in the sense of being able to do business, Lord Empey, it is a case of cutting out the superfluous and putting in place the practical and effective response. We share the view of the British Government on this very strongly, not to the point where we will need a raft of changes to the European treaties, but, within that limit, there are clearly opportunities for more effective working with the community, and we have been supportive of that at Commission and at Council level.

10.15 am.

Senator Keane, yes, there is a great deal of co-operation, obviously, with the radiology business in terms of Altnagelvin and the health relationship there. The building in Dublin of the national children's hospital will be one of the biggest construction jobs ever carried out on the island of Ireland and will provide specialist, world-class facilities for children for the island of Ireland for the next 50 years. So, we hope that that gets the green light in terms of its planning application and the process thereafter.

You also mentioned the close co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda. Obviously, this is ongoing, and we recall the murder of Garda Adrian Donohoe. The level of co-operation that exists between the Garda and the PSNI is very important for all our peoples, and we want to see that maintained.

You mentioned short-term secondments. I think that the value of having the British-Irish and also the ministerial council is that where complications or obstacles arise, the value of political discussion is to be able to eliminate them. You have mentioned one case in point of having to resign in order to take up the secondment—

Senator Cáit Keane: It is everybody who wants to go North; they permanently have to resign.

The Taoiseach: Obviously, these are things that should be looked at in the context of having 10 years follow-through in reaching a decision. Maybe it is opportune that that and others should be looked at as well. Thank you for your contributions.

The Co-Chairman (Deputy Frank Feighan TD): An Taoiseach, I would like to thank you for addressing us here today and for your insights and observations on the development and the role of BIPA and many other topical issues. An Taoiseach, thank you very much.

[Applause.]

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I would like to add my thanks to An Taoiseach for joining us yet again. It is really good to see him and to hear his views not only on British-Irish matters, but also on wider European and international matters. Thank you very much indeed.

COMMITTEE A (SOVEREIGN MATTERS): POLICE CO-OPERATION

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): We will move on now to the reports of Committees A, B and D. I remind Members that we are just hearing about the reports at the moment. We will hear about the wider activities of the committees tomorrow morning, but we are just discussing the reports now. First, I call on the Chairman of Committee A—Sovereign Matters, and that is Senator Paul Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Thank you, Co-Chair. Fellow Members, as I reported when we last met in Kent in October, Committee A has been conducting an inquiry over the past year into co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and An Garda Síochána and between other law enforcement agencies, with particular reference to cross-Border smuggling, organised crime and dissident activity. Committee A has been extremely busy on this inquiry and has held a large volume of meetings and evidence-taking sessions in the last year.

During the course of this inquiry, the committee met with a wide range of witnesses, including with the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD; Minister of Justice, David Ford MLA; the Garda Commissioner, Nóirín O’Sullivan; and the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, George Hamilton. The committee also held meetings with officials from the Northern Ireland Department of Justice and the

Department of Justice and Equality; representatives from the Revenue Commissioners and from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs; the chief executives of Monaghan, Louth and Donegal county councils, representatives of Retailers Against Smuggling, Irish Petrol Retailers Association and Grant Thornton, which produces an annual report on the fiscal losses incurred as a result of illicit trade.

In addition, I recently travelled with Senator Jim Walsh and Viscount Bridgeman to south Armagh to meet with members of the PSNI in Crossmaglen to hear at first hand of the effects of cross-Border smuggling on the policing of that area. We also met with members of An Garda Síochána in Dundalk to hear their assessment of the situation. I would like to thank all those who gave of their time to speak to the committee on this important issue. I hope that the plenary will today take note of this report as an important contribution to the debate on matters of considerable importance and public interest in these islands.

The report is intended as a follow-up to Committee A's 2009 report into cross-Border co-operation between police forces. In the intervening period, we have had policing and justice powers devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive, so the committee agreed it was a good time to revisit the issue to see what progress had been made since that milestone had been reached. I am pleased to report that we heard that cross-Border police co-operation is excellent, and I hope this report will serve as a testament to the great co-operative work being done across this island, not just by the Garda and PSNI, but by the many law enforcement agencies, especially the revenue authorities and the departments involved in tackling organised crime and illicit trade. This excellent co-operation spans across all levels of law enforcement and is both formal and informal, with daily co-operation taking place on an operational basis.

We also heard that despite this excellent co-operation, cross-Border smuggling continues to cause huge problems across the island, costing both exchequers hundreds of millions each year. In particular, fuel laundering and cigarette smuggling are causing huge problems, and many of the witnesses the committee met commented on the ingenuity and capability of the organised criminals involved in these enterprises to adapt to changing market conditions. In the case of fuel laundering, we also heard that it is very difficult to secure prosecutions against these crime gangs because the fuel plants are frequently operated automatically in remote, often difficult-to-police Border areas, with limited opportunity to arrest the perpetrators. On our visit to that area we saw a number of these installations.

I heard first hand of some of these difficulties when I recently travelled, as I said, to south Armagh with my colleagues to meet with PSNI officers stationed in Crossmaglen. The south Armagh Border region is an area with a particularly high concentration of fuel laundering plants and filling stations selling this illegal fuel. The PSNI there are operating in an often difficult policing environment and are closely co-operating with their southern counterparts to carry out operations to eliminate this illegal activity. But more needs to be done, hence our recommendations, particularly that a task force be established that would be inclusively comprised of the police, the Revenue, customs, the Criminal Assets Bureau, the northern equivalent, and the environmental agencies, and indeed the recommendation that deals with 'phoenix company' operations.

The report outlines also what I hope are some useful recommendations to aid law enforcement officials, North and South, to once and for all tackle these organised crime gangs. The work that has been done in this regard to date must be recognised and praised, and the committee is particularly impressed with the recently formed cross-Border enforcement groups established to tackle fuel and tobacco fraud. Additionally, the committee looks forward to the introduction of a new fuel marker later in 2015, which was developed by a recent cross-Border project and promises to seriously curb the incidence of diesel laundering. This has been a very interesting and thought-provoking inquiry. I would like to recognise the hard work and contribution by the committee to this report. With your permission, Chair, I would now invite my committee members who wish to say a few words on the report to do so. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chair (Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much indeed, Paul. I call Baroness Harris.

Baroness Harris: Thank you, Co-Chair. Could I congratulate Committee A for this really excellent report? Over the years, having been speaking on policing in this body and in my national Parliament, I can say how disappointed I was that the committee found a huge amount of laundering still going on, especially in the Border areas, in some places getting worse. This is a huge, huge loss for our exchequers, and I congratulate the committee for pointing this out. I do hope that our Governments will look very carefully at how they help to minimise this in the extreme. One of my main concerns is that we are realistic, and while H

on page 14 recommends a full-time force dedicated to eliminating the activities of organised crime, we need to be realistic when budgets are tight just how this could be hypothecated. I really do not know how, knowing the PSNI as well as I do, with a much-reduced force and a huge deficit coming on to their police budget, they are actually going to achieve this. I do hope that all parts of our Governments will look very carefully at this report and support it, and especially the really excellent recommendations that we have been given, because they are a real, clear indication about the areas that need to be looked at carefully. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Deputy Patrick O'Donovan.

Mr Patrick O'Donovan TD: Go raibh maith agat, Co-Chair. I would like, first of all, to compliment Senator Coghlan and the committee of which I am a member, but unfortunately I was not able to attend some of the sessions that they had. However, I think that the report that the committee has given to the Assembly is probably one of the most important reports, and certainly I think, from a political point of view, it is fair that the two sovereign Governments and, indeed, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly should be looking at it, because while the illicit trade has a detrimental effect in terms of environmental issues, I think it goes much deeper than that.

I know that reference was made previously, in the last session, to European co-operation, and I think that other EU member states have an important role to play in this as well. If you look at the arrests that were made recently in Spain—and I think that there are court proceedings pending there, so I will not delve too far into it—I do think that there are people that are living a very high life on this island and overseas on the back of illicit trade. Some of that money, I would dare to say, is winding up in the political process.

I think we have to come clean here and basically own up to the fact that this trade—the illicit trade of cigarettes, alcohol and fuel—has replaced a very nasty political underbelly that was a cancer on this island for a long time. To borrow the words of one individual who frequents around here, ‘They haven’t gone away, you know’, and they have not gone away. They have morphed now into people who are peddling fuel and cigarettes, and having a very plush life on the back of it. A comment was made that crime does not pay, but it seems to pay very handsomely for certain elements on this island. I think that this issue has to be addressed, and

addressed with some ferocity, by both Governments and we should stop turning a blind eye to it for the sake of appeasement. That is what I believe is fundamental here: there is an element of appeasement that is allowing this to continue; allowing people to have a very plush lifestyle on the back of it.

I will conclude on this by saying that, while I am an advocate of the plain packaging of cigarettes, I would have a concern in relation to one element of it, which is: are we are playing into the hands of people who are already in a zone where they make large amounts of money on the back of this illicit trade? Could we be making it even easier for them and could we wind up with a certain amount of it finding its way into the political process on top of what is already there? I know where the money that funds the Fine Gael Party comes from. Everybody knows where it comes from. Everybody knows where the money that funds the Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party comes from, but there are strong question marks over other political parties. I think that there is an obligation on the Government south of the Border, the Government in the UK and the Northern Ireland Executive to stop pussy-footing around this issue and deal with it, and deal with it head on, because the law should be applied across the board for everybody, regardless of the political party that they support. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Patrick. I call on Joe.

Mr Joe O'Reilly TD: Thank you very much, Chair. Might I, at the outset, join my colleague, Deputy O'Donovan, in congratulating Senator Paul Coghlan and his colleagues on the report? Senator Coghlan has given a very fine exposition of the main issues that we need to address here, which are critical. I rise to comment on this and address them, because they are of enormous importance to the area that I represent in Cavan-Monaghan, and have huge implications right along the Border.

10.30 am.

To turn to Senator Coghlan's latter point, I would ask him again to comment. I am very excited and very confident that we get a good outcome from the new dye, scientifically arrived at, that will render laundering almost impossible, we hope. There is very good prognosis, for want of a better term, about that, and I would like Senator Coghlan to comment further.

I would also strongly support Senator Coghlan's proposition, and I presume that it is Committee A's proposition also, that we have the taskforce established of every agency—CAB, the police forces, the Revenue—and that we get a taskforce that is resourced and equipped to deal with the illegal cross-Border trade. I think it is crucial that that is done. It is crucial that it is a very strong body, that it is put in place and that the resources are put here. I said recently in the Dáil Chamber that the money that would be invested in putting in enough personnel to deal with smuggling and to deal with illicit cross-Border trade would yield a rich profit in terms of legitimate taxation that would arise as a consequence, and allow proper legal people to trade.

To finish, I would just say to you, Co-Chair and colleagues, that the entire legitimate trade in haulage—small hauliers, small petrol distributors and diesel distributors, small oil operators along our area in Cavan-Monaghan, right along the Border—the legitimate people are put under huge pressure by this, and are put in many instances out of business and they drop workers because of it. Apart from the criminality being wrong and the need to catch up with it in itself, the spin-off in terms of its impact is quite enormous. I agree with my colleague, Deputy O'Donovan, that we cannot be equivocal about this and that it has to be stopped, that the stopping of it has to be resourced and that we have to bring all the agencies together in that proposed taskforce and get something done about it. It is a vital issue for the maintenance of jobs and legitimate business in my region.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Okay, thank you very much. I have got eight further people wanting to contribute, so brevity would be greatly appreciated. I call Deputy Martin Heydon.

Mr Martin Heydon TD: I will not take that personally, Co-Chair. [*Laughter.*] Thanks very much. I too would like to be associated with the praise of Senator Coghlan for the leadership he has given our committee in what is an extremely important report. There is a couple of elements to it, Co-Chair. When you talk about illicit trade, there is the obvious loss of revenue for both jurisdictions and Government, and for our economies, but also, more than that, there is the impact and the loss of trade for the legitimate retailers that work in all jurisdictions and who are impacted upon by this. There is also the element of concern as to where the money that is made from these ill-gotten gains finally rests and where it is spent.

Elements involved in the Troubles decommissioned their arms, but obviously they have not decommissioned all their personnel when you see where some of this activity is occurring. I would say that political parties that had links to criminals have a moral obligation to work with the relevant authorities to bring about an end to this activity that is doing both our countries so much harm.

I want to concentrate on the tobacco element within the report, and recognise that there has been a reduction in the cigarette consumption from illicit cigarettes from 14% in 2010 to 11% in 2013, but 11% is still too much. When we look at the figures from 2010 to 2013, there were 420 million cigarettes seized with a retail value of €180 million. There were over 1,000 people prosecuted, but not too many ended up in jail. But, for me, the really worrying figure is the total amount collected in fines from that time of €900,000—0.5% was collected in fines. From the element of carrot and stick, I would point to recommendation K in our report that we have to see greater increases in the fines and greater increases in the prosecutions to make sure that those caught in the act of doing this are sufficiently scared off by much stronger penalties. Thank you, and I commend the report.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Viscount Bridgeman.

Viscount Bridgeman: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I was privileged to be a member of the party that went up to the Border with Senators Paul Coghlan and Jim Walsh two weeks ago. So many speakers today and in our report have mentioned that the encouraging thing is the co-operation between the two police forces. I was very interested in our visit to the Garda Síochána in Dundalk, where they said that, frankly, the problem is much greater for the PSNI than it is for the Garda. However, they are very worried that, all over the Republic now, there are signs of these laundering processes taking place, and the sergeant in the station there told us that there is now evidence that it is spreading to Great Britain.

So, both forces are involved, but I think that the other point I would like to make is about paragraph 16 of our report. There was a problem about the National Crime Agency extending its responsibilities to Northern Ireland, and that has now been agreed, and I think that that is going to be a great step forward because it is going to make a big increase in the exchange of intelligence, which is going to be so important.

Turning back to Senator Keane's point about the short-term exchanges between the two forces, that is very important, but her problem with the longer exchange, which she voiced to the Taoiseach, is very important, and I do hope progress can be made on that, because it is all about intelligence.

Finally, I would say that on the Concession Road out of Dundalk in the south Armagh section, you only have to look at the mansions on that road to see there is money around in that business.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Senator Imelda Henry.

Senator Imelda Henry: Thank you, Chair. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Senator Paul Coghlan and Committee A on this report. As someone who lives in a Border county, this is a huge issue. In particular in relation to tobacco I support the Government's plan to introduce plain packaging, but I think that a lot of businesspeople whom I know who have shops in Sligo are quite annoyed about the plans for the plain packaging. Obviously, it is the right thing to do for health reasons, but it is because of the problem they have with the selling of cigarettes illegally.

I know that Martin has stated figures there, but the rate of the euro against sterling is not very good at the moment, and therefore not many people are travelling across the Border. In the last number of weeks and months, I think that the selling of illegal tobacco has increased. I certainly think that it is a huge issue, and I am very pleased that Committee A has done such an extensive report into this. I look forward to some action being taken on it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Senator Cáit Keane.

Senator Cáit Keane: Thank you. I would like to congratulate Senator Paul Coghlan and the members of Committee A on this very detailed report. There are very many good recommendations there. Hopefully, they will be taken on board, and we will hear back on what is happening on foot of the recommendations. Thank you for the support there for the

long-term exchange. As I said, there is great co-operation between the Gardaí and the PSNI on the ground, with great work on the secondments and everything else, but it is just the administrative side for people who want to go longer than a year or two years or whatever. Everybody who wants to go has to resign from one force and go to the other. Indeed, before Judith Gillespie left the North, I had a discussion with her on this, and she agreed with me that there was a need to look particularly at that.

I just wonder as well, and I just ask Committee A, whether any work was done on the facilities afforded to the PSNI and the Gardaí, particularly technology, and how they compared. I know that every member of the PSNI has a smartphone, and I know that Minister Fitzgerald has spoken about this herself and is looking at it, and I would hope to see the day when all of our gardaí catch up with the PSNI on the issue of smartphone technology. For instance, when Derek Brockwell, or whatever his name was, went from Tallaght Hospital recently, the gardaí did not have the wherewithal to circulate the picture of the escapee; whereas immediately it was circulated to every member of the PSNI, even the ones off duty. So, that is a catch-up game we have to play there, but it is not a game; it is a very serious issue. Technology helps to solve crime as well, and you cannot solve a crime with your hands tied behind your back. We have to move and ensure that every member of the Garda has this. It is money well spent. I know the Minister is looking at it and, hopefully, it will be speeded up. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. We are making good progress, but I still have seven people wishing to speak. I call Barry McElduff MLA.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I just want to say, on behalf of Sinn Féin, in relation to this matter, that Sinn Féin is unequivocal in condemning fuel laundering, cigarette smuggling and counterfeiting. We call for full openness when it comes to party-political fundraising.

I have in my possession a letter from An Garda Síochána. The second part of the letter reminds Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, TD for Donegal and it is from An Garda Síochána superintendent Frank Walsh, private secretary to the Garda Commissioner—lest any misunderstanding be left in this room—that, according to the independent monitoring commission, the military departments and other IRA structures have disbanded. It also says,

in follow up to remarks made in the *Irish Independent* newspaper by Mr Cusack, the correspondent:

An Garda Síochána hold no information or intelligence to support the assertion of Mr Cusack that “the Provisional IRA still maintains its military structure and confines its...activities to fuel laundering, cigarette-smuggling and counterfeiting”.

Superintendent Frank Walsh was directed by the Commissioner of An Garda Síochána to make those remarks in a correspondence to a Sinn Féin TD in Donegal earlier this month—lest there be any misunderstanding in the room.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Senator Jim Walsh.

Senator Jim Walsh: Thank you very much. Just to start on the latter point, I would like to say that, if the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána is in denial, I would be quite happy to take her with me to the Border region and to south Armagh to see the high visibility of the outlets where the fuel smuggling is going on, and to talk to people in the locality who have information. I would lay down that particular invitation to the Commissioner here in response to the letter read, which went to Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and with which I am familiar.

Let me say, as a member of the committee, that we also got from many of the people who attended at our hearings the same message as you got in the letter from the Commissioner. However, when you go to the people who are operating on the ground, you then get a different message: you get the true picture and you get the facts. I have to say that not only are all these outlets visible, but in one particular short stretch of road of a couple of kilometres, we saw between 11 and 12 fuel outlets. I would say, if you travel the rest of the country, the rest of the island, you will travel for many miles before you come across a second outlet. So, it raises a question as to why.

Let me say as well that the perpetrators, particularly the principals who are organised in this particular area of criminality, are well known to the authorities on both sides of the Border.

On the environmental damage, we saw the streams in which a lot of the residue had been dumped, which is causing significant environmental damage. That is obvious to the naked eye. It is open. The Environmental Protection Agency, only belatedly, actually, attended there

and was taking some samples, and hopefully, its samples will show exactly what is going on in those areas.

Let me also say that the criminality that is going on must be tackled. We raised the issue of impunity and whether the authorities were, in fact, operating as vigilantly as they should have been in this regard. They, in fact, denied that there was any impunity, and they were tackling the point. To be fair to them, there were certain successes that they had had. Yet, the savage murder of Paul Quinn is unresolved, despite the fact that some of the perpetrators are known to the authorities. So, it really does beg the question.

In the Crossmaglen area, we visited the PSNI barracks, and I think my colleagues would agree with me that it is a fortress, where, in fact, the police officers are domiciled. We were told that, when they go to do a major criminal investigation to some of these areas, they have to be supported by armed forces.

So, there are serious issues there, and I just think that, 17 years after the Good Friday Agreement or the Belfast Agreement, it is a little bit late now, I think, for these kinds of things to be allowed to continue.

There is an issue, and it was raised by some of my colleagues here, regarding the proceeds and the application of the proceeds, and I would bring the attention of the Assembly here to recommendation E. I will read it:

The Committee believes that concerns regarding the ultimate beneficiaries and application of proceeds of these crimes can only be addressed through a more focussed and concentrated effort to deal with these cross-Border activities, and thorough Criminal Assets Bureau and National Crime Agency investigation to follow the money trail.

Anecdotally, we were told that a particular specified percentage off the top goes towards, euphemistically, 'the cause'. This has the potential to distort the political landscape in the island, and I think should be addressed, let me say, in the interests of Sinn Féin as well.

10.45 am.

If, as has been said, Sinn Féin has nothing to hide in this regard, then I think it should be transparent with the authorities with regard to its funding. I think there should be no charges. We do not have any evidence. However, the authorities should ensure that the integrity of the political process is, in fact, totally underpinned.

In that regard, in that area, there is also an element, or an atmosphere, of omerta, because the people believe, simply because the perpetrators are former combatants of the Provisional

IRA, that, in some way, there is still a connection. I do not know. I know that is denied by Sinn Féin, and, yes, we were told that many of these prominent people, some of whom have been successfully charged, were fined meagre amounts of money, and then would attend publicly and be seen at Sinn Féin Ardfheiseanna and other events. So, I think there is a need for the party to distance themselves, and expose, if they have evidence with regard to the type of activities going on.

Finally, I will just say that I would like to see this particular Assembly call for a really genuine intensification of the efforts. The taskforce is an essential part of that infrastructure, but I think the letter from the Commissioner is a sad reflection maybe on the attention and on the importance that this whole issue is given. That was our suspicion as we undertook the various meetings that we had, and the various hearings. So, I am calling upon the authorities and the Governments—and that is why I put the question to the Taoiseach this morning—and hopefully the North-South Ministerial Council will take this as a particularly insidious issue that needs to be tackled once and for all. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Can I just say a couple of things? I have still got quite a number of Members wishing to contribute. If it gets to the point where we have to take the other reports tomorrow morning, then unless I am faced with any violent objections from the Chairmen of those committees, I think we will do that, because I do want to allow time to discuss this issue. A lot of work goes into preparing these reports, and I think we should do justice to them.

I have let the debate go a little bit wider than the actual terms of reference of the report, but the debate is not about political-party funding, although it may become slightly relevant. I bring the debate back now to the central theme of the actual cross-Border co-operation and illicit trade. I think we need to do that. I call Mr Darren Millar.

Darren Millar AM: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I also congratulate Senator Coghlan and the members of his committee on coming up with such a high-quality report, which identifies much of the good practice and still where some good work and further work needs to be done.

One of the issues that is growing in prevalence certainly in Wales, and which I have no doubt is also a problem in Northern Ireland and certainly has been a problem here in the Republic of Ireland over a number of years, is that of new psychoactive substances and their availability, and the damage that they are doing, particularly to young people in our society. I know that the Government here took some action to ban the purchase and availability of legal highs a number of years ago—or so-called ‘legal highs’, as we call them, in the UK—and, indeed, that seems to have had a significant impact on the availability of new psychoactive substances, particularly through so-called ‘head shops’, with the Republic of Ireland appearing to have stamped them out. However, of course, they are still available, new psychoactive substances, in Northern Ireland and, indeed, elsewhere in the UK.

A recent Assembly Health and Social Care Committee report in Wales identified this as a need for some concerted action by the UK Government. I wonder whether the committee might take this issue up as there is clearly a potential for greater cross-Border co-operation and more consistency around the law in order to ensure that the availability of these very damaging products is stamped out on both sides of the Border, because, of course, if they are legal in Northern Ireland, it is much easier to get them across the Border into the South and make them available to young people here. So, I think that, perhaps, this Assembly ought to champion the cause, particularly to any new incoming UK Government, whatever the outcome of the election may be in May, to address the inconsistencies on both sides of the Border on the island of Ireland in order that this situation can be addressed, and, indeed, if they could take note of the Welsh Assembly’s health committee report into this, I am sure that there will be some useful information in there in order to assist with the process.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Deputy Seán Conlan, please.

Mr Seán Conlan TD: First, I commend the committee and Paul Coghlan for the report. It is a very timely report. The loss of revenue to the state in both jurisdictions and the damage to legitimate traders who purchase their product from legitimate suppliers is well known, but the issue of damage and possible risks to human health is of major concern to people along the Border area. I live in the Cavan-Monaghan constituency and know the area very well. It is a major issue down in south Armagh and in Louth, which is supplied from Lough Ross and the

Muckno region. There is dumping of acid sludge, which is a by-product from diesel fuel laundering, in lakes and rivers. It is a massive concern to the communities locally at the moment.

The task force would be welcome. It needs to be very proactive and to happen immediately. We need a concerted effort between the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the gardaí, customs and revenue and the Environmental Protection Agency to get a grip on the situation immediately, because it has gone on for far too long. It has gone on for years. Why it cannot be dealt with and tackled is beyond me.

It is a small geographical area. We are not talking about somewhere the size of Wales. We are talking about a place that is very small in geographical size, so I do not think the amount of resources that some people suggest are actually required. We need a concerted effort to deal with the problem.

I know that there were a number of recommendations about the markers and how they would have some effect, but I honestly believe that they have the technology that exists out there. According to information that has been given to Members of the House here, these people are very sophisticated. I do not think it will take them very long to remove those markers or whatever new marker is brought forward.

I believe that the only way to deal effectively with the issue is to get rid of coloured diesel, have one colour for legitimate diesel and then give rebates to farmers or whoever else you believe you should subsidise. If we get rid of the two-colour diesel, then we get rid of the issue and we provide legitimate rebate, whether it be to agricultural contractors, farmers or whoever else you decide you want to give a subsidy to.

Cigarette smuggling is also a major issue. Plain packaging may have a very positive effect in changing the perception of cigarettes among young people, but there is a problem here. By bringing in plain packaging, we are going to make it easier for the illicit trade to survive.

I also have concern about what we are doing here in the Republic. There is some talk of us bringing forward legislation in the House to license public houses and place a charge on public houses that wish to have vending machines. That is going to cause a greater problem, because then you are going to have a situation where, rather than paying the licensing fee, people will be selling cigarettes under the counter that come from illegal suppliers. We have to be realistic about what we are trying to achieve. Are we trying to deal with a public health

issue or are we going to create a situation in which people can make further gains through illegal purposes?

All in all, it is a very positive report. It needs to be actioned immediately. The issues are around loss of revenue to both jurisdictions, the damage done to legitimate traders across the island and the specific issue of damage and risk to human health. It is very concerning that that acid sludge is being dumped in rivers, lakes and public water supplies. We need to get on top of this immediately. It should not be left on the long finger.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I want to bring Senator Paul Coghlan back in to round up. That will have to finish by 11.00 am and I still have a number of speakers, so brevity, please.

Mr Noel Coonan TD: I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Garda Síochána and indeed the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the work that they do, because, as we all understand, they stand between us and anarchy at times. I welcome Senator Paul Coghlan's report. It is obviously a very topical and important one, as shown by the interest of speakers.

Senator Coghlan mentioned the idea of a task force. In the report, he does not seem to concentrate on training. I think there are great opportunities for both police services to come together in the area of training. While I understand that the PSNI comes to the Garda College in Templemore for high-level conferences, in speaking to both police forces there is a feeling that they could be better trained together. I ask that Senator Coghlan, in his report, considers the idea that is being put forward now by the Garda Commissioner, Nóirín O'Sullivan. She intends to concentrate on inter-agency training. In other words, you would have members of some of the agencies that we spoke of, like the Revenue Commissioners, a task force or a drug force, coming together with the Garda Síochána for training so that they could specialise in dealing with the issues that they face. It could be recommended that the Police Service of Northern Ireland gets involved in training schedules like that. The future lies in co-operation in training and in operational matters.

I know that you are in a hurry, Chair, so I will conclude by saying that I deal quite a lot with An Garda Síochána and it is a highly professional and progressive police force that has achieved some spectacular success. There have been veiled inferences today that the force is

not up to scratch and that it is not provided with the equipment and technology that it needs. The Garda College in Templemore has a nerve centre that is one of six in Europe. It is wonderful to see the work that they do there, and I support them in their efforts.

Senator John Crown: Go raibh maith agat. Thank you, Chairs, and welcome, colleagues, to our House, Seanad Éireann. I, too, would like to compliment the committee for its great work. This is clearly a problem that needs to be addressed, but we do not want to lose the big context when it comes to the issue of tobacco smuggling. Deputy Conlon has just asked what it is that we are trying to achieve. What we are really trying to achieve is the end of smoking and the bankruptcy of the tobacco industry. That is actually what we would like to achieve.

The main victims of tobacco smuggling are not omnivorous, high-spending Government Departments that are being deprived of the revenue that they would get from cigarette taxation. It is the four to five people per day in the Republic and the one to two people per day in Northern Ireland who die from lung cancer and the twice that number who die from other smoking-related illnesses. In the worst years of the Northern Ireland carnage, that pointless period of madness that engulfed the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, there was never a year when more people died from violence than from smoking. There were more deaths from smoking in every single one of those years of violence, and, on the island of Ireland, there were more deaths every year from lung cancer alone.

The reason that I am saying this is because there is a subtext being offered by many in these Chambers, this Assembly and the outside world that, if we try to tackle the tobacco problem by turning the squeeze on "legitimate" salespeople for this really evil industry, we are somehow facilitating smuggling. I have made the point previously to this group, and indeed in this very room before, that it is important that people realise that, while we have identified who the principal victims of smuggling are, we also need to work out who the principal beneficiaries are. It is not the people who live in the mansions in whatever Border counties and who are actually smuggling the cigarettes. The principal beneficiaries of tobacco smuggling are the tobacco industry; it is big tobacco. Overwhelmingly, the produce that is smuggled is "legitimate" product manufactured by "legitimate" companies who love smuggling.

Some years ago, our colleagues in the British House of Commons asked, in their select committees, some very pointed questions of representatives of the industry to try to get to the

bottom of whether there was, in fact, a policy on the part of the industry to facilitate smuggling across European borders for two reasons: number 1, it is their product that is being sold; and, number 2, it is a cheap way to addict new children. If the product is cheap, people will buy it. Smuggled product is cheap and means more addicts. Everyone please remember that the business model of the tobacco industry is summed up in four words: addict children to carcinogens.

Our plain packaging legislation is under a sustained highly immoral assault by foreign forces that are trying to undermine our sovereignty to legislate for the health of our own citizens. I appeal that this Assembly, which has influence in the various Houses of Parliament across these islands, uses all the influence that it can to support us by trying to bring in the very same kind of legislation in Her Majesty's United Kingdom and to make sure that plain packaging becomes the norm and the standard across these islands. We will then be able to tackle the issue of smuggling in a much more effective way.

Senator Mary Moran: I, too, would like to congratulate Senator Paul Coghlan and those involved with Committee A on the report. As somebody who also lives in the Border area between Louth and south Armagh, it is something that we have known about for years. I commend the committee for travelling up to our area and actively engaging on both sides of the Border to see the exact and full picture. I agree with the picture that you portray that, when you go up and speak to the people on the ground, you find that they are the people with information.

11.00 am.

Several Members referred to the fact that it is a small area. It is a very small area when you look at the smuggling that is going on between North and South along the Border but there are also roads with hundreds of smaller roads off them. People who travel on the Louth and south Armagh roads can get lost. Diesel smugglers have sophisticated means of getting across the Border. I welcome the recommendation for the all-Ireland task force, which absolutely needs to be in force straight away and given all the resources that it needs.

I note in the report the support that there is between councils North and South and I am delighted to see the comments about the excellent co-operation between Louth County Council and Newry and Mourne District Council. My colleagues have also referred to the health issues that have been highlighted in papers recently and which, I know, have caused

great concern to the people of Dundalk and the Louth area. As some of the people who have travelled to the area have said, all you have to do is look to see the environmental damage that has been done.

Damage has also been done to the economy of the towns and the people in them. Reference should be made to the number of people who have innocently driven their cars into garages, unknowingly purchased laundered diesel and had their engines completely ruined. We should also mention the legitimate traders in Dundalk. There are places, particularly in my own area, that are well known and people are told not to go there and there are places that are quite safe to buy diesel from.

Mr John Scott MSP: I want to raise the issue of this crime spreading to mainland UK. I have particular concerns about diesel laundering spreading to the west of Scotland. I would like to know, if a task force is being set up, whether Police Scotland would be involved in that, at least to have a watching brief. I am very concerned about illicit fuel laundering spreading to mainland UK but particularly to Scotland. I am also concerned about the illegal trafficking of cigarettes in plain packaging. We certainly have problems in the west of Scotland with that already, and perhaps this is the source — I do not know.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: I support what Senator John Crown said. I am chair of the all-party heart group in the British Parliament. The biggest killer in these islands is heart disease and the biggest factor influencing heart disease is smoking. Ireland led the way in banning smoking in public places, followed by Scotland, Wales and England. The UK is leading the way on plain packaging, although the lobby against it is massive and well-funded. They used it in Australia and predicted the collapse of Australian society if plain packaging was introduced. They said that the triads would come over from China and destroy Australian society, but nothing happened except that the number of people smoking decreased. BIPA, through its committees, should be looking at other ways of maximising pressure on the big tobacco companies to cut back on the recruitment of young people and children, as has been so eloquently pointed out by Senator John Crown.

The Lord Bew: On behalf of Committee A, I thank our officials without whose work this report would not have achieved the quality that it has achieved. One of them, sadly, will no

longer be working for BIPA. The whole committee feels a tremendous sense of gratitude to the officials for the work that they done on this report.

Ms Alison McInnes MSP: In relation to disrupting illegal trade, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 has been used very effectively in Scotland. Over £80 million has been recovered and £50 million of that has been put back into communities through CashBack for Communities. The rest of the funding goes back into the police force to fund things such as forensic accountants, who can look into some of these crimes. It allows the police authorities, even if it is not possible to secure a criminal conviction, to bring a conviction through civil recovery powers on the balance of probabilities that the assets or the properties have been achieved through illegal gains. It has been used quite effectively, and I wonder whether there are perhaps some lessons to be learned from that.

Mr Dinny McGinley TD: As a newcomer to the Assembly here, I was not aware of the fact that this report was in preparation. For that reason, I was pleasantly surprised when I did see the report and that this problem is being addressed.

For those of us who come from a Border area, as I do from Donegal, it has been a long-running sore. It has come to the point now around my county and other Border areas that you have to be very careful where you go to purchase your diesel and other fuel because you could do irreparable damage to your engine and so on. I will not go over the other points that have been made on the loss of revenue and the environmental damage: we read about that regularly in the papers.

I believe it is possible to address this matter and to solve it. We have the technology, the communications and the co-operation between both sides of the Border, be that the PSNI, the Garda Síochána and, indeed, the Revenue Commissioners — it can be done.

