

Monday 4 July 2016

The Assembly met at 9.20 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. May I bring the Assembly to order, please? It gives me enormous pleasure to open the fifty-second plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA). The Assembly is now in public session. First, I remind all present to turn off mobile phones and other devices, please, or at least put them on silent. Secondly, I advise Members that, as normal, the audio recording of the proceedings of today and tomorrow's sessions are being web streamed on the BIPA website, www.britishirish.org. Thirdly, I ask Members, when invited to contribute from the Floor, to stand up and clearly state their name and which Parliament they represent. Finally, I remind Members that proceedings of this body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate formally our colleague Kathleen Funchion TD on her appointment as the new Irish Co-Chairperson of the Assembly. I also take this opportunity to express my great appreciation to her predecessor, Senator Frank Feighan, who is with us today. He was a great help to the Assembly over the last few years, and I am sure that the Assembly will join me in wishing him every success in his new role as a senator. Thank you, Frank. *[Applause.]*

NEW MEMBER

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you here today. An up-to-date list of the BIPA membership has been circulated to you all. I have to inform the Assembly that, in accordance with rule 2A, the following associate Member has accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of the session: John Paul Phelan TD.

APOLOGIES

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I present apologies on behalf of my friend and colleague Laurence Robertson MP, who, sadly, cannot join us. He is busy in London as we go through rather historic times in the United Kingdom. In his absence, I will be the Acting Co-Chairperson. There are also apologies from Linda Fabiani, Member of the Scottish Parliament. I now hand over to Kathleen.

MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Go raibh maith agat, Andrew, agus tá fáilte romhaibh go léir go Mullach Íde. I welcome you all to Malahide. I thank Andrew for his kind remarks. I look forward to working with

everyone here in a spirit of cooperation and partnership to make the Assembly even more relevant and topical.

Before we commence proceedings, I would like to refer to a decision taken by the Steering Committee yesterday on foot of a request from Robin Swann MLA. Mr Swann asked that the plenary session hold a minute's silence in recognition of the sacrifice of those who lost their life at the Battle of the Somme. The Committee agreed that this plenary session would hold a minute's silence now to remember all who made sacrifices at the Battle of the Somme, as well as those who made sacrifices during the 1916 Rising, and Jo Cox MP who tragically lost her life so recently.

I ask Members to be upstanding to observe a minute's silence, please.

Members observed one minute's silence

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Go raibh maith agaibh, a chairde go leir. Members will have received a copy of the proposed Programme of Business. In light of the UK referendum on membership of the EU, we have devoted the morning session to this topic. We have a strong panel of speakers over the next day and a half, including a former Senator, an Assembly Member, newly appointed Ministers of State, both Assembly stalwarts, eminent academics and a panel of tourism experts, who, I am sure, will have interesting and stimulating—perhaps challenging—things to say about many of today's pertinent issues. The result of the Brexit referendum is obviously of profound significance and will inform much of our debate. I hand back to the Co-Chair, Andrew Rosindell.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank the Co-Chair for her opening remarks and I thank the Irish Members, once more, for hosting us here today. It is fitting to have a plenary in this beautiful coastal town as we will be discussing tourism opportunities later in the afternoon. The view from the window demonstrates the superior tourism product this country has to offer.

I now move formally to the adoption of the proposed Programme of Business. You should have the revised programme for today in front of you. Can we agree that, please?

Programme of Business agreed.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. I now hand back to Kathleen, who will chair the opening session.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH-IRISH RELATIONS: EU REFERENDUM IN THE UK

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Our first speaker, Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, will now give his opening address. I welcome the Minister back to the Assembly. As many of you will know, he is a former Co-Chair of the body.

The Minister of State for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid (Mr Joe McHugh TD):

Good morning. My compliments to the Co-Chairs for getting the show on the road so punctually. I spent a few years as Co-Chair and I do not think that I ever managed to get things started on time. Well done. I wish you well. I see a few familiar faces and some new ones. It is great to be back during very interesting times. I was speaking to a few of the officials on my way in, whom I will not name. They said that lots of opinions have been flying around over the past week, so no doubt this is a great opportunity for you to discuss the outcome of the very significant event a few days ago.

I congratulate my Dáil colleague, Kathleen Funchion. I wish you very well in your new role. You are in good hands with both sets of officials. I have nothing but good things to say about them; they are extremely professional, and no doubt you will have good support here. Among the esteemed people here, I see Lord Dubs in the driving seat. Good to see you again, Alf. No doubt you will have plenty of experience in this room to keep you on the right course.

I expect that many here, like me, were gripped by the events that unfolded on Friday 24 June.

In this room are colleagues who campaigned in the referendum—not all on the one side, I appreciate—and they have no doubt been sharing experiences of what were an extraordinary few months leading up to polling day and beyond. Although the result of the referendum was not the one that we had hoped for here in Ireland, we respect the outcome. I wish to offer some perspective and reassurance on what the result of the referendum means for the relationship between Britain and Ireland.

9.30 am

First and foremost, Ireland will retain its close relationship and alignment with the United Kingdom and the European Union. Ireland will remain in the eurozone and the European Union, and we will maintain our close political, economic and people-to-people ties with the United Kingdom. I do not need to remind you about the advancement made in that relationship over the past number of years. Whether it was the significant visit by the Queen in 2011 or the significant first ever state visit by an Irish President to the United Kingdom in 2014 by Michael D Higgins, we know that those were not one-off events but building blocks in a very important process in the relationship.