I come from a part of the country where we had other illicit fuel, or liquid if you want to put it that way, in the past. Poitín, or mountain dew if you want to call it that, was being made in every parish in the west of Ireland. The gardaí and the Revenue Commissioners got to grips with that problem, and it is very difficult at the moment to get a bottle of poitín. I understand that Barry McElduff may know something. *[Laughter.]* It is very difficult at the moment; it has been rooted out. It can be a kitchen industry in that it can be made in the back room, whereas diesel laundering or fuel laundering is on an industrial scale. Certainly, with the

technology that we have at the moment, it should be possible to have it brought to an end. I do not know whether there are vested interests or not, but it something that has got to be done for the reasons that have been pointed out by all previous speakers, and I will not go over that.

One other point that I make coming from a Border county is that there are regular cross-Border intrusions into Donegal and probably into other Border counties. Small shops, post offices and all that are being raided at gunpoint by criminals and such people and then they go right across the Border again. There is great co-operation but it can be improved as well.

The last point that I want to make is to congratulate Senator Paul Coghlan and his committee for undertaking this. He is coming from a part of the country, the deep south, where they probably do not have diesel laundering to the same extent that we have in Border areas, so perhaps he has looked at it from an objective view. I hope now that the recommendations in this report will be implemented and that that will put an end, once and for all, to this unacceptable business that has been going on for so many years.

The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you to everybody who has contributed. It is obviously an issue that is very topical and of great interest to all Members of the Assembly. I will ask Senator Coghlan to sum up. Thank you, Paul.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Thank you, Co-Chair. First, I thank all of the Members of the Assembly for their constructive and valuable points, and I sincerely thank all of my fellow committee members, who contributed so much to the report. We will take on board all of the points because we had agreed yesterday evening at the committee meeting that we felt that a follow-up on this report would be necessary. We will look into all of the points that you have made.

We are very serious about the full-time task force operating on a full-time basis on both sides of the Border because, as has been said by many of you, too much time has elapsed for the law to be held in disregard, as apparently it is. These crime overlords seem to be able to act with impunity, certainly with scant regard for the law, and there are very few prosecutions.

I have never been in Crossmaglen in my life, despite the fact that my mother was born and baptised there. As has been said, the barracks there is a fortress. It is a metal sheet-clad bombproof bunker. Apparently, it was machine gunned in some attack a few years ago.

The police do not feel able to live in the community. We were told that the last two policemen who lived in that community were murdered. Let us be honest: normal policing does not operate there, at least not yet, but hopefully it will. If we are serious, both Governments and the Northern Assembly must be prepared to take on the recommendations that this committee has made. Only by doing that, will matters be improved for the communities in the Border areas.

Chairman, we are stuck for time. I will leave it at that. We will take on board all the points and there will be a follow-up. Go raibh míle maith agat.

COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS): THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. The Minister still is not here, so I will ask Bob Walter to speak, if he does not mind. I am sorry for the disruption, Bob, but we may as well press on with the reports as far as we can until the Minister gets here. Thank you.

Mr Robert Walter MP: All right. It may be necessary, therefore, to continue the debate tomorrow because I know that a number of my colleagues want to participate in this discussion.

I am delighted to present this report on the European Investment Bank (EIB). Before doing so, I want to thank the co-rapporteurs. As a European committee, we are very European in having rapporteurs — Mike German AM and Seán Conlan TD. I will introduce the report but I am sure that those co-rapporteurs will wish to speak to the report as well.

At our autumn 2013 plenary in London, the committee agreed the terms of reference for the inquiry and sought written evidence. We visited the European Investment Bank headquarters in Luxembourg on 13 January 2014, when we met officials from the bank, including Jonathan Taylor, the vice-president.

One of the benefits of our visit was to be informed of projects of the European Investment Bank that have come to fruition. At the spring plenary in Dublin last year, the committee decided to visit one of those projects to see what lessons could be learned from international comparators. As a result, in June, a delegation of the committee visited Bilbao in Spain, where the bank has helped a number of initiatives to establish. The committee met Bilbao City Council, officials of the Basque railway network who were undertaking a large-scale project, and representatives of La Caixa Bank, which acts as an intermediary to small and medium-sized enterprises that want to access EIB funding.

At the autumn plenary in Ashford, the committee agreed that the co-rapporteurs should visit Brussels to follow up on the evidence that we had received. In November, they met representatives of the European Commission and European Parliament. They also met officials from the UK representation and the Irish permanent representative. I thank all who met the committee and helped with the arrangements. In addition, I thank the co-rapporteurs for their dedication to the task that we undertook.

Our report looked at how the United Kingdom and Ireland had made use of the European Investment Bank and how the EIB can assist in creating jobs and long-term growth. That was with a view to encourage Governments and public authorities within the British Isles and Ireland to make more use of the services of the EIB. In addition, we looked at the European Investment Bank's processes to see if that institution could do more to help those who might be seeking funding from it.

11.15 am.

One point that was repeated to us in the inquiry is that EIB funding is available for all types of projects. We thought that local authorities could benefit from accessing EIB funds but felt that they are not sufficiently aware of the opportunities available to them. We therefore recommended that the EIB, national Governments and the devolved institutions do more to raise awareness of this additional source of funding, with a view to encouraging more localised projects to put themselves forward for consideration by the bank.

While we were in Bilbao, we saw what can be achieved in a region when the different authorities in that region come together on a project. Therefore, our report urges the UK and Irish Governments to reflect on this example of collaboration to see where joint working can bring forward similar projects.

There are, in addition, opportunities for national commercial banks in Bilbao to direct EIB funding to SMEs. However, as the risk is borne by the commercial banks, they tended to be risk averse. We recommended that, where SMEs seek to gain EIB intermediated funds, the Governments explore how it might be possible to de-risk these projects and the EIB inform the commercial banks of the type of activities these loans have been used for, so that commercial banks might have more confidence in their own decision-making.

The European Commission through the multi-annual financial framework 2014-2020 is trying to take some of the risk burden from the EIB. We have welcomed this approach, because if the European Union is going to generate growth and create jobs it needs to try new things which involve a greater degree of risk. This step by the Commission will also enable member states to do more with the funds they receive, such as Horizon 2020 and EU structural funds.

One of the barriers to receiving funding from the EIB is the scale of a project. We have heard examples where an initial small project has been bundled, so that it might be replicated in several areas. The scale of the project can be multiplied, so as to meet the minimum limit for funding. One example of this was in Ireland, where a €100 million loan helped to renovate 47 schools over a five-year period. We have recommended that public authorities assess whether they can take advantage of this type of bundling in order to overcome the scale barrier of EIB funding.

Finally, we have called on the European Investment Bank to review its processes to explore whether it can be more effective. For example, we have heard praise for the EIB's expertise, but it has been made clear to us that it should be made more readily available, so that it is not only dispensed in relation to a particular project.

The most emphatic message that we have received, however, is that the bank is risk-averse. We therefore call on the European Investment Bank to assess its levels of risk, the incidence of loan defaults and explore how it might de-risk projects. The EIB is an institution with a key role to play in supporting the European Union's economic recovery, and it is our view that the bank has to step into that role more confidently and assert more influence. I hope the Assembly will agree that our report provides recommendations that can improve how the United Kingdom and Ireland and the EIB interact with one another and work together. It is therefore my pleasure to present this report to the Assembly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Bob. We are going to have to suspend our discussion of that subject until tomorrow, but it is very useful to have the presentation of the report. We will return to the report tomorrow.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Co-Chair. As mentioned earlier, we will have progress report updates from all four committees tomorrow morning.

ADDRESS BY MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): We now move on to the next item of the plenary session. I am very pleased to invite our next guest speaker today, Mr Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, to speak about the importance of sport in our shared culture. I am sure that the Minister will be pleased to hear that we travel to his constituency to visit Croke Park later today, where we will continue our examination of this theme. I call on Minister Donohoe to make his opening address.

Mr Paschal Donohoe TD (Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport): Thank you. Good morning, Co-Chairs, distinguished Members, fellow parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen. It is an honour to be with you all this morning, and it is a great pleasure to be invited to address the 50th plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I congratulate you on the fantastic work you have done over the last 25 years in building close relationships between parliamentarians across these islands, as well as on the island of Ireland.

The last time I addressed the Assembly was during its 47th plenary session in 2013 in my then role as Minister of State with responsibility for European Affairs. My theme then was of a shared agenda in a changing world. Today, I am here in my new role, as Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, to discuss a different shared agenda: the importance of sport and the benefits that it offers to communities and participants.

Of course, the significant health, social and economic benefits of sport are widely recognised. As Minister for Sport, I am committed to increasing and developing participation and interest in sport, improving standards of performance and developing sports facilities. In government

we understand that sport and physical activity have huge potential to contribute to the development of a healthier society, and we recognise the importance of sport for social and economic development.

This year alone, the sports and recreation service programme from my Department accounts for approximately €90 million. This is a very significant investment in sport, and it is a strong indication of our commitment to sport and our recognition of the value and the benefits that it brings. This is further evidenced by the delivery so far in this Dáil of two rounds of sports capital funding. This is a funding programme that delivers support and benefits to small and medium-sized clubs in local settings all over the country. The fact that we have been able to deliver two rounds of this, despite the massive pressure on our public finances, is a very clear indication of the support and recognition that we give to sport. I am very pleased that, in the coming weeks, the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Ring, and I will confirm a third round of this important programme. We are doing this because we want to ensure that all people are encouraged and given opportunities to participate in sport and enjoy all the benefits it can bring to developing a healthier lifestyle.

The growing problem of obesity and inactivity lifestyles, particularly among young people, is a cause for real concern. Research shows that overweight issues and obesity alone cost the State approximately €1.13 billion per year and, of course, the contribution of sport to health and the prevention of illness and disability is very significant, and I need hardly state the very well-understood benefits of sport to positive mental health. So, the benefits that can be gained from participation in sport and investment in it are important, not just for the individual but for our health system, with the consequent reduction in the demand for its services.

That is why the Irish Sports Council works closely with the governing bodies of sport to encourage greater participation in sport and physical activity. Many of our governing bodies in sport are structured on an all-island basis, with a close working relationship established between many others and excellent North-South co-operation in the overall area of sport. Examples include hockey, golf and rowing. Of course, rugby and cricket are the most topical examples of this approach at the moment.

The Irish Sports Council and Sport Northern Ireland work closely together and are currently engaging in a number of joint initiatives, such as a code of ethics and a code of good practice for children's sports. There is also co-operation on such issues as research, development of

high-performance sport and high-performance sport coaching and anti-doping. Coaching Ireland also operates on an all-Ireland basis. Officials from my Department and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in Northern Ireland also meet regularly to discuss sporting issues of mutual interest.

I am very committed to pursuing continuing North-South co-operation in the area of sport and building on these good examples of co-operation to mutual benefit.

11.30 am.

There is also very good all-island co-operation in the area of sports tourism. An excellent example of that was last year in the hosting of the Giro d'Italia cycling event on an all-island basis, showing that the island of Ireland can successfully host such events. Building on that, I am sure that you are all aware that the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive recently announced our joint and very enthusiastic support for the preparation of a joint bid for the 2023 Rugby World Cup by the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). The IRFU, with the support of both Governments, has commenced work on compiling the bid.

The social impact of sport should not be underestimated. It is a key element in the formulation of Irish sports policy. Sport and physical activity can develop the personal skill of individuals. Alongside that, values such as tolerance, self-discipline, team spirit and strength of character are demanded, practised and promoted. In that way, sport serves as an indispensable educational tool in schools, colleges and in our wider community. It can also play an important role in tackling some of the social challenges faced by society, including exclusion, antisocial behaviour and alcohol and substance misuse. An example of that is the success of the Football Association of Ireland's midnight soccer leagues in reducing Garda call-out rates by 48% during the periods that the leagues ran in some of Dublin's disadvantaged communities, which is further evidence of the positive influence of sport.

All of that highlights the role that sport and sporting organisations play in community development. I know the president of the GAA will address the Assembly this afternoon, and you will all get to see the wonderful facilities of Croke Park later today. The GAA is the largest and one of the oldest sports organisations in the country. The significance that it plays in Irish society cannot be undervalued. It is the lifeblood of many different communities throughout the country, as each town and village has a Gaelic club that has provided sport and physical activity for generations of young and not so young people over the past 130 years.

As somebody who spends most of his Saturday mornings standing by the side of pitches of GAA clubs in different parts of our city, I can say that it is really evident and you can see so clearly the great role that they are playing at the moment in the area of social inclusion. If I look back at the different objectives that I mentioned earlier in my contribution about looking to promote sporting excellence and participation, the work that they do in both those areas has to be really recognised. They have their annual congress coming up this weekend in County Cavan. That will provide an example and an opportunity for them to reflect on the great work that they do.

The success of our elite sportspeople and teams at national and international level boost morale, and nothing unites people quite like sport. Those sportspeople are role models for young people, and their performances and achievements can inspire the next generation by encouraging sports participation at a local level. We have all seen the feel-good factor that major sporting events can deliver. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games was one of the most well-run games in recent years. Events such as the London games can encourage people to get involved in physical activity and sport, and it is important to build on that foundation after the events are finished.

The Olympic flame is one of the endearing symbols of the Olympic Games and sports in our world. It was a great honour when the London 2012 Olympic torch relay travelled across the Border from Northern Ireland to Dublin. That historic occasion recognised the friendship, peace and co-operation that now exists on our island and demonstrates the unifying power of sport. The London games was like a home games for Ireland, and the Ireland team enjoyed one of its most successful events.

A major legacy of these games was the contribution made by the volunteer workforce and I know that the British Government is working to ensure that the spirit of volunteering continues to grow and can benefit large events and local communities. We enjoyed a similar experience in Ireland when we hosted the 2003 Special Olympic World Summer Games, the first time the event was held outside the United States. This event generated the greatest voluntary effort ever seen in this country with more than 30,000 volunteers, many of whom continued volunteering with the Special Olympics after the games were over.

Sport is the most important arena for volunteering in Ireland and it is estimated that in the region of half a million people volunteer in sport throughout the country every year. They play a major role in keeping the high level of sporting activity in Ireland with all the

associated health and social benefits that it delivers, and they can contribute significantly to the development of elite sport in Ireland, which has done so much to benefit our international reputation. Every athlete in sport can only reach their potential because of the support, encouragement and inspiration they receive from the volunteers in their clubs. There is also a significant economic value of sport volunteering with recent research indicating that this is worth around €1 billion per year.

It can build better community relations and deliver a better understanding and respect for the rights and traditions of everyone, while contributing to the building of a more cohesive society. It can teach us honesty and fairness and how important it is to uphold the highest standards of respect. Sport teaches us that, for communities to remain peaceful, positive and productive, we must act with the utmost integrity at all times. A diverse and inclusive sporting environment is most likely to be realised when people who differ from one another are valued and appreciated.

We in government are fully aware that we must continue to promote sport and physical activity, to support our sporting bodies and to strive to provide the best sporting facilities we can, not just for our elite sportsmen and women but for women of all ages and levels of ability. All of us involved in sport need to continue to work together and engage productively on matters that are important to sport. We have a mutual interest in seeing sport develop to its full potential. It has the potential to build bridges between people like no other sphere of human activity, allowing the making of friendships and the developing of new relationships to be a crucial part of sporting endeavour.

Of course rivalry adds to the excitement of sporting occasions and Britain and Ireland have enjoyed such rivalry over the years on many great sporting occasions. I greatly look forward to welcoming another magnificent sporting match this weekend, the Six Nations match in which England and Ireland will compete at the Aviva Stadium here in Dublin.

However, nobody has captured the joys and the complexities of sport in an Irish setting more brilliantly than Seamus Heaney, who of course once trialed for the Derry Gaelic football team and whose name was honoured with a spontaneous ovation by a capacity crowd attending Croke Park for the Dublin versus Kerry all-Ireland football semi-final, just days after his death in 2013. In 'Markings' Heaney writes of four jackets laid on bumpy ground for goalposts, teams picked, and then a game under way. He writes:

Youngsters shouting their heads off in a field

As the light died and they kept on playing

Because by then they were playing in their heads

He concludes:

It was quick and constant, a game that never need

Be played out. Some limit had been passed,

There was fleetness, furtherance, untiredness

In time that was extra, unforeseen and free.

So again, I would like to congratulate and thank the Assembly for the valuable work of the last 25 years, and I wish you continued success in the future. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Minister. I now invite comments from the floor. First up is Chris Ruane.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: I congratulate the Minister on the intelligent, informative and poetical speech that he just given on sport and also the GAA in Ireland for the work that it does in connecting with the youth in Ireland. My cousin Tony O'Keeffe was secretary of the GAA in Kerry for 17 years and now has a position with the national GAA.

My question is not actually on the sports side, but relates to his position as transport Minister. Is the Minister aware of the High Speed Two (HS2), which will take high-speed train travel from London to Manchester, and High Speed Three (HS3), which will connect Hull, Liverpool, Manchester and Holyhead? What assessment has he made of the impact of this huge investment in the UK on UK-Irish trade, freight, tourism and business? Will he, in his position as Irish transport Minister, make some connections with British and Welsh transport Ministers to ensure that that connectivity from Dublin to Holyhead, London and Europe and Dublin to Holyhead, Manchester, Hull and the Baltic states is developed to the best of all the nations' capacity?

Ms Joyce Watson AM: Thank you for that speech. It was inspiring. I will use some of your words back to you. You said that, in sport, you can have the highest standard of respect. I am from the Welsh Assembly — I should have said that at the start — and I have been

involved since 2007 in getting men to be involved in the White Ribbon campaign to take the pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The most successful part of the campaign has been getting sports clubs and organisations signed up to this because, as you said, the reach of sport is significant. In 2007, the Welsh Rugby Union signed up. In 2014, the Scarlets wore white ribbons on their shirts and the Ospreys signed up. In 2013, Wrexham Football Club and Newport County Association Football Club signed up. The reason that I have targeted football, rugby and sport in general is because the incidence of domestic abuse goes up by 25% when there are national and international games. It does not make any difference whether they win or lose. Every single year, two women in the UK lose their lives to domestic abuse. My question to the Minister is this: would he, in his position, consider looking at the possibilities, which are immense, to promote through his office the take-up of the campaign against domestic abuse by wearing white ribbons on the days of internationals; days when men can say no to violence against women? I have had a huge response from men who have signed the pledge — 3,500 last year alone — because they want to be involved in saying no to domestic abuse.

Mr Joe O'Reilly TD: At the outset, Minister, may I be associated with the general appreciation of your excellent and comprehensive address? Might I just hone in on or reference one aspect of it that I think is important? It is your recognition of the importance of volunteers; the people who go out on the wet Saturday mornings to assist with underage teams, assist with club work, give people lifts to matches, do umpire and stand around — the unsung heroes who are there for the junior B matches and all the minor sporting activities. Their contribution is enormous and should be celebrated. I am glad that you recognised them in your remarks, Minister.

I always think about them this way: we will never know the good they do because we will never know what would have happened without them and only for them; the children who would have gone ultimately to skid row, fallen off the rails, gone into delinquency, dropped out of school and whose self-image would have been very different. We can never quantify their good because we do not witness it and they have achieved it. It is only when kids slip through the net that you see what more could have happened. I think that you are so right that those volunteers should be celebrated. My point is this: you are right to recognise them and I appeal to you as you go on in your ministry to go on celebrating in every way that you

can and giving recognition and encouragement to the volunteers in all our sporting organisations by any methods that you can use to do that. These people should receive our affirmation and encouragement. They are the lifeblood of our communities.

I will finish on this, Co-Chair. I went to my local GAA club the other night. It is drawing up its five-year plan for the next five years. We all got into groups at tables for the drawing up of it and brainstorming on the various aspects of the club's activity. What was so impressive was the sincere commitment of about 50 people in that room to making life different for the children of the village. I think that no one could commend that enough.

Mr Paschal Donohoe TD: I thank all the Members for their contributions. Firstly, I will just respond back to the comments and questions from Chris Ruane MP. Thank you for your points. For one moment, when you started talking about the HS2 and HS3, I thought you were going to stand up and ask whether I would be willing to fund their extension over here. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Chris Ruane MP: All donations will be accepted.

Mr Paschal Donohoe TD: I was struggling to think of how I was going to answer that question. I am very much aware, particularly of the HS2, I must say, and the work that is under way and some of the benefits that it is offering at the moment. I am also aware of some of the discussion that is taking place in relation to it in the UK. Over the weekend, the *Financial Times*, I think, had an article about the great change that is taking place in Manchester at the moment. I would imagine that one of the drivers of all that is of course the facilitation that is taking place now and improving rail connectivity in the UK. I understand that the UK, at the moment, is considering setting up a rail academy to further develop and sustain excellence in rail engineering because of the prospect of the number of high-speed rail links that would be built across the United Kingdom in the years to come. It is certainly something that we are interested in looking at.

At the moment, I am working in my own Department to put together a programme to visit the United Kingdom in the coming months, specifically to look at the work that they are doing on rail at the moment and also to look at the work that is under way on the roll-out of cashless

card systems. For example, I know that the UK — London, in particular — has now moved away from the Oyster Card system and is using contactless cash cards now. That is something that we are interested in here in Ireland because of the success that we have had with the Leap Card initiative.

In short, the answer to your question is yes: I believe that there are great opportunities to look at how we can deepen connectivity through the development of a high-speed network within the UK. I noticed the particular reference that you made to the Baltic states because of the opportunity that it may offer to connect across Europe. As an island nation that places great value on our ability to trade goods and services in the most efficient way possible, that of course would offer a benefit to Ireland, too. I will most certainly be looking at doing that before the summer. Thank you for raising it here today.

In relation to the point that was made by the Member of the Welsh Assembly, Joyce Watson — thank you for raising that — I am shocked about the statistic that you offered regarding the increase in incidence of domestic abuse across major sporting events. It is a particularly striking and disturbing point to hear this morning. With regard to the point that you made about the role that sporting organisations can play in changing cultural norms and practices in homes and families, I have seen huge evidence of this. I saw one very clear example of this very recently where a local sporting club in my own community hosted a morning on nutrition and healthy eating, which I know is very different to the point that you are making, but the leading sporting figures in the club were the main speakers. The event was thronged. They had to run it on a number of occasions across the morning. Hundreds of young people turned up to hear what their local sporting heroes had to say. I can assure you that they took it a lot more seriously than anything I would have said. It showed the real value that those sporting clubs can play.

11.45 am.

You referred to the White Ribbon campaign and the success that it has in Wales and beyond. If it is anything that we will be able to support, and if a charity or organisation here locally is doing anything in relation to it, I would be very eager to find out about it to see if we could support it further.

I move now to the points that Deputy Joe O'Reilly made. I am well aware of the importance of the voluntary activity that you referred to. I saw a different example of it, last Friday night, when I attended the women's Six Nations sporting contest between Ireland and France

at Ashbourne Rugby Club. When I met the people who lead the club and who were involved in hosting it, they told me that there had between 70 and 80 volunteers at the club, all day, getting ready for the event.

Of course, the point you made in relation to your local GAA club is a point that stands up very strongly in relation to all the different kinds of sporting activity in clubs all over our country, regardless of whether they are large, like the GAA. The kind of sports that I would like to reference this morning are the smaller sports, the smaller clubs and the level of support that goes into them from volunteers within their communities. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I am conscious that we have to be out of here at noon. A few more people want to contribute. I am bringing in Jack Wall.

Mr Jack Wall TD: Thank you very much, Co-Chairs. First of all, I congratulate you on your work, Minister. It is what I love to hear. Talking about sport has been a big part of your life. Joe spoke about volunteers. As you said, there is nothing that a volunteer likes more than to see you on the sideline, watching your kids play. The volunteer loves to see parents present, because he knows then that what he is doing is being appreciated. You just cannot measure the value of having parents present and seeing their kids play.

You talked about small clubs and small teams. I looked after a very small school down in Churchtown in Athy. We played in six county finals and lost six in a row. The kids cried every time. Sometimes, Jack cried as well, to be honest. I always thought I would keep training them until they did win. They did win, but they cried on the day that they won as well. I wondered then what was the essence of the whole lot of it.

Minister, I am delighted to hear that there is going to be a third round of the capital programme, because this is the lifeblood of communities in Ireland. It is advancing at such a rate that it is hard to keep up with it. We all saw 'Operation Transformation', and we saw what that did for communities around the country. People in employment, voluntary groups, housing communities etc got out and provided for themselves. I hope that you will put some type of an initiative into the capital grants to allow them to develop further, because it is hugely important for community development to give them something to show your appreciation. As a result of 'Operation Transformation', my club has put a walkway around the GAA grounds. The amount of people who come, park the car and walk round the

grounds is unbelievable. I hope that you look at something in that regard in relation to the capital grants.

My other point is in relation to minority sports. You mentioned it yourself. We have to look after them, because not everyone is associated with one of the major sports.

The last thing I want to mention, Minister, relates to the use of facilities. It annoys me to see facilities closed up for the weekends, especially in schools, where we have basketball arenas and other wonderful facilities. You see the kids looking in at the gate and knowing that they cannot get in because of insurance, or whatever it is. Can you please, please talk to the Minister for Education and Skills and see if the two of you can come to a common ground in relation to using the facilities? A huge amount of money was provided by the parents in many instances to provide those facilities, and they are not being used to their full potential. Sporting facilities should be used 24/7, and some of them are not. I would love to see you entering into a debate and creating a debate on ensuring all such facilities are used for the benefits of our communities.

The Lord German: Minister, thank you for your speech. You mentioned sports tourism, and I would like to ask you a quite narrow question about how you measure the impact of large-scale sporting events, particularly where the Government is asked to put in a substantial investment to make the event work. On the one hand, you have economic impacts such as the number of bed nights, increased occupancy and individual spend, but, on the other hand, you have much softer economic impacts that are sometimes described by phrases such as "put us on the map". It is about showing that we can manage and run very successful large-scale events. In your terms, how do you measure the overall impact of such large-scale events in order to be able to justify the money that you have to put in from the Government and the income return that might come back to the community at large?

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: I will follow on with the Seamus Heaney theme. Apparently an older man from the United States arrived in south Derry — the Bellaghy and Castledawson area — and asked a local man whether he knew Seamus Heaney personally, and he said, "Don't mention that man's name to me. He lost us an under-18 championship". *[Laughter.]* Seamus Heaney apparently carried the ball over the line and they lost a very important match.

Could I ask the Minister to comment on an article in today's *The Irish Times*, which holds up Katie Taylor as an excellent role model for young people, not least young women? There is an excellent article along those lines in today's *The Irish Times*.

Finally, to do a Chris Ruane, the Taoiseach was in earlier and I pressed him about the A5. You have transport responsibility as well. I want to get your ongoing commitment to the A5 because if Tyrone, Monaghan, Donegal or Derry win the Sam Maguire, we want a very smooth passage home for the cup.

Senator Cáit Keane: I will be brief. I congratulate the Minister. Thank you for coming today. Sport can help prevent obesity and we need to highlight that more. We have sporting clubs as well. The GAA is involved in the alcohol and substance abuse prevention (ASAP) programme at the moment, and it is promoting that to reduce substance abuse and prevent alcohol use among the youth. That is rolling out to all the communities. The Ulster GAA has a programme on promoting healthy eating. As well as that, we should say that the clubs themselves promote that message to players. Every rugby and football club has sent out a message that healthy eating is better than taking substances — supplements really — to promote muscle growth and whatever. Minister, that is one point.

We have a fantastic rugby match coming up on 1 March between Ireland and England, and we know the price of the tickets for that. I am not looking for a ticket for anybody in the audience or anything like that, but I think that stadiums like the Aviva should make an effort to give one ticket for a raffle to a very needy and deprived area where there are youths. They could sell it on or youth could even go to that match between Ireland and England. I know a fellow who was not interested in sport but was interested in drugs, and he changed his lifestyle by attending an all-Ireland final. Can you imagine what it would do for two youths from a residential centre for youth with drug issues if they could go to that match? That is something to think about, Minister.

Mrs Brenda Hale MLA: Minister, your passion for sport clearly came through during your address, and, in your concluding remarks, you acknowledged how it can be inclusive to different communities. However, in Northern Ireland, many see the poaching of football players who come through the Northern Ireland youth system as damaging to community relations in Northern Ireland and having the potential to sectarianise the international game.

Will you encourage the FAI to enter into a formal agreement with FIFA on that issue in the interests of good relations between the two associations and to help improve community relations in that sector? In Northern Ireland, that has proven to be extremely divisive.

Hon Stephen Rodan MHK: I want you to highlight the importance and value of giving opportunities for young people to engage not only in local or national competition but in international competition. It is perfectly possible for small communities to do that. Thirty years ago, the Isle of Man, as part of its international year of sport, started the inter-island games — small island communities around the British Isles and beyond in Europe — which meet every two years. That contributes to a sense of national identity and value to community and cultural development and it gives young people an opportunity to compete at international level, and it is perfectly possible, even for small communities, to do that. In 2011, the Isle of Man hosted the Commonwealth Youth Games and, despite being a very small jurisdiction, it was a huge 70-nation and territory international event. So it is possible, even for small communities in Ireland, to do that sort of thing.

Mr Seán Rogers MLA: Minister, you are very welcome. This year, the Irish Open will be hosted in the beautiful constituency of South Down. I have both a question and a plug. What discussions have you had with our Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister and our Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister about the promotion of the Irish Open? You are very welcome to South Down, if you can find the time.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Finally, my Co-Chair wishes to ask something that is very close to his heart.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Welcome, Minister. I have the great racecourse of Cheltenham in my constituency, and you would be very welcome — I think I might have mentioned that once before — to come in a couple of weeks' time. When I was at Fairyhouse the other day with Horse Racing Ireland, they mentioned a concern about one of your great festivals, the Galway festival, and the bypass that is being discussed in that area. I said that I would pass those comments on to you. It is a very brief point, and I apologise if I

have stepped in anybody else's territory, but I was with them and said that I would mention it to you.

Mr Paschal Donohoe TD: I certainly have a broad variety of points to respond to. First, I will respond to the point that Deputy Wall made about the role of parents. There is no doubt that the investment that parents have in sustaining clubs and voluntary activity is huge, not to mention the work that they do in getting children and their neighbours' children from game to game and event to event. Local clubs could not survive without that level of support.

Deputy Wall also referred to the importance of minority sports and the need to support them, and I absolutely agree with him. I will relate a point that is very important in how we ensure that our investment into sport reflects the two different priorities that we have. The first one is how we sustain high performance and the second is how we continue to support the participation of all people, regardless of their ability.

For me, my main interaction with sport — this should come as no surprise to you — was not at all in the area of high performance. Until I became an adult, I had asthma, and I found it very difficult to participate in sporting activity. What made me realise how important it was, how important coaches are and how important good organisers are was not always how they responded, indeed, if at all, to the young boy or girl that had no difficulty excelling at sport. It was the recognition that they give to effort, and the recognition that they give to people giving of their best and how to encourage that, regardless of their level of ability. My defining appreciation of sport and how important it is was how my teachers supported and encouraged me, despite the fact that I was as far away from being a high-performance athlete as is possible to imagine, and that has given me the great value that I have of sport now and my desire to support it in my time in this role.

In relation to how we can sustain that and sustain the role of smaller clubs, it is something that the Minister of State, Deputy Ring, and I are very conscious of. I know that it is something that the Minister of State has tried to advance in the last two rounds of sports capital funding, and it is something that we will certainly have a look at in the next round of sports capital funding that we are in the final stages of getting ready.

12.00 noon.

In relation to the points that the Chairman put to me about how we evaluate sports tourism, I have an awful lot of appreciation of that from the recent work that we did in getting ready for

our joint bid for the 2023 Rugby World Cup. From our point of view, the simple answer regarding how we evaluate it is the incremental economic activity that is brought into our jurisdiction that you can attribute to the hosting of that sporting event. The most quantitative way in which we evaluate that at the moment is in terms of additional bed nights that would be made available in our hotels.

That has a very direct consequence for the kind of sporting events that we would look at, which are the ones that are of particular value to us or ones that would happen in the so-called shoulder season; in other words, ones that would not happen across a period in which our hotels would be busy anyway, such as across the summer period. That had a huge effect on improving the economic metrics of hosting the 2023 Rugby World Cup in Ireland, were we to achieve it.

Much of the economic activity that will be happening then will be happening across September, October and November, which, of course, is a period of time in which, for us and the Northern Ireland Executive, we would be looking at other activities to try to get our hotels supported and busy. That really is how we looked at it. It is the metric through which we evaluate that bid for the 2023 Rugby World Cup, which, in turn, made the investment in capital infrastructure affordable. We knew that visitors will come here to our country; we are confident that they will. That will facilitate the investment that you referred to.

In relation to Barry McElduff MLA and the importance of sporting icons, the point that you made was very interesting. You picked Katie Taylor. I have really noticed the effect that that has had as well. I spend each week doing work in my constituency of Dublin Central. I visit a lot of schools, and I spend time talking to their transition-year students and participating in debates with them. The role of people like Katie Taylor and Stephanie Roche has really punctured through in an enormously positive way into the value and recognition that young girls, in particular, give to their sporting activity. I expect to see that being recognised in terms of the broadcasting, coverage and support that those events will be given in the near future.

We have sporting athletes representing our country at the highest level of excellence in international sporting events. Regardless of whether they be women or men, I expect to see more recognition of that level of participation in the near future. There has been much debate, for example, in relation to coverage of the Women's Rugby World Cup. As I said earlier, I saw Ireland and France play at Ashbourne Rugby Club a couple of weeks ago. I

expect that, over time, our broadcasters will give those kinds of events more support than they are able to at the moment.

In relation to the direct question that Barry McElduff asked about the A5, it is a road project that I am very much aware of. As I always say when I talk about that project, I am aware of many different road projects across the different areas that I am responsible for. I also know that that is a road project that has a particular political status; it is embedded in international agreements. I continue to emphasise that we have a £25 million reserve for that project across this year and next. I know that, at the moment, it is in the planning process and is the subject of work in the legal system in Northern Ireland. I recognise the impartiality of that process and the right of people to appeal any project.

In relation to the point that Senator Keane made about smaller sports and how important they are, I was at a Korean kick-boxing club in my own constituency a number of weeks ago, and to see the number of people — children, teenagers and adults — who were there was not at all unexpected but was such a positive thing. It goes to the point of coming up for a variety of sports that meet a variety of abilities and interests. It is a club that has been established for nearly 30 years now. Of course, there are clubs like that across the length and breadth of the country. To go back to the point that Deputy Wall made, we try to support sports like that through our sports capital programme.

In relation to the point that Senator Keane made about tickets, I know that it is sometimes an area of controversy, because, of course, the ability of the IRFU or the GAA to sell tickets for very big events at a particular price can sometimes cause disappointment to people. All that I will say in relation to that is that I know that much of that funding is then reinvested into sporting clubs throughout the country. In fairness to the IRFU, I know that for other events they have put together price plans and promotional activity to get schoolkids at them and to get as many people to turn up as possible. For example, I saw the Ireland v Georgia winter international, which I know is different, of course, to Ireland v England, but the IRFU did a lot of work to get as many schools at that event as it could. I know that it continues to allocate many of its tickets through local clubs to try to ensure that as many people as possible can get them.

In relation to the point that Brenda Hale MLA put to me in relation to sporting symbols, of course I know that it goes both ways. They can be symbols of unity at times but they can also be symbols of and can cause disunity and division at the same time. We have to

recognise that in the work that people like me do. I will talk directly to the FAI in relation to the point that you made and the nature of the relationship that it might have with UEFA, because I cannot give you an informed answer on that point now. I will respond back through your Co-Chairs on that point, because it is an important question that you raise.

In relation to the role of island communities, I take Stephen Rodan's point that for island communities, because they are smaller, it is difficult at times for them to generate the funding that they need to host major sporting events, whether they are national or international. I am glad to hear of the success that you have had in your own isle in relation to the Commonwealth Youth Games and other events like that. In how we allocate funding, through, for example, things like the sports capital programme, we do our best to recognise sporting clubs and locations that, on their own, would struggle to fund the kind of events that they want to do.

In relation to the comments of the Co-Chair, Laurence Robertson MP, I am well familiar with Cheltenham myself. When I lived in the UK I had the great pleasure of visiting it on two different occasions and I am aware that it is an occasion that nearly transcends sport in terms of what it offers. I am well aware of all of the support and value that your constituency will offer to us. I am aware — it is a very topical issue at the moment — of some of the concerns that have been articulated regarding a potential route for the new Galway bypass project. Six different routes have been identified, and it has been alleged to me that one of them could have a very negative effect in relation to the hosting of the Galway Races. I am sure that that is one of the factors that will be taken into consideration in the period of consultation that is under way.

In relation to the point that Seán Rogers MLA made — I am just looking to identify him — sorry, Mr Rogers, I missed you there. We are very much aware of it. Tourism Ireland, as you will be aware, is the body charged with promoting events like that across the North. I know that they are working on that at the moment, and I have heard them talk about it. The hosting of that event is not just of major consequence to your own constituency and county, but of course offers great opportunity for sports tourism.

Going directly back to a question put to me earlier by Lord German; when I last visited the United States to support the work of Tourism Ireland part of my programme was to support sports tourism, and golf tourism within it. Your own event was one of the events I offered as an example of the benefit that is there for communities that are located beside it and beyond.

Thank you, everybody, for your wide range of questions. I have dealt with everything from Cheltenham to the Galway bypass, to the HS2 and HS3. Sport has been the common ground amid all those questions. I wish you much luck in your deliberations across the day.

The sitting was suspended at 12.12 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.23 pm.

ADDRESS BY GAA PRESIDENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Colleagues, welcome back from dinner. I see that Barry McElduff has been looking around Croke Park—I understand that he will not be here for a long time with his own county. Is that true?

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: Chair, I ask you to withdraw that remark.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I will withdraw it. I would like to welcome Liam O’Neill, president of the GAA, for hosting us today. Liam has one week to go in his four-year term. I thank him for taking the time out to talk to us today.

Liam O’Neill (President, Gaelic Athletic Association): Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh, as an bhfáilte sin. I am delighted to host such a significant Assembly here in Croke Park.

Some of you have been here before, but for those who have not let me say that we are very proud of this stadium. We are an amateur organisation but professionally run. We have the fourth-biggest stadium in Europe and we are really happy with that. The stadium holds 82,000 people. If we decided to take 5 metres off one of the stands and move the seats, we could host two international soccer matches across the field at the same time. So that gives you an idea of the possibilities here.

We have been proud to host international soccer and rugby matches here while our colleagues in the IRFU and the FAI are rebuilding the Aviva stadium. We managed to rebuild this

stadium without ever moving out of it, and that was down to a wonderful predecessor of mine called Peter Quinn from Fermanagh. He had the vision to see that we could do it, the financial acumen to realise that we could pay for it and the force of will to push it through what was at the time an unwilling organisation. The stadium has, to some extent, given the organisation a confidence that it never had before, because people recognised that, if we could build and manage a stadium of this size, we were capable of great things.

The GAA is now not just a national organisation but has also operated abroad for quite some time. London and New York were our two flagship areas outside of Ireland and, indeed, they still are, but I am here to touch on what is happening in Britain and to give you some flavour of that. In Britain, we have seven counties: Scotland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Warwickshire, Hertfordshire, Gloucestershire and London. In those counties, the numbers of adult clubs are: London possibly 34; Gloucestershire seven; Hertfordshire eight; Warwickshire 18; Lancashire 11; Yorkshire six; and Scotland seven. Cardiff GAA brands itself as Wales GAA and the clubs in Scotland brand themselves as Scotland GAA.

Over the last number of years, we have been working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs to employ development officers in all the counties that I mentioned. The function of the development officers is to go out, develop the Gaelic games and attract children to our games. They work in schools and talent academies and use all the methods that we use here to develop the games, but we recognise that it is a difficult ask in some places because, essentially, we are asking people to take on games whose history and significance they do not really know. But significant inroads have been made and we have a development plan for Britain.

We recognise that, in all those counties, the clubs have managed to get access to pitches and they play Gaelic games. The Gaelic games are played not just for Irish people; most of the clubs and counties in Britain are run by people whose parents were Irish but they were born in Britain—people who are first and second-generation Irish—and we are very happy with that. We now have a significant juvenile programme, and we want to build on that and strengthen it. While acknowledging that we have the pitches at local level and we have great co-operation with some local councils, we are beginning to see that we are a community organisation that has something to offer communities in cities across Britain.

For redevelopment, we have targeted London, Páirc na hÉireann in Birmingham and Glasgow as three hubs for Gaelic games activity in Britain. We are investing €2 million in

Ruislip, which is the home of Gaelic games, where the ground has fallen into some disrepair. We want to build a stand, renovate the pitch and make it a place to which we would be proud to bring people. Our three-pitch complex in Birmingham, called Páirc na hÉireann or Ireland Park, is also in need of renovation, so we will be spending more than €1.5 million on that in the next year or so. We also have a pitch in Glasgow called Pearse Park, which has fallen into disrepair, and we are now co-operating with the local authorities to find a home for Gaelic games there.

I just want to mention Scotland. We have done a good bit of work with the Camanachd Association, which runs shinty. We have compromise internationals twice a year, which we play home and away—in Inverness and in some city in Ireland. We are very keen to share facilities with shinty. We see that hurling and shinty could develop together, and we are quite prepared—and open—to share facilities with them.

Over the past year, Gaelic games in Britain have received a significant boost from the fact that our games are now available to those who subscribe to Sky Sports. As most people in the room will be aware, when we had our third successive replay in our hurling final, we had a huge number of people watch those two games.

We are delighted, too, that the Queen of England is a fan of hurling. Some of you might not have realised that, but when I met the Queen at a lunch in Belfast during the summer—the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Nichola Mallon, had me at the top table with her—we shared a few moments of conversation on hurling. The Queen said that she was not quite sure how she found it and—she did a motion like this—she said that it was quite a fast game that went end to end. She thoroughly enjoyed it. The only difficulty that she had was that she did not know when the games were on. We assured her that we would send her a list of the games, so that she could arrange matters. I had this image in my mind that there may be a little disagreement on the couch between herself and her husband as to whether they would watch racing or hurling, and we wanted hurling to win. That was a fascinating little conversation.

2.30 pm

We are delighted that our games are making an impact. We have reports from Britain that, because the games were so popular and people have recognised the value of them, the children of a number of English-born, Scottish-born and Welsh-born families have come to our clubs and said, “Please can we play these games?”, and we are delighted to do that.

The only thing that is holding us back, really, on the island of Britain is recognition from Sport England. We know that we are working quite closely, but we have to demonstrate that we take care of boys and girls—I want to make that point to those who might not realise that.

In Gaelic games, we have six sports: hurling and Gaelic football, which are the two best-known games for men; we also have ladies' football and camogie, which is the female version of hurling; and we also promote handball—including a new game called one-wall handball, which is quite easy to play because you do not need a court—and rounders. We have six sports and we want to popularise them. Rounders and handball are particularly good, I feel, because they include children who may not like contact sports. We want every child to feel part of what it is to belong to the Gaelic games family.

We would welcome your support for the development of the games across these islands. In tandem with the rest of the world, we are now in 64 countries and our games are viewed in 175 countries across the globe. We have 400 clubs abroad, and the numbers are growing literally week by week. It is not that we want to conquer the world; we want our diaspora to share in the good feeling of being involved in the community organisation that the GAA is. We want to bring that to their communities, share the good feeling and join in the sports. Our people abroad play the local sports as well, but we want to develop our games and we want people with an Irish flavour in their background to enjoy playing Gaelic games.

I wish you all the best with your deliberations today. I hope to be present for some of the debate, as I believe that you have some interesting topics to be discussed. I wish this Body all the best. I know that it has played a significant part in bringing people together on these islands, and I congratulate you for that. I would like to thank you for the time that you have given. It is important to us all, because we have to build a future where we all belong together. People talk of a shared future, but we share it whether we like it or not, and we might as well share it as friends. I hope that Gaelic games and the GAA can contribute to that in some way. Best of luck to you in your deliberations.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you very much, Mr President. We will now adjourn for 40 minutes for a tour of the stadium.

The sitting was suspended at 2.34 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 3.15 pm.

**SPORT AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT: PANEL DISCUSSION**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Colleagues, that was a very enjoyable and interesting tour of Croke Park. Having seen my performance on the field, I think that the words that spring to mind are “Don’t give up your day job.” We are now back in plenary session, and we have a panel discussion with members of various sporting organisations on various aspects of their work, including their work at community level. I suggest to each speaker that they should take about seven minutes, which will leave a good bit of time for discussion.

I now have pleasure in inviting our first speaker, Mr Ryan Feeney, who is head of community and public affairs for the Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association, to deliver his address to the plenary session.

Mr Ryan Feeney (Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association): Go raibh míle maith agaibh, a Chathaoirligh, a aoíanna speisialta is a chairde go léir, agus fáilte romhaibh go Páirc an Chrócaigh. I am delighted, on behalf of the GAA, to welcome you to Croke Park.

I am privileged to be a member of staff within the GAA, but as I am sure you can hear from my accent, I am not a Dublin man and nor do I live in Dublin. I am a Derry man living in Belfast and working in Armagh. My role within the GAA is outreach and engagement and, while I am primarily based in Ulster, I have a special role right across the national GAA that involves me outreaching and engaging with those who traditionally would not have been involved in the association.

As our president indicated, the GAA is a community-based volunteer organisation. I am one of the privileged who get paid to work full-time in this role, but there are others—1 million in this island and 250,000 in Ulster—who do not.

I would like to highlight that I am welcoming a lot of friends here today to Croke Park, such as Seán Rogers MLA and Barry McElduff MLA, but in particular I want to highlight two people who traditionally would have had no involvement with the GAA or people like me:

my Northern Ireland Policing Board colleague Brenda Hale MLA, whom I know very well and am delighted to see here today, and my good friend Sammy Douglas MLA, who as MLA for East Belfast has done a tremendous amount of work over the past number of years in Ulster to try to promote community and bridge-building. I am delighted to see both of them in Croke Park today.

The association that we are part of is an organisation that traditionally would have been viewed by many as a Nationalist, Irish organisation that would have very little interest to, or involvement with, the Unionist community in the North. For many years, we have worked to try and address those issues. In 2008, a landmark decision was taken by the association to move from a very, if you like, on-the-fence stance of being non-sectarian and non-racist to being anti-sectarian and anti-racist.

Several landmark decisions were taken after that, not least the opening up of this stadium to allow other sports to share Croke Park. We were delighted to welcome Queen Elizabeth to Croke Park in 2011 along with the then President Mary McAleese. I have also met Queen Elizabeth and I have also talked to her about hurling, and we both concluded that Derry will not do very well in this year's Ulster hurling championship. Those are part of the bridge-building exercises that the association has been, and will continue to be, engaged in.

I am from Faughanvale in County Derry—from Greysteel, which many people will know for different reasons—and I have been involved in the GAA all my life. To me, it is more than just a sporting organisation. I am trying to reflect that to the Members of this Assembly who do not come from this island that the organisation that I am part of is something that my parents gave to me and is a legacy that I will give to the next generation. It is something that we cherish and something very special.

The GAA believes in community-based values. It believes in the very simple premise that you give rather than take. The former Secretary of State in the North, Owen Paterson, indicated that the GAA was the “big society” in action. For all that Prime Minister Cameron wanted to talk about in terms of volunteering, community building and capacity building, here was a model on our doorstep.

Over the past number of years, the GAA has taken a significant and important direction in terms of outreach and engagement. We are an organisation that can reflect on our past and say that there are things that we could have done better or there are parts of our past that we are not proud of. We are not focusing on pointing the finger of blame or on recrimination.

Our role, as the largest sporting body and volunteer body on this island, is to promote peace and reconciliation, and to do that with a clear and important fundamental principle of respect.

The GAA is an Irish organisation that operates over the 32 counties. I am an Irish citizen, I hold an Irish passport and I am resident in Northern Ireland. I am very proud to be from Ulster, from Northern Ireland; I am very proud to be from Ireland and very proud to be Irish. But my Irishness comes with the caveat that I have to respect and protect those on this island who are British, who are Northern Irish or who share a different identity. If I or this organisation ever did anything to demean that, we would be taking away from our own cultural outreach and our own cultural identity. So we are very clear on that: we protect, we respect and we give space to those who share this island and share this community with us.

Our president talked about a shared future. Sometimes we forget, as Liam O'Neill said, we are all going to have share the future anyway. What we are looking at, instead of a shared future, is one future, where all of us can continue on the path that we are on to peace and reconciliation. Our journey as an organisation in terms of peace and reconciliation will never end, nor will the journey that we are on on this island. We are all very clear that we have come a long way. If we look round this room today, I would say that 10 or 15 years ago an Assembly like this would never have met in Croke Park because there would have been too many difficulties around the venue itself. Those days are gone. There are no issues now that we cannot sit down and discuss or talk about. There is no one afraid of their own identity; there is no one who feels that it is impinged by anybody else's identity. That is where we have to go, I think, and the work that we have to be involved in.

In 2011, the association also had to take very difficult decisions when one of our members was murdered who was also a serving member of the PSNI—I refer, of course, to Ronan Kerr. At that time, it was probably about eight years since the GAA took the landmark decision in 2001-02 to recognise the PSNI as the new police service that would represent the entire community in the North. That young man was murdered for two reasons: first, he was a police officer; secondly, he was a member of the GAA. The entire community in Ulster and Northern Ireland completely united around the Kerr family and, during that time, the GAA very proudly took the steps to recognise, probably for the first time, that we had a member of our association who was a serving police officer who was murdered by dissident Republicans. Some 8,000 people stood in O'Neill Park, Dungannon, County Tyrone, for a minute's silence. Without stating the obvious, that probably would not have happened a

number of years previously. The entire community—North and South, east and west—united together to pay tribute to a young man who had put on a uniform to serve his community.

There are many from my community who still have problems with the PSNI and who are still in some way angry about the decisions that were taken by this association and by the Nationalist political parties in the North to recognise the police. I would say that we have come a long way, although we still have a way to go. The only way to try to combat that argument is by continuing to be positive and promote peace.

Let me conclude by saying that we in the GAA are delighted to welcome this august body to Croke Park today. As an organisation, we will continue to play a key role in building peace and reconciliation on this island. We will continue to reach out the hand of friendship to those who want to receive it, and we will continue to show leadership. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Mr Feeney. I now have pleasure in inviting Ms Claire Adams, who is outreach project officer for the Irish Football Association, to address us.

Ms Claire Adams (Irish Football Association): Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen and colleagues, good afternoon and thank you for the very warm welcome that I have received here today and for the invitation. The Irish Football Association is delighted to be represented on this panel and we would welcome any questions or queries or comments in the discussion afterwards.

My name is Claire Adams and I am the outreach project officer for the Irish Football Association. My main role is to look after the outreach and education work that the association undertakes on a daily basis. The work of the association spans across hundreds of thousands of people, including young people and children, in Northern Ireland. We are delighted that such a universal sport can have such a lasting and profound effect on young people's lives.

The Irish Football Association first developed the Football for All project in 2000. The Football for All project aims to create a fun, safe and inclusive culture at all levels of football in Northern Ireland. It is no lie or secret that the Football for All project came about because of football fans' sustained experiences of sectarianism and, unfortunately often, of violence at

international football matches involving Northern Ireland. Steps had to be taken—the association realised that—and we put our front foot forward and we have committed to the project hundreds of thousands of pounds in staffing over the past 10 to 15 years.

We operate at a range of different levels. Internationally, as I have just mentioned, one of our core successes has been the “Sea of Green”, which some of you may be aware of. As you may know from watching previous World Cups, Holland are always renowned for being in such bright orange; we sort of copied that and went for the green. Obviously, Northern Ireland play in a green jersey, and we encouraged our fans to come together, to shed community colours and to come together in the colour of Northern Ireland, which is green. That was profoundly successful. Our aim was, and remains, to allow people to celebrate a positive and inclusive Northern Irish football identity. Not only did we do that on the surface in terms of the green, but below the surface we worked with football fans, families, Governments and other FAs in different countries to provide workshops and awareness-raising seminars and whatever we could to move away from that unfortunate stereotype that we had gained of being sectarian in our fanship.

We are now extremely proud that, in 2015, we have almost completed our new stadium, our fanship is through the roof and we have the highest level of membership of any sport in Northern Ireland. The number of young Catholics playing in our elite squads majorly outnumbers those in previous years, and we are so proud of that. We are now an inclusive welcoming sport for any young person in Northern Ireland, no matter where they come from or what language they speak.

At a domestic level, with our clubs we have really learned from our partnerships with Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby, and our club development and volunteer development is now at such a level where we have over 20,000 active volunteers in our 1,200 football clubs in Northern Ireland. We are developing our new club education systems with our club mark. We are really proud that our clubs in Northern Ireland are becoming inclusive clubs: we have those with disabilities, as well as women and girls, represented at all levels in all clubs. We will do anything we can to encourage and sustain that activity.

At a grassroots level, which is perhaps what I am most passionate about as that is what I work on on a daily basis, our grass-roots projects such as Street Soccer have experienced enormous success. Again, that is looking at a totally different way in which football can improve our community. We work with a group of homeless males. These young men have come from

having nothing—no job, no livelihood, perhaps drug and alcohol addictions—and, as some of you may have seen in the recent media coverage, we have now competed in the Homeless World Cup two years running and this year we won our group in the Acción Total cup. So many people come to me and say, “Oh, you won the World Cup”, but I have to say, “No, we did not—nearly but not quite.” We are so proud of what we have done with that group of young men, some of whom have gone on to compete in further education and some of whom have secured employment.

We also work with multiethnic groups and with different sports clubs to try to bring them together when there are clashes over training or young people’s commitment. We find that, more and more in Northern Ireland, people are becoming more willing to look at the sport; the politics behind it falls away. When people have a passion for a sport, that is all that should matter and we are finding, more and more, that that is all that does matter.

We reach over 23,000 children a week through our curriculum sports programme—the GAA runs the same programme—which is funded by the Department of Education. Every day, we strive to include as many young people in those programmes as possible. We are currently developing our new OCN-accredited courses, which will be run out for anyone who wants to participate.

Once again, thank you for inviting us here today. The Irish FA acknowledges that we still have a way to go in bringing as many communities as possible into our sport, but we are committed to working with anyone who will have us in order to make football a fun, safe and inclusive sport. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you, Claire. We now come to Ms Miriam Malone, who is the business partnerships manager at the Football Association of Ireland.

Ms Miriam Malone (Football Association of Ireland): Ladies and gentlemen, elected representatives, it is an honour to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. You are all very welcome to Dublin.

The FAI is the governing body for the development of football within the Republic of Ireland. In terms of participation, football is the largest team sport in the country and has a major role to play in the areas of community and cultural development.

3.30 pm

Culturally, sport has a huge role to play in our society. It unites us on a national level and gets everyone in the country behind a team or an event. For example, everyone in this country probably remembers Ray Houghton's goal against England in 1988—perhaps some have fonder memories than others; Jack Charlton's success with the national team in Italia '90; the Special Olympics World Summer Games, held here in Ireland, with the opening and closing ceremonies here in Croke Park; Katie Taylor's rise to fame, through various boxing competitions, culminating in her gold medal at the London Olympics; the Irish rugby team's Six Nations win; and each year the country focuses on the all-Ireland finals for GAA sports held here at Croke Park.

Supporting our Irish athletes and teams plays a major role in bringing the whole country together. It unifies us and provides a joint identity. With future and potential events on the horizon, such as Euro 2020 and the Rugby World Cup, sport can bring not only community and cultural benefits but also economic dividends.

However, in terms of sport and its contribution to the economy, perhaps the most significant impact is felt at local and community level through programmes that can be operated there. While people tend to focus on the success of international teams or the development of elite players, the majority of the work that we do in grass-roots plays a large part in community development.

The FAI's vision is to make football accessible to all. We have taken a leading role in Ireland through a partnership model, working closely with national and local government to make this happen. We see the simplicity and the global appeal of football as a tool by which to reach into and engage with communities.

A very visible face of these partnerships is the network of 43 co-funded development officers that we have around the country. These are mostly co-funded with local authorities on a 50:50 basis. Our development officers are coaches working in the community, and much of the work that they do is genuinely life changing for those whom they impact. This model is based on sustained and mutually beneficial relationships that have grown over the past

decade, but the common theme throughout is the ability to use football to engage members of society. Without it, such initiatives may fail.

The work that we do broadly covers three areas. The first is our intercultural programmes. Like the IFA, as Claire Adams mentioned, we use football with the aim of uniting and facilitating inclusion for people from diverse ethnic, cultural, national and religious backgrounds. Our Football for All programme works with 15 national disability groups, supports 3,500 participants, has nine international football squads and enables everyone, regardless of their ability or disability, to enjoy our sport.

The third and probably the largest area of work comes under social inclusion programmes. These can be as simple as a drop-in or can go on towards programmes like our Late Night Leagues, which are run by the gardaí—the police force—local authorities and local youth groups. These tend to be held late on Friday night, from 8 pm to about 10.30 pm, and provide local youths between the ages of about 14 and 21 with an activity that is an alternative, if you like, to anti-social behaviour. In areas where the Late Night Leagues were delivered, the gardaí in the Dublin metropolitan area experienced a 26% reduction in anti-social behaviour and an improvement in the quality of life for local residents.

We run numerous programmes like that. For example, Dads and Lads encourages fathers who are not present in the household actively to engage with their children through football. We run mental health programmes, with occupational therapists from our health service. We have a Goal to Work football and education programme and Project FUTSAL—a project that we did with Wales that we got EU funding for—which is a programme for the long-term unemployed to engage and educate them through football and other education to go on and, hopefully, get a job afterwards.

We also engage with segregated communities in Border regions with cross-Border tournaments, and there are countless more initiatives besides. All these projects have a major impact on the communities served and the individuals concerned. I will give just one example. It is a simple one, but effects like this are replicated in many programmes. Seán, who is 14 and attends a school in Dublin city centre, lives in a disadvantaged area. The school has a lot of problems with absenteeism and serious social challenges that are experienced on a daily basis. According to the Department of Education's schools completion programme, the school contains some of the most marginalised students in the country and the department has found it almost impossible to engage with these students and their

families in the past. The schools completion officer liaises with our FAI/local authority-funded development officer to develop a six-week programme with the aim of increasing attendance and improving the students' outlook on life, to help build life skills through a range of football modules.

Seán did not like school, he frequently did not show up and he was moved from one school to another. However, like many kids of his age, he liked football, so when the programme came long, he participated in the full six weeks of the programme. Football was used as a carrot—in the morning, prior to school-work modules, and in the afternoon directly after school-work modules. Not only did Seán attend for the six weeks; the programme taught him the value of practice, punctuality, respect, fair play and team work. Most importantly, the programme engaged Seán in this activity; it allowed him to believe in himself and in his potential for his own future. He has now been introduced to his local football club, where he attends. He has also been brought for the second phase of the programme as a young leader for the new first years coming through the programme.

This sort of work does not happen by accident; it can be achieved only by design, adaptability and innovation on the part of great staff. But, by its nature, innovation constantly needs to move forward and evolve, and working with elected representatives is a key part in this process. While player development is one of our main aims in football, there is no doubt that football is a valuable social inclusion tool and can be used as such with huge benefits. My main message to you today is to see the value of sport as the glue that bonds our communities and to continue funding this and to keep strategic partnerships high on your respective agendas.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you, Miriam. We now come to Mr Hugo MacNeill, who is chair of the British-Irish Association and a former rugby international, to make a contribution.

Mr Hugo MacNeill (British-Irish Association): Thank you very much. It is a great pleasure to be here on behalf of the association today. I spent 20 years in the UK and now live in Dublin, and one of my great examples of how Britishness and Irishness can be intertwined or entangled came from playing with Trevor Ringland in the British and Irish Lions in 1983. After visiting a school during the tour, which was always a highlight of the tours, I got a letter

in my pigeonhole at Oxford University—I was studying there at the time—that had about eight different stamps on it. The youngster in Hamilton had simply addressed it to “Hugo MacNeill, Oxford University, Ireland”. Whatever claims we might make, we will not be claiming Oxford.

Let me make two comments: first on sport as a tool of reconciliation and, second, on the wider objectives of sport. If it had not been for sport, I would never really have gone to Northern Ireland. Like most kids in the Republic who do not live on the Border, we went once a year when we were on holiday in Bettystown, County Meath, when we might go up for a day to Newry, where we got a toy and we got different sweets such as Opal Fruits and Mintolas. It was only when I started playing rugby that I came up to the North to visit.

When we played in the Irish team, people used to say that the great thing about it was that you all played together and you never mentioned the Troubles. We kind of thought, “Well, that is fine as far as it goes, but it is not very far.” If you have the benefit of someone playing on the same team in international sport, depending on them and trusting them, then you can go and sit down and understand what your differences are and understand what is important. So we did—not when we started playing on the Irish team but certainly when Trevor Ringland and I were in the second part of our careers. So we did talk and understand and got a real sense of what the hard issues were in Northern Ireland at the time. I then had to go and meet a lot of Nationalists because most of the sport in the North was played by Unionists. So that was the take-away message. That is a challenge even for a lot of people today in the Republic of Ireland. The vast majority of people do not go to the North, and some of the comments that are made about the North may be very ill-informed.

Secondly, even before that, getting into some of the rugby issues, at the end of my first season for Ireland, Ireland was due to go to South Africa. It was 1981 and the apartheid regime was still there, and so there was a lot of controversy as to whether we should play. Should sport get caught up in politics? I ended up not going because I felt that, actually, in South Africa at the time sport was very much used as part of the justification for the apartheid regime. After that, it was interesting to see how sport came from being a symbol of great division to the symbol of great reconciliation when South Africa won the Rugby World Cup in 1995.

For reasons that I will mention later, I got to know Francois Pienaar, who was the captain of that team and whose image with President Mandela went around the world. He said that the

most striking thing about that whole period was that, when they were about to go out and play against the All Blacks—they were massive underdogs—with five minutes to go there was a knock on the door and the manager of the South African team said, “The President wants to come and see you.” He said, “He can’t—we’re about to go out and play the match.” “But the President wants to come in.” “Okay.” So the president came in wearing the Springboks jersey and Springboks cap. None of them knew this was going to happen, and they all just stood there, because this had been the active symbol of division. And a man who had spent so many years in jail had embraced that symbol. He recognised the importance of symbols, and there are a lot of lessons from that for us today. We can learn many lessons from President Mandela about symbols and how we deal with symbols, which is very important.

The great thing was that we benefited a little bit from Francois Pienaar’s involvement in that image of South Africa’s transformation. The following year, in 1996, there was the breakdown of the ceasefire, the bombing of Canary Wharf and people all around Ireland were saying, “Not in our name”, and rugby took a stand. Trevor Ringland and I organised a peace international, but to do it we had to get one of the big South Africans there—to organise a match out of season and fill Lansdowne Road for this, we had to get one of the big players. Of course, Francois came and was absolutely inspirational. Of all the games that we played in that great stadium, people came to that match in particular and filled that stadium. The guests of honour were four children whose lives had been profoundly affected by terrorism—one had lost his parents in the Shankill Road bombing; another was from Greysteel, which Ryan Feeney mentioned; another had lost his brother in a reprisal attack; and there was a young boy called Gareth Boldsworth, who was best friends of Tim Parry who lost his life in the Warrington bombing. We were privileged to spend many great days in that great stadium. We had all these great players from around the world who came and lent their credibility and their name to those who were working for peace in Ireland. That touched people and it had a fantastic reaction. It shows still the ability of sport for unfinished business.

A wonderful day in Croke Park was in 2007, when “God Save the Queen” was sung for the first time. We thought that it would go well, but we were slightly nervous. I was working for the BBC that day, and actually the BBC news programme slightly mischievously was whipping up the possibility that things could go badly. I remember going down to the pitch beforehand, because I wanted to watch Jonny Wilkinson warming up. On seeing Brian Ashton, the coach of the English team who had coached here in Ireland, I said, “I think you’re going to get an amazing reaction today.” He said, “Do you think we will?” Of course,

the rest was history. I was in the commentary box beside Matt Dawson, who had been a World Cup winner with England, and there was a pride from every Irish person as they turned to him afterwards as a neighbour and said, “Welcome to Croke Park.”

Another great thing that has been touched on is the huge potential of sport to make an impact on areas outside sport. Basically, on the whole commercial front, I think that I knew that the Navy v Notre Dame American football game raised €100 million for the Dublin economy. There were 30,000 American visitors—more than came to the London Olympics—from the United States. I knew that €100 million was raised by the Tall Ships in Galway, but I did not know that recreational angling here in this island raises €756 million and creates 10,000 jobs. As Miriam Malone said, the FAI has been fantastic in the realm of social inclusion. After the London Paralympics, the number of deaf and blind athletes in Ireland participating in the Special Olympics doubled. In addition, 95% of the children in the juvenile courts come from disadvantaged areas, which by definition have very poor sports facilities. Not everyone from poor areas ends up in criminal situations, but the correlation is high.

Then there is the health issue. It has been said that 11% of the budget of the NHS is for illnesses related to physical inactivity. The Minister talked this morning about the cost of obesity and type 2 diabetes. We may not have said that we could see the financial crisis—maybe we should, and I speak as someone who has worked in the financial industry—but we cannot say that we did not see the obesity and type 2 diabetes issue coming. But that is a dilemma for the political system, and I have sympathy for that—how do you make these very long-term decisions in a very short-term political cycle?

In conclusion, I think that it is fantastic that you have included sport within this programme, and I think that sport can have massive positive benefits. Both the Taoiseach and the Minister talked about the bid for the Rugby World Cup. I had the privilege and pleasure of chairing the working group that prepared the report for the Government, and what I found was the incredible potential of this island as a whole for bidding for the tournament and running a tournament like that. It would be the like of which we have never seen in these islands. Both in the practice of the tournament and in the communities having to work together to formulate a winning bid, immense good can come from that.

3.45 pm.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you, Hugo. Finally, we come to Mr Trevor Ringland, the chairman of PeacePlayers International Northern Ireland.

Mr Trevor Ringland (Chairman, PeacePlayers International): Thank you very much for inviting me to address your conference. Just taking on board the comments of my colleagues, you can see that sport, promoted in a positive way, can have a huge impact on society in many different ways, whether through health, crime, education or, particularly in the context of what I am going to talk about, reconciliation on this island and between these islands. It would be an understatement to say that in the past we have made a mess of relationships both on this island and between these islands, and I think we have a real opportunity to create something different as we look to the future.

As I sit here in Croke Park, I am reminded of my first visit here many years ago. Despite quite a considerable number of invitations from a close friend of mine at Queen's University, I had refused to go because my father was a serving police officer and I said that until you got rid of Rule 21—the ban on members of the security forces playing GAA—as a matter of principle I would not attend. The GAA did remove Rule 21 and that ban on security force members, and I got a phone call the next day from my colleague, who said, “What do you want to go to, the hurling or the football?” I negotiated a trip: a meal when I got down there, as much as I could drink when I was there and a meal on the way back. I went and I had what I expected to have, which was a very enjoyable day, meeting people whom I could have a great relationship with. That is the thing that flows through building relationships—you suddenly discover that those whom others have tried to keep you alienated from are actually the same as you, share the same values as you and want the same sort of future as you do.

Hugo MacNeill talked about England playing Ireland at Croke Park when the GAA lent its stadium to football and rugby while Lansdowne Road was being rebuilt. I attended that match. As Hugo said, there were quite a number of people trying to stir things up. I did about 20 radio interviews trying to calm things down. Rightly or wrongly—and I hope you do not mind me telling you this—the line I took was that in sporting terms nobody unites the Irish more than the English. That was fine until one of my interviews with Radio 5 Live was heard by one of my English brothers-in-law, who phoned me and gave me what for, and I think the conversation finished with me saying, “Dry your eyes.” The significance of that day for me personally was that it was the first rugby match I had been at where I sang the two national

anthems and “Ireland’s Call”, the anthem that has looked to address the particular problem of symbolism in Ireland. So it was a powerful occasion for me and it showed what is possible.