I acknowledge the work of our Parliaments and Assemblies and their Committees in putting forward analysis of the British-Irish dimension to the UK's relationship with the EU. Northern Ireland was, rightly, the most prominent feature of the various reports, along with trading, political, cultural and people-to-people links. I am a TD for a border constituency, and I am joined here by politicians on both sides of the border, including my county

colleague Pat the Cope Gallagher. We are all the more conscious of the serious implications of the UK's referendum decision. The fact is that 56% of those who voted in Northern Ireland did so to remain, from the Nationalist and the Unionist traditions, and they now face their preference being set aside as a result of the overall result across the UK. That raises some profound issues, as we know it also does in Scotland.

It seems that Northern Ireland will find itself outside the European Union and without the support that the EU has provided for the progress made on this island over recent decades. Those are real and genuine concerns, and the Irish Government intend to play their full part in addressing them, with a spirit of determination, responsibility and inclusiveness. One thing is clear to all of us: irrespective of the referendum result, the Good Friday Agreement remains the template for political relationships on this island and between these islands. As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and succeeding agreements, the Irish Government are determined that those agreements' institutions, values and principles will be fully protected.

Work is already under way in response to the referendum outcome, with my colleague Minister Flanagan having met the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister, the Secretary of State and Opposition leaders in Belfast last week. As you will be aware, there is a meeting this morning on North/South matters being chaired by the Taoiseach.

We must work collectively to protect the gains of the past decades and prevent the worst effects of a UK departure from the EU. In particular, as far as I am aware, no one wants to see the reimposition of a hard border on the island. All want to see a continuation of freedom of movement of trade, services and people. I am also conscious that there is a new generation of people born in the 1990s that has no recollection of a hard border, soldiers or customs along the border. You will no doubt be acutely aware, while you go through your deliberations today, that we do not want to go back to the imposition of a hard border.

As Minister of State for the Diaspora, I am very aware of the concerns of the Irish community in Britain since the results of the referendum were announced. Providing them with the assurance that they need and safeguarding their interests will be a priority for me and the Government. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the groups that I met in Camden Town Hall a number of days before the referendum. Conor McGinn participated in that event, and it was refreshing to have that debate and hear the different perspectives. Post the referendum, I had the opportunity to meet many Irish groups in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I see a couple of the parliamentarians whom I met in the Parliament at Holyrood; namely, John Scott and Willie Coffey.

It was great to see you there again, and it was great to see and hear the different perspectives during those days.

Another important aspect of the British-Irish relationship that I do not need to remind you of is our economic trade links. The trade between these islands is worth over €1 billion a week. We must recognise that the interests of Ireland and Britain are very closely aligned and will inform Ireland's position during any negotiations in the future. The Government are committed to the work needed to protect and sustain trade, business, tourism and investment flows in this island as well as with Britain and the European Union. With so much upheaval and uncertainty, so many questions and, as yet, so few answers, it is easy to lose sight of the solid foundations that underpin the relationship between Ireland and the UK.

When I met the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall during their visit to my home county of Donegal this May, I was reminded that these foundations are solid, that they are deep and that they exist because the men and women of these islands are deeply committed to maintaining this close and mutually beneficial relationship. The current situation offers a lot of uncertainty and many challenges but I am confident that the friendships that we have nurtured here in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and elsewhere will help us to maintain these invaluable relationships while we search for solutions that are acceptable to everyone. Institutions such as the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly will have a valuable role to play in nurturing and maintaining these close bonds and opportunities for discourse.

In conclusion, I thank all of you for attending this plenary session. It is a visible sign of your commitment to furthering the discourse and friendship between these islands. I reiterate and re-emphasise—not just as a Donegal politician or as a border politician—that I think that it is paramount, important and critical that there is a focus on the unique situation of our peace process, one that is still very much in train and still very much a process. People still use words like “the fragility of the peace process”. We are still conscious that there are over 85 so-called peace walls in Northern Ireland, and it is important that the gains that have been made are not in any way hampered. It is also important to remind the European Union that it was paramount and was a significant player, and is a significant stakeholder, in that peace process. We have the mechanism of the Good Friday Agreement, which is an international agreement on a North/South basis but which is, equally, a pillar on an east-west basis. I have no doubt that I have confidence in this Assembly to offer perspectives, insights and possible suggestions on the way forward because, for example, there is difference between this referendum and the general election in our own country in the last few months. We had to come up with a solution in 70 days. We tried to do it earlier, but it took us 70 days. This is something on which we do have time. There will be at least two years in which to figure something out. There are plenty of people with ideas, suggestions and potential solutions for finding a common-sense way forward for our unique situation on this island.

We are not looking for an exception; we are looking to build on the progress that has been made, and I acknowledge the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly for the role that it has played since 1990. I know that there are people in this room who have been Members since 1990. I think that I have to mention you again, Alf. I think that you were there from day one, and the purpose and objective of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly back in 1990 was to get people talking. Now that you are talking, keep the talking going. Keep it going, and we will come up with a solution. Go raibh míle, míle maith agaibh arís. Go raibh maith agaibh as an chuireadh, agus ba mhaith liom, ar dtús, comhrádh a dhéanamh libh féin. I am looking forward to the conversation between you, and I am absolutely delighted and privileged to be speaking here in front of you today. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Go raibh maith agat, Minister. Thanks very much for addressing us here today and for the update. It was comprehensive and insightful. I am going to pass back to Andrew, who is going to chair the debate.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We are now going to have a debate about Britain's relationship with Ireland in the context of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. Will the Minister be staying to respond to any comments?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

Yes, I can stay for half an hour.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK, the Minister is going to stay for half an hour. We will move into a general debate on the whole issue. The debate will go on until noon, so we have almost the whole of the morning to discuss these issues. Everyone, hopefully, will get the chance to express their views.

I call on Members to make contributions on the motion that the Assembly will consider the impact on British/Irish relations of the UK referendum result on EU membership. I ask Members to keep their contributions as succinct as possible to ensure that all those who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so. On such a significant issue, it is important that we hear a wide range of views.