That is really what I want to talk about—what future do we want, what is possible, and what can each of us do to make that future that we surely want, one where we work together in peace and stability in a constructive way and bring out the best of ourselves and our children? The relationship between the different sports has played a very constructive role. In Northern Ireland we have a game called the Game of Three Halves, produced by Paul Brown from Knock Presbyterian Church—he is youth convenor. It is rugby, football and Gaelic experienced by the children who are brought together to play it, and we have also developed a fourth half—an Irish definition—which is the community-relations part. PeacePlayers International delivers that community relations part. But it is the three governing bodies working together in a way that helps break down the barriers that exist in our society and build those relationships between our children that surely is the bedrock of the future that we want on this island and between these islands—because we did get it wrong.

Also, the GAA, through the leadership of the likes of Danny Murphy, Ryan Feeney, Mairéad Kelly and others, has shown that the great sense of community that the GAA has can be extended to parts of the society on this island that it previously felt alienated from. That work continues. It is not finished yet. It is ongoing. But it is there and it is about constantly building relationships and bringing out that true aspect of the GAA, which is a great sense of community, and extending it to those others.

The Irish Football Association recognised that it was being destroyed by sectarianism, which was destroying this island and Northern Ireland in particular, and set about addressing it, with leadership from the likes of Claire Adams here, Michael Boyd, Jim Rainey and the Northern Ireland football fans themselves, who stood up and said, “We are sectarian. It is destroying our game. We have to tackle it”, and set about coming up with ideas and new songs to sing, such as, “We’re not Brazil, we’re Northern Ireland”—as if anybody would make that mistake. But they showed, through good leadership, what is possible. Nobody can say that sectarianism cannot be tackled because the Irish Football Association and the fans themselves showed that it could be tackled.

When I played rugby for Ireland, I always reflected on the fact that there was an Irishness that could also reflect its Britishness and a Britishness that could be quite comfortably Irish. It was an environment of friendship. As I said, my father was a police officer and all I

experienced from Hugo MacNeill and my other friends on the team was that concept of friendship. I often reflected at the time on why that was not the dynamic at play in this island instead of that other dynamic. In Ulster rugby we have developed a concept that is very proudly nine-county Ulster. Northern Ireland is six counties of the nine counties of the Province of Ulster, but Ulster rugby says, “No, we represent all nine counties”, and the fans themselves buy into that and recognise that. We can play for Ireland, we can play for an all-Ireland team and we can play for the British and Irish Lions as well, so it shows that we can move between different identities at different times when it is appropriate.

PeacePlayers operates under the expression, “Those who learn to play together can learn to live together”. We also operate in Israel and Cyprus, and in South Africa we particularly deal with the AIDS problem there. But if you remember the problem in north Belfast between Holy Cross and Wheatfield schools—and if you have never seen it, go on the internet and look at some of the deterioration in relationships in north Belfast, a place that did so much damage to relationships—we began working there. We promoted community relations but we used basketball to do so. The teachers said they would let us come in and work with the kids. The parents, quite importantly, said they would allow us to come in and work with their kids. We brought those kids together after about four months of work, despite the history that had gone on between them. Even on the morning that we tried to bring them together to play basketball, some of the parents went to their lawyers to try to get it stopped but the rest of the parents said, “No, we want it to go ahead.” If you look at where relationships were then to where they are now, we have those same kids from those schools playing as one team, representing both schools against teams from other interfaces in Belfast. Again, it shows what is possible.

We also look at others, such as our boxers, Paddy Barnes and Carl Frampton. They box for Ireland and for Northern Ireland. If we look at cricket, the English cricket team, the Test team, is actually a British and Irish Lions cricket team. The captain Eoin Morgan is an Irishman. Other sports have played a constructive role in showing the way that things can be done differently from the mess that we made of relationships in the past. We can learn how to compete in certain situations, as any sportsperson knows, and then to co-operate on other occasions.

In symbols, we developed the anthem, “Ireland’s Call”. It came about in 1987 in the first World Cup. We had just listened to the very powerful Welsh anthem being played and we were about to play against Wales, and over the tannoy system came about the worst recording

I have ever heard of “The Rose of Tralee”. There are many songs you will lay your life down for but “The Rose of Tralee” is certainly not one of them. Con Houlihan, who wrote for the *Irish Independent* at the time, said, “Maybe for the next match we should play ‘God Save the Rose of Tralee’.” But out of that came “Ireland’s Call”, which dealt with the problem of symbolism.

As we look to the future, there are some challenges that we have to face up to. All-Ireland sport is a good thing. All-island sport is a good thing. The symbolism that is around some of the all-Ireland sports has to be looked at to ensure that those all-Ireland teams are properly representative in their symbols. A Northern Ireland flag being flown at Lansdowne Road on the day that Ireland is playing is a small gesture but it says it all, and it continues that theme of how we make ourselves inclusive of all the identities on this island and on these islands. It is also something that can be passed around other parts of this island as they also face up to the tensions that are emerging in our society, racially and otherwise, as those who hate the most continue to try to press the buttons and drag the rest of us into their personal and sick fights that they try to create.

I will make one comment on the FAI and the eligibility rules for young players when young players from Northern Ireland started to play for the Republic of Ireland. We were getting to a point where I was involved with the football furore and I thought that we could have a match between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland for charity and make it an event that showed a reconciliation between the people on this island. That simple move is a reminder that sometimes you can do something you do not fully understand the consequences of and yet do tremendous damage to a relationship. In politics we have to be acutely aware of that.

I will not mention some of the political points I would make about that, but I think as we look to reconcile the future we must not ignore the tremendous grace that has been shown by so many people to allow this process to develop in a way that will create an opportunity to make sure that what happened before never happens again. It is not the loud voices who have shown that grace, it is the many quiet voices in Northern Ireland who have suffered tremendous hurt but who have stayed quiet, to allow this opportunity to be created, and we would be failing them if we do not make sure that we bed down the sorts of relationships that we should have on this island and between these islands. That was so well shown by the Queen’s visit here and the way that she was received, and the reciprocal visit when the President was received in the United Kingdom. That is the way of the future. To me, it was

the recognition of a relationship that had gone wrong and was being rediscovered, and we should never let those who hate the most determine our relationships again.

I will finish with that point, but there are so many benefits in so many ways that flow out of sport. You are the politicians. We need your support in many ways to help us achieve as much as we can through the rolling out of sport in those many varied and different ways. At the peace international that Hugo MacNeill talked about, we held the hands of those young kids who had suffered so terribly as a result of the hatreds of our society coming into play. If we were looking for a way to make sure that what was visited upon them is never visited upon future generations, what you are seeing across this table will symbolise that. We have plenty of other ideas through which we can make sure that that dream that we all surely should share comes to pass. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much—five excellent, thought-provoking presentations there. I am going to ask for some contributions from our Members, starting with David Melding.

Mr David Melding AM: Thank you, Laurence. I echo what you have just said: five absolutely inspiring presentations. I hope I am not letting the side down, but I will go in a slightly more mundane direction and talk about elite sport. We heard the Minister for Sport this morning talk about his own experiences. Like most of the population, he was never going to be an elite athlete. I have to say that I am in that category, but it is very important that people who do not have those capacities engage in sport.

As an anecdote, I recently heard the great Paralympian Tanni Grey-Thompson speak. She was asked, “What makes an elite athlete?”, and she said, “I am not quite sure I know, but I once took part in a marathon in which my husband was also a participant and I ended up citing him and disqualifying him.” To do that, she had to have \$100 to register a complaint; this was to put off those who were inclined to make frivolous complaints. But she made sure she had the \$100 in cash just in case there was a competitor who annoyed her or she thought had infringed.

Most of us are not in that category but we take great pride in our elite athletes as spectators. It is a huge part of our lives—most people’s lives, anyway. Using that resource to get more people active in sport is very important. As politicians, it is crucial for us. One of the speakers

said that the focus is on children and young people, and I think that has to be the case. Most of the participants in sport are going to be under 30 but it is the children and young people who may need the game slightly adapted; it is then older people who need a more flexible way to get involved. I just wonder how we are developing these approaches. I note that for over a generation now in New Zealand, for instance, in the schools they allow a lot of rugby to be played basically by physical development rather than chronological age, which disqualifies an awful lot of children from playing contact sports simply because the physical development differs so much among young people.

4.00 pm

There need to be ways of allowing people to participate in sport, the over-30s as well. I am sure it will be a great benefit to people to see that as more routine in terms of what is available to them.

Mr. Jim Sheridan MP: Many colleagues will be aware of the sectarianism that still prevails in the west of Scotland. Indeed, some of our guest speakers have referred to sectarianism. While both clubs, I have to say, and indeed the Football Association in Scotland have done everything possible that they can—and indeed more—unfortunately it still prevails. But the sad fact is that that sectarianism has now moved into politics. It was evidenced by the recent referendum that people's views were polarised by what team they supported or what the other side was reported to be supporting. That is a sad reflection of where we are going as a society.

There is a debate coming forward in Scotland about the reintroduction of alcohol into the game. Alcohol has been banned in Scottish football for a number of years but people are now saying that we need to have a more civilised society and bring alcohol back into the grounds in Scotland. I just wonder what experience our guests have, if there are any problems, of sport, football and alcohol all sharing the same stadium.

Mr. Lindsay Whittle AM: I am a passionate Welsh rugby fan but I will cheer for Wales from rugby to football, even to tiddlywinks if I have to. We have a campaign in Wales called Show Racism the Red Card. I do not know if that operates in Ireland. I would be extremely interested to hear of the experiences here. I wonder if you could elaborate a little more on disabled sport, please.

Mr. Sammy Douglas MLA: I thank the panel for their excellent presentations. I thank Ryan Feeney and the GAA for their hospitality so far. Hugo MacNeill mentioned the numbers of people who would not be coming to Northern Ireland as visitors. I looked at a website about Irish travel. Last August, more than 100,000 people had visited the Titanic Belfast in east Belfast; 37,000 of those were from the Republic of Ireland and 15,000 were from England. So things are changing, Hugo, and those sorts of things are very encouraging.

Picking up a point my colleague Brenda Hale raised this morning, I suppose it is good to hear so many encouraging things that are happening in sport in terms of reconciliation and promoting peace-building but I could not come here without quoting the Bible to you, the King James version at that, where it says that it is “the little foxes, that spoil the vines”. I am going to talk about one of the little foxes. We got a report from one of the committees about the Irish in Scotland and Britain, which referred to “public criticism of second-generation Irish footballers James McCarthy and Aiden McGeady” for choosing to play for the Irish national team although they had been born in Scotland. At the plenary earlier today, my colleague Brenda Hale asked Minister O’Donoghue, in terms of the so-called poaching of young Northern Irish players who had gone through the FAI youth training programme: “Would you encourage the FAI to enter into a formal agreement on the issue, to be lodged with UEFA or FIFA, in the interests of fostering good community relations?” Could the panel respond to that, about the poaching of some of our best players? As a Northern Ireland supporter, it hurts me as well.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. We will take some comments from the panel now, starting with Ryan at this end. Comment on whichever question you feel willing or able to.

Mr Ryan Feeney: That is good, Chair, as I can avoid the controversial ones. I will first answer our Welsh guest’s issue on elite sport. My belief very simply is that sport is about the many, not the few. Probably the best model that we have for sports governance sits in Scotland, where there is a very strong link between preventive healthcare and physical participation in sport. Certainly through the Assembly in the North and others, many of the sporting bodies are lobbying very hard for people to recognise that the more people we have

involved in sport, the lower the bill will be for the NHS. We can spend a lot of money on elite sport and it is great to win an Olympic or Commonwealth medal—it is fantastic for individuals and we have been very lucky on this island to have had quite a few over the last number of years—but I am of the firm belief that, although there is a place for elitism, for example in the organisation that I am part of, the GAA, less than 1% of our membership are elite players; the vast majority are people like me, who played club football or were just completely useless at football but had the opportunity to contribute to the organisation. So I think elite has its place but it very clearly has to be about participation.

We do have Show Racism the Red Card here, in both jurisdictions. It operates very well. We have all had issues of racism in organisations, thankfully minimal, over the last number of years, to the extent where there is a zero-tolerance policy across all sporting codes that anybody on the field of play or off the field of play who engages in racist activities is completely banned. We have a wee bit of work to do on that. My organisation has changed a number of rules over the last number of years. The situation now prevails that if somebody engages in racist activity they are suspended and put through the rigours of the rules process.

I do not want to say very much about the FAI. I can understand Sammy Douglas's outlook on it. I want to be very careful in how that is dealt with. I can see the argument on both sides but I recognise the fact that in the North in particular we have a smaller pool of people. I think that others around the table, particularly those from the FAI, would understand that when young players go into an elite programme and then leave that programme and declare for the Republic, it might be perceived as poaching. However, the one thing I would say—and this is not to counter what Sammy is saying but to try to broaden the debate a bit—is that it is very clear that if people want to declare for any country, if they feel that they are Irish or British, they should be able to do that. Trevor Ringland and I discussed this at lunchtime. There are eligibility rules in place at the moment. If they were applied, I think everybody would be happy.

Ms Claire Adams: Thank you for your questions. I will work down through them. David Melding, thank you for your comments on elite sport and youth development. Just to bring to the table some of the things that we are doing in the Irish FA, we are currently developing a youth strategy, and that will encompass all youth football. We have consulted extensively with UEFA, FIFA and various FAs right across Europe on how we should have our playing

structures in terms of small-sided games. That also focuses very heavily on the education and welfare of young players. While this is based in the football development department, it will go right across the Irish FA in terms of the elite development programme. Our international development programme, which is headed up by Jim Magilton, the former Northern Ireland international, is currently looking at developing an academy structure in schools. We are approaching grammar schools to bring in different education workshops to develop the players. That is where our main focus is.

You also mentioned the 30-plus. We have new masters football programmes, which are for male and female players, and currently we are engaging with footballers who are 30 right up to 70, and that takes place on a weekly basis. It gives those footballers an opportunity to get back into the game at a suitable pace but also provides them with the chance to move into coaching education structures.

To move on to the comments about alcohol, that is a difficult one. Currently we are redeveloping our national stadium. A massive part of that is around fan engagement and what we need at the ground to make it enjoyable. With football, it is illegal to have alcohol in the ground. I am not privy to any discussions that would change that. What I would say is that we are looking at the possibility of bringing a more celebratory and festival atmosphere to games, to set up fan zones where people can come and feel that they are safe and they can enjoy themselves before the match—enjoy the build-up of the festival atmosphere. But certainly we would not be putting anyone at risk or in danger. Of course, I am sure that any decisions that would be legally taken would be well researched and consulted upon.

With Show Racism the Red Card, we actively train football clubs in that on a regular basis. We run “train the trainer” courses, normally annually, where we bring over Show Racism the Red Card from Scotland to deliver that, and it is very well received.

In terms of disability football, we have powerchair football clubs right across Northern Ireland where we have provided powerchairs for players to come and get involved in the game. We also have an active blind football club and league that we participate in. Deaf United is a deaf team from Belfast which has done extremely well and has participated in finals across the water. So we provide quite a lot. We also go into football clubs and teach them about blind football. Obviously it is a completely different concept. You are playing with a heavier ball with bells in it. We do like to vary that training to let other able bodies see how we develop our disability football.

Finally, I am sure that Miriam Malone will have more to say on the player eligibility issue, but at the Irish Football Association we want to develop our young players. We have a responsibility to show them what Northern Irish football wants to do and where we want to go. Since Michael O'Neill has come into post, he has made great efforts in moving right across the country to talk to young people, to explain what Northern Ireland wants to do with its football and what the IFA wants to do, but we really need to show them what we can offer. A lot of it comes down to personal choice but the Irish FA's focus right now is to develop the best players and the best people that we can and hopefully that will be enough for them to decide to stay on with us, but we support any young person if they are involved in sport, and if they are involved in football, we are happy about that.

Ms Miriam Malone (Football Association of Ireland): I will hit some of the other ones first, before coming to that last one. On the question from David on the increasing participation side, like my colleagues here as well, we would focus on participation. We look at it as a pyramid structure, with participation being on the bottom, with only the smaller percentage as you move up to a higher level of sport. Most of our emphasis is on the participation side.

In relation to getting more people involved, I think that we all need to be a bit creative and flexible about our sports, to try to involve more people. Particularly in team sports, we have a lot of competitive-focused competitions. So no matter what age you are, if you are not able to commit to your training twice a week and your match at the weekend, is there an option for you? That is one of the challenges that we have to look at in our own associations to see what options we are providing for those people. So, for example, in football, our participation is high because we provide a recreational element to football as well—a lot of people play five-a-side football or non-structured competitive football. That is a key one for us all to look at.

If you jump up to the next older group, we have a new programme called “Walking Football”. I am not sure if you are quite at that stage yet, but that is an option. We have worked with the health services to provide walking football, which was targeted originally at people with heart conditions, trying to get them into an active sport. It is very like indoor football, with the same rules, but you are not allowed to run, so it is a bit like a walking race. So there are various options available, and it is important for us all to look at those options and develop them a little bit further, or else we will lose people from our sports.

4.15 pm

On the alcohol query, from our experience within stadiums, our international matches are governed by UEFA or FIFA, depending on which qualifiers we are in, and no alcohol is on general sale now for our international matches. We do have some alcohol in a premium-level area, but it is not on general sale for qualifiers or international matches. We have the option to have it on sale for our friendlies, and we take that up sometimes, but not all the time. So it varies a little bit, but the bulk of matches are non-alcohol.

On Show Racism the Red Card, I want to be exactly the same as yourselves. We have rolled that programme out to all our clubs, and we do that on a regular basis.

On the disability football side, we have put a lot of work into that. There are 15 different national associations within Ireland that we work directly with—football for the blind, CP, Powerchair and a number of other groups—and we provide support to them. We switched focus slightly in our disability football programmes. We spent a lot of time working with those particular groups individually. Because they are very small participation populations, you would tend to have, for the likes a national CP team, people having to travel from all around Ireland to one central base, and we found that it was not community friendly.

Although, yes, at an elite level, people will be prepared to do that, to provide participation opportunities for people at a local level, we have gone much more down the route—a bit like they do in England and Wales—of community disability clubs. Rather than have a separate club for the disability sport, we have linked with our biggest community clubs here and trained them up much more, so that it is not just one disability: you do not just go there for blind football or to a separate place for the Special Olympics. We have trained up the clubs to take in all abilities and all disabilities. It is a challenge. It takes a lot of work for those clubs to be comfortable to take in all abilities, but that is the route we are going right now. We have 32 clubs around the country in our “Football for All” programme at the moment.

On the final point on the selection of players, this is not the area that I work in—I am more on the community side and the grass-roots side—but I would make one comment. We talked a lot earlier about respecting an individual’s choice, and that is, I suppose, what it boils down to for me: respecting the individual’s choice to play for where they choose. We spoke about this briefly at lunchtime as well. I am not trying to take from the impact that that might have. I do understand that it would have an impact on you, particularly if you perceive that some of

your top players are moving. For me, it boils down to respecting the individual's choice—where they choose to play.

Mr Trevor Ringland: I will try to be reasonably brief on the different points. On participation, I think that the elite look after themselves—ultimately, they will look after themselves. They will get sponsorship from various sources and all the rest of it. The challenge is get as many people participating as possible, and I include disability in that. There are some fantastic programmes out there. You get them interested at primary school level—perhaps you need to look at how you fund school sport at that level. Where you get the interest there, it then stays with them throughout their lives. Every weekend, thousands of people are taking part in park runs right across the UK. There are many examples of how you maintain and increase participation in sport, but where the focus and the funding need to be is on participation. As I said, I think that the elite ultimately will take care of themselves through their own sources of funding, with a little help perhaps from Government programmes and what not.

On disability, you see wheelchair rugby, and I have seen various sports for young people with disabilities, as well as other activities that are out there for them. With just a bit of encouragement, the volunteers are there to them help to participate in those sports, and sometimes a little financial help can free up an awful lot of volunteer working. Again, it is out there; it just needs to be focused on and brought together.

On sectarianism, I think that sometimes a challenge needs to go out. I see it in Scotland, because we suffer a wee bit from the consequences of sport in Scotland in Northern Ireland. Are some of the football clubs' business models built around sectarianism? Maybe that is a question they need to be asked, so that they take a hard look at themselves and the way that they promote their clubs and challenge themselves about whether they are doing enough to really tackle the sectarianism that is a poison in Northern Ireland, and it is a poison in Scotland. It is something that you constantly have to work at, but to have Rangers and Celtic in particular coming together to run programmes sometimes, to me, smacks a wee bit like getting funding for anti-cancer programmes from the tobacco companies. I would make the comment that they need to look at how they promote themselves and see how they can change their behaviour.

That feeds into racism as well. I think sport again has played a very positive role in tackling racism. We saw it rear its head again last week, and we saw the response to it. I think that constant challenge to sectarianism and racism has to be maintained because we do not want it getting out of its box and getting out of control. It damaged sport enormously, and soccer in particular, in the 1970s and 1980s. An awful lot of good work has been done there, but it needs to be continued, just as working at any society needs to be continued.

On alcohol, every sport has to make its own determination on whether or not it is appropriate to sell alcohol. Some sports can do it.

On eligibility and the particular problem about young players from Northern Ireland opting to play for the Republic of Ireland, it is not like other sports. It is young players from Northern Ireland who, under the rules as properly applied, in my mind, are eligible to play for Northern Ireland deciding to play for the Republic of Ireland, which is a totally different football team. It is a disappointment to me that they are choosing not to represent me and a lot of the work that has been done in promoting a shared Northern Ireland and building relationships in many ways. They are saying, “We don’t want a relationship with you,” and they are going off to play for somebody else. It has happened, it has done damage to relationships and it has made things a wee bit more difficult. But as regards the Irish Football Association, they are going to make sure that, through the work that they are continuing to do, there is no reason that young players should not opt to play for Northern Ireland. To play for Northern Ireland is also to play for an Irish team, because Northern Ireland is an Irish team, just as it is a British team. Certainly, I know the work that the IFA have been doing, and will continue to do. They are delighted for any player who runs out in Northern Irish jersey, and they get their support from the supporters. As I said, the supporters understand all the issues. I just think that it did a wee bit of damage to the relationships between the two soccer teams on the island, and it is going to take a bit of work to repair those relationships, but that is work in progress. They both love football, so you can start from there.

Mr Hugo MacNeill: I will not go through all the questions; I will maybe make three points.

David, on participation, a fascinating study was done here for the Sports Council by the Economic and Social Research Institute, which should have got much more publicity than it did. A couple of the findings very much related to what you were saying. People understanding sport is good for health—one of the findings was that 95% of people get that—

but on actually getting people to participate, the study found that 72% of primary school children and 75% of adults over the age of 21 took up an activity only if they were encouraged by someone else. Whether it was children or their parents, and whether it was about coming out to play five-a-side, or getting on a bike, or doing something that is called Operation Transformation, with long walking, 75% of people over 21 took up something only if they were encouraged. That has implications.

The study also found that capital expenditure was not the problem, apart from on swimming pools and some indoor facilities for children. It is the current expenditure and the people who are motivating and running the sports and promoting them that will make the difference.

On the second point, I completely agree with Sammy on the Titanic and tourism. It is fantastic that more people are going from the South to the North—although it is still a small amount—and it is great that they are going to things like the Titanic; the sign on the M50 here in Dublin that says “90 minutes to Belfast” is fantastic. If we bid for the Rugby World Cup and win the bid, I will be encouraging people to go from the South to games in the North and from the North to the games in the South, even if it is not their favourite team playing.

Lastly, I completely agree that the social inclusion potential of sport is enormous—we talked earlier about the late-night leagues for kids—particularly with disabilities. It was fantastic how the London Paralympics were a brilliant springboard for people with disabilities here, and the participation rates went up.

There is a wonderful initiative here, which is a legacy of the Special Olympics. It is in Trinity College, Dublin and is one of the first in the world: a National Institute for Intellectual Disability, where students with intellectual disabilities go. They study, they get a degree—a Certificate in Contemporary Living—and they graduate with all the other students, in their gowns and with their parents and families. We have just added to that in the past few months: Trinity, like a lot of universities, has sports scholarships, and we have just launched two sports scholarships for students with intellectual disabilities. The launch was a few weeks ago. There were about 20 guys from rugby, Gaelic football and soccer, but in the end, it was Fiachra Costello, a young man with intellectual disabilities who played for all kinds of Gaelic teams around Dublin, but is now playing for the freshers’ team at the university. The other was Maeve Philips, who was a Special Olympics gold medallist.

What was fantastic was not just the pleasure and recognition that they got, but the appreciation from the rest of the students who were participating, saying, “These are my fellow colleagues and students.” I think that sport has an enormous role to play in the field of disabilities of various kinds.

The last thing that I would say is that Brendan Kennelly, who was professor of poetry at Trinity College, thanked the National Institute for Intellectual Disability for removing the mask of disability to reveal the extraordinary ability that lay below. There is a message there for all of us.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much for those responses. I will take one or two more contributions from Members. Arthur Spring, please.

Mr Arthur Spring TD: Thank you very much. I have just two brief questions. The first is around the idea that sport and education can play a role in health. It is quite apparent from my knowledge of the education system, particularly in the Republic, maybe an hour a week is given over to PE or physical education, as we call it, but that is perceived as sport and fitness being looked after. We talked about diabetes and the problems that are emanating from a generation who are not as physically active as those who went before. Can sport become more involved in education? Are the different agencies becoming more interlinked with the Department of Education for that purpose? We all know that you can have better health but should fitness be monitored as well as just sports participation?

The Scandinavian and the Germanic countries look at what time it takes a 10-year-old to run a kilometre and how many press-ups they can do. They monitor it along the way. For kids to go out for an hour and kick a ball around during physical education, to me, is not enough. You are probably setting something in train for the rest of people’s lives, rather than going back to them at 22 years of age and trying to get them to re-engage. That is the first question.

The second one is difficult, particularly for Northern Ireland. I am a Kerry man and when you are seven or eight years of age, you remember your mother driving you to football, hurling, golf, soccer, swimming or whatever it is. There was no cultural divide at all. I am afraid that there is touch of a cultural divide, particularly in Northern Ireland, between the Gaelic Athletic Association—whose ultimate origin was to promote its own ideology and what it represented—and what soccer and rugby have represented so far in society. How do we

surmount the obstacles that have been created by those? Is a more integrated approach needed?

Trevor highlighted some issues there. When I heard that he was coming here, I had a flashback to the Fred Cogley moments of 1985—the triple crown—and I think that was the first time that I decided that I wanted to be a rugby player. The inspiration that the elite athletes had given us made people want to join the game. I am very proud that in the part of the country that I come from, there is no division at all as to what sport you want to play—just get up and do it and your parents will accommodate you. I would like people to elaborate on how we are going to overcome the challenges that still exist. Thank you.

Baroness Corston: I would like to address another aspect of community development in sport. I have six grandchildren—five boys and a girl. They have all played football. They have all been encouraged and taken by their parents, but only one has been recruited into an academy, and that is my granddaughter. I have been interested to see what a difference that has made to her self-confidence. If we think about the pressures on girls nowadays in terms of body image and the rest of it, sport can play a huge part in developing their confidence. What steps are taken to support girls in organised sport?

4.30 pm

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: In his address, the president of the GAA, Liam O’Neill, made reference to a number of barriers that are currently in the way of the GAA and Britain, especially England, being recognised for funding support. Is that something that BIPA can look into? Can it do something practical to endorse the efforts of the GAA to secure that type of recognition?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Seán Rogers.

Mr Seán Rogers MLA: Thank you, Co-Chair, and thanks to the five presenters. Thanks particularly to the GAA for hosting this today. I will bring the GAA down to a local level, to

my wee club in An Ríocht in County Down. I look at not only the development of sport, but at well-being, for example, and the social initiative for older men, when the cancer bus visits and so on. So it is very much about the GAA club building community. The GAA and the local community have a good thermometer in terms of how we build a shared future. I want to know how the Game of 3 Halves and four halves and so on has been filtered down to the local level.

My second point is that the GAA and rugby do not recognise a border in this land. What joint work has been done between the IFA and the FAI? Taking Sammy Douglas's point of view, is it time for an all-Ireland team?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. We will start at the far end this time. Hugo.

Mr Hugo MacNeill: I will comment on a couple of things, rather than go through everything. On the question about the granddaughter playing, one of the interesting elements of that report that I mentioned was concerned with when various people drop out of sport. They found that teenage girls dropped out of an awful lot of sport because they were finding that it was not as interesting as what the boys were doing. The boys were doing soccer, rugby, Gaelic football or hurling or whatever. So there was a real need to find things that were active, but were engaging them, such as dance or whatever.

The GAA are a fantastic example of this, because they have such a high level of people playing. The Irish women's rugby team in the last couple of years have won the grand slam. They beat the All Blacks in the world cup, which is something that the men's team has never done. This was a fantastic example for teenage girls. I am not saying that every girl has to go and play rugby, because not every girl will be interested in that, but it was wonderful to get another sport where you could not just play for your country, but you could be champions of Europe or champions of the world. We need to promote that. They should be playing at least one of their games in the main stadium every year, and not just around the country. So I think there are an awful lot of positive things there.

On the holistic question about health, you have to look at it in a holistic way. It is not just something that sits within the Department of Health. It has to be wider in the Government, because this obesity and type 2 diabetes—there are medical people in this room who know

much more than I do—is going to be a significant issue, unless we tackle it. I was shown statistics before speaking at the Global Irish Forum. On current trends, more than 50% of people in the United States will be obese by 2025.

Some statistics came out recently for the Republic, which were pretty scary. I am not sure what the statistics are for the rest of the UK, but we need a holistic approach to health and sport to really make an impact.

Mr Trevor Ringland: Coming back to health and sport in education, nearly every town and village should have a look at itself and see what the provision is in those towns and villages. They should also look at what kids are not getting—the sorts of activities that maybe other kids are getting. In Peace Players, we have limited resources, so we strategically focused our resources of community relations in sport in the most difficult areas and did not just take the approach of trying to cover everywhere. So you bring a focus. You look at which kids are not getting the same sporting opportunities that maybe kids in other areas are getting, and then look at properly resourcing those, so that those kids get those same experiences. That is something that could be rolled out with not very much work, and identified in every town and village.

In Northern Ireland, I would love to get to the position of sport in Kerry and in many other parts of the UK and Ireland. When we talk about the GAA, I think of something like 70 universities. I think the GAA is flourishing in England, Wales and Scotland. I would foresee in the not too distant future a match between England and Ireland in Gaelic football, and hurling as well. That will be the natural evolution of the game. It is a great game and will attract many people to it.

In Northern Ireland, we have a particular history. We have done tremendous damage to our society. Right across Northern Ireland, it is like a patchwork quilt. You move from green, white and gold to red, white and blue; to green, white and gold and red white and blue, right across our society. That is going to take time to break down. I was involved in the “One Small Step” campaign, which was essentially about building relationships through incremental steps and changes. That is what is happening. We are seeing that where leadership is shown and opportunities created, people will take those opportunities and follow that leadership.

I would put a challenge out to our politicians. Can they do more? Can they stop pressing those divisive buttons and press the constructive buttons that look for a society that does well. On that point, when you come back to an all-Ireland football team, Northern Ireland exists and sometimes we need to watch. We do not constantly want Northern Ireland to be somewhere else. It has been created because of our history, and it is probably going to exist for the foreseeable future into generations. It maybe is the solution to the Irish question that it continues to exist.

We have our own identity, many of us, and we are very proud of the place. It is beautiful and the people are fantastic when you press the right buttons. It is about trying to get a politics that presses the right buttons. We can have relations where we could happily have an all-Ireland dimension to us and an all-UK and, with Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke, an all-European dimension as well. We can move between those in quite a relaxed way.

In soccer terms, I love getting Germany, Spain, England and some of the top teams from around the world coming to Belfast to play against the Northern Ireland team. It is highly unlikely that there will be an all-Ireland soccer team. There is no reason why there should not be tremendous relations between the FAI and the IFA. As we talked about earlier, there is work to be done. There is a lot of good work going on but it could be built on and some of the mistakes made in the past not fallen into.

As for girls in organised sport, I have two daughters and I know from my experience with the Sports Council of Northern Ireland that a lot of young girls give up at 14. It is about trying to find ways to keep them involved in sport. That is a challenge but there are so many different ways to keep them involved in activity. Runher is solely for young girls, so they do not have to dress up and run with men. It accommodates them in that respect and is one example of what can be achieved. It is so important.

The long-term vision of sport in Northern Ireland is to use the likes of Game of 3 Halves and other sports combined, such as hockey and hurling, to break down those barriers. The refreshing thing is that when that leadership and opportunity is created people actually take it. We see that time and again—am I not right? I think the governing bodies of the three sports are showing tremendous leadership in such support. They are also looking at themselves to ask how they could do things differently.

Ms Miriam Malone: I will take the subject of girls in sport first. Sometimes to get equal representation some groups need unequal support. Over a number of years we have looked at our marketing communications and tried to ensure that we have a balanced approach for males and females. A few years ago we dedicated more resources and effort to girls-only programmes. Even though studies in Europe showed boys and girls could play together in team sports up to a certain age—up to 12 should not be a problem—our experience was that girls under that age struggled to maintain competitiveness and to be comfortable in that atmosphere, except for the ones who were particularly good and seemed to thrive in it, which was great.

We have looked at providing alternatives for girls to participate. We had a programme called Soccer Sisters that is a girls-only space. It does not mean they are precluded from playing with the boys. That system is there and set up and ready to go. However, we found that programme alone has increased our numbers hugely. We have gone from 10,000 registered players on the girls side to 23,000. We are going to continue that focused approach on the girls side.

On the question of funding support, the one thing I would add is to look at being creative in how funding is given, to look at programmes and people. Anybody who has the capacity to provide funding would have a look in more detail about programmes and people and how that is happening. They would be sustainable programmes, not one-off. Big-hit events tend to be easy for administration to give grants to—“We’ll give you a grant for a one-off event,” or a blitz day kind of thing. But we need to look a bit deeper at what will have a lasting, sustaining effect. The problem that you talked about where you hit 23,000 children per week—a one-off, blitz day type of thing tends to be easy to administer. That is what I would suggest on the funding side.

We talked earlier about sport being a tool for social inclusion and community development. It can be, but it needs support because there are other agendas in sport as well. In order for sport to be a tool for social inclusion and community development, it needs support to go in that direction and, as someone mentioned, a bit of joined-up thinking.

Finally, on the joint work of the FAI and IFA, we do a fair bit of work together on a grass-roots level. I know that our intercultural co-ordinator and Michael Boyd, the co-ordinator up in Northern Ireland, meet regularly. They have a good working relationship. A lot of our development officers on the ground meet up and tend to do cross-Border work. For example,

in Donegal we have a development officer for the county there. They have worked on PEACE III programmes for the last few years, so they do a number of cross-Border programmes with the development officers based in Derry.

On the grassroots side, there is a lot of work going on between the two associations. There probably needs to be a little bit more work in the higher levels, and they acknowledge that.

Ms Claire Adams: Thank you again for all your comments and questions. In terms of sport and education playing a role in health, the Irish FA do quite a lot, but there is always more we could do. Our national curriculum programme that I mentioned earlier brings health messages to parents and teachers in terms of healthy eating presentations, cookery skills and that sort of thing. We have after-school clubs that engage young people who are interested in football on two or three afternoons a week. For young players, we have game development centres with suitable game sizes every Saturday. We also have holiday camps, which bring in young people while they are off school—Easter, Halloween and summer. We also do healthy eating, confidence building and positive mental health workshops alongside the football play.

We deliver health seminars to all clubs in Northern Ireland. We have given out over 100 defibrillators, as well as training and first aid courses. We will equip clubs with materials to give to players with regard to eating before and after matches—just general health and well-being, but we will also go out on a needs basis. If clubs identify potential problems with mental health, we will go out and deliver a needs analysis-based training course.

In terms of a cultural divide in sports, I feel very strongly that football and rugby bodies and the GAA in Northern Ireland are very strong at working together on almost a daily basis. Arthur mentioned a Game of 3 Halves; we also do club and community development, volunteer development and a really wide variety of knowledge-sharing seminars right throughout the year, which bring clubs from the three codes together to learn about issues that go across sport and how to deal with those together. From delivering workshops, I know personally that, for example, a GAA and a football club have gone away to work together on potential joint initiatives that they can deliver in their community. I have seen it happen myself. Through the new stadium programme, we hope to bring the three different sports and their fans and players to the stadia to experience the atmosphere, the cultures and the game play.

I am delighted to hear that your granddaughter was selected for an academy. I was horrifically awful at football. I cannot kick a ball to save my life, so it is brilliant to hear that she is doing so well. In terms of what the Irish FA offer for girls, we have girls-only holiday camps and a schools programme specifically targeted at getting girls involved in the game at a primary and secondary level. We have a clubs programme where we specifically train female coaches in football clubs at Irish league level. We also have female ambassadors among our international female players, who go around clubs and schools to inspire young girls to get involved in the sport. In our youth strategy, we are also looking at improving our girl structures.

4.45 pm

To come to the Irish FA-FAI partnerships, I was personally involved in the Republic of Ireland taking on Northern Ireland fans in a game last year, where a group of 12 Republic of Ireland fans came up and we played a match at Dixon Park in Ballyclare. Afterwards, we held a workshop on how fans could work better together. It is those sorts of things that do not really get into the media, because they are of a small level, but they are very important to us. We feel that we are very effective at that sort of level. We also worked together on shared learning. As Miriam said, we have done a number of shared learning seminars where we come together and discuss our different programmes. We worked together on our youth strategy consultation and, in a competitive way, the Setanta cup, which crosses the Borders.

In terms of an all-Ireland team, the only thing that I will say on that is that it is important that football—no matter whether it is North or south of the Border—is inclusive and safe, and that people enjoy it. For me, personally, that is where I am at. People need to enjoy it and feel safe. That is where I will leave it. Thank you.

Mr Ryan Feeney: First, on sport, health and education, I feel very strongly that we are missing a golden opportunity to plan for the future. Hugo outlined very eloquently some of the issues we have in terms of obesity; he also outlined some of the economic benefits that sports provide. Parliamentarians in this room—former Ministers—will all be aware that sport can be a silver bullet, saving a fortune in public spend. I go back to the Scottish model and the work that Claire indicated that the GAA and IFA are doing together in terms of the Department of Education, which sees close to 30,000 children a week getting physical literacy training in schools.

One hour of PE a week is not good enough on these islands, across Europe or anywhere, for that matter, in terms of sports in schools. Sport should be mainstreamed. It should be part of the curriculum. I am not a doctor or a medical academic, but I can assure everybody in this room that people who perform well at sport or have a strong sporting background perform well in life. We can see that very simply: any community that has a strong sporting club is a strong community. Any school that has a strong sporting tradition is a well achieving school in academic attainment. This is not rocket science, but something that we can change easily. I do not understand why we still have a situation where we have a growing health and education budget, yet are not dealing with something that could reduce that budget in the long term. I leave that up to you as elected officials and parliamentarians.

There is a cultural divide with sport in the North. There is no point in saying any different. There is, and unfortunately Derry is not Kerry—I wish it was, in footballing terms, but it is not in any other way.

Mr Arthur Spring TD: You would have to see the Rose of Tralee.

Mr Ryan Feeney: Well, you have to do that. Kerry has won the All-Ireland, I think, 37 times. Where we are at the moment, the cultural divide remains. It is extremely difficult to tell people in certain sections of our community that Gaelic games are the indigenous sports of this island, because there is a long-standing tradition that we are something to be suspicious of and that we are an organisation that is inherently about trying to demean culture and take away people's identity. That is not true, but it is that idea that is out there. Equally, that counters for other sporting bodies.

I have been working for the GAA for nine years. I have been a member all my life. I do not think that the relationship between Ulster Rugby, the IFA and the GAA has ever been as strong as it is now. We meet every Thursday morning. We have a strong cohesive relationship and we are totally committed to building a shared future. We support one another, and we give each other the space to take steps on the road to reconciliation. That is a positive outcome. I hope that 20 or 30 years from now Derry and Belfast will have the same sporting traditions that Kerry does.

In terms of female participation in sport, within the GAA we do not try in any way to segregate. If a coach goes to a school, they coach boys and girls. If a coach goes to a club,

they coach boys and girls. At central level, Camogie, Ladies Gaelic, and GAA are separate governing bodies. There is an integration process under way at the moment and hopefully we will be one GAA family shortly, but at club level and county level, the GAA is integrated and it participates for all. Ladies' Gaelic is one of the fastest growing sports on this island. It is very important.

Just as a quick anecdote to show how far the GAA has come, I remember in 2002 that at my local club, Faughanvale, the men's and women's sections were totally separate. We amalgamated into one club and we are the better for it. I remember one guy landing in whose daughter was the captain of the under-16 team and whose wife was on a committee saying, "Women should not be playing sport, they are there for making tea and washing jerseys." That was some of the mentality that used to exist, which is absolutely scandalous and outrageous. Thankfully, we have come a long way from that right across the board but you can see sometimes that you are dealing with different, if you like, backward, mentalities.

Barry McElduff mentioned the recognition by the BIPA issue in Britain. If the BIPA can do anything on that—as Trevor mentioned, Gaelic games are very strong at university and county levels in Britain at the moment. We are doing a lot of work with the diaspora. Ulster is twinned with Britain, and I spend a lot of time there working with the development officers and the county committee. We are not recognised as a sport, and we are a large participative sport, so if anyone can try and expedite that, that would be very useful.

Finally, on Sean's question on how we can work to a shared future, it goes back to the Game of 3 Halves. Trevor mentioned a great guy called Paul Brown in that Presbyterian church, who came up with the concept eight years ago, believe it or not. He went into areas of high social deprivation. We played Gaelic games, rugby and soccer, and we engaged in a camp during the week. The secret of the Game of 3 Halves is that you try to break down cultural barriers. You get people involved in sport, they learn different sports, and during the summer they are not engaged in any interface tension, because they are playing sport, and that is what interface games about. Instead of kids throwing stones at cops, they are playing sport.

I remember the night that the World Police and Fire Games ended in Belfast, when dissidents decided to have a march through the city, and flag protesters decided to counter it. I saw the city being ripped apart as I was standing in Seaview in north Belfast with 300 kids from right across the community, who were engaging in sport. So that shows the difference in the power of sport in terms of where we are going.

I say to Trevor, Hugo, Claire and everybody who has been involved in supporting the work that is going on in Ulster, there is a massive contribution going on at the moment. There is a unity of purpose and a shared direction. We encourage everybody, and all Governments on this island, to get behind that, because sport and reconciliation is one of the great stories of the peace process.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. We have about six people wishing to contribute, and about eight minutes left, so brevity would be greatly appreciated. Lord Dubs.

Lord Dubs: Thank you. I have one comment and two brief questions. The comment is that I am delighted to be at Croke Park with this wonderful panel. I have been here once before for a conference. We had great success on something quite different: it was a conference that decided we would achieve a ban on cluster bombs and cluster munitions. It was a very exciting day. I will not bore you with it—it is off the point—but I have a terrific memory of it, and now I have a second good memory from today.

Hugo talked about encouraging people to get into activity and about obesity. Walking, for people of a certain age, is the only activity they can really start. I do not suppose that at the age of 60 you can start hurling, but you can start doing walking. What surprises me—maybe I am a little bit out of date—is the reluctance of people in Northern Ireland to walk. On the path from Newcastle up the Glen river on a hot August Sunday to the Mourne Wall, there is nobody. You have wonderful walking and you do not do it. Get off your butts and do some walking!

My other question relates to the point that Jim Sheridan mentioned about Scotland. We are going to discuss tomorrow morning the report of Committee D on the Irish community in Scotland. The issue of football and sport and Celtic and Rangers looms so large, I am not sure I can ask the panel to do anything about it this afternoon. I only wish we had something. All you have said is that it is up to the football clubs to do a bit more in Scotland, but the situation is pretty bad there. I wish I could get the five of you over there to Glasgow to sort it out.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. Martin Heydon.

Mr Martin Heydon TD: Thanks, Chair, and thank you, panel. Alcohol was mentioned earlier. I am going to take a slightly different approach to it. We continue to have a significant debate here in the Republic about restricting alcohol sponsorship of sporting organisations. In the new legislation that we are going to bring in, we have decided not to go down that route. That is a decision that I agree with. I represent Kildare South, a strong area—the thoroughbred county—for horse racing and breeding. The idea that we would make Punchestown or Galway races not be able to use alcohol sponsorship, yet Cheltenham would be beamed into every home in Ireland while the horses run past the Guinness stand, would be madness, so it is not something that we can do as a stand-alone, but with Northern Ireland, Ireland, Britain, everyone working together, maybe it is something that we should be looking to down the line.

The big conundrum for any sporting organisation is how you would replace that very important revenue that comes in to FAI, IFA, GAA and rugby. I am interested in your views to see whether you think it is an aspiration we should be looking at in the medium term. If so, how do you think we could access other streams of funding to replace this? On the one hand, you do not want to be glamorising alcohol, which has negative connotations, and obviously you can understand why alcohol firms want to be linked with healthy sports stars. On the other hand, you do not want to starve sporting organisations of funds that go to encourage young people to play in the first place. It is a difficult debate, and I would like your views on it.

Senator Mary Moran: I will try to keep my comments brief. The first one relates to PE in schools. Maybe this is the time to mention that, in the reform for the new junior cert, PE and well-being will be part of the new course. That is something positive happening there.

Talking about the FAI, IFA and the possibility of them becoming one, you mentioned the Setanta Cup. I am from Dundalk, the proud recipient of the Setanta Cup this year. It was a great match but one awful thing that marred it was the sectarianism on the day. That is certainly alive and well and was very much evident in Dundalk and Oriel Park that afternoon. That is something that should be noted here.

I am trying to rush because I know we are under time constraints. I am well aware of the mental health programmes that are ongoing with the GAA. I would ask for a comment from the other two about mental health programmes, and what is being done to support mental health. We talk about health and the benefits there. We need to look at mental health issues as well.

Miriam, I am delighted with the “Football for All” programme you mentioned. I am a proud parent of a child with an intellectual disability who has benefited greatly from the FAI summer camps, and has been included. That has been an absolute godsend, both physically and mentally, for everybody. They have commented that the children have been very accepting and inclusive. There is a fantastic opportunity. There has never been any doubt and I would like to say thank you, and maybe ask for more of them throughout the year. That is very good.

There is one last thing I would like to ask, about television coverage. We talked about the fantastic coverage of the London games, yet when the Paralympics came on straight after it, we had no live coverage in this country at all. That is another thing that was followed with the Special Olympics last year in Limerick. I was very much involved in that and I started an online petition to try to get more coverage for those games. Some of the reaction that I got from people was appalling, asking why people would watch it. People most definitely would watch it and I got a fantastic response, which resulted in more coverage on the news. I ask every one of you to support that call for more coverage for intellectual sporting things such as the Special Olympics, the Paralympics or minority sports in general.

Mr John Paul Phelan TD: I have two brief questions. One follows on from what Martin Heydon asked earlier about alcohol sponsorship. I want to bring it down to local club level. I am from Kilkenny. I have visited this place thousands of times but never been in this particular room. I welcome the GAA having us here today. In terms of sponsorship for local clubs, I have no doubt that the GAA can replace major sponsors for the hurling championship, as for the Heineken cup, since in theory at least other sponsors can be found, but I played junior rugby for years and our club was sponsored by someone associated with alcohol; equally, my GAA club at home where I am going back to play on the junior B team that you mentioned earlier, Joe, is sponsored by the local pub this year. Can that funding ever

be replaced for those lower level units of the organisation? That is the question I wanted to ask.

Secondly, for years I mostly played hurling. There is a funny anecdote, if you will allow me, Chairman. In Ireland “foreign sports” has a connotation. In Kilkenny, Gaelic football is the foreign sport because we have loads of soccer clubs and plenty of people playing rugby, but we do not allow much by way of Gaelic football.

5.00 pm

While I was still playing I coached under-age teams in my local hurling club. There is a great awareness within sporting organisations now, particularly on issues of child protection, but I want to be perfectly honest: there were people who coached me in rugby and hurling over the years who should not have been let near the coaching of kids, because of the wrong techniques they were using in coaching. I really want to know from the three different sports whether it is now mandatory for people to have some sort of qualification or badge to show that they are able to teach people the right techniques. I started playing rugby when I was 17, which is a bit old. I probably caused myself a lot of injuries because I was so late arriving to it. It is important that younger people learn the right techniques when they are starting out in sport, so that they can avoid injury and enjoy the sport they are taking part in.

The Hon. Stephen Rodan SHK: I wanted to ask about tackling the problem of children who drop out altogether of sport and physical activity, and the extent to which that can be dealt with by improving the standards and quality of coaching, teaching and session delivery. Our Isle of Man sports strategy involves looking at best practice in the UK and other jurisdictions. Our Department of Education is working with the national coaches’ association on developing a continuing professional development programme for teachers and coaches by expanding qualifications and introducing bolt-on courses. I wondered how you dealt with the problem of improving the standard to reduce the drop-out rate.

Senator Cáit Keane: I will be brief. We are talking a lot about women in sport, and I mentioned Stephanie Roche, who has now left our shores to go to Houston Dash. When women do it, they do it well. Her goal compares with Ronaldo—this is about women in sport. They might be the poor relation, but when it comes to performance, they are tops. I just wanted to say that.

On education, Mary Moran beat me to it on this now being included in the curriculum. This is the most important thing. We are talking about obesity, and we will do what we can. In terms of what the last speaker said, there is no point having it in education if you are going to teach it incorrectly. We are talking about continuing professional development, but let the people who teach know what they are doing as well. That is where all of you will come in.

I was totally impressed with the information about the 26% reduction in crime rate. It is all right getting the children who are in school. The last speaker spoke about the children who drop out of school. The street leagues and the league for the homeless that Claire and Miriam spoke about should be promoted more—particularly the dads and lads bit. All of that plays a huge part. You have to get the people who are in the system but also the people who drop out of the system. It is not all just about being great; it is about doing as well.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. We are slightly over time, but we will just have some brief comments in response.

Mr Ryan Feeney: On the alcohol issue, the GAA took a decision a number of years ago to drop our multisport sponsorship deal with Guinness. You may notice that, at the moment, we do not have, and will not have, an alcohol sponsor at central level for any of our competitions. It is the same at county level. As both of you will know, it is slightly different at club level because a local pub or a local bookmaker—that is another issue for us in terms of gambling companies—would step in and sometimes support the club.

I do not have an answer for you, other than to say that what we have done at central level and across the counties is try to phase out alcohol sponsorship. That has been replaced, and we have not lost out as a result of it. It is very difficult when you have local companies—a local pub or local bookmaker—that dip their hand in their pocket to support the team. They are not getting any brand awareness out of it. They are not making any money out of it themselves, so it is done out of love for the community. It is a fine balance for us, but, as an organisation at central level, we have dropped alcohol sponsorship, and we are not at a loss as a result of that. In fact, our attendance and our revenues will be up.

I take on board the point about TV coverage, because there is a slight controversy at the moment with the GAA's involvement with Sky. That has opened up a conduit to other countries seeing our sport, though a very close friend of mine would have a different view.

One of the things we have tried to do is highlight not only the elite-level games but also wheelchair hurling, wheelchair football and the other events that we run as an organisation to see if we can get some coverage of that.

Unfortunately, in the way that sports are branded and marketed, it is really about exciting elite games, and the secondary work does not get much coverage. One thing I will say is that I have an ambition to bring the Special Olympics to Belfast some day if we ever get Casement Park finished. We have Kingspan and Windsor Park on the way. It would be a good opportunity for something there that would showcase the entire island and showcase the North.

It would be a good opportunity for something there that would showcase the entire island and showcase the North.

Finally, in terms of the drop-out rate, everybody will highlight the fact that drop-out rates come between the ages of 16 and 21. For some reason, once children reach the age of 16, they either drop out of sport or continue on in sport. I am probably of the last generation that did not have games consoles or anything in the house. We were sent outside to play with a ball in the garden. At the moment, we have a more sedentary society, and children are not engaging in sport as often. The main thing we need to focus on is the age bracket of 16 to 21 and how we can try to push them back into sport. I welcome the Senator's comments on the leaving cert and where that is going.

Finally finally, every coach who comes into the GAA has to have child protection training, and every coach has to have a qualification. We are very clear on that, and we do not allow anyone to coach otherwise. If a club is breaking that rule, it will be subject to a penalty. At the moment, our coaching pathway is very clear. We need every coach to have child protection, Garda vetting or AccessNI. They need to go through all that process and also have a coaching badge.

Ms Claire Adams: I will go first to alcohol sponsorship. Currently, our international team, our premier league and our championship leagues are not sponsored by alcohol. I am unsure of the future arrangements, as I am not privy to our sponsorship arrangements, but currently none of our domestic or premier leagues, nor our international team, are sponsored by alcohol.

On the comments regarding sectarianism in the Setanta cup, I will certainly take that back and see whether there are any efforts we could perhaps make for this year's competition. I would certainly be keen to link up with the FAI to see whether there is anything that we could perhaps do to promote an inclusive culture there.

On mental health training, we offer training in mental health to all clubs in Northern Ireland. We train by league, so we will go out and train the league, which will then descend the training down into their clubs. In order to move up our club accreditation pathway, at least two members of your club have to attend a mental health course in order to identify signs and symptoms of potential mental health issues in their players.

I agree that there should be more live TV coverage, but that is not within my power. I will certainly report that back to the association.

On coaching levels, it is mandatory for any coaches who coach children to have a level 1 coaching award. Coaches also have to do first-aid, child protection and AccessNI in order to do that, and it must be renewed every three years to ensure it is as current as it can be. For coaching at higher levels in senior clubs, you must have a B licence or higher. Again, the prerequisites for that to be valid are to have the AccessNI and child protection renewed every three years.

On drop-outs, we are currently looking into further developing the CPD for teachers and coaches. We currently have plans for a CPD course for female teachers and coaches. We already have CPD levels for male and female coaches who have been previously accredited. On drop-out rates for the 16 to 21 age group that Ryan mentioned, we are embarking on an education outreach programme that will include accredited courses based on football. For those young people who perhaps love the game of football but feel the pressure to drop out and get more involved in their academic studies, or who do not have time, we want to offer them an opportunity to become accredited through sport. For example, we will be doing that through an accredited football and business qualification, football in the community qualifications and football leadership in the community. That is certainly something in which we hope to engage that 16 to 21 age group to ensure that they get the most out of their sport.

Ms Miriam Malone: On the alcohol sponsorship query, for us it may be a challenge to replace the sponsorship that we have with other levels of sponsorship, so it is something that we would have to look at. I am not saying that it is not possible—it certainly happened in

Australia, where it has worked for them—and I understand the rationale that you chatted about, but it is something that we would have to look at from the top right down to grass-roots level.

On the Setanta Cup, I agree with the comments that you made there. It would be good to link together on that and see what we can do to try to prevent that issue. That is a good comment, and it is a good way for us to go on that one.

On the mental health programmes, one of the challenges that we would have currently, particularly in Ireland—I do not know whether it is different in other countries—is that there is no one governing body overall looking after mental health, so we would have a number of different groups coming to work with us. A lot of it is a little bit fractured at the moment. At ReachOut.com, for example, we work with them and do training through our development officers. Some of our programmes have developed organically. In Finglas and Blanchardstown, we worked with the HSE and the occupational therapist there and developed a programme. I think we started with something like eight people in that area who needed to get some kind of physical activity programme going. That went on initially for six weeks, then on to eight weeks and then 12 weeks. We have another round of that happening now with that particular group.

The first programme was wrapped up about three months ago, and I went to their wrap-up party. I was quite taken aback by the participants who were there and by their stories. One of the participants gave a speech, and that would have been unheard of previously. One of the participants was telling me a story about how they had not come out of the house for months. They had literally not left the house. To hear those stories is wonderful, but I do not have an answer of a big, overall, national programme. Again, going back to the funding, they happen locally because our DOs might link locally with partnerships that happen on the ground. That comes back to my original point that if we were to look at better national structures or national partnerships, and funding towards them, we could look at doing those things across the board a little bit better. But they are happening in spots.

For the gentleman who mentioned coaching qualifications, the coaching qualification pathway has come on hugely, hopefully, since you were involved in support. *[Interruption.]* That is not meant to be derogatory; apologies. I should say that in the last number of years, the coaching qualification and the courses themselves have come on hugely. The courses are dedicated to coaching specific age groups. They are not a generic, “Get up there, here is how

you play the sport”; they are very specifically dedicated to particular age groups. Governed by UEFA, we would have similar courses. There is a lot of CPD and a lot of structure in how you make your way up through the pathway. There is no longer just one way the whole way through. You can take the youth pathway to a level of excellence or an adult pathway. It has come on hugely, and there is a lot of CPD involved there, too.

Finally, on drop-out, the key to that is providing more flexible forms of participation. The traditional competitive structure does not suit everybody. Unless we look at other alternatives for participation, we are going to lose some people. That is probably key. Particularly for girls, traditional structures may not suit, so let us have a look at alternatives.

Mr Trevor Ringland: I will try to be very quick and cover most of these points. First, on sectarianism, the Scottish Parliament did an awful lot of work on tackling sectarianism, and it still struggles to tackle it. That is the nature of the problem, as with racism. You have done all that work, and you just have to continue doing it. I describe it as a marathon without end, and some societies, like Northern Ireland and Scotland, need more work than others. Racism is a growing problem as our societies deal with their diversity. In England, there is the Muslim debate and all the rest of it. The challenge is how you keep that sense of interdependence going in a society and how you build a society that recognises that we are different in many different ways but that we have to work together constructively, so that we all do well. That is a constant challenge for politics.

It is also about challenging those politicians who just go for the easy, divisive type of nationalism or sectarianism to promote their politics. That is the thing that did the most damage to Northern Ireland’s society. One lesson that is not widely seen from Northern Ireland is that those who behaved badly in the past did not continue doing that; they are the ones who changed their behaviour. It was the middle ground that won the debate. As to how the future should be, there is a constant challenge about how we continue with that debate in our society, but the middle ground did not change their arguments; it was the more extreme elements who changed their positions.

5.15 pm

I will finish with alcohol. I do not know what rugby’s position is on alcohol, but alcohol exists as a problem in our society. Our kids drink alcohol, as do a lot of us. Our young people tend to drink alcohol badly, and that is a challenge for our society. I am a father of three kids,

and I was out in Cyprus and, looking at the kids who are the same age as my children—late teens—it struck me that they were drinking coffee, Fanta orange or something else. They were not guzzling alcohol in the way too many of our young people do. That is a societal problem that I do not think we can necessarily blame on advertising in sport. Kids see alcohol, and they see it being drunk, but it is something in our nature that says they drink in the way they do.

In coaching, in all the sports, if you throw a problem at the three governing bodies, they say, “How can we address the problem?” I hope that that is one of the things that you have come away with from today. When you mention mental health, they say, “Well, what can we do about mental health. What can we do about young guys driving too fast on country roads at night and killing themselves? How can we tackle those problems?” Because they care about the young people they are involved with, they find ways of dealing with it. All the sports constantly try to do that. Any good coach recognises that the greatest achievement is helping those who struggle to achieve, to actually achieve. That is what we try to bring out in all our coaches across our sport.

I started off my talk by saying, “What future do we want? What is possible?” I hope that you have seen today what is possible and what can be done. If you throw another problem here, I think that people can come up with ideas as to how to address some of those problems and ask what we can do. We challenge ourselves as to what we can do, whether it is the Game of 3 Halves, the Belfast Interface Games, mental health or all sorts of other things. The politicians have to challenge themselves and ask, “What can we do to support that work?” I hope that the discussion today has been helpful for all of us.

Mr Hugo MacNeill: Let me just make two points in the interests of time. First, some comments were made that maybe the FAI and the IFA should come together in an all-Ireland soccer team. I wonder if that demonstrates the kind of understanding of the different traditions. My understanding and sense is that there is no wish or desire for that among the Unionist population of Northern Ireland. The history of rugby is very different. The history of boxing is very different. We need to be very careful because comments that can seem superficially attractive to some people are deeply provocative to a lot of other people; I say that with respect.

The second point raised was the question on sponsorship and alcohol sponsorship. It is a big issue. It is probably a tougher challenge to rugby than it is for some other sports, for reasons that were made earlier. We cannot avoid that we have a problem with alcohol as a society. We need to find a way of dealing with that. I remember somebody much smarter than me writing that when, in dealing with tobacco, the move went from prevention to cure—sorry, from cure to prevention—it had a deep effect.

You will all have heard about young children not being able to identify cigarette brands now, but they are able to identify alcohol. It is a massive problem. I think that over time we will have to wean ourselves off sponsorship—certainly at the major levels. If it is not having an impact, why are the most sophisticated marketing companies in the world doing that? My sport, rugby, is absolutely just trying to survive at the moment. In the professional game, when four club sides in England and half the club sides in France are paying their way, when most of the provinces here are not breaking even and when the rugby union is hardly breaking even, to remove the sponsorship at the moment would be like a perfect storm. We have to figure it out.

We will have to, over time, find replacement sponsorship at the major level, or we cannot really say that we are serious about the problem of alcohol that we are facing and the devastating consequences that we never mention. We talk about obesity, but the fully-loaded cost of illnesses that are due to alcohol at the moment is very high. It is not an easy subject. It is a long-term or a medium-term problem, so it raises a difficulty: how does a political system that is based on short-term electoral cycles deal with this? We cannot say that we were not warned or that it is not coming. It is incumbent on all of us, even for our old sporting organisations for which it may be pretty tough, to face up to it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Co-Chairman. This has been a wonderful, wide-ranging debate and thank you to all the Members who contributed.

The debate brought back very fond memories for me. When I look at you, Ryan, I think of the times when you used to play Gaelic football and when I was asked by one of the managers to leave a restaurant, because I was more interested in where we were going after the match than the match itself. I have run boats to Carrick-on-Shannon to play against Leitrim, caught buses for Castlebar against Mayo and planes to London and New York with the Roscommon supporters club, and we have had some great fun. Ryan, the one thing that

this body should be able to get is recognition for the GAA as a sport in Britain. That could be very helpful.

Claire, when people talk about sectarianism, I remember back in 1982. I had come from 40 miles from the Border when Northern Ireland were playing Spain back in 1982. My brother was getting married and I was best man, and the wedding was postponed for two hours. Every man and a woman shouted for Northern Ireland, because we did not think that there was sectarianism; they were our northern friends. It is amazing that, 40 miles from the Border, we did not realise that there were those divisions. That is something that shows that up.

Miriam, in 1988, I ran a double-decker bus to Germany, and the good news is that we are nearly 28 years undefeated by England. If we can work together, this body should call for more dialogue to try to forge common ground to overcome the impasse between the IFA and FAI, because that is in the interests of the wider footballing community. A workable, long-term protocol should be reached to deliver a fair solution to this issue, because I think with more dialogue, we can solve it.

Finally, to rugby: I did not play much rugby, but I remember going to Dublin back in the 1980s for the grand slams and the triple crowns, and I remember Hugo and Trevor. I was at one the rugby matches, but I am not sure which one. *[Laughter.]* As a very positive act, I think the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly should support the all-Ireland bid for the Rugby World Cup in 2023, and I will ask for a letter to be sent to that effect, if that is okay. I think that the Co-Chairman agrees with me. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Finally, I want to thank Ryan, Claire, Miriam, Trevor and Hugo for being wonderful hosts today. I would like to thank Tara and Robin for their work, and indeed all the staff, and those at Croke Park for hosting us today. It has been wonderful opportunity, and a wonderful discussion. Thank you very much.

On a housekeeping matter, we are meeting tonight at 7.30 pm in the Shelbourne Hotel, where we will listen to a speech on its history and that of the Constitution Room and much more. I think that Paul Coghlan is funding wine.

Senator Cáit Keane: Yes, he is.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): In his absence, he certainly is funding the wine for us. The Plenary Session is now suspended until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The sitting was suspended at 5.25 pm.

Tuesday 24 February 2015

The Assembly met at 9.30 am.

**COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS): THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK
(RESUMED)**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Colleagues, I call this session to order. We will get straight down to business and resume our consideration of the committee reports and governmental responses to them.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): At the session yesterday, Bob Walter kindly gave us a presentation on his report from Committee B. We did not have time to take any more contributions, so we will do that now. It might be helpful if Bob Walter spent 30 seconds refreshing our minds as to the report, and then we will move on.

Mr Robert Walter MP: I presented the report of the committee yesterday. It is on the activities of the European Investment Bank, to which a number of Ministers have referred, including the Taoiseach, as being exceedingly important not only in Ireland and the United Kingdom and the various devolved areas, but, as our report points out, in promoting cross-Border projects. We can use European Investment Bank funding to give a kick-start, if you like, to some of those cross-Border projects. I will leave it to my co-rapporteurs, Lord German and Seán Conlan, to follow up on that, because they were really responsible for putting the report together.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): That is helpful—thanks very much. I call Lord German.

The Lord German OBE: Thank you, Co-Chair. I start by saying how wonderful it has been to be a rapporteur under the chairmanship of Robert Walter. At our previous committee meeting, he told us that it was to be his last as Chair, because he is not standing at the next general election, although, as somebody wittily said, you never know what reincarnation might appear. However, on my behalf—and I am sure that Seán Conlan will say the same thing—I pay tribute to Robert for the work that he has done as the Chair of Committee B and for the wise counsel that he has provided from his huge experience of European matters.

The report is an important one on where finance can and might be a source of revenue for funding streams for local and national government and for cross-Border working. The keywords that I want to emphasise are “derisking” and “blending”. Some might think that they are to do with cookery, but in fact they are key words that show how in future the European Investment Bank’s funding might be useful to us in these islands. If Members do nothing else, they should read paragraphs 35 and 36 of the report, which are not necessarily the recommendations but which give the background to how the new European Commission is thinking about using its European funding.

“Blending” simply means that the Commission is pressing forward and planning to use as a key financial instrument in the European Union the European Commission structural funds along with loans from the European Investment Bank by bringing them together into a single financial instrument. The Commission thinks that that can get the biggest return on investment across the European Union and that it will possibly give greater value for money to the member states for the work that they do together.

Of course, not every member state has taken full advantage of the European Investment Bank. We were told that the United Kingdom has not made full use of it because it could get cheaper money freely on the markets given the role of financial institutions in London. However, in November 2014 the UK took out the largest loan ever from the European Investment Bank—of some €2 billion, or about £1.5 billion—in order to build the new infrastructure for the national grid for energy use across the United Kingdom. The UK was not averse to taking the funding; it was looking at it because it was a very large sum of money.

Many of the complaints that I know many Members here will have received have been about smaller enterprises and smaller businesses being able to access funding and about giving a kick-start to business development and access to funding. That is where I believe the issue of

blending comes into play, together with another b word—bundling—which means bringing together smaller projects to get the scale of operation that the European Investment Bank requires. It does not give small loans. Therefore, if you are going to approach it, you need to get a big loan. Many small enterprises and small businesses seeking to grow require only small loans, so putting them together and using the abilities of local government as well as national Governments to put together a whole package is crucial.

One of the lessons that we learned from Bilbao was that the intermediaries there were often banks. The bank that we visited was a Basque Country bank, but smaller banks, which now include some challenger banks in the United Kingdom, may well wish to access key funding to balance the funding that they can already put their hands on and to put it into that bundling mechanism.

The first lesson that we have learned from the report is that local government, regional government, member state Governments and the banking community need to work closely together in partnership in order to access funding for the best use of developing infrastructure.

I wish to make two further points. First, on the issue of derisking, the European Investment Bank has AAA status, because very few people default on their loans, as most of those loans are to member state Governments. Recent and current experience will tell us that member states do not tend to want to default on their loans. As a consequence, the EIB retains that very high status, which gives low interest rates. The bank does not want to damage that—I do not think that there is any question of damaging that.

In the blending exercise that the European Commission is proposing, some of the problems of that AAA status will be derisked. AAA status means that the bank will lend only if there is the collateral as back-up. For a small company, that sometimes means its total assets. The Commission intends to take that very first risk element out for the European Investment Bank. It is taking the first risk, and it is acting as a sort of guarantor for a first loss. That might be a role that local government and central Governments across the European Union could also consider, in order that the money can become available for a slightly more risky opportunity for small businesses or small infrastructure developments.