Who would like to start? I think Senator Feighan is first.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am delighted to be here, and I wish you and Kathleen—Kathleen, you are very welcome—every success in the coming few years. Joe, you are welcome back as well. You have done great work.

We can readily acknowledge that the relationship between Britain and Ireland has never been stronger politically, socially, culturally and economically. We are determined to protect that strong relationship, but the Brexit vote has caused a lot of concern in this country and on the island of Ireland. It has also caused huge uncertainty in Scotland, Europe, England and Wales. We do not know what will happen in the UK if the UK formally exits from the EU, a process that will take years.

I was in the UK in early March. I addressed the Irish for Europe meeting in the House of Commons. The first thing I said to them about referendums was that we have had one nearly every year since 1990, so we were familiar with referendums but still did not know much about them. I said that, in referendums, the electorate normally do not vote on the question that is put to them. They do not like the Government, and they may have issues such as immigration. Referendums are interesting, for want of a word, but they can be difficult as well.

We are where we are. As one fellow said years ago when a tourist travelling around Ireland asked for directions, "Well, I wouldn't start from here". We are in a very difficult situation and we have to make it better. As Joe rightly said, trade links with the UK are vital. There are suggestions that the Taoiseach is setting up and developing an all-Ireland forum to consider the challenges. That is being discussed at the North South Ministerial Council today. I very much welcome that because we have to look at this as well on an all-Ireland basis.

We have to look at a lot of issues. A lot of people here will be coming up with their own views on the best way forward. Last week, I led the debate in the Seanad about the merits of Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth. I think that this could be an interesting view because 20 million Irish-born people live in the Commonwealth.

With 2.2 billion people and trade links, it is now time to debate that. We are a Republic, we are a democracy and we are very confident. Now is the time to look at the merits of increasing those trade, cultural and historical links with our near neighbour. That could be of interest.

9.45 am

There is a lot at stake and we have to look at everything to ensure that we maintain those strong links and the links that have been built up since 1990. The Taoiseach told me that he was at the first meeting of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in 1990 and that it was a much different place than it is today. That is because of the great work that has been done by politicians from all sides.

In the Commonwealth, there are hundreds of intergovernmental agencies and many cultural, historical and business groups. I think that being in the Commonwealth could help the situation we are in today. Some people will disagree and some will have other views and that is for discussion here today. I look forward to the debate.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Frank, for those comments. We now have others who would like to contribute.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

Go raibh maith agat. I am very pleased to get the chance to put my view and that of Sinn Féin on the record. The first thing that I would say—I will say it fairly strongly—is that just because England and Wales trump the North of Ireland and Scotland in voting weight does not mean that this is a done deal; it does not mean that it is a done deal at all. I call for all Governments and parties around the table to respect the remain vote in the North of Ireland.

I want to note early in the debate that the majority of people in the North, including many Unionists, voted to remain, and it would be wrong to drag us out of the EU against our will. In my constituency of West Tyrone, 66.8% of the people voted to remain. I agree with Nicola Sturgeon who said that it would be democratically unacceptable for Scotland to be pulled out of the EU against its will. I say the same thing about the people in the North.

It is good to see Minister Joe McHugh here. He mentioned that day, Friday 24 June. I arrived in Omagh first thing that morning for a meeting with Mencap, which, you might say, is the voice of learning disability. On the way to that meeting, on foot from the town car park, lots of people who were going to work in their cars and vans shouted out at me about how shocked they were. They were listening to Radio Ulster and Morning Ireland and the word was shock. When I met the representatives of Mencap, the leader of Mencap in Omagh, when talking about the disability rights agenda, said that, unfortunately, the uphill battle for equality seemed to have got steeper.

The next group I met that morning in a neighbouring unit in the Omagh Community House was the Omagh Ethnic Community Support Group. Polish people had gathered there and they were full of fears, anxiety and uncertainty for the future.

Then, of course, there are the business and trade links. Later that day, I met the representatives of a company with 12 employees and for which Invest NI cannot secure a four-acre site in Omagh to expand. The company's mission now is to relocate to Dublin; that is its full determination. That is OK, and it is the choice in business.

As an MLA for a border county—Strabane is one mile from Lifford—I have to ask whether we will see the re-erection of the Camel's Hump to prevent people moving freely between Lifford and Strabane and Strabane and Lifford. Farmers are up in the air and are full of anxiety about single farm payments and are wondering whether the British Exchequer will cash up and pay the equivalent of the single farm payment.

More recently, I took a group of young people from Omagh to Stormont for work experience. We did a vox pop consultation and every one of them wanted to remain and felt under pressure and ill at ease about the developing situation.

I do not feel bound by the so-called UK vote, because Sinn Féin, as we say on the tin, puts the people of Ireland, North and South, first. To have one part of this country inside the EU and the other outside the EU makes no sense whatsoever, and to have a border in Ireland between a non-member state and an EU member state creates massive problems and, for me, points up the folly of partition.