My second and final point on how we might move forward is on the issue of clarity about how the European Investment Bank can operate and assist local, regional and private sector investment. The EIB is the world's largest bank, and it has very great levels of expertise in

putting together financial mechanisms for funding the sorts of projects that I know all elected and other Members are very keen to progress.

The EIB's plea to us was that we do not make enough use of its expertise. We might not make enough use of that expertise because the EIB does not express itself very clearly in how it operates. In other words, it uses a lot of jargon and financial terminology that is not readily and easily understandable by those at the sharp end of providing projects and programmes to assist with economic development.

As regards the message that I think we want to send to the European Investment Bank, I hope that the report will go both to it and to the European Commission, so that we can get a response from the Commission as well as from member state Governments and the devolved Administrations.

The question for the EIB is whether it can be more clear and transparent about the sort of assistance and help that it can provide, in the sort of language that is readily accessible to everybody. Secondly, the message to member states and to devolved and regional Governments is that we need to ensure that we put the issue in the menu card for people who want to take forward projects and programmes.

I conclude by saying that there is a great opportunity for the sorts of investments that many Members have talked about in many areas over recent plenary sessions but which we do not yet seem to have captured the way forward in the way that other member states and other regional Governments seem to have done in other parts of the European Union.

I am grateful to Bob Walter MP, the Chair of the committee, for giving me the opportunity to act as a co-rapporteur on the report, and I commend it to Members as a way forward. I hope that the Assembly will send it to the European Investment Bank and the European Commission, as well as to member states.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you; that is very helpful. I call Seán Conlan.

Mr Seán Conlan TD: I would also like to compliment Robert Walter on his chairmanship of the committee. He did an excellent job, and I wish him well in future. It was a pleasure to act as co-rapporteur on such an interesting project, and there are lots of lessons to be learned for

both Britain and Ireland about how we deal with the EIB and how we can access finance from it.

Lord German has quite correctly and properly outlined the issues of derisking, bundling and blending. I would place particular emphasis on how we can access funding in both Britain and Ireland for projects along the Border with Northern Ireland, so that we can deal with infrastructure deficits that have been created over many years because of the Border and the conflicts along the Border. By putting that infrastructure in place, we can alleviate some of the difficulties that surround the impoverishment that has resulted from the Troubles.

If we can use the bundling concept, there are lots of small projects that could be done along the Border to improve road infrastructure. There is a need for real communication links to be re-established. In the 1950s, a lot of rail networks were dismantled because of the change of circumstances. They could be re-established, and I believe that the concept of bundling and access to EIB finance could be of major benefit to both Northern Ireland and the Republic if we concentrate our efforts on finding projects of mutual benefit.

We need to use the fact that such projects are transnational to seek funding from the EIB and get them done in the next five to 10 years, rather than waiting 30 or 40 years. The constant theme that we always hear when we put forward ideas for projects is that there is no finance available. The EIB made it perfectly clear to us that we are not making proper use of the funding that is available from it. That funding is readily available if a proper approach is taken to seeking it.

On the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, of which I am a member, we are constantly talking about projects across borders and we are constantly told that there is no funding available for those projects. The EIB can provide that funding if approached properly, and that is something that should be explored in great detail by both Administrations. That would be a positive result of the report, if implemented.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Baroness Harris.

Baroness Harris: I reinforce what Lord German said about the chairmanship of our committee. For a long time, Robert Walter has been absolutely tremendous as our chair, and it is sad to think that he is stepping down. However, as Lord German says, he may come back

to us in another guise. Who knows? I wanted to begin by reinforcing the sub-committee's thanks to Robert Walter.

I had only one role to play, but it was an important one—to go along with my fellow committee members to see the EIB in Luxembourg more than a year ago now. I was struck by the fact that it had a lot to offer, but, frankly, it was not giving out any hints about how we could improve things.

I think that what we have heard from the co-rapporteurs today is the answer to that. The two buzzwords that we have are “bundling” and “blending”. If we do not go away with anything else from the report, we know that the EIB has the money there and that, if we work smartly and certainly along the Border, as Seán Conlan has said, we can access a lot of money to do the things that we need to do.

The local authorities and small and medium-sized enterprises are finding it very hard to get any money to do those jobs. It is really important that we take advantage of that if we want to grow our economies. Working together will be the only way in which we can do that, and it is crucial to fund the future investment that we both need for the good economy of our countries.

9.45 am.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Joe O'Reilly.

Mr Joe O'Reilly TD: At the outset, I associate myself with the words of both my colleagues to Bob Walter. I have had the pleasure of working with him on Committee B, but I have also had the pleasure of working with him in another form in the Council of Europe. I have found that, whenever I work with him, he is extremely effective, very committed to his job and very professional about the way that he does things. He will be a big loss to politics and to public life. I sat with him for the dinner the other evening, and he explained to me his personal reasons for not standing at the next general election, which make absolute sense. I wish him and his good wife well.

I associate myself with the words on the need to maximise the use of the European Investment Bank. I suppose that there are a couple of compelling reasons to maximise our use of it. The obvious one is that, if we still have an infrastructure deficit, we still have too many people not working and we still need a lot of development in our country. The bank would have a function here, too, obviously, but it is important from our perspective, as well. It is important that we propose projects that will have a good social and economic dividend and would make sense. I presume that there is an all-round requirement to achieve that.

In an Irish context, one global project that strikes me as compellingly necessary is universal high-speed broadband. It is the great deficit at the moment. There is a huge variation in our broadband in the country. Our distinguished Irish Co-Chair will be very aware that in the area that he represents—I represent a similar area—issues such as topography, dispersed population and a lack of numbers make it difficult to provide broadband from a physical point of view and also make that commercially unviable in many instances. Therefore, there is an onus on Government. There is a national broadband plan now, but we need to expedite it. We need to get it going as a matter of great urgency. There are whole swathes of country affected.

I recently met a local businessman in my own constituency who is a very good fellow and has done a lot already. He told me that he could create five more jobs the next morning—five jobs are a lot in a very small rural community—if he could get proper, modern-speed broadband, because he could then sell on the internet and into Europe. He cannot create those five jobs at the moment. There are many such five jobs dotted through those dispersed areas. We need universal broadband. It strikes me that that is one issue.

There is also a point around the infrastructure deficit along the Border area. We have talked a lot about the Ulster Canal, the A5 and the Narrow Water Bridge—all those projects along the north-west and along the Border region. While a lot of them will, we hope, gain funding through the upcoming Peace IV fund, and while others will gain funding from other sources, the EIB would seem to be a logical method of accessing funding for some of those necessary pieces of infrastructure so that we can normalise life along the Border, build a peace and create a normal society there where there has been a huge gap over the years. That is important.

I rose first to commend our investigation of the European Investment Bank so that we go on with it, so that our Government uses it more in the Irish context, and so that we will go on

using it. If we look for ways of using it, it will become an option as we approach infrastructure issues. That applies in the United Kingdom also.

I rose to make that point and to join in the good wishes to Bob Walter, which are very apt and should be given.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call William Powell.

Mr William Powell AM: I would also like to associate myself with the remarks about our chair. This Assembly and the Conservative benches in the House of Commons will be much the poorer for the absence of Bob Walter. He has made an enormous contribution, particularly to the work of our committee.

I would also like to pay tribute to our Co-Chairs for what they have done to shape up this excellent report. It is a readable and useful document, and it must be shared as widely as possible. Finally, I would like to thank John-Paul Flaherty, our former Clerk, who has done so much to bring the report together in the form that we have before us.

I would like to speak briefly to recommendations 30 and 38. In the context of yesterday's report on cross-Border co-operation, which received so much coverage, it seems to be absolutely essential that the very infrastructure that was systematically dismantled in the 1950s and 1960s is reinstated, and there is no more appropriate form of investment than that to come from the EIB. That is really important and it needs to be brought to the attention of the relevant sections of Government in this country and in the UK.

In the context of the renewed emphasis on the European Union multi-annual financial framework 2014 to 2020, on the blending of European Union funding with EIB loans, we should also welcome last week's announcement, which was certainly welcome in Wales and the east of this country, on the €79 million European regional development funding for Irish and Welsh projects on cross-Border innovation and the adaptation of coastal communities in the face of climate change. Large benefits could accrue from that, particularly from the blended approach that our report recommends at recommendation 38.

In that context, I commend the report to the Assembly. We need to make a positive effort to ensure that it is shared with the other relevant administrations so that we get the full benefit that can be accrued.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. As there are no further contributions, I ask Bob Walter to sum up.

Mr Robert Walter MP: I am embarrassed and flattered by the comments that my colleagues have made. It has been both an honour and a pleasure to have served as the Chairman of Committee B.

I reiterate my thanks to the co-rapporteurs for the work that they have put into the report, which is excellent. Also, as has just been mentioned, I thank John-Paul Flaherty from the House of Commons, who was our Clerk until the beginning of this plenary session. He has done a lot of the legwork in putting the report together.

The message that comes out of the report and our debate today is that the European Investment Bank is our bank. It is owned by us as Governments and taxpayers, and therefore we should use it and use it more. I believe that it can make a real contribution to the prosperity of our various jurisdictions in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

In saying that, I am also saying that I think it can increase prosperity across the Border in this island. I commend the report, which I hope that the Assembly will approve and which I hope that we will send to the various Governments. I think that because of the cross-Border nature of the European Investment Bank the report should also go to the British-Irish Council and the European Investment Bank itself.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I thank Bob Walter and the committee for all their work on what is clearly a very important and informative report. Does the Assembly approve the report? [*Interruption.*] I am advised that we do not need to do that. Thank you very much indeed, Bob.

COMMITTEE D (ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL): IRISH COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND)

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): We move to Committee D to introduce the report on Irish communities in Scotland. I call Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs: Co-Chair and colleagues, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the report. Committee D built on our earlier work on the Irish community in Britain. We had two investigations into the community. This is not the time to summarise what they said in their entirety, so I merely say that the Irish community in Britain is a mixture of some very successful people who are doing well—who have risen to the top ranks in business and elsewhere—and some people who came over from Ireland to Britain years ago who are old, who are not well off, who often suffer from sickness and who need help and support. Between those two parts of the Irish community there is a vital sense of culture, cultural values, vibrancy and energy. It is all those things together.

In those two studies, we did not go to Scotland. It was put to us, particularly by Michael McMahon, who is a member of Committee D, that we should have a look at the Irish community in Scotland, which we proceeded to do. This report is sort of an addendum to the other reports, but the situation of the Irish community in Scotland is so different that you will be quite surprised: in many respects it is not at all like that of the Irish communities in England and Wales.

I thank not just members of the committee but the Vice-Chair, Senator Maurice Cummins, who has been a staunch supporter and energetic member of the committee, and Michael McMahon for the work that he has done to encourage the committee to have a look at Scotland and the help that he gave us in producing and tweaking the report. We had an excellent committee clerk, Chris Atkinson, who I am afraid has been moved to other work. He was here until yesterday but he will not be helping the committee in the future. We hope that a replacement for him will be announced soon.

I will deal with the report's contents briefly. One striking fact is that the Irish in Scotland are not identified or regarded as a distinct ethnic minority group, as they are in England and Wales. That means that the statistics about their situation are thin and we do not have as much information as we ought to. It also means that access to funding is much more limited

for Irish community groups. We propose that that should be put right and that there should be matched funding for various schemes from the Scottish Government, the Irish Government and, indeed, Scottish local authorities—whichever would be the most appropriate combination. We believe that the inability to attract money for Irish community projects is a serious point of weakness for the Irish community in Scotland. The community needs to be identified.

Something else that we found very surprising is that there is no St Patrick's day parade in Glasgow. We were told that in the past there had been fears of contention in the community and that it was just not worth proceeding. That is a sad comment and, in our report, we urge Glasgow City Council to revisit that and see if there is any way in which it could facilitate a St Patrick's day parade in Glasgow. There are parades in other towns in Scotland but not in Glasgow itself.

There is also the question of a famine memorial. It is positive that Glasgow City Council wants to construct a famine memorial but there are some concerns about the memorial's design and nature. We urge that further consultation take place on the details before the scheme proceeds, although we very much welcome the fact.

10:00 am.

One other disturbing thing is that some Irish community centres have been burnt down as acts of sectarianism. That is a very sad comment on the situation. We have found from our studies in England that Irish community centres can be vital in providing support to, and a focus for, the Irish community. There are some very successful ones, including in Hammersmith, Camden and Manchester as well as in other parts of England. It is rather sad to think that things have been going the other way in Scotland and that some centres have been burnt down.

When we did the study in England, we found that Irish community centres were increasingly being used by other minorities as well. For example, the Irish community centre in Camden welcomed the Polish community and there was good collaboration between them. In future developments in Scotland, it would be good if community centres could provide not just for the Irish community but for other minorities as well.

We then got to the vexed question of football, which we covered partly in the discussions yesterday at Croke Park. We could spend an hour or two or three discussing the effect that football—that is to say, Rangers and Celtic and so on—has on attitudes to the Irish

community and on the interaction between football and sectarianism. It is not a happy tale. Many of you will be familiar with the history and symbolism of some of those football clubs. We think that the football clubs have to take upon themselves a clear responsibility for doing something about the situation. It is beyond what we can do to identify exactly what they should be doing and of course it sounds a bit lame for us to say from a distance, “You get it sorted.” On the other hand, the football clubs must accept responsibility. As we heard yesterday, we ensure that sporting clubs have a responsibility in other respects, through Show Racism the Red Card and so on. We would like the football clubs in Scotland to play a more proactive role in helping to tackle sectarianism.

We had some discussions and heard some evidence about a bit of legislation that has quite a long title—the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012. The act is quite contentious and people feel that sometimes football fans are victimised under the act—they are made into martyrs and cannot express what they would like to express. For example, there was a bit of very good singing the other evening, and I am told that one or two of the songs that were sung would fall foul of that act if they were sung at a football match. I cannot speak with any authority on that because I could not hear all the singing very clearly—some of it was slightly out of tune. I just mention that something that is quite innocent and that we think is quite ordinary can fall foul of that particular act.

Finally, on a positive note, I understand that The Irish Voice is now going to be published in Scotland. It will be a voice for—and reflect the views of, and news about—the Irish community in Scotland.

It is not a terribly happy tale overall but, on the other hand, we learnt about some positive, good things as well and there was a lot of enthusiasm that we were doing this report, which I hope will be helpful in regard to the situation of the Irish community in Scotland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you, Lord Dubs. Chris Ruane is next.

Mr Chris Ruane MP: I was privileged to be part of the two previous BIPA Committee D inquiries on the Irish in Britain as well as the latest inquiry on the Irish in Scotland. I went up to Glasgow and we took evidence there as part of the latest inquiry. One of the most striking

things for me was the sense of Irishness among the Irish community in Glasgow—or, at least, among the people who gave evidence to us. Some of them told us that their families were fifth-generation Irish but that, if Scotland were playing Ireland, they would still root for Ireland to win.

I am second-generation Irish; my father came over in 1948 from Galway to Rhyl. He came over with Joe Murphy, who was known colloquially as Grey Murphy—the construction giant down in London. However, my mother is Welsh and I was born and brought up in Wales. If Wales were playing Ireland, I would want Wales to win and Ireland to come second.

I am the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Irish in Britain. There are 130 MPs in that group. I do not think that there are any first-generation Irish in the UK Parliament, except for the Social Democratic and Labour Party members. I would say that, were Ireland playing England, Scotland or Wales, all those MPs would want their home team to win, which was not the evidence that was given to us at the committee. That is strange, because there is a sense of Irishness, yet that was not able to manifest itself in Glasgow in a St David's day parade—sorry, I meant to say St Patrick's day parade; it is St David's day next week, by the way.

The famine memorial has not taken place. It seems unusual that the strong sense of Irish identity has not found expression in a parade or a memorial. Perhaps that is because of the numbers and the polarisation of views that are involved in Glasgow. However, expressions of identity can be done sensitively, as they can be and have been in Northern Ireland between Britain and the Republic, with the Queen going to the Garden of Remembrance in Dublin and senior Irish representation at the memorials at the Cenotaph and in Flanders.

We know that the issues can be handled sensitively. Were advice and help given in the Glasgow or Scottish situation, that expression of Irish identity could be achieved, could be allowed and could flourish without further polarisation.

We also looked at the funding that is being drawn down by Irish groups in Scotland. The Irish Government has been very generous over the years. Despite the fact that the country has gone through the worst recession that it has ever known, it has kept in place the €10 million funding of what was the Díon fund but is now called the Emigrant Support Programme. The Irish Government should be congratulated on that.

Scotland's population is almost six million and the UK's population is around 62 million, so Scotland's population is 10% of the UK's. Out of the €10 million funding, people in Scotland

who have Irish roots should be looking at just over €1 million of funding, which is 10%. However, over the past two years, they have drawn down only €100,000, so they are getting only 1%. There needs to be capacity building there, so that Irish groups can draw down more funding to help Irish people in Glasgow and the rest of Scotland to express congenially their Irish identity. That needs to be looked at.

The Irish Government has also given other grants for the Irish in Scotland. The Emigrant Support Programme is a community pot for Irish groups around the UK, but groups in Scotland are not accessing that funding.

We looked at sectarianism and sport. We felt that there has been a heavy-handed response. It is a delicate issue and we are outsiders looking in, but the enforcement of the new laws seems to be heavy handed, with dawn raids where people are grabbed out of their beds in front of their family. That could reinforce instead of reduce sectarianism. The situation must be looked at afresh.

Yesterday, we received evidence from the Gaelic Athletic Association on the programmes that it uses in Northern and Southern Ireland to build bonds and bridges in highly polarised situations. Primary schools are being used as focal points by people with sectarian views to vent their spleen, but the GAA has gone in and built bonds through sport. Best practice in the island of Ireland could perhaps be loaned or transferred over to the Scottish situation to combat sectarianism in sport.

Lord Dubs mentioned that two Irish centres have been burnt down. It is a crying shame that things have got that bad. Have a look at the best practice in England. In Cheetham Hill in Manchester, Michael Ford has developed a brand new Irish centre on 15 acres, I think, with GAA hurling and football pitches. The Irish centre in Hammersmith in London has been rebuilt from the base right up to a fantastic centre.

If there is funding out there and capacity is needed, it should be supplied so that the Irish in Scotland can express their Irishness in a way that they can feel pride in without upsetting the others who live in their community.

Ms Mary Scanlon MSP: I have to get a taxi at the Shelbourne Hotel in three minutes, so I apologise for not being here for the end of the debate. I thank you for allowing me to speak early.

The first two recommendations in the report are mainly about Glasgow, and then it goes on to football. I have to say that I am not a great football fan and I represent the Highlands and Islands, so I am not here to talk about Glasgow. My mother, who was an Irish Catholic, came over from Donegal in the 1930s and my father was in the masonic order and a Protestant. As far as sectarianism, racism and ethnic communities are concerned, I do not belong anywhere, really. To be honest, I am probably a typical Scot in that sectarianism is not the major issue for me.

Although my mother has been dead for a few years, I still think of myself as half-Scottish and half-Irish. However, I know that my mother would have been totally offended if she had been told that she was from an ethnic minority. If anyone coming from Ireland was put into a migrant centre, that would be offensive to me.

I think that the Irish in Scotland are fully integrated. They are not different; they are the same as the English. Whether they are Northern Ireland Irish or Irish, it does not matter. I still have one third of my mother's quarter of land in Donegal, so I still own a little part of this country even though I live in Scotland.

If I may say so, I actually found the report a little bit inflammatory rather than helpful. I say that because I have been around Scottish politics for about 40 years and I am very proud to represent the Conservative and Unionist Party. With my background, I am not a Protestant Unionist but a Unionist for the United Kingdom. My mother was a Catholic, which some people find difficult. We have just come out of the most divisive votes ever in the history of my time in Scotland, which is quite a long time, and I am one of the longest-serving parliamentarians there. I do not want a Scotland divided on the lines of Nationalism and Unionism—that is not my Scotland. I would rather get back to the old battles of Labour, Tory, Liberal Democrat and Nationalism—that is my Scotland.

I respect the excellent list of witnesses but I do not find references to ethnic centres, the label “ethnic minority” or migrant centres helpful. I do not want the Irish labelled in Scotland, because at the moment they are integrated, fully respected, fully valued and fully loved members of our community. They are not different; we are all just the same. I am afraid that I think the report is a little bit divisive.

Although I respect the excellent list of witnesses, I do not support the report as it is written. I think that it is more inflammatory than helpful.

Senator Cáit Keane: I thank Mary Scanlon, because we should hear every voice. I also thank our Chair, Lord Dubs, and our clerk, Chris Atkinson.

As Lord Dubs has said, we listened to what we heard on the ground, although we obviously did not hear from everybody. There are different approaches, and every approach should be and will be taken on board. However, there was a very strong sectarian divide among the voices that we heard. I was absolutely surprised because, coming from Ireland—the west of Ireland, originally—and the Gaelic language, I had it in my head that when we went to Scotland we would find it a lot different from what we found in London in that it would not be as sectarian and there would be no sectarian divide.

However, I was absolutely amazed—flabbergasted, indeed—when I sat down and heard from the various witnesses, whether or not the witnesses were very vocal. I was very well aware of the football issues—Celtic and the divides there—but I was not as aware of the other issues, and I take on board what Mary Scanlon said in that regard.

10.15 am.

Looking at the facts on the ground, when I found that the local authorities did not fund particular groups, and were actually afraid to fund them because of possible repercussions, I said, “You know, that’s not right.” Chris Ruane said that he would support Wales, and it is everybody’s right—enshrined in law in Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales in relation to the principle of self-determination—to support who or what they like, and that is all that the report says on that. The choice is there, and it should be respected.

Maybe some people have stronger roots than others in relation to their connections, but I think that, going on the self-determination legislation of 2005, we would say, “Give that right to the person and let them choose.” That is all that the report is saying.

Inclusivity was mentioned, particularly with regard to the Gaelic Athletic Association. The report noted that there are more Muslims playing in a certain GAA club than Irish people, so there is inclusivity. I agree with Mary Scanlon that the report is looking for inclusivity.

I was surprised to hear that there is no St Patrick’s day parade in Glasgow. I did not know that. However, there is one down the road in Coatbridge, which is very well attended. Indeed, I think that a lot of people from Glasgow travel there. Considering all the countries all over the world that have absolutely no connection with Ireland but have St Patrick’s day parades, we asked ourselves why there is not one in Glasgow. That is one recommendation in the report that I would wholeheartedly support. We would all go along with that. Why not? It

does not make the Irish stand out; it only promotes their identity. Again, the same is the case with the famine memorial. I know that Glasgow City Council has set up a consultation process that is looking at providing a memorial. Again, when you think about all the countries that we visited throughout the year, and all the various war memorials, you have to ask why there is not such a memorial and what would be wrong with having one. It is not segregating anyone and it is not based on a special identity.

On the connection between Ireland and the Gaelic language and whatever, I note that, in 2003, in Scotland, the Bòrd na Gàidhlig—I am pronouncing that wrongly because Scottish Gaelic is different from Irish Gaelic—was set up with a view to promoting recognition of Scottish Gaelic. I know that the number of speakers had dwindled, much as was the case with Irish Gaelic. In 2011—I think—the board found that the number of people under 20 who could speak Gaelic had increased. Again, I take on board everything that Mary Scanlon says.

The report should be looked on as recognising the facts, promoting equality and ensuring the right to self-determination. I had not heard the terminology for a long time but with regard to football teams that the third generation of Irish people support, there were some very derogatory remarks—we all know of them—about football players who choose to play on one team or another, and the term “plastic Paddies” was used elsewhere.

So, the report is there. It has the facts that were on the ground, nothing more and nothing less. All that it is looking for is equality, really. Again, that is what we found in every other previous report that we looked at.

Viscount Bridgeman: I want to make two points. On the Glasgow famine memorial that is being contemplated, I believe that the potato blight extended to Scotland a year or two after the great famine here. Presumably, that will influence the Glasgow authorities in their decision on the erection of a famine memorial, which could, of course, include victims in Scotland, and in the Highlands in particular.

The other point is that I believe that, when the Irish workers who came to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s—mainly working on the lump—returned to Ireland, they found themselves in the difficult position of having contributed to neither the UK retirement system nor the Irish. I just wonder whether in your investigations you came across any Irish people who had elected to remain in Scotland rather than return to Ireland for that reason.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP: I will make a number of points about the report. First, I will offer some clarification for Members about the intention and purpose behind the Act to which Lord Dubs referred. It does not criminalise singing songs—that has to be made clear and understood. The Act criminalises behaviour, and sectarian singing may be a part of that. The statistics that have been gathered so far by the Scottish Government show that only around a third of the charges that have been brought under the Act have a singing element as part of them. Therefore, it is unfair for anyone to claim that the Act criminalises singing songs. It does not—it is about behaviour.

The Act has been in place for only the past couple of years. The statistics show that about 77% of the charges that have been brought against people in Scotland under it were for behaviour that was levelled against the Catholic religion. The nature and purpose of the behaviour are established when the charges are brought. Therefore, it is fundamentally wrong to suggest that the Act somehow targets or attacks the Irish community in Scotland, and the statistics and facts bear that out. It is a wee bit of a surprise to read some of the language in the report about repealing the Act, when in fact it is helping us to tackle the sectarianism that has been a scourge in Scotland for many years.

Yesterday and today, Members mentioned the Celtic and Rangers element. Again, the statistics and data that the Scottish Government has presented show that a number of the charges that have been brought against people do not even involve matches involving Celtic or Rangers.

It is important that we try to get a more balanced view of what is happening on the ground in Scotland. That more balanced view might have been obtained if there was some kind of consultation and dialogue with the Scottish Government, but I do not see that in the report. The Scottish Government has committed to reviewing the Act and its effectiveness this year. It is a wee bit early for the Assembly to jump to the conclusion that we should perhaps repeal the Act. Let us give the Act a chance to see how effective it can be. There are certainly some successes to record, and the data backs that up.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD: I do not think that the report was ever intended to be divisive. I hope that people, on reading it, will see that it is not intended to be divisive, as has been suggested.

The Irish community in Scotland is not Catholic or Protestant; it is Irish. There are different aspects of it. We would be foolish to bury our heads in the sand. I have travelled to many parts of Scotland, and I have seen great similarities with some of the Irish centres of population in, for instance, Liverpool. Those centres have many of the same issues, although not in the same way as in Scotland. We need to remember that the link between Ireland and Scotland goes back many years and has a long history. In fact, the Irish kingdom of Dál Riada extended into Scotland, and we still find that some of the traditions of the north-eastern part of Ireland are linked to those in the south-western part of Scotland. There are also language links.

Today, different groups of people identify themselves in different ways. It is the same in this island and in the six counties, when we look at the census. In Scotland, many people of the Irish community identify themselves as Irish, and rightly so. Others identify themselves as Scots-Irish and others just as Scottish. Within those definitions, there are many problems, and some of them relate to underemployment and lack of investment. In looking at the same problems in England, we have found that there has been discrimination in the past against the Irish community.

Many people in the Irish community in Scotland believe that the same discrimination has happened, or the same marginalisation. If you go into the likes of Coatbridge or Plains or other centres where there is high unemployment, you will find that there is a greater concentration of people who identify themselves as Irish. In fact, they would often know more about Irish politics than about British politics.

The report has done a good job of work. The recommendations are simple and, if implemented, they will have addressed some of the shortfalls in five or six years' time. There is a good proposal around funding—there has been a deficit in funding. Rather than looking for 10% initially, you look to make up the shortfall that has been there for years. That will help.

I have attended some of the centres. Thankfully, there are centres in those communities, and they are not run by themselves; they are often run by charitable organisations. Thankfully, they are there, but they are not of a scale that would be capable of representing all the community or all the services that they need. I welcome the report.

Mr Jim Sheridan MP: In his usual fashion, Lord Dubs has produced a report that teases out some of the tensions in Scotland and Glasgow around the issue of sectarianism. In saying that, I am aware that it is very difficult to make a comment on issues around sectarianism in Scotland three months out from a general election. One has to be careful what one says.

The Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012—on the singing and what have you—was meant with the best intentions to be non-partisan. If there is a criticism, it may be that some people have misinterpreted the intent of that legislation. There is criticism on both sides of the divide that some of our police officers perhaps do not understand the sensitivities surrounding it.

One or two other issues have come up. Mary Scanlon alluded to this. We had one of the ugliest scenes in Glasgow the day after the referendum. George Square is a venue where there have been hundreds of momentous moments but, after the referendum, there were Unionists with Union flags and separatists with the Saltire fighting in George Square. It was a disgrace, and it was something that Scotland should be ashamed of.

I turn to the St Patrick's day rally. The report was written by people with fresh eyes. Some people in Scotland would argue that there is already one march or parade too many. Half the country celebrates—if that is the right word—the past, while the other half seethes with anger. Although it may be a good theological idea to have a St Patrick's day rally in Scotland that celebrates the past and St Patrick, we need to think seriously about the impact that a St Patrick's day rally in Scotland would have.

Although I sympathise with people who use the argument that we have one half of the town or city celebrating, the other half should, too, if that is the case, and if we are serious about asking Glasgow City Council to authorise a St Patrick's day rally, the first people we should be speaking to are the police, who would have to monitor and make that situation secure. Would it help with sectarianism in Scotland? I doubt it very much. I think that it would make matters even worse. We need to think seriously about having a St Patrick's day rally.

I am from Irish stock and am extremely proud of my family's history and that of other families in terms of what Ireland and the Irish people brought to Scotland, but I have moved on. I have no ambiguity whatsoever. If Scotland are playing Ireland, I know exactly who I am supporting: I am supporting Scotland. I have no doubt about that whatsoever. However, there are some people who hold on to this old, romantic idea. Indeed, those of you who listen to the Celtic or Rangers games will hear some of the songs that are sung about romantic days

hundreds of years ago. That lends nothing to a modern Scotland, which is what we need to think of.

10.30 am.

Catholic centres or Irish centres may well have been burned down, although I have never heard of it. It has never happened in my part of Scotland, so I do not know anything about it. That is news to me. I have never heard of Irish centres being brought down, and to regard Irish people in Scotland as some sort of ethnic minority is beyond belief, I would say. I do not think that Irish people regard themselves as an ethnic minority.

I conclude by saying that I can well understand the rationale and the thinking behind the report, and it is indeed welcome, but it is from eyes from outside Scotland and I really think that people need to think of the consequences. If the report and some of its content were implemented, it would have serious consequences in Scotland and the city of Glasgow. If people want parades up and down the streets, that is entirely up to them, but I do not think that the taxpayer should be asked to pay for it during these austere times. That is one of the problems.

I think that people need to look forward, move forward, think of a modern Scotland and stop living in the past and thinking about what happened hundreds of years ago.

Mr John Scott MSP: I begin by thanking all those who took the trouble to give evidence to Alf Dubs and his committee on this. I hugely respect those who did so. However, having read the report this morning, I find it surprisingly negative and, if you like, one-dimensional. I am sorry to say that. It suggests to me that a more detailed look at the issue is perhaps required, if it is perceived to be an issue by the Assembly. We have already heard different views this morning, and there is no doubt that a great many more people in Scotland might want to contribute other views. I will not say that that would lead to a more balanced report, but there certainly need to be more contributions.

I share Jim Sheridan's view. I do not regard—and I would hate it to be thought of Scotland that we regarded—the Irish as an ethnic minority. They are a fully integrated part of our community. I am a completely native Scots person—to the best of my knowledge, I have no Irish roots—but I certainly want to believe that the Irish feel very much part of and welcomed in Scotland.

That said, however, fresh eyes are a good thing. Maybe there is a lesson to be learned from yesterday's discussions on the Gaelic Athletic Association, and that is that nothing is perfect. Robert Burns said:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us

To see oursels as others see us!

It wad frae monie a blunder free us.

Maybe a fresh look at the situation is not a bad thing. The report should perhaps be commended to the Scottish Government. I am certain that it will have a view on it.

I am well aware that the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 has not been met with universal approval, but it is due to be reviewed fairly soon, and we could reasonably argue that it is still bedding in. I know that it does not meet with everyone's approval, but there it is. Thank you for allowing me to make those few brief remarks.

The Lord Empey: I think that Aengus Ó Snodaigh put his finger on it. The situation is different from that of Irish immigration to the rest of the UK because of the fact that parts of this island and parts of western Scotland were historically a kingdom. People would have rowed across the North Channel to go to church. There is a history to it. There is also the fact that many of the people who migrated there and ended up in Scotland came from the different traditions on this island. Many people in my home city would see Glasgow as their number 2 city. In other words, they perhaps feel at home in that city more than any other.

It is good to have a look at these things, but the situation is very different from that of many of the people who emigrated to other parts of the UK such as London or Birmingham because, first, most of it took place a long time ago and, secondly, because of the geographical proximity and because the culture and, in historical times, the language, were the same. It is right that the matter was separated out as a separate report. The situation in Scotland is very different from that which would have pertained in London or other cities in the rest of the UK.

Mr Sammy Douglas MLA: I thank Lord Dubs for the report, which I found very interesting. I have read it a couple of times. My grandfather was from Scotland, and my name certainly

denotes me as an Ulster-Scot. I have spent a lot of time in Scotland over the years, particularly going to Rangers and Celtic matches, when I saw in Glasgow a lot of the sectarianism that I had left behind in Belfast.

I would like to make a couple of points. If I went back to my constituents of east Belfast and I gave the report out, many people in my constituency would have difficulties with some of it. Let me give an example. It talks about 26% of the people in Scotland concerned being from Northern Ireland. When I look at the report and at the list of people who were interviewed, I would certainly concur with Lord Empey. I do not see their views there. Those people who would go to Scotland, such as myself, felt very much at home. We felt that it was part of the United Kingdom, as Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom.

There were a couple of references in the report to which I think people would take exception, and which could be termed inflammatory. Let me read them out. On page 3, the report talks about

sectarian divides and the existence of vocal groups such as the Orange Order.

To highlight one “vocal group” in Scotland in the same line as “sectarian” and “divide” could inflame the situation. There are other groups in Scotland, such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which is a mirror reflection of the Orange Order. There are lots of Ancient Order of Hibernians parades. In Northern Ireland, we have parades and we have protests; so does Scotland—it has parades and protests.

The one concern that I had with the suggestion made by a Member that there should not be a St Patrick’s parade is about where we draw the line. For me, the right to march is a fundamental democratic right. If we start at that level, do we stop trade unions, the Boys Brigade and a whole range of organisations? That leads us down a difficult path.

We then go on to page 5, and I will finish on this point. Paragraph 8 talks about

exacerbating community tensions, and ... groups including the Orange Order.

The Orange Order gets a second mention in terms of “exacerbating community tensions”. All I am saying is that people from the Unionist community in Northern Ireland who read that will see that, in a sense, we are highlighting the Orange Order as a major problem in this situation. There are difficulties.

I will finish with this point. I am having to organise a St Patrick’s breakfast in the City Hall in Belfast. We will have senior members of the Orange Order at that breakfast. We have a St

Patrick's Lodge in Northern Ireland. Let us not just think that St Patrick is just about the Irish and Catholic community—far from it. St Patrick belongs to us all.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. Deputy Roger Perrot will have to be the last speaker before I bring Lord Dubs back in.

Deputy Roger Perrot: As a Channel Islander, I hesitate to trespass upon the sensitivities between the Scots and Irish or anybody else. In saying what I am going to say, I do not wish Lord Dubs to feel at all that I am getting back at him for coming to Guernsey in the 1980s and telling us that we ought to send Members to the House of Commons, which did not go down terribly well. I am not getting back at him for that: that is all history. What I do want to say is that I get the feeling that the committee is looking for something to be over-anxious about. I support what Mrs Scanlon said earlier.

Guernsey and Jersey have minuscule communities compared with others, but we have a tremendous number of people living there from other jurisdictions. In the 1960s, a lot of Italians came to Guernsey and they were followed by Madeirans, Poles, Scots—there are more Scottish people there than you can shake a stick at—and many people from Ireland. There has also been much interchange among the communities. As I am sure Members know, a lot of people from the islands served with several of the Irish regiments in the First World War.

We do not regard those communities as somehow being deprived ethnic communities. They have their own parades and associations; they are proud of what they are. How they would regard a football match, I have no idea. I do not particularly like rough games myself and I am not sure how I would cope in a football match. [*Laughter.*] I have to say that I would probably support a Guernsey win at the annual Muratti between Guernsey and Jersey, but I am ambivalent about it. I suppose that it is because there is much mongrel in me—my father came from Jersey, although I keep that secret and would be grateful if Members do not spread it around too much. [*Laughter.*]

As I said, I hesitate to trespass upon the sensitivities of the Irish and Scots, but perhaps we are looking for something to worry about that is not there. Forgive me; I am a callow youth in this Assembly and maybe I know too little.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much to everyone who has contributed to an interesting discussion. I am going to bring Lord Dubs back in.

The Lord Dubs: It is good that we have heard differing voices. I am very grateful to all who have contributed. There is no point in a committee producing a report and all of us yawning and saying, “That’s fine” and just going on. We are supposed to debate and discuss, so I very much welcome that. I could talk for hours, but I am not going to, although I think that the topic is worth a longer discussion even than the lengthy one that we have had today. We probably need more time.

I will just make some brief comments if I might. I hardly know where to begin. We used the expression “ethnic minority”, but I am not terribly comfortable with applying it to the Irish in the way that has been suggested. It was simply a matter of attracting funding; in Scotland, if someone wants to get funding for community projects, they have a better chance if they are identified as an ethnic minority. It is a vehicle for attracting funding rather than a description of a group in the community. It is perhaps slightly unfortunate that it has been interpreted in that way, but we saw it as a funding device; other minorities in Scotland use that as the way of attracting funding for their causes and we thought that the Irish should not miss out on an opportunity for funding.

10.45 am.

As regards the mention of the Orange Order, maybe we have overdone it. On the other hand, the Orange Order is a very significant organisation—it is more significant than some of the others. I will quote one of the recommendations, which also might deal with the helpful comments that Jim Sheridan made:

Given Glasgow City Council's commitment to celebrating diversity ... we recommend that it facilitate a dialogue between the police service, and representatives of the Irish communities and other Glasgow residents (including the Orange Order) to consider whether it might be possible to stage a St Patrick's Day parade in Glasgow itself.

That is a fairly moderate suggestion: that the council should talk to the police and the minorities. We mentioned the Orange Order because it is important, but maybe we should leave it out because mentioning it might be misinterpreted. However, we can certainly talk about opening a debate between the police and others to see whether a St Patrick’s day parade

could happen. After all, there are such parades in many parts of the world and it seems a bit odd that Glasgow does not have one. However, if it is difficult, we can at least talk about it and see how we might proceed.

Similarly, with regard to the references to the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, we had a lot of evidence on that legislation and the report talks about it. Again, I will quote a recommendation:

“Ideally, the Scottish Government should consult widely on the future of the” legislation “and then consider whether or not it should be repealed. That review could usefully consider other legislative provisions and the impact of the Act.”

In other words, we are simply saying, “This is worth looking at.” We are not saying that we are certain that the legislation should be repealed; we are saying that there are problems with it. There were good reasons for having the legislation, but the way it is working has caused some anxiety. All that we are saying is that it should be reviewed to see whether our anxieties and concerns about it are valid. I think that that is a fairly moderate position.

I have dealt with most of the points that were made on the report, including about the label of “ethnic minority”. As regards Irish people retiring back to Ireland, which I think Viscount Bridgeman mentioned, we did not get much evidence in Scotland on that. We got quite a lot of evidence in England that some elderly Irish people think about returning, but Ireland has changed so much that they do not feel comfortable about going back to their villages or towns because they are not the places that they left. It would not be easy for some of them to return, but we argued in our report that it should be made possible for them to return and that that should be looked at. I know that there would be difficulties about housing as well, but all that should be addressed. However, as I said, that issue did not come out of the evidence in Scotland.

I really welcome the discussion on the report and the fact that people are not just yawning about it. Maybe it would meet the wishes of colleagues here if the committee were to have a further look at the issue and consider some of the points that have been made, then present that at a future plenary meeting. That might be the best way forward in order to take account of the important points that have been made.

In defence of the report, I say that we had witnesses and took their evidence, and our report reflects that evidence. It might be argued that the evidence was not quite as balanced as it

should have been and that we should have talked to other people, which is maybe what we should do. It is not a perfect world, and we took the evidence in less than a day in Glasgow. However, I thank colleagues for the discussion and I suggest that, if the plenary agrees, we refer the report back to the committee to consider the comments that have been made and come back to a future plenary on that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Alf. I put to the Assembly the suggestion that we refer the report back for Committee D to have another look at it and come back with a further report. Is that agreed? I see that it is. Thank you very much. In view of the time, I am not going to be able to call committee Chairmen to give update reports on the committees' work. If we get a few minutes later, we can do that.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I now have to go through Government responses. The first was circulated to Members as the response from the Government of Ireland's Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to a report by BIPA Committee B entitled "Report on the Impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on the Free Movement of Goods on the Island of Ireland." We have four minutes to hear about the responses to Committee D's report "Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations" from the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, the Minister for Education and Skills, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Justice and Equality; and about further responses from the Scottish Government on the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 and from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the "Travellers, Gypsies and Roma" report.

Again, given the time, I am unfortunately not going to be able to call Members who wish to contribute on those responses. I should say, however, that the steering committee has considered a paper about how we might run plenary sessions in the future. We have tried to come up with ideas that generate a lot of discussion; I think that that is what has happened with the reports, which is, of course, a very good thing. I apologise to those whom I have not been able to call, but we have had a lively, informative and useful couple of days.

The steering committee has agreed the draft annual report 2014, copies of which have been circulated electronically. I ask that the plenary session take note of the 19th annual report 2014. Is that agreed?

Question agreed.

ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR JOHN COAKLEY

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Co-Chair. I now welcome to the podium a distinguished academic and expert in the field of Anglo-Irish relations to engage with us on the wider significance of this organisation, which this week marks its silver anniversary. He has published extensively and has recently edited “Breaking Patterns of Conflict: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland Conflict”. I have met Professor John Coakley many times at the British-Irish Association in Cambridge and Oxford, and he is most welcome to the meeting.

Professor John Coakley (Institute of British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin):

Thank you very much, Co-Chairs, for this invitation to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly on the occasion of its 25th anniversary. It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to be asked to mark such an important occasion in this way. I will, of course, be speaking from the perspective of the outsider, as I lack the detailed knowledge of the Assembly’s functioning that its Members possess.

When the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, as it then was, held its initial meeting on 26 February 1990 at Westminster, public reaction—especially in Ireland, where it loomed rather larger than perhaps in Great Britain—was positive, although the press noted the absence of Northern Ireland Unionists from the meeting, an absence that lasted for almost two decades. The challenge faced by the Assembly was profound, and we might appreciate just how profound it was if we take a long historical perspective on the matter.

In that other body that brought together Irish and British parliamentarians for 121 years—the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland—the first generation of Irish MPs took some time to settle. Although it was made up entirely of Protestant Anglo-Irish gentry, they represented an unwelcome challenge to some of their British counterparts. As the

MP for Bristol, Lord Sheffield, put it bluntly in private correspondence at the time, he was opposed to

the admission of 100 wild Irish

as was proposed in the Bill of Union and which eventually took effect. He warned against a potential Irish political influx, saying:

the intrusion of 80 is rather too much, 75 would be sufficient ... I do not think any of our country gentlemen would venture into parliament if they were to meet 100 Paddies.

I was not aware that the word dated back more than 200 years, but apparently it does.

The new United Parliament, however, survived the shock of the admission of 100 “Paddies”, if such a label can be applied to such stalwarts of the establishment as Denis Browne, MP for Mayo, George King, MP for Roscommon, or James Butler, MP for Kilkenny. However, the UK Parliament could not withstand the shock of the election in December 1918 of 73 “Paddies” of a quite different kind who represented a new radical Nationalist movement, Sinn Féin. As we all know, the clash between Sinn Féin and the British Government, though halted by a settlement or treaty in 1921, left a range of unfinished issues that re-entered politics from 1968 onwards.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly was born against that tempestuous political background. It drew its impetus from a set of negotiations in 1980-81 between the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher and successive Irish Governments headed by Charles Haughey and Garret FitzGerald. There was something of a rotating set of Governments in the early 1980s. Although first envisaged in the FitzGerald-Thatcher summit of 1981, the issue of implementing the Body was not pursued in the tense political atmosphere of the early 1980s. However, some discussion took place from 1983 onwards between Irish and British delegates to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 sought to give impetus to the process. The two Governments agreed to support any joint body that might be established by the two Parliaments.

Finally, following the recommendations of a planning group under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union headed jointly by Peter Temple-Morris, who is a tireless supporter of this form of co-operation as a mechanism for enhancing understanding across the Irish Sea, and the late Jim Tunney, who was a veteran politician and Leas-Cheann Comhairle of the Dáil, the new Body eventually came into being in February 1990, as you are aware.

At a purely mechanical level, it is easy to assess the achievements of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, or the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, as it was renamed in 2008. Of its 50 meetings to date—there is not quite mathematical parity between the two islands—26 took place in Ireland, often rather far from Dublin at exotic venues such as Killarney, Clonakilty and Bundoran; 17 took place in England, again typically in regional venues rather than in London; three took place in Scotland; two took place in Wales; and historic firsts were recorded when the body met for the first time in Belfast in 2006 and in the Isle of Man in 2010.

Again as you are aware, in addition to debating important issues in plenary sessions, the Assembly, like other parliamentary bodies, conducts much of its work through committees. Its committee structure has remained substantially unchanged since 1991. Two committees were established in 1990 and two were established the following year. Little has changed since then, apart from the renaming of each committee in 2000 to take account of enlarged membership and to reflect more accurately their actual priorities as they had by then evolved in practice.

The division of material between the four committees groups very broad areas. Committee A, which deals with Sovereign Matters, stands apart from the others, of course, given its focus on sensitive political and security issues that are of particular interest to the sovereign Governments. Committees B, C and D focus on European Affairs, Economic affairs and Environmental and Social issues respectively. In practice, their reports seem to range very widely in subject matter, with some overlap across the committees. It is not always immediately obvious why a particular report has been produced by Committee C rather than by Committee D. Given the significance of the European dimension, Committee B has an interest in all those affairs, of course.

An outsider such as me can assess the work of the committees from what they report themselves, notably through the Assembly's website, although I appreciate that there is a risk of underreporting, as is always the case with websites. The website lists 37 reports that have been produced since 1999, almost half of them by Committee D, and 20 formal responses to those by Governments—at least, 20 is the number reported on the website. Two thirds of those are in respect of Committee D. At a minimum, the committees have helped to inform the policy process and, in particular, to sensitise Members from different political entities to the cross-jurisdictional complexities of many of the items on the agenda.

It seems clear that the Assembly has maintained an active and relatively visible presence since its establishment in 1990 if we measure its visibility by looking at newspaper reporting, but how are we to evaluate its effectiveness? Early assessments in the late 1990s by academics such as Patrick Buckland, Harvey Cox, Robert Hazell and Mads Qvortrup judged it to be a useful but unexciting initiative. That was not intended as damning with faint praise; it was intended as a positive judgment on the work of the Assembly. Others, such as Nick Taylor and Clive Walker, have pointed to the Assembly's very important symbolic role in providing a bridge over the turbulent historical waters of the British-Irish relationship and other relationships, as well.

After 25 years in operation, it is worth reviewing the Assembly's overall achievements. Although it has no legislative role and a strictly limited advisory one, it constitutes an important forum in which parliamentarians can formally question Ministers from the host jurisdiction. Many committee reports may go unanswered and those to which Governments respond may have limited impact, but the value of a body where parliamentarians of such different backgrounds may highlight potential approaches to shared problems or, indeed, suggest that a common approach to those problems is not appropriate, is clearly of great value.

11:00 am.

As well as formal dialogue during plenary sessions and elsewhere, meetings of the Assembly offer a crucially important opportunity for informal networking, which was particularly important in the past, when there were very few political contacts across the Irish Sea. The two clerks who steered the body through its early years, Frank Cranmer and John Roycroft, pointed out that importance when they reviewed the first 10 years of the Assembly's work 15 years ago, in around 2000. They used more colourful language to describe the nature of the interaction, however, and they stressed that the Assembly is convivial in nature. The value of this forum for building trust in relationships between neighbours, where it is truly needed, can scarcely be overestimated, but there are other respects in which the Assembly has shown remarkable capacity to reinvent itself and ensure its continuing relevance.

There has been a seismic shift in the character of relations in these islands since the Assembly first saw the light of day, 25 years ago. Back in 1990, the focus of Governments was on the catastrophic consequences of the Northern Ireland conflict, and differences over such issues as the Falklands War embittered the Anglo-Irish relationship. Scotland and Wales did not

possess the independent voices that we now take for granted, and the three island jurisdictions, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, were largely ignored in the politics of the two sovereign states.

However, by the time that the Assembly celebrated its 10th anniversary at the end of the 20th century a complex package designed to stabilise Northern Ireland had been agreed and partly implemented. It is now the second decade of the 21st century and the inter-communal division in Northern Ireland has been overshadowed by much larger geopolitical questions, such as Scotland's relationship with the UK, and the UK's relationship with the EU—questions of huge importance for all parts of these islands. Those changes were reflected in a significant reconfiguration of the structure of the Assembly. The original Body, as Members are aware, consisted of an equal number of Members from the two sovereign Parliaments—25 from each. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 raised an existential challenge for the Inter-Parliamentary Body. In essence, it contemplated an alternative structure to the Assembly. It set up an inter-governmental British-Irish Council, an eight-member body including the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the three island jurisdictions. That raised questions about the need for a parallel inter-parliamentary tier, to which the agreement also committed itself—and it was by no means clear that this body would have filled that function.

A combination of proactive thinking by the leadership of the existing British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, which produced three thoughtful discussion documents on the future of the Body between 1998 and 2000, and decisions by political leaders themselves, resulted in an extension of the Body's membership in 2000, to include the three new devolved legislative bodies and the three island Assemblies—the present position, in other words.

The Assembly in many ways resembles the Nordic Council, with which its counterpart, the British-Irish Council, is often misleadingly compared. In fact, there are closer similarities between this body and the Nordic Council. However, there are three important differences between the Assembly and the Nordic Council.

First, the membership structure of the Nordic Council is relatively symmetrical, with equal representation for four large countries of comparable population, and a reduced presence for several smaller jurisdictions. There is an element of symmetry, because although Sweden admittedly is larger than the other three countries, it is not all that much larger. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly gives equal weighting to the British and Irish Parliaments, with

additional representation for six second-tier British entities. In reality, though, the UK, because of its dominant demographic position—it accounts for 93% of the population of these islands—and corresponding share of political resources, is likely to continue to overshadow completely its smaller Irish partner, not within the Assembly itself, but in the world of real politics outside it.

Secondly, the budgetary positions of the Assembly and the Nordic Council are utterly different. The modest running costs of the Assembly allow little scope for any kind of other funding initiatives. It is difficult to say exactly what the running of the Assembly costs, because of the multiple sources of revenue, but clearly it is quite modest. The parallel British-Irish Council also has a tiny budget: in 2012 it had just more than £60,000. That probably does not account for its full costs, but that was the official figure. The Nordic Council, by contrast, together with the parallel Nordic Council of Ministers, had a budget for 2014 of about 1 billion Danish kroner; in other words, about £100 million. It is thus able to fund a range of influential cultural and other institutions at a level that is inconceivable in the current British-Irish context.

Thirdly, as the Assembly's Committee B itself pointed out in 2004, the privileged position of the Nordic Council is greatly reinforced by its close links to the Nordic Council of Ministers. By contrast, relations between the Assembly and the British-Irish Council continue to be tenuous, though their agendas overlap and their members represent precisely the same jurisdictions—an issue that might be worth addressing. Given the challenges facing these islands in the years ahead—the UK's Scottish question, the EU's UK question, and Ireland's resulting dilemma because of those questions—the Assembly may well find a place for itself in new domains. It might, for example, seek to emulate the role of the Nordic Council in assisting transition in constitutional relationships in its corner of Europe. Ironically, institutions that were created in response to a conflict in a small disputed area—Northern Ireland—may end up forming a bridge to deal with troubled relationships in these Islands on a much larger scale.

The experience of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly over the past 25 years, especially when set against the much slower progress in establishing a similar North-South body, which was envisaged in 1998 and took shape in 2012 as the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association—the word “Association” is significant, as was the word “Assembly”—suggests that cross-jurisdictional contact plays a significant role in enhancing political relationships. However, inter-parliamentary dialogue is more likely to flourish precisely when such political

relationships are already good in the first place. In other words, co-operation is easiest where it is least needed. In any case, the Association's experience since its inception suggests that the fear of Lord Sheffield at the time of the Act of Union of 1800 about the risk of disharmony between Irish and British MPs may be well and truly laid to rest.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you very much, Professor, for a very interesting, informative and independent engagement with us. Sometimes it is nice to stand back and see after 25 years of history that it is written down. I thank you very much again, Professor. I am now going to invite contributions from the floor. First, obviously, is Baroness Corston.

Baroness Corston: Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I first joined what was called the "British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body" in 1995. I was on it for eight years. One evening at the 1995 conference, a group of Irish and UK Members sat together. I asked those who had been on the body at its inception what their experience had been. They all said they had approached each other with what they called "wariness" rather than hostility. I think it was beautifully summed up by the Irish President, Michael D. Higgins, when he made his state visit to the UK recently and addressed both Houses of Parliament in the House of Lords. I had the privilege of being present. He quoted an Irish member of the House of Commons, Stephen Gwynn, who said in a debate when referring to Members

we look at each other with doubtful eyes.

That was certainly the tone of that discussion that night. They then said there had been emerging personal friendships which were a precursor to trust.

One of the people who came, I think, to the next meeting of the body was the then Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, a lovely man called Ted Barrington, who some of you may remember. He told us we represented the most remarkable relationship in the world and he pointed out something to us which we had never really thought about. He knew that my mother was Irish. He asked whether I knew I was an Irish citizen and was entitled to an Irish passport. I said "No" and he badgered me until I got one. He pointed out that at that time, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was entitled to an Irish passport and the Irish President, Mary McAleese, was entitled to a UK passport. He was saying that the relationship was unique. Whatever the past, that uniqueness is something we should treasure.

I would like to refer to something else that was mentioned, particularly by Irish Members, as having helped them to cement the kind of relationships that everybody in this room now takes for granted. We were not meeting as a body, given that old history - we were meeting as equal members of the European Union. Irish Members, in particular, said how important it was to them that the landscape had changed and we had a different relationship. That equality within the European Union had made a big difference to the way they saw the body develop.

I had an exchange with a shopkeeper one day when I was shopping in Cahersiveen in County Kerry with my daughter. He asked me where I was from and I told him that I grew up in England but I am half-Irish. He grinned at me, and so I knew that something humorous or mischievous was coming. He said to me “Ah, you’re all right – we thought we hated the English until we joined the European Union and met the Germans”.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Maybe he has got a chip on both shoulders. Next up is Baroness Harris.

Baroness Harris: Thank you, Co-Chair. Very simply, I think we should all have a copy of Professor Coakley’s address to us. If that could be made available, that would be wonderful.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): I would like now to welcome the British Ambassador, Dominick Chilcott, who is in the Gallery. Ambassador, you are very welcome. Is there anybody else who wishes to contribute?

The Lord Dubs: Can I speak briefly?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Yes.

The Lord Dubs: Can I thank Professor Coakley? He has brought back memories of things we had forgotten. I think he has done a lot of work. I share the view that it would be useful to have a copy of what he said. When people sometimes say the Assembly is just a talking shop, I tell them there is a lot more to it than that. With which other group of politicians am I on first-name terms with so many of them? I feel so easy and comfortable about phoning them up, or their phoning me up, to ask whether we can co-operate on this, that or the other. That is not a relationship we have from Britain with politicians of any other country – not to that extent. I welcome all the other benefits of being a Member of this body, including the relationships and the ability to co-operate. We can defuse difficulties and get on with things. I think this body does a lot more useful work than is sometimes acknowledged by people outside.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Professor, would you like to respond?

Professor John Coakley: Thank you, Co-Chair. Simply, it seems I have heard nothing to contradict the kind of views I expressed as to the value of the body and what it means to its Members. It seems to me that it performs an extremely function, and one that is likely to develop and hopefully will develop.

Mr David Melding AM: I just want to ask the professor to expand on his hint that perhaps we ought to look at relationship with the British-Irish Council. How feasible does he think that is? Could we receive a report reflecting perhaps on the Nordic Council? Would that be valuable or would it undermine some of the discretion that is required to make the British-Irish Council an effective body? If we had that link, would it add a level of political controversy? A certain level of pungency in debates could even be created. It could possibly come at the cost of undermining consensus.

11.15 am.

Professor John Coakley: Yes, it probably is the case that there is a midway point. I was not suggesting anything like a merger of the two bodies. There probably is something like a midway point between one where there is little contact between these two bodies and one where the connection is so intimate that each body loses its identity. It struck me that there is a need for greater co-operation between the two. For example, why not have a shared website like the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers have?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you. Baroness Corston has been very informative on what we needed. Deputy Dinny McGinley was on the first session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Maybe he might share some of his views or thoughts.

Mr Dinny McGinley TD: I do not know when I attended my first meeting, to be quite honest. I was certainly there in 1992 and 1996. I remember particularly the 1996 meeting, which we had in Adare Manor in County Limerick. I remember arriving down in Adare that evening, having driven all the way from Donegal. I was acknowledged there by the head of security for that particular session. He said “you are the Donegal man” and I said “I am”. He said he was in charge of security for the weekend. Tom King, Peter Brooke, Sir Giles Shaw and Michael Colvin were among those present at the meeting. Michael Colvin and his wife had a very sad demise shortly after one of our meetings when their house went on fire and they were both burned to death, unfortunately. Three or four weeks after the 1996 meeting that I mentioned, the head of security in Adare – the late Jerry McCabe - was murdered. That certainly left an indelible mark in my mind. He had a close association with this body when we met in Limerick at that particular time.

I attended meetings of this body, on and off, for many years. Approximately ten years have passed since I left it. The former Co-Chairman, Deputy Joe McHugh, took my place as Minister of State last July and I have now taken his place as a Member of this body. Both of us are from County Donegal. It is true that we have developed a great friendship with our colleagues from the UK and from other areas. I have great memories of being at meetings in London, the House of Commons and the Great Hall.

I mentioned last night to Viscount Bridgeman, who is present this morning, that I became great friends with a colleague of his from the House of Lords – Charlie Lyell, or Lord Lyell, a

Scottish peer who was a member of the Government in Northern Ireland for a while. I was told he is still very active in the House of Lords. As I recall, when we were at a committee meeting in Belfast, we visited the all-Irish school on the Falls Road. Some of the British Members I have already mentioned were absolutely flabbergasted to see all the young children there speaking fluent Irish and doing Irish dancing. I was inveigled to expose my limited talent in Irish dancing. I was known by those people as the Irish dancer. I say that with all due respects to Deputy Mattie McGrath, who was an Irish champion in Irish dancing. I was there at the time and he was not.

I think the establishment of this body was a great idea. We got to know one another and trust one another. Not alone are we colleagues, but we have also become great friends. I think it has done a great service to the relationship between our two countries.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Deputy McGinley. Would Viscount Bridgeman like to contribute?

Viscount Bridgeman: I had the privilege last night of sitting next to Mr Niall Burgess, who is the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He has just returned from the trouble spots in the Middle East. He said he was reminded of the envy and the admiration of the British-Irish relationship which is totally unique throughout the world in having grown out of past differences. This Assembly is so much a part and core of that. It is a huge privilege to be a Member of it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you, Viscount. Does anybody else wish to contribute? I thank Professor Coakley for his fascinating and memorable analysis of British-Irish relations, particularly in regard to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I think we are all very honoured at the work the Assembly has done. I understand you went through the website to see what we have done. I think there is an awful lot of off-the-premises meetings and discussions that are very valued. We leave our politics outside the door and we have a lot of friendships here. Those friendships have forged huge relations in the last 25 years in very difficult times. I am honoured, the same as everyone else, to be on this prestigious Assembly. We hope it will go from strength to strength. Does Lord Empey wish to say something?

Lord Empey: I just wanted to know if there was an answer to Baroness Harris's request for Professor Coakley's speech to be circulated.

Baroness Harris: It is here.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): It has been circulated. Copies are available outside the Chamber.

Lord Empey: Okay. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Does Professor Coakley wish to say something?

Professor John Coakley: No, thank you, Co-Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Is there anybody else who wishes to contribute? Senator Coghlan, you have had plenty of views outside the Chamber. Would you like to put them on record here?

Senator Paul Coghlan: I share all the views that have been expressed. I have been on this body on and off since 1997. I agree wholeheartedly with everything that has been said. It was lovely to hear Deputy McGinley talking about the early days. We were not there then. It is a tremendous body. Like your good self, Co-Chair, I am honoured to be a member. I hope to continue to be a Member for years to come, hopefully into the next Parliament if I am fortunate enough to be back. Go raibh míle maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): Thank you very much, Senator Coghlan. Thank you very much, Professor Coakley, for your engagement. We really appreciate all the work you have done. I hope to meet you at the next British-Irish in November. *[Applause.]*

UPDATE ON WORK OF COMMITTEES A, B AND D

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): We have a few minutes before the Minister of State is due to arrive, so I think it might be productive to go back to the chairmen of the committees. We did not have time to receive updates on their current work. I think we will do that now. We will hear very brief reports, if we may. I will start with Senator Paul Coghlan, who has perhaps ended up with a little bit more to do after this plenary than he might have anticipated at first.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Indeed, Co-Chair. You have put a lot of extra work on our shoulders, but we do not decline it. You might want to tell the full body what the extra work you are going to give us is. There has been a great deal of commentary on the report which you so well received yesterday. We decided as a committee that there would be a follow-up. We will follow up with both governments and the relevant ministers. One of our Ministers has already been in touch with me in regard to it. I think there is a lot of work in that. We must remember that our work will probably be interrupted now. We will have to wait until after the election in the UK, when the House of Commons has been re-established and reconstituted. That will interrupt the work, naturally. Do not worry - we will continue right up to your election. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Paul. The steering committee referred the whole workings of BIPA to Committee A to consider what improvements might be made to the body and how we might ensure that it remains dynamic and contributes to political life on the islands as best it can. It is up to Committee A to come up with any proposals. I am sure Senator Coghlan would be very happy to receive any communications from Members about how we might continue to perform as a body.

Senator Paul Coghlan: Absolutely.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much for taking that work on, Paul. I invite Bob Walter MP to give us an overview of the work of Committee B.

Mr Robert Walter MP: Thank you, Co-Chairman. Since the Ashford plenary, our co-rapporteurs for the European Investment Bank inquiry have been working hard. They visited Brussels on the 13th of November while producing the committee's report, which we discussed earlier this morning. In addition whilst in Brussels, the co-rapporteurs held an initial meeting with Commission officials in relation to the committee's next inquiry, which is on visa systems. At the committee's meeting here on Sunday, other than agreeing the EIB report, we discussed how to carry out our next report. That inquiry seeks to look at the rules that apply within the Schengen area and the common travel area of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. The focus is on the impact that these visa systems have on the tourism, business, labour and study sectors. The committee will seek to establish the advantages and disadvantages of not being a member of the Schengen area, to consider how the common travel area could operate more effectively, and determine what administrative and cost burdens are incurred through operating the two systems. The co-rapporteurs for this inquiry are Lord German and Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD. I know that the Assembly will look forward to hearing their report when it is produced.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Bob. I do not think Jack Wall TD is here to give us an update on Committee C. Therefore, I call Lord Dubs to give us an update on Committee D. I think he has probably already done so.

The Lord Dubs: Thank you, Co-Chair. When the committee met on Sunday, we drew up a list of possible topics for future study. However, that has been overtaken by the plenary this afternoon. The first thing on Committee D's agenda is to reconsider our report in the light of the comments that have been made, before we proceed to other things.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much.

The Lord Empey: Maybe there is somebody else here from Committee C, but if there is not, I would just make the point that we had a meeting on Sunday. We have two meetings that we would like to hold – one if possible with the new Commissioner in Brussels and another one here. Obviously, the difficulty of squeezing that in before the end of next month is going to be a challenge because there will be a gap until maybe June or July before we could even hold another one, if indeed by then. The clear intention is to have the report in by November. We are looking at youth unemployment and other issues.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Reg. I think the Minister of State is here.

ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF STATE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR NORTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I would now like to welcome to the plenary session the Irish Minister of State with responsibility for North-South co-operation, Mr Sean Sherlock. He is the first person to hold the office of Minister of State with responsibility for North-South co-operation. We wish him well in that role. The Minister of State played a pivotal role in the negotiations in Northern Ireland just before Christmas which resulted in the Stormont House Agreement. He has been invited here today to inform the plenary on the talks and to engage in what we hope will be a useful discussion. We have decided that rather than just having a question and answer session, we will allow Members to make brief contributions on any thoughts they may have. They are very welcome to ask questions, but they are also welcome to make very brief contributions. I have to give the apologies of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dr Andrew Murrison, who was due to come and have an input as well. Parliamentary business has precluded his attendance, but he does give his apologies. Without further ado, I call the Minister of State. I thank him for joining us. *[Applause.]*

Mr Sean Sherlock TD (Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade): Thank you very much, Co-Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, for the warmth of the welcome. I am absolutely delighted to be here. It is a privilege to address the 50th plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I consider it a personal honour to be here to address you this morning.

I am delighted to see that Members of the Assembly have had such an interesting and varied programme in Dublin over the last few days. I want particularly to mention their visit to the Garden of Remembrance yesterday. This visit, and the laying of wreaths by the Co-Chairs to honour those who gave their lives for Irish freedom, was significant and welcome.

I know that Members also visited the GAA headquarters at Croke Park. While I am on the subject of commemorations, I want to acknowledge the work of the GAA in remembering the often forgotten Ulster GAA volunteers who fought in the First World War. I was pleased to speak at a remarkable event in Belfast last October, when I launched the GAA-led research into the forgotten Gaelic volunteers, which is a seminal piece of work.

11.30 am.

In my capacity as Minister of State with responsibility for North-South co-operation, and particularly during the time I spent at Stormont House before Christmas, I have come to realise how the past very much affects our present. I am aware that addressing the legacy of the past is essential to achieving reconciliation. As we move through this decade of centenaries, commemorative acts that honour and celebrate all our national, regional and personal histories can help move us closer to understanding ourselves and each other better.

Next year will see the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, which was a seminal event in Ireland's path to independence. The Irish Government will shortly announce the programme to commemorate the events of 1916, a programme which will aim to deepen understanding and promote reconciliation. Easter 2016 will be followed a few weeks later by the centenary of the Battle of the Somme, where so many people from these islands lost their lives. While moments of solemn reflection will be at the core of our commemorations, these centenary anniversaries will also give us a chance to reflect on and celebrate everything that has been achieved on these islands over the last 100 years.

Over the last 25 years, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has provided a unique forum for parliamentarians across these islands to come together to discuss issues of mutual concern. Those years span a generation that has seen fundamental positive change, ever

stronger ties between our political institutions, increased co-operation to the benefit of our citizens and an enduring peace and stability on this island that could only have been dreamed of in 1990. Today, I will focus my remarks on the enormous work that has been done in the name of peace, stability and co-operation on this island.

The path that has brought us here has been neither short nor easy. Despite a number of challenges, we have not faltered. Perhaps most importantly, we have always travelled the path together. There have been many milestones along this path, including historic agreements from the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 to the St Andrews Agreement in 2006, the Hillsborough Agreement in 2010 and, most recently, the Stormont House Agreement; the establishment of the devolved institutions at Stormont; historic moments such as the state visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland in 2011 and the return state visit to the United Kingdom by President Michael D. Higgins in 2014. We saw a series of gracious and symbolic gestures during those visits, all aimed at furthering peace and reconciliation.

The growing importance of cross-Border co-operation is a matter close to my heart as Ireland's first ever Minister of State with responsibility for North-South co-operation. This progress has required and will continue to require sustained co-operation, engagement and investment, including from the people in this room today. I wish to pay tribute to those collective efforts over the years. Today, with a functioning partnership Government in Northern Ireland, an agreed way forward on a number of complex and sensitive issues and increased North-South co-operation, we may take for granted things which were aspirational at the time of the first meeting of this body.