I will move to a conclusion. I want to say that I believe that the position of the British Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, one of the leaders in the leave campaign, is totally untenable. She has never represented us properly on European or any other issues. Today, the North/South Ministerial Council meets. There is a duty on the Irish Government to convene that all-Ireland forum, and I believe that the Assembly parties, the Oireachtas parties, EU experts and civic society should get around the table. If we have to be inventive and creative, as we were when we devised the Good Friday Agreement, about arrangements, architecture and structures, so be it: we have to be inventive and creative. This is not a done deal, and we do not accept the outcome.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Minister Joe said it all: we basically do not know. We are in an unknown space, in a sense. The important thing is that we do not rush it. The parties in Britain, which will have a new Prime Minister, must keep their finger firmly on the pause button. We have a lot to find out. Hopefully, we will have two years to work on it. There is a lot of work to be done in that time. We know what we want to achieve. We have ties that bind and have bound for a long, long time in our history, and we must not allow a hard border to exist between Dundalk and Derry again. We must protect the free movement of our peoples within Ireland and Britain. A lot of our forebears worked in Britain and so on and we still have a lot of people there, and, thankfully, we have a lot of visitors coming from Britain. We regret the fall in the value of sterling, because that is hindering it slightly and will continue to do so, unfortunately. We must also try very hard to secure trade as we have it. We might not be able to achieve it fully, but we will try to achieve free trade—our own bilateral agreement. There is not much point, with respect, in rehashing the referendum. We have to look forward, not back. We have a lot to secure and I think that, together, we can achieve it. This body can achieve much by coming

out strongly with a recommendation to our respective Governments as to what we believe. I hope that we will get it across.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP:

This is my first time addressing this Assembly, and I am delighted to be here in Malahide. My party voted leave, as I did personally, and a majority of my constituency voted leave, but I want to say at the outset that, in doing so, we were not in any sense motivated by a desire to undermine the relationships that have been developed on this island in recent years. Far from it. We remain absolutely committed to the political institutions that have been created. The First Minister will be at the North South Ministerial Council today. That is the proper forum within which to discuss these matters, as is this forum. I want to echo the comments made by the Irish Co-Chair, Kathleen Funchion, last evening when she made it clear that we have institutions that become even more important now in developing our relationships, not least this British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

Even though we supported leave, our desire was not borne out of any objective to undermine the agreements that have been made or to diminish the relationships on this island.

Let me also be clear that we do not want to see a hard border on the island of Ireland. We need to, with cool heads, find a way of dealing with these issues, be it how we handle people who come to the island—I think there are sensible arrangements that can be developed—or how we continue with a very strong trading relationship. I welcome comments that have been made about the Republic of Ireland giving further consideration to how it might strengthen its ties with the United Kingdom, including through the Commonwealth. We would certainly be very supportive of that.

With the greatest of respect to Barry McElduff, we could spend the next year whistling in the wind and not accepting democratic outcomes. I am sure that Barry would not want me to say that, if there were a poll in Northern Ireland about a different issue, we would not accept the democratic outcome. It was a UK-wide referendum, not a Scottish or Northern Irish referendum. The result will stand. There is no legal basis—Brussels has made this clear—for either Northern Ireland or Scotland remaining in the European Union in the current circumstances. That is the case. We can either have a big discussion about things that have no basis in reality or law, or we can be pragmatic, as Sinn Féin has been in the past and I hope will be with this issue, work through this and find the best way to ensure that the outcome is good for the island of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. I believe that this forum can provide a very important debating chamber for us across these islands to discuss these matters.

In conclusion, we now need cool heads. There is no point in trying to rerun the referendum. It is over. People had the opportunity to put their views. Of course, I respect the fact that a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain. I also respect the fact that a majority in Scotland voted to remain. However, the reality is that, in law, it is the overall result that counts. We have to deal with that and the consequences of it. We need to do so in a realistic fashion.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Jeffrey. Would the Minister like to comment on some of the remarks that have been made?

The Minister of State for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid (Mr Joe McHugh TD):

Thank you, Co-Chair. I will try to be as brief and succinct as possible to allow other people in. I am not going to bind myself to half an hour. It is an important debate, and I am very interested to hear what you have to say.

Senator Feighan talked about the concern in the country and the island of Ireland, the question of a referendum and the question of referenda in our country down the years. I remember a referendum on rights for children, where the country voted yes but my county of Donegal voted no. I remember asking a particular gentleman, "How come you voted no in a children's rights referendum where we're giving enhanced rights to children?" He answered by saying, "The reason why I voted no is because the option of no was on the ballot sheet". He did not vote on the actual referendum. We could have a big debate about the merits and demerits of referenda or a specific referendum, but that is not why you are here today; you are here today to discuss the outcome in what the future will be and what can be done over the next couple of years. However, it is important for Senator Feighan to put that on record. It is probably an aside debate that would be worthwhile.

I am not going to go into the issue of the Commonwealth. Senator Feighan is on public record in the upper House in relation to that. A wide-ranging debate on a number of issues will be the order of the day over the next couple of years.

Barry McElduff said that 66.86% of the people of West Tyrone voted to remain. That was eclipsed by Derry; I think that they were up on 73%. It goes back to the point that a referendum is an overall, but we can look at the reasons why border constituencies such as West Tyrone, Derry and other areas close to the border voted to remain. It represents a fear and concern that you obviously have the opportunity to articulate here today.

That will give merit to the forum that has been advanced today through the NSMC as a possible opportunity to debate those issues.

10.00 am

There is anxiety and uncertainty, and we are moving into the unknown. There are issues for young people, as you mentioned, and issues on both sides of the border for farmers about the price of beef and one thing or another. These are the issues that need to be debated. I am picking them up in my constituency and not just on the border; it is important to point that out. I was picking up the issue of a hard border from people in Edinburgh and in Scotland who have not lived here in the last 20 or 30 years. It is important to re-emphasise that it is not just coming from along the border but from wider afield.

Paul Coghlan showed wisdom and maturity when talking about keeping cool heads and taking time out. We have two years to figure this out. The expertise is not only in this room but among a whole new, young generation. I met people from Facebook, LinkedIn and Google over the weekend who were talking about creative ways in which technology can be used as opposed to having a hard border. There are ways around it.

It was important that Jeffrey Donaldson helped us to differentiate between motivations. It was not to undermine the process but it was a separation of motivation. It is important to do that. I am delighted to hear a re-emphasis on the focus of the institutions and on the peace process.

Nobody knows the gains better in your constituency than you, Jeffrey. It is important that we keep those at the top of the agenda and that we talk about having cool heads to find a way.

We can provide a proper debating chamber. This chamber can provide a proper forum for debate. When I think back to 2013, 2014 and 2015, the big debate was about whether there was a need for this particular forum. We were discussing whether it was needed at all because the peace process was sorted and everything was grand and rosy. I think we need it more than ever now and the initial contributors to the debate have pinpointed the fact that this chamber is more important now than ever.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you for your remarks, Minister McHugh. It now gives me pleasure to ask the new shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Dave Anderson MP, to say a few words.

Mr Dave Anderson MP:

Thank you very much, Andrew. While the discussion was going on, it took my mind back to a discussion we had in Cheltenham last year and the real fears people that expressed there, from across these islands, about where we would be if the result were as it turned out to be. The short discussion we have had already shows that the worries we had in Cheltenham were nowhere near as bad as things are actually going to be. None of us realises, as yet, how many problems this has brought up.

Notwithstanding the different views that have been expressed, all those worries have to be addressed as fully as possible. The Minister is right; we do need time and space to deal with this, even if it means going beyond the two years that some people say is the maximum. If that is the case, so be it. The discussion around whether we should rerun the referendum is gaining momentum, certainly in Great Britain.

One of my great worries is this: while I might want to see the decision overturned, my belief is that so many people who voted in the referendum, as Frank Feighan said earlier, did so not because of the EU issue but because they feel alienated from the political class. If we really want to go back and reignite the real anger and violence that led to one of my colleagues being assassinated, then we will start having serious discussions about having a second referendum, and I am sad about that. The truth is that it would be seen—and it would certainly be portrayed by people who do not have the same democratic beliefs as we in this room have—as the elitists telling the ordinary man and woman in the street that they do not really know what they are doing. It would be like patting them on the head and saying, “Come out and vote for us every five years but let us get on with the real business.”

I have genuine worries about where that might end up; I really have heartfelt concerns. So let us be very careful. One of the things that struck me in the last week was the fact that we have a Prime Minister who put this agenda forward, and, as a matter of process, he should have had an alternative prepared if the people voted no. Whatever your view on the rights or wrongs of yes or no, as somebody who said that he was going to let the people make this decision, he should have had at least a basic plan for what a no vote would mean and where we would go.

If the Minister has time, I would like to ask whether any preparatory work has been done in the Republic on the impact of how we in the United Kingdom voted, both for the Republic

and for ourselves. I believe that, as Barry said, the Secretary of State has taken a very loose view of this. I think that she made up her mind very early on, and it was tied to the position of some in her party. I think that she has done the people of Northern Ireland a disservice by being tied into that position from so early on. I am really pleased that people are saying that they do not want to see a hard border; but I worry about the practicalities of that.

I also worry about the fact that we had people who ran a referendum campaign saying that, if you do not come out of the EU, 76 million people from Turkey will swamp this country. The back door would potentially be the Northern Ireland border. I hope to God that we can avoid going back to a hard border. However, I worry that, if Dundalk becomes the new Calais, we may have no option. There are huge problems, and I am glad that people say that we need to work together on this because, by God, we do.

Senator Catherine Noone:

I am a new Member of the Assembly, and I am very happy to be here, especially at such an important time. I feel privileged to be a Member of this Assembly, and I want to thank both Co-Chairs and all the officials for their work to date.

I make no apologies for expressing my disappointment at the result. The day of the referendum result was my birthday, and it was just crushing. I felt so disappointed and depressed. I think that the word “depressed” expresses how I felt, and a lot of people I speak to in Ireland feel the same way about the outcome.

What highlighted the utter depression for me was the vote of young people. Some 75% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 or 25 years in the UK voted to remain. If you look at the graph, it shows the exact opposite result for the vote of people over 65. I find it very difficult to take. There is a lesson there for younger voters. It is the case, across the world, that younger people are not as inclined to vote as older people. I would love to know whether anyone in the room has the statistics for how many young people voted. I wonder whether it is possible to get those figures, because it would be very interesting to know.

Unfortunately, I agree with Dave Anderson that the leave campaigners’ message resonated with many disenfranchised voters, and they used it as an opportunity to vent their frustration, having no real awareness of the potential outcomes. Whether leave voters intended the outcome to be positive or not for the relationship between the North and the South of Ireland, the outcome and the effect are just factual. It creates difficulties for us; that is the reality.

I have Irish friends in the UK, and a good few of them were in touch with me around the time of the result. One in particular, a hard-working doctor who enjoys living in London, texted me that she no longer wants to live in that country any more. I find that—I come back to my word—depressing.

There are many unintended, or maybe not unintended, but negative outcomes that were not foreseen. Already in our Parliament last week, in the Seanad, we had to put off implementing a couple of pieces of legislation because of the potential cross-border effects and outcomes for the two jurisdictions. That is disappointing.

One small example, which is close to my heart because I campaigned heavily for it, is putting a sugar tax in place in Ireland. If there is one thing that experts say will make a big difference

to childhood obesity, it is a sugar tax. I know that people say that, on its own, it not will solve the issue, although that is a whole other debate.

However, our Finance Minister said that, given the problems and issues with companies selling in the North and in the South, we would have to wait until the UK implemented the tax—if it does—before seeing whether we could, based on the difficulties that are presented between the North and the South. I am very disappointed about that.

I accept the outcome of the referendum, although I find it difficult to swallow. We need to plan, and the Taoiseach and the Queen and various other people—Paul Coughlan said it here—need to take time to digest it. There is no need for panic. It is a huge disappointment to the majority of us in the Republic of Ireland and, I think, to most of Europe. That is really all that I have to say. I could speak all day about it.