Turning to the Stormont House Agreement, I am pleased to have been part of the Irish negotiating team, together with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan. We worked closely with our British counterparts, Theresa Villiers and Andrew Murrison, and of course with the Northern Ireland parties, to play an important role in helping to broker the agreement on 23 December 2014. In time-honoured fashion, it came right down to the wire. The agreement represented the culmination of many months of negotiation and many years of close relationship-building.

The agreement addresses a number of complex issues that had been a significant source of political deadlock and a source of frustration for the wider public. It lays a firm foundation for Northern Ireland, its politicians and its people to look outward and to move forward together. It comprehensively covers a broad range of political, economic and social issues. In

particular, it sets out a plan for financial and welfare reform; proposes a way forward on flags, identity, culture and tradition through the establishment of a commission; envisages the devolution of responsibility for parades to the Northern Ireland Assembly, with proposals on parading to be brought to the Executive by June 2015; establishes a programme of institutional reform at Stormont; and makes progress with a number of outstanding aspects of the Good Friday and St Andrews agreements. Significantly, the agreement establishes a new comprehensive framework for dealing with the legacy of the past. This includes a new historical investigations unit, an independent commission for information retrieval and an oral history archive.

In the months ahead, the work of the two Governments and the Northern Ireland parties will focus on the effective and expeditious implementation of the Stormont House Agreement, which is likely to be as challenging as its negotiation was. Important steps have already been taken in this regard. Under the terms of the agreement, both Governments will convene quarterly implementation and review meetings and publish six-monthly progress reports. The first of these implementation and review meetings took place on 30 January, at which a detailed implementation timeline was agreed. It was clear from that meeting that all stakeholders are taking seriously their responsibilities to see the full potential of the agreement realised.

The Irish Government has already fulfilled its commitment to allocate €5 million to the International Fund for Ireland to assist with its important reconciliation work North and South. In line with relevant provisions of the agreement, important work in the North-South space is taking place. I will return to that shortly. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, the Government is conscious of its responsibilities to all the people on this island. In the months ahead, we will continue to advance political progress and play our part in the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement.

Peace and reconciliation is a collective investment with a collective return. One important way this manifests itself is in North-South co-operation on a range of policy areas. The Government's commitment to North-South and all-island economic co-operation remains a priority. My role as Minister of State with responsibility for North-South co-operation is tangible evidence of the importance the Government attaches to seeing progress in this area.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly for its recent report on cross-Border police co-operation and illicit trade. This very welcome report

recognises the good North-South work which is being done in this area. I also welcome the decision by the Northern Ireland Assembly to allow the remit of the UK National Crime Agency to be extended fully to Northern Ireland. An Garda Síochána already enjoys effective co-operation with the NCA. This extension in the remit of the NCA should facilitate increased co-operation.

I am particularly pleased that the Stormont House Agreement included some significant decisions in the North-South space. The agreement includes the provision that new sectoral priorities for North-South co-operation will be the subject of a report to the North-South Ministerial Council before the end of this month. I look forward to that meeting and to ensuring opportunities for mutual economic benefit are to the fore in any discussion of new priorities.

Practical work is being taken forward in many other areas, all of which are benefitting communities and economies on both sides of the Border. In the area of transport, there is ongoing co-operation in developing strategic road and sustainable transport networks on the island. Opportunities are being explored to pursue EU funding for the development of cross-Border greenways. We have reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the A5 road project, which will benefit the north-west region.

Tourism Ireland continues to do an excellent job in encouraging international visitors to come to this island. Its work has resulted in the creation of more jobs and the strengthening of our economies. We will look to build further on last year's record growth in 2015, when the tourism sector on the island will look to benefit from the recently launched British-Irish visa scheme.

Many citizens of this island will flock across the Irish Sea later this year to attend the Rugby World Cup in England and Wales. We wish the organisers every success with hosting the event. We hope to welcome a return visit to these shores in 2023. The support of the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive for the IRFU's bid for the 2023 Rugby World Cup presents a remarkable opportunity to showcase what this island can offer. It would be wonderful to display such an example of North-South co-operation to the audience of the world's fourth largest sporting event. As a proud Munster man, I am sure the Members of the Assembly will forgive me for being quite parochial. Although we wish the England team the best at the weekend, I have to say we will definitely put it up to them. It should be a good sporting contest.

Job creation and exports are crucial to both economies on this island. InterTradeIreland, which is continuing to support and grow cross-Border business, is having a significant impact in terms of building the capability of small and medium sized enterprises in both jurisdictions. The most recent trade statistics show that the cross-Border economy is showing significant growth. Cross-Border trade in 2013 was worth over €3 billion, which marked an increase of over 7% on the 2012 figure. InterTradeIreland also chairs the all-island Horizon 2020 steering group of partner agencies and departments North and South. This group is a manifestation of tangible North-South co-operation, as we aim to maximise our drawdown of funds from the €80 billion EU research and innovation fund. The group has set itself an ambitious target of €175 million for specific North-South projects by 2020.

I must profess to having a personal interest in this matter, having been a member of the negotiating team that negotiated an €80 billion package of measures during the Irish Presidency of the EU. When we launched that programme from Ireland's perspective, we specifically stipulated that it would have a strong North-South emphasis. We strongly believe the leveraging effect of having North-South collaboration in this space will ensure that new money will come in to the island, both North and South, to tackle the great societal challenges of our times, as stipulated under the Horizon 2020 programme. We look forward to meeting those challenges and targets.

To date, 70% of Northern Ireland's Horizon 2020 drawdown has been from North-South collaborative projects. A significant percentage of our drawdown can also be associated with cross-Border partnerships, which shows that co-operation is vital to us all. Involvement in such projects is essential for building research capacity on the island, creating jobs and opportunities and ensuring we become world leaders in innovation. As we speak the same language and we are geographically close, it makes sense for us to collaborate, especially when the success rate of North-South applications is higher than the EU average.

In the field of the environment, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency continue to work together to identify emerging research needs and strategic planning of research funding programmes. Education is another sector of great promise. Among the joint work being undertaken by the two education departments on the island is the Middletown Centre for Autism, which seeks to provide the best possible educational outcomes for children and young people with autism.

The potential for co-operation between and across these islands is bounded only by our desire to pursue it. Increased North-South co-operation and the recent achievement of the Stormont House Agreement are two of the most significant examples of this. Unlocking this potential further will require the sustained engagement of political leaders North and South, east and west. I know I speak for my senior colleague in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade when I say we look forward to taking the work forward and engaging with Members of the Assembly on their views on these important topics. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much indeed, Minister of State. It is now my pleasure to invite Members to make comments or ask questions. I will ask the Minister of State to sum up at the end. Who would like to begin? I have to say this silence is very unusual.

11.45 am.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, particularly for his reference to Committee A's report on police co-operation and illicit trade. The committee looks forward to following up on the report with the Minister of State. His colleague was in touch with us this morning through his personal assistant. I would like a meeting with the Minister of State as much as I would like one with his colleague because the Minister of State is dealing specifically with North-South co-operation, as he pointed out. We know that there is excellent co-operation at every level between the respective police forces in Dublin and Belfast. At operational level, there is excellent co-operation between, for example, Dundalk and Newry or Crossmaglen. Viscount Bridgeman, Senator Walsh and I experienced that in the recent past. We learned that these people are able to ring one another up and share intelligence. The intelligence is very good and is improving all the time. Despite all of that, much more can be done. We have seen the drawbacks and the pitfalls and we have reported on them. We would be failing in our duty if we did not follow through. I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, and assure him that we look forward to following through with him.

Senator Cáit Keane: I congratulate the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, on his appointment as the first ever Minister of State in this role. It was fantastic to listen to him there. His great appointment outlines the importance we donate towards North-South co-operation. I thank him for his remarks.

As someone who often works to try to get North-South co-operation, for example with regard to social history on behalf of historical groups, I think it would be a good idea to draw together all the different funding organisations in areas like education, health, history and social and community relations. Such a system might be in place already, but I have not found it. I suggest it would be helpful if a social history group, for example, knew what line to take on the sourcing graph. An awful lot of co-operation is taking place on the ground, some of it led by politicians and some of it led by voluntary community groups and organisations in places like Termonfeckin. Perhaps something like that could be drawn together to show all the groups where they can source funding.

I would like to refer to a little spot of bother that resulted from the availability of funds under different headings. One might apply for funding under a specific heading, but that does not mean one is that particular person – one merely comes in under a leg of it. I think that is what we were trying to do when we were looking at the ethnic minority funding. It would be good to have this particular funding drawn together.

Mr Sammy Douglas MLA: I thank the Minister of State for his address today and for his involvement with the Stormont House Agreement. He will be aware that during those discussions, the whole notion of the legacy of the past, which has been a major difficulty for many of us for many years, was raised again. It is planned that a protest by Mr William Frazer, who is one of those victims, will take place in Dublin in the coming weeks. I think his father and uncle were murdered during the conflict in Northern Ireland. He is hoping to bring 200 people to Dublin to highlight what he considers to be the Irish Government's lack of co-operation into the inquest. Could the Minister of State comment on that? Could he look at ways in which we could speed up that co-operation so we do not have another march in Dublin? I know there was violence at the previous march a couple of years ago.

Mr Dinny McGinley TD: I compliment the Minister of State on his presentation and his account of all the areas of co-operation between North and South. Such co-operation was

non-existent for many years, so it is great that so many initiatives have been taking place for the last 20 years. The Minister of State mentioned the Government's continued support for the International Fund for Ireland. Perhaps people are not aware of the excellent work that is being carried out by that fund since it was established in the late 1990s. The Border counties, particularly my own county of Donegal, have benefitted greatly from the expenditure and the projects that have been supported by the fund along the Border.

The Minister of State mentioned the commemoration of the Battle of the Somme. During my term as Minister of State, it was a great privilege to be at the Somme on three occasions – in 2012, 2013 and 2014 – along with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Westminster Parliament to lay wreaths there and commemorate all the people who perished there, including 50,000 Irishmen. Little things like listening to one another and participating in one another's cultural functions mean a lot. I refer to events like Robbie Burns night in Belfast and similar events down here.

We all knew Reverend Paisley, who is no longer with us, in different ways down through the years. As I was telling Sammy Douglas last night, I had an excellent night with Reverend Paisley here in Dublin when he and Baroness Paisley spent a few nights in the Government guesthouse in Farmleigh as a guest of the Government. I was surprised that he knew so much about my own constituency. He even knew about Tory Island. He asked me about Fr. Ó Peicín, who was the parish priest of Tory Island for many years. He told me he prayed for Fr. Ó Peicín when he was on his deathbed. I do not know whether that was good or bad. I do not know whether he prayed for his salvation. There was a great rapport between Fr. Ó Peicín, who was a Jesuit priest, and Reverend Paisley, who had his own church. I think they were probably singing from the same hymn sheet, or from the same book if I can put it that way.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly is continuing to bring people together. When I was at the Somme, there were many people from Ulster there with their bands, sashes and everything else. I was always able to tell them that I am an Ulster man as well. I also told them - I suppose Barry McElduff will not like to hear this – that I am the only TD in Dáil Éireann who holds some of his branch's annual general meetings in the Orange Hall in Ballintra. We get on so very well. It is all about getting to know one another and engaging in co-operation. It is great that the Government is continuing that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Lord Empey.

Lord Empey: During his address, the Minister of State referred to the European research and development funding. He will be aware that the outgoing Commissioner, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, played a very big part in dealing with that particular fund, which is a colossal sum of money. I just get the impression – perhaps the Minister of State could confirm this – that Government and private sector bodies throughout these islands have been under-performing in terms of getting access to that money. This has the potential to create the seedcorn for the jobs of the future, which will pay for the public services that we all want. What can the Minister of State suggest in practical terms to accelerate this process? It seems to me that there is a lack of understanding within the private sector of the potential that exists. What can Governments do to put out that information, so that people can actually grasp it? I do not know of any other source of funding on such a scale. We all know that research and development is a very expensive business, but it has huge potential. I would appreciate a response from the Minister of State.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I call Barry McElduff.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA: I would like to ask the Minister of State a couple of specific questions. First, can he give me an assurance that the Irish Government is continuing to pursue an independent investigation into the murder of Pat Finucane, the human rights solicitor, in Belfast? Second, has there been any discussion in structural terms about future areas of North-South co-operation that might actually be strengthened? I refer to a range of issues. Perhaps the Minister of State, coming out of the Stormont House Agreement, can make some predictions with regard to growth areas or areas of co-operation within North-South bodies.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you. I call Senator Imelda Henry.

Senator Imelda Henry: I thank the Minister of State for coming here today. I want to raise the sharing of services across the Border. My colleague, Deputy Dinny McGinley, will share my view that we are lacking in some services in the north-west. There are plans to build a state-of-the-art radiotherapy centre across the Border. Along with my colleagues on the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children, I attended a joint meeting with the Northern Ireland Assembly health committee in Stormont two weeks ago. I feel that progress in this area is very slow. It is very important for people living in counties Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal that we work together on the sharing of services both South and North.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I will bring the Minister of State in at this point, if that is okay. If anybody else wishes to come in a little later, we will try to accommodate them.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: I will endeavour to answer the questions as comprehensively as possible. If I do not, Members should not hesitate to come back at me.

I will begin by responding to the point made by Senator Henry about shared services. Within the ministerial silos that exist, a natural discussion takes place within a format that is adopted between Ministers both North and South. Radiotherapy services are being provided at Altnagelvin Hospital, to take a concrete example. Perhaps that offers a good test bed of where we can deepen the collaborations North and South, or on a regional basis.

While we all have our own political philosophies and outlooks, we now live in a world where borders are not recognised in certain circumstances. I refer, for example, to the provision of health services to citizens both North and South. It might sound like a cliché to say health does not recognise borders, but I think there is massive scope within the specific sectoral meetings in the health area. If specific proposals come forward through those formats, as between Ministers both North and South, I think we can make progress. It is mutually beneficial to people on both sides of the island. That is why I would love to hear about any concrete examples that exist.

As a former Minister of State with responsibility for research and innovation, the issue of Horizon 2020 is very close to my heart. As I alluded to earlier, when Horizon 2020 was

launched, we were very clear about our vision for it. The Horizon 2020 model is based on the fact that when countries collaborate – when there is inter-state collaboration – there is a greater opportunity to leverage the possibility of getting access to the not-insignificant pot of funding. That is why we invited InterTradeIreland to the launch of our own Horizon 2020 programme.

As a precursor to that, we changed the legislation governing Science Foundation Ireland so that people from the northern part of the island could potentially apply for funding under Science Foundation Ireland as well. We sought to ensure we were talking about the grand societal challenges of our time – things like smart grids, smart cities, food for health, food innovation, big data, data analytics, information and communications technology and transport. It stands to reason that there would be a deepening of the collaboration on this island in these big thematic areas. We put together a €300 million fund, €200 million of which came from the State architecture through Science Foundation Ireland, with the assistance of Enterprise Ireland and other agencies, and the other €100 million of which came from industry. It is either €100 million in direct cash or in in-kind investment on those thematic areas.

12.00 noon.

Now we are in the process of setting up centres. We have set up some of them. In my own region of Cork, there is a marine or maritime renewable energy cluster that involves foreign direct investment, IDA Ireland-supported companies or indigenous companies. There is forced collaboration between research institutions. There is collaboration between, for example, the Marine Institute in Galway, University College Cork, Cork Institute of Technology, University College Dublin and Trinity College. At a time when we may have a tendency from an academic point of view to think within our own silos, we are forcing people out of the silos to collaborate on great areas. That allows them to leverage further opportunities at Horizon 2020.

If I was offering suggestions on how to ensure industry can take up the cudgel in that regard, I would say we need to find a mechanism whereby industry can approach academia and say “we have a challenge, we need your assistance”. We need to ensure those challenges are met through collaboration. That is really where I think the rubber hits the road in relation to job creation. I think we have a good model here. I would not say it is nascent, as it has been there for the last two years or so. The Cork maritime energy cluster that I have mentioned

has already leveraged approximately €4 million from Horizon 2020 funding. It is already gaining in terms of inward investment. That can only serve to benefit industry downstream.

In relation to parades, I think both Governments are very committed to dealing with the legacy of the past. In broad terms, we have given a commitment that the Irish Government will legislate in any way, shape or form to meet its obligations in relation to the Stormont House Agreement. I do not want to skirt around the issue of specific parades except to say that the regulation of any parade on this part of the island will be a matter for the Garda Síochána. That includes the specific instance which has been mentioned.

Senator Keane spoke about social history. I think the oral archive proposal has the potential to act as a model for the type of work she was talking about. She asked about specific organisations that fund social history-type projects. While I understand the point about diverse pockets of funding - sometimes there is a regulation around that – I believe this small island should adopt a collaborative model so that people can collaborate within grand thematic areas. I take the point she was making about the idea of a stem from which everything flows. I think the oral history archive proposed under the ambit of the Stormont House Agreement can become a really excellent model for the type of social and personal histories to which people will want to contribute. I would be quite ambitious in that regard. I should say, as we are talking about reconciliation, that I believe we have some of the best academics in the world on this island. The robust academic institutions we have both North and South offer a wonderful model. We can tune into excellent people in those institutions to make sure these models work effectively.

Deputy McGinley spoke about the north-west. We will all be aware of the piece of work that is in play there at the moment. If we are talking about regional growth specifically in relation to the north-west, I should mention that when I recently attended a dinner at the Derry-Londonderry Chamber of Commerce, one of the principal people in Seagate, which is a big employer in that region, spoke about the need for investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. I think both sides of the island will depend on STEM graduates for future jobs growth, no matter where we are. I think there is a particular emphasis on the STEM area in the north-west region. It is up to the Executive and both Governments to try to support those initiatives in every way we can. I think there are massive areas of opportunity there.

I recently attended a tutorial in Derry that was organised by FabLab, which is involved in 3D manufacturing. They bring artists in from the community. They have developed a model there. They are at the early stages of recognition of the potential of 3D manufacturing. They have already developed a wonderful hub there. They are now trying to create spokes throughout the island of Ireland. If we can support initiatives like that, it will inculcate within students, particularly at post-primary level, the idea that STEM education is going to be a major way forward in terms of creating the cadre of entrepreneurs and technologists that we will need, encouraging foreign direct investment and creating indigenous jobs in indigenous companies. That is not something that is going to happen overnight, but it is something that we are putting a particular emphasis on.

As I also have responsibility for official development assistance, or overseas development aid, I must congratulate the ladies from Derry – forgive me if I do not recall the name of their school – who won a prize for a project on Irish aid which involved the development of a model around irrigation. We really have to take account of the fact that within our educational landscape both North and South, there are really excellent students coming up to the fore. We need to support them because they are going to be the future entrepreneurs. We need to make sure that Government policies North and South, east and west, support those initiatives in every way. These people are going to be the beneficiaries of Horizon 2020 and other such programmes down the line.

The Irish Government continues to raise the issue of Pat Finucane. It was raised by the Minister, Deputy Charlie Flanagan, at his most recent meeting. I absolutely assure the Assembly that we continue to raise that issue regularly and assiduously.

The Lord Dubs: I wonder if I might come back. I thank the Minister of State very much indeed for such a tour de force. I would like to ask two specific questions about dealing with the past. Will the Finucane case, which was raised by Barry McElduff, come within the scheme as outlined in Haass and taken further in the Stormont House Agreement? Will Ballymurphy come under the process of the Stormont House Agreement as well? I could not get an answer to that out of the British Government, so I am hoping to get one from the Minister of State.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Are there any other comments or contributions?

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: Very briefly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): By all means.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: The Irish Government has consistently raised these issues with our British counterparts and we will continue to do so.

The Lord Dubs: Is it not the case that the agreement takes that on board as an inevitability without the Irish Government having to raise it with the British Government? In other words, should it not be automatic under the Haass proposals, taken further by the Stormont House Agreement, that the Finucane and Ballymurphy cases should inevitably be looked at?

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: Yes.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Okay. Thank you.

Mr Seán Crowe TD: I would like to raise the whole question of co-operation on the island of Ireland. We are a small island. If we are genuine about building peace, I think we need to have co-operation. It does not make sense that we have the duplication of services that the Minister of State mentioned in relation to health. If I have cancer and I am looking for treatment, I want the best of treatment. Perhaps we can merge the services in a situation like that. It does not matter to the family of a child who has a disability or an impairment where the service is provided as long as the child gets the best return from it. This applies to areas like education and health. The whole area of co-operation in sport was mentioned earlier. If we are going to get real peace on this island, we need to bring people together, to deal with the past. People are mentioning different cases. Last week, I met the families of victims of

the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in this building. They spoke about the difficulties they have encountered in their case because of the failure of the British Government to co-operate by supplying information that may be relevant to that case. They mentioned the possible release of information in relation to members of the Glenanne gang who are believed to have been involved in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

I genuinely see the William Frazer thing as a difficulty for North-South co-operation. I would have a view. I was one of the people who was outspoken in supporting Love Ulster. I said we should let them come down and take part and so on. We saw what happened there. I do not think that helped North-South co-operation. I would have some trepidation in relation to that particular march. I would be of the view that people should be able to protest anywhere on the island of Ireland if they want to genuinely raise matters in relation to their loved ones.

The big frustration for myself and for many people who feel very strongly about the whole peace process is the slowness of change in the area of North-South co-operation. I would like to ask the Minister of State about that. When I spoke to one Minister about this, he mentioned the dead hand that sometimes comes into the thing. Ministers might feel very strongly about a particular project moving ahead, but it does not happen for some reason. There can be all sorts of reasons.

The Minister of State said the Governments are now talking about meeting to discuss implementation and targets on a six-monthly basis. I think that is a hugely positive step forward. We need a plan in the first instance, then we need to move from A to B on that plan, and hopefully there will then eventually be an accumulation in that regard. North-South co-operation is a broad area that covers many issues. We need to spread that work as widely as possible. It is about pulling all those strands together. I wish the Minister of State well with his work.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much. I will bring the Minister of State in to close this session and make any concluding remarks he might wish to make.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: I fully appreciate that the terms of an independent public inquiry into the Pat Finucane case, for example, were agreed at Weston Park. This is the 26th anniversary

of the death of Pat Finucane, and we are still talking about it in these Assemblies. It does not take from the commitment of the Irish Government to continue to press the case with successive UK Governments. We are strongly committed to that because it is part of pre-existing agreements, as Lord Dubs said.

I do not know if a tendency of mine is a generational thing. We are all proud of our heritage and of our political perspectives. Deputy Crowe spoke about collaboration on both sides of the island. Some people, particularly younger people, are not as hung up about geography as other generations are. That is why I think it makes absolute sense for collaboration on things like health, education, science, research and innovation, where the potential exists for access or leveraging opportunities to funding pots. I do not think it diminishes in any way anybody's own individual identity. I absolutely agree with the Deputy.

12.15 pm.

As Barry McElduff said when speaking about other areas of co-operation, we need to seek out as many areas of co-operation as possible and see what we can pull out of that. I think we are instinctively an innovative people. The global indices will clearly show that. We need to try to find new opportunities for collaboration. Ultimately, it delivers for society and for the economy, and that benefits everybody on the island. I know it sounds a little bit verbose for me to say that, but I already see obvious areas for closer co-operation. We need to keep working on such areas.

At the same time, we need to have reporting mechanisms under the Stormont House Agreement. We need to continue to kick the tyres on previous agreements and make there is no slippage. If these are agreements that involve the British and Irish Governments and the parties within the Northern Assembly, then the onus is on us, particularly from a governmental perspective, to make sure we continue to monitor those agreements and make them work, especially along the sectoral lines that have been discussed here. I thank the Co-Chairmen for this opportunity.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I thank the Minister of State very much indeed for addressing us and for answering so many questions. I was going to wrap it up there, but I will allow Senator Walsh to raise a final question.

Senator Jim Walsh: Thank you, Co-Chairman. I think we still have a few minutes. I was following it on the monitor. Undoubtedly, there has been a lot of progress made, but I think there is a tendency to paper over the cracks as well. I do not think we should do that because it is not in the interests of the people who elect us and to whom we are responsible.

I concur with everything Deputy Crowe has said about the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. The British Government and the British authorities have failed to come clean with regard to the information they have about the collusion that led to those atrocities in this part of the island. Equally, there are atrocities in the North that need to be flushed out because the victims of those crimes there have not been fully satisfied. I refer in particular to the Omagh situation.

I was one of the Members of this Oireachtas who, approximately ten years ago, listened to the victims of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings and took evidence from a variety of people, including the authorities, over a period of two or three years. As Mr Justice Barron, who headed up the inquiry, said at the time, it was very clear that there was a complete failure on the part of the British authorities to co-operate and make information available. If this Assembly is sincere about ensuring relations are based on a solid foundation going forward, we should collectively seek to ensure that is rectified.

I do not accept that MI5 should have a veto, as was conveyed to a former Taoiseach by a former British Prime Minister. That simply is not good enough. I ask for this to be made a priority. These people have waited 40 years for some sort of closure and justice. The inquiry reports that were compiled by an all-party group in the Oireachtas clearly stated that this State had failed the victims. I do not see any commitment on the part of this Government, and indeed some previous Governments, although not all of them, to actually get to the bottom of this. I think that is a responsibility.

In the same way, I would regret the failure of the British and Irish Governments to have been engaged over the last number of years. This has allowed a little bit of a void to develop, which in turn has led to many of the protests we have seen in the North, which have been an affliction on Loyalist communities, in particular, as well as Republican communities. I do not think that is particularly good enough.

I want to refer specifically to the savage murder of Paul Quinn, a young boy who was brutally beaten to death in south Armagh. As I mentioned yesterday, there is widespread suspicion as to at least some of the perpetrators who were involved in that. They have not been brought to

justice. That only encourages them to continue to be involved in criminality. That is unacceptable.

I am actually surprised with the response we got from yesterday's report. I have been contacted by people from south Armagh - I think others in this House have been contacted as well - who want to say that even though they feel abandoned by the authorities here and elsewhere, they are grateful that some people, at least, are showing a degree of courage and empathy with them at last. The report that Senator Coghlan put before the House yesterday is a case in point. Of course that is valueless if it is not pursued.

I will finish on this. I understand from somebody who is related to a nurse in the hospital to which Paul Quinn was brought, and who was there during the Troubles, that the beating he took actually had him in a condition - he was dead, obviously - which was akin to the worst victims of bombings they had seen during the Troubles. That simply is not good enough. The authorities have an obligation to stand by innocent law-abiding civilians and not be putting political imperatives before that. Our first responsibility is the security of the people we represent.

Baroness Harris: Thank you, Co-Chair. I hope the seriousness with which we have listened to some of the representations today will certainly be taken to heart. On a lighter note, I would like to welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Sherlock, who will be coming to celebrate St Patrick's day with us in Westminster on 10 March. He may not know this. *[Laughter.]* I have just been told that he will be the Irish representative that day.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: Where are my officials when I need them?

Baroness Harris: I look forward very much to welcoming him to our St Patrick's day celebrations in the Palace of Westminster, and I know my colleagues do too.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Hear, hear. There is obviously no British Minister to respond to Senator Walsh's comments. Would the Minister of State like to comment briefly? Then we will have to wind this session up.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: Thank you. I do not want to embarrass myself, but I am unaware at this point in time of what Baroness Harris has said. If that is the case, I look forward to it.

Senator Mary Moran: I am sure you will get plenty of people to go with you. I will volunteer gratefully, no problem.

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: I thank Baroness Harris for the warmth of her remarks. Go raibh maith agat.

I will respond to Senator Walsh by referring specifically to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. I take the points he has made in relation to a murder. Many of share his views in relation to how that poor man was treated. Anybody who has any shred of humanity will see that he has not received natural justice. I think we would all share that, regardless of our creed, if you will.

The matter of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings was raised by the Irish Government on 15 January last. The Minister, Deputy Flanagan, raised it directly with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I acknowledge that there have been two all-party motions in the Dáil, one in 2008 and one in 2011. Perhaps the Senator might call us naïve, but we hope that the Stormont House Agreement and the creation of the independent commission on information retrieval - that process, to which we are committed, will require legislation when the time comes - may provide some sort of an avenue in relation to these matters also. I think there needs to be a mechanism. Perhaps the independent commission on information retrieval provides some mechanism where we can try to make progress on many of these outstanding issues. I am optimistic by nature. I would be hopeful that we could make some progress on some of the issues that have been articulated by Senator Walsh.

Senator Jim Walsh: I think the Minister of State. Can I ask both Co-Chairs to discuss this issue at their steering committee? I know it is challenging. Some people here will find it politically challenging. On the other hand, if the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly speaks with one voice on an issue like this, it sends a powerful message. As has been said, an all-party motion was agreed in the Dáil on two occasions. All parties, speaking with one

voice in relation to this, called on the British Parliament to look at this. I tried to get some MPs in Britain to become actively involved in this. Some of them have shown some interest. I think that if this Assembly were to lend its support, that would be a powerful assistance to those in the House of Commons who might like to see that justice was done in this case.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): I mentioned earlier the proposals that may make this body even more dynamic, important and relevant than it already is. One of the proposals I am putting forward involves reporting back to Ministers and making the points to Ministers following each plenary session. Even if we are not of one voice on everything, the issues can still be raised. Thank you very much for raising those. It just remains for me to thank the Minister of State very much indeed for coming here today, making a speech and taking so many questions which were not the easiest ones to answer, I am sure. Minister of State, we wish you well with your work. I am sure we will meet again very soon. Thank you very much indeed. *[Applause.]*

Mr Sean Sherlock TD: Thank you, Co-Chairman.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD): It has been a long 48 hours since we met on Sunday. Our business is now concluded. On behalf of you all, I would like to thank all our speakers, the secretariat, the staff at Croke Park, the Office of Public Works and all those who helped to make the 50th plenary anniversary such a successful event. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our Westminster Members who are facing elections the best of luck. I think I can say that we hope to see them at our next BIPA plenary.

I would like to deal with a few issues. I thank the Taoiseach for coming to address us yesterday. I thank those involved in committees A, B, C and D for the work they have done. I thank the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport for coming in as well. I think our visit to the Garden of Remembrance was poignant and historic. We were very fortunate to hear from the extremely competent people who spoke at Croke Park on behalf of the various associations - the FAI, the IRFU, the IFA and the GAA. I think that was very engaging.

I will conclude by mentioning one thing I would like to see coming out of this session. I am delighted that the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has put its weight behind the island of Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. I hope to see you next year. Once again, I thank my Co-Chair for the work he has done. I will hand over to him.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Just in closing I would like to thank Frank and his team, as indeed I did last night. I would like to repeat those thanks for putting on what I think has been an excellent plenary session. It has been very interesting indeed, linking sport in a positive way to how it might impact on the political situation in bringing people together. It has been an enormously informative, enjoyable and interesting plenary. Thank you, Frank, and all your team. I also thank the Cathaoirleach of the Seanad - I had to practice that word – for allowing us to use this beautiful Chamber, which I think really lends itself to very good discussion.

I thank my team – Robin, Amanda and Sir Michael – for everything they have done to help us. We are going to hold the next plenary in Cheltenham in November. If you would like to come to Cheltenham in two weeks' time for the festival, you will be very welcome. Just let me know.

I want to mention two Members particularly. Paul Murphy MP, who cannot be here today, is a former Co-Chairman and a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Wales. He is one of the vice chairmen of the British side. He is retiring at the next election. He has been a huge help to me. I would like to pay tribute to him in his absence and thank him for everything he has done.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): As we have heard, Bob Walter MP is also retiring at the next election. He is the other vice chairman on the British side. He has been a huge help. I would like to thank you, Bob, very much indeed for all the help you have given me and all the work you have done for BIPA over the years. It gives me great pleasure to ask you to move the adjournment.

Mr Robert Walter MP: Thank you very much indeed, both Co-Chairmen. It is a great honour indeed to move the adjournment. As we have just heard, we have had a very successful plenary over the last couple of days. We have heard from Ministers, including the Taoiseach. We have visited the Garden of Remembrance and Croke ark. We have enjoyed the luxury of the Shelbourne Hotel. Most importantly, we have had the contribution of Members of the Assembly.

12.30 pm.

This is the 50th meeting of the Assembly and our 25th anniversary. As Laurence has just said, it is my last meeting. My commitment to this Assembly goes back over many years. I have to say I have no Irish antecedents. I have got no Irish property. I cannot claim any distant Irish relatives. I am always reminded of our former colleague, Peter Brooke. No matter where we were in Ireland, he could always tell the story of some distant relation of his who was the local auctioneer, might have played cricket on the village green or was the Church of Ireland minister. I cannot reflect really on that.

All I can say is that over the years, I have had many Irish friends. I have been very close to a number of incidents in the troubles, including the bombing of the Post Office Tower. I just happened to have a flat which was virtually in the same street. That was way back in 1971. One of the pubs targeted in the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings was a pub that I used very regularly as a student. I left the Grand Hotel in Brighton just 30 minutes before the bomb went off there.

The most poignant recollection which always sticks in my memory and really is why I have felt that the dialogue here is so important is that in March 1979, Airey Neave MP was assassinated on the car park entrance of the House of Commons. We had some very dear Irish friends whose children were roughly the same age as our children. My daughter was at tea with these dear friends that day. When I went to pick her up, I was greeted at the door by my friend Annie who said “Bob, today I am ashamed to be Irish”. I thought I wanted to write that nobody should have to be ashamed to be Irish because this really needed to be solved, not by violence, bombs and bullets but by dialogue.

When Michael Mates and Peter Temple-Morris asked me to join this Assembly back in 1997 – 18 years ago – I jumped at the opportunity. I have thoroughly enjoyed it. Much has changed. The Good Friday Agreement, the composition of this body, which is now the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the visit of Her Majesty The Queen, the visit of

President Higgins to London last year, our joint commemoration of the sacrifices of the First World War. It has been a great pleasure and a great honour to be part of this body. I wish you well. I wish you success in the future. I shall miss you. *[Applause.]*

Thank you very much. I formally move the adjournment.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP): Thank you very much, Bob. I now declare the 50th plenary session of the Assembly closed. We will next meet in plenary session in Cheltenham in November. The plenary session now stands adjourned. Lunch will be served in the Members' restaurant. Thank you all very much for your attendance.

Adjourned at 12.34 pm.