Mr Paul Farrelly MP:

In answer to Catherine’s question, the depressing statistic for young people is that, of those in the age range 18 to 25, 35% turned out—less than half the numbers of pensioners, who voted heavily for leave. That is very depressing.

First of all, I thank the Irish Government for their efforts in campaigning on the remain side in the UK during the referendum. One of my staffers was actually with the Taoiseach as part of the campaign in Liverpool and Manchester, when, sadly, he had to cancel his speech because of the tragic death of our colleague Jo Cox.

Be under no doubt that in England and Wales, for those people voting leave, this was a referendum on immigration solely. During the last three weeks, the mood became quite clear from activities that I did in my towns—as I had been all year—particularly when, to take one example, the leave campaign put up a big red banner in my town, as it did across the country, saying very simply, “Turkey, population 76 million, is joining the EU. Vote leave”. It was a complete lie, of course, but political advertising is not regulated in the UK. However, it hardened the question, “What are you going to do about the Turks?”, in a way that was reminiscent of our general election, when people stopped asking about Ed Miliband’s leadership and simply asked very precisely, “What are you going to do about the Scots Nats?” That is what swung it in the end.

The Brexit side will be having its own argument about the trade-off between freedom of movement and access to the single market, and those arguments will be played out during the Tory leadership campaign and in the months ahead when we start negotiating. I make one plea to the British Government, to whomever is elected after September 4 on the Conservative side and becomes Prime Minister, to the Irish Government in its bilateral relations and to the EU: do not let the bitter argument take root about the rights of people who are already living and working in our respective countries. If we go down that route, it will not only lead to more division and uncertainty, but be absolutely detrimental to our mutual relations and our relations with all other countries in the EU.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

Co-Chair, I wish you well, and I also wish the other Co-Chair, Kathleen, well in the years ahead.

I have been involved in politics since 1979. I have fought 15 elections and, of course, nationally, there were times when we were happy and times when we were unhappy. I believe that the result of the UK plebiscite, rather than a referendum—not a constitution like ours, and not bound by the outcome. Of course, David Cameron said that the UK would implement the outcome if it were leave, so it does not look as if there is any turning back, but I take the subjective view that, if the referendum were to be held next week, there might be a different outcome. However, we have to move on from where we are.

10.15 am

In the Dáil, I represent Donegal, and in the European Parliament, I have represented Connacht-Ulster, in the west of Ireland, for 13 years. In the case of Minister McHugh's county and mine, we have a border of about five or six kilometres with the rest of the country. Our boundaries are the Atlantic on one side and Northern Ireland on the other. This is a disaster for Ireland and a disaster with a capital D for Donegal. For anyone who tells us that the common travel area will continue, I ask this: will it continue? I and others who have spent years in the European Parliament know full well that it is not as simple as that when dealing with Brussels. It is going to be very difficult.

I have travelled through Northern Ireland. From Lifford to Strabane, Castlefinn to Clady, or Aughnacloy to Emyvale, which is where we would traditionally travel, I have sat in long queues, not just during the troubled times, but when there was a customs border there. The greatest change in my political life was the peace process, but side by side with that was the Single European Act and the removal of the customs border. I saw it when I was going to Dublin one day and coming back the next. It was a complete transformation. We are in this position because of membership of the European Union and adhering to the Single European Act. Is someone going to tell me now that we will wake up in two years' time and nothing will have changed? Of course it will change.

Irrespective of what happens in the meantime, Europe played an important role in the peace process. At the time of the announcement of the cessation of violence, I recall that Jacques Delors, the President of the Commission at that time, said that Europe would respond in a positive and practical way, and it did. The EU responded immediately by increasing the International Fund for Ireland budget and then established, under Monika Wulf-Mathies, the Commissioner for Regional Policy at the time, the peace and reconciliation programme. I remember working with MEPs, North and South of the border, and we have had, over the years, a billion or more of funds from the peace and reconciliation fund. The International Fund for Ireland is tapering out, but the peace programme is still there, and let us not forget INTERREG. The INTERREG programme also helped in the development of major projects, North and South of the border. Is that all going to remain as it is? My view is that it is not.

I agree with the previous speakers who said that this was not about in or out. It was about the view of the people of mainland Britain and Northern Ireland. It was their view at the time and it was coloured by their vision on social and economic factors. That is not criticising the UK electorate; it is criticising ourselves because, from time to time, when we had referendums here, people were more interested in the pot-holes in their roads than the major issues, and that is unfortunate.

One thing that we did, and sometimes we did not agree with it, was to establish a commission so that we would have a tabular statement that would point out very clearly the benefits and disadvantages of remaining. Maybe that was also used in the UK prior to this referendum;

correct me if I am wrong. On the other side of opting out, we would have seen the consequences.

It is a disaster for trade because of the close trading relationship between Ireland and Northern Ireland and between the island of Ireland and the UK. Some say that we will see nothing for two years, and if we wait until next January to trigger article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, it will be a number of years. Things are happening, though, even now. We saw the markets on the morning after the result, and I believe that there are those who campaigned on the opt-out side who genuinely did not want this result. My former friend and colleague in the European Parliament, Nigel Farage, was quite sure, the night before, that it was not going to happen. It is unfortunate that it has happened, and it is unfortunate that it is having such dire consequences for my country, more so than for any of the other countries in mainland Europe.

I agree with Joe McHugh: the mere fact that we have this forum is extremely important, and its importance will become increasingly obvious in the months and years ahead. I cannot understand the British Government or those in opposition who support this. Do they want to go back into the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which they left many years ago when they entered the European Union? In EFTA, you make a contribution, come into that club and have no say in how it is run. That makes little or no sense to me. It worries me and others that we may again have to establish a hard border between North and South.

To conclude, lest I did not refer to the intervention of Frank Feighan that we would re-enter the Commonwealth. Frank, let me say to you: I will be on the other side of that debate in Ireland.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I have a couple of comments. A lot of people are trying to speak in the debate. I am trying to get a balance between Irish and British and all sides of the argument. I apologise that not everyone has been able to speak so far. There is a very long list of people who want to speak. I have been listening to the debate, and we are already well into it, but let us try to talk about how we build our relations in the future rather than rerunning the debates that we had during the referendum in the UK. That is not productive. We need to find positive ways in which the new British/Irish/European relationship can be built, and we can then look at positive ideas for the future.

The Lord Dubs:

I will try to do what you said, but I want to say one or two things initially. I intend to stay friends with all the leave people, even if one or two things that I say might suggest otherwise. I have been absolutely dismayed at the outcome of the referendum because it has left the United Kingdom as not the sort of country that I feel comfortable with. Think of the halcyon days of the London Olympics, when we were international and multicultural, and the whole world was there. We have now moved into being an inward-looking country. I hope that we will not stay that way, but we have to live with the result of the referendum. I was at Castle Buildings on the Thursday and Friday of the Good Friday Agreement, and, when the thing was agreed, I felt, at an emotional level, that we were moving forward magnificently. We have now turned the clock back. We have to stop turning the clock back too far.

Barry McElduff talked about the result in Tyrone. Of course, the result in London was to remain, and that was the biggest chunk of remain voters. Let us not write off London. It was not just Northern Ireland and Scotland; London was a big part of the remain vote. That must count for something.

I agree with Paul Farrelly that, on the doorstep—I knocked on scores of doors—immigration was the issue. Immigration, immigration, immigration. OK, there is freedom of movement within the EU. David Cameron could not achieve a better deal than he got, I assume, but that was certainly a difficulty.

I will turn to the present time. There are unpleasant consequences. We heard a reference to an Irish doctor who does not want to live in London any more. The result of the referendum campaign has led to an increase in what we would call hate crimes. People who have lived in Britain for years are now being told by their neighbours to get out, whether they are European or from the Indian subcontinent or wherever. We have to make sure that that is nipped in the bud. I think that some of the publicity for the leave campaign encouraged that sort of racism, and we have to make sure that we nip that in the bud and stop it.

Positively, in looking forward, one of the models that we might look at is that in the Nordic countries. After all, I know that Norway is in the single market, but the Nordic countries seem to have good, close relationships despite the fact that Norway is not in the EU and the other countries are. We need to look at that and see whether we can learn anything from them.

I see in today's papers that Angela Merkel is not keen on the way Juncker is talking—hectoring, rather—and wants a more relaxed attitude. I think that we should take advantage of that. A more relaxed attitude enables us to negotiate better and, I think, more positively. If BIPA ever had an important function, it is now, because, whatever we were doing in the past, this is a time to talk through all these difficult issues.

I cannot talk for the British Government, of course, but we have to be careful that we do not disharmonise taxes. In other words, the more that we can keep things harmonised, the better that it will be for ease of trade and so on. We have to look at that.

Given the particular situation in Ireland, and the potential problems with the border—customs, trade, people moving and so on—we ought to suggest a joint approach by the Irish and British Governments to Brussels. For all that Brussels is supportive of the peace process and the money that it has provided, the issue is so serious that, at an early date, the British and Irish Governments should approach Brussels and point out that there is a unique situation—quite unprecedented, unless you take the Norway example—and see whether there can be some easing of what would otherwise be a rather harsh set of rules.

For example, let us just keep the border open. Let us not have any customs and see what happens. Seventy million Turks are not going to arrive in Dublin and then walk to Belfast. That is not going to happen. Maybe we should just say, “Look, let's leave it as it is. Let's not put a border there. Let's not have these controls. Maybe we can be relaxed about it”. We can go to Brussels and tell it that it should see it that way and not start being too harsh with us. I argue for a joint approach to the people in Brussels, and maybe a parliamentary approach from BIPA as well, to point out the dangers and what can be done positively to keep the border away.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

Andrew, I congratulate you and Kathleen on your positions. It is a pleasure and honour to be here among so many wise heads. I come from the border constituency of Louth. I remember too well that we had our backs turned to each other for many years. For the past 20, we have begun to face each other and deal with our problems collectively.

My immediate reaction to the Brexit vote, to use the Latin phrase, was this: *festina lente*—hasten slowly. In all of this, there needs to be huge respect for each other. We are far too small island nations to be talking about independence. I believe that we should be talking around the whole issue of interdependence.

As I said to many Members last night, it is not about Brexit but about how we can fix it to work in an interdependent way. I welcome the fact that the Taoiseach is proposing an all-Ireland forum. This organisation, which I watched carefully over the past number of years, should be given a pivotal role in how we go forward. Many people voted to leave because of a disconnect, so, whatever role an all-Ireland forum and BIPA may have, there is a huge need for input from chambers of commerce.

The East Border Region committee deals with six counties—three from the North and three from the South—that are intrinsically aware of the issues and of how Brexit will impact on the border. We have the Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN). I am sure that many of you know of the cooperation on input into health matters that has existed through Cooperation and Working Together (CAWT). Equally, there is the impact on agriculture and the need to embrace all the agricultural organisations. I have chaired the memorandum of understanding meetings between Louth and Down local authorities for the past four years, where people have been working on various massive EU programmes to show how we can work collectively without any conflict.

At a very early stage, it is incumbent on the EU to give a commitment to what Pat the Cope Gallagher referred to: the INTERREG programme and, indeed, the peace programme, and to their continuation. We can talk about a two-year interregnum, but the reality is that the communities and organisations out there need to be given an assurance that the good work that has happened with the peace process will continue.

I hope that this organisation gets the role that it needs and that the very wise heads around this table can work together to find a solution to the problems

10.30 am

Baroness Harris:

I think there were many and varied reasons why people voted as they did. I accept that a huge majority were talking about immigration, but they were not talking about it where I live up in north Yorkshire, which is a huge rural area, because there is no concern about immigration there. It is really more about the sheep and the prices of their beef and milk. There were all sorts of reasons.

I heard a taxi driver in London the other day who was very thoughtful about why he had voted out. We had a very good conversation about why he felt as he had. His final remark to me was, “I’m British. I’m very proud to be British. We have always been able to sort our problems out. We will sort these out, and I am sure we will do it together.” It was quite an

interesting point of view. However, on 24 June, there was a collective howl of anguish from 48% of our country. I hope that those who voted leave will remember that. They may have won the day by 4% or whatever, but they must remember that a huge number of people in our country voted remain. It is almost a fault line now, which is cutting our country apart.

I totally agree with what Alf Dubs said. The warning that I want to give is about the appalling unleashing of violence, certainly in the more urban areas in parts of Yorkshire, where I live, and where children have been spat on because they were born of Polish parents or are of a different colour or wear a hijab. These are things that, collectively, we absolutely have got to stop. We must make sure that we do that. I do not know whether these concerns have been felt in the North of Ireland. I would be surprised if they had not, because of some of the concerns that are there. I truly believe that the BNP members in some of our communities have moved seamlessly to the UKIP-style main political ground now. It worries me to death, because there are about two million of them in our country, and their dangerous, dreadful creed is beginning to appear mainstream. We have got to work together to absolutely stop that. The peace process between the North and the South of Ireland is a very good indicator of how we can begin to address some of the concerns around that.

I am so depressed that I cannot think of how we get through this and how I can say anything wonderfully positive about where we go from here. I believe that the onus now is on the people who said that they wanted to leave to come forward with a plan. They did not have a plan. It is all very well saying, "Well, nor did the Prime Minister." He hoped that we would all mainly vote remain. It is the leavers who have got to tell us what they want to do now, and then we can see where we go.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

I think Frank is in a minority of one on the question of the Commonwealth. That was dealt with many years ago. There is no harm in people raising issues, but we should not be raising issues that will, in the current climate, bring us down blind alleys and serve as distractions.

We have huge challenges, not least in trying to work our way through the implications and the potentials of the result: there are always potentials if we are clever in how we address them. There are major challenges, obviously, from the vote.

One thing that I caution against, and am slightly perturbed by people's calls for, is a re-run of the referendum. In Ireland, we were twice forced to re-run referenda on Europe because the result did not match the result that the Government parties or the main establishment parties wanted. When people dismiss the vote for Brexit as being an anti-Government vote, is the reverse, namely that the vote to remain was a pro-Government vote, also true? It is not; it is not that simple. People vote in certain ways in elections, referendums or whatever for very different reasons.

The decision has been taken, but, in the main, it has been taken in England and Wales. There needs to be some recognition by those on the Brexit side of the huge vote to remain in the North, Scotland and the likes of Gibraltar. Those people also have the right to be heard and have cognisance taken of their position, particularly in Ireland, where there could be drastic consequences for the economy, North and South, unless we live up to the challenge that is put before us.

Obviously, from my point of view as a Republican, the logic for those in the North who voted to remain should be to campaign for a united Ireland. If they wish to remain in the EU, the quickest and easiest way to do so would be to join with us. The same could be said for Scotland, and we might have the resurrection of the Dalriada Kingdom of many moons ago. If Scotland votes for independence, as it should, it will have to apply to the EU, with everything that that entails. Maybe a quick route would be to join with us, and the same goes, as I said, for the North.

For certain sectors of the economy, agriculture in particular, and those who are involved in environmental campaigns and workers' rights, the greatest protections that they could ensure for themselves would come from staying in the EU. I have been critical of the EU for many years. My father campaigned against joining the EEC, and I have campaigned in every referendum since to try to protect the limited sovereignty that we have in this state to ensure that it was not diminished by, or disappear in, the European Union. If more had been done over the years by the British representatives to protect small nations and national Parliaments in negotiations and in EU treaties, we would be a lot better placed as a small nation.

Having said that, we are a small nation. We are on the edge of Europe and, given the direction of our economy, our education, our workers' rights, and our environment, our future is in the EU, and we should develop that without diminishing our sovereignty in any way. In fact, we should enhance it by encouraging those in the Six Counties to join with us in a united Ireland in Europe.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

The next speaker is John Scott MSP.

Mr John Scott MSP:

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Assembly, Co-Chairperson. I thank Joe McHugh for his speech and pay tribute to his work in developing the improving relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland in the last British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly session.

We are 10 days on from the tectonic plates shifting—from the earthquake that has affected European, British, Irish and probably Scottish politics. After any geological event or storm, we have to evaluate what remains and secure what we have. In the spirit that the Co-Chairperson suggested, we have to look forward and build on what we have.

First, we have to accept the result and move on. There is much to be proud of and much to develop and build on. It has been work in progress in the recent improving climate, and we must continue it. In particular, we must develop our business links. I put in a plea for building on the business links between Scotland and Ireland. In the spirit of building and improving links between our countries, I note with interest Frank Feighan's comments about Ireland joining the Commonwealth.

As others—particularly Paul Coghlan and Alf Dubs—have said, it is absolutely a time for cool heads. I associate myself with their remarks. What we do and build in future is for the next generation, and many of our young in Britain are particularly unhappy with the result. We have to be very mindful of their views as we move forward.

Fundamentally, I do not want to see the re-establishment of a hard border in Ireland. I am afraid to say that I do not think that that would take us anywhere positive.

On the likely work in the foreseeable future for the Assembly, which is uniquely placed as the only body in which elected delegates from all our countries meet in a forum, there is a huge opportunity for us to play a very positive role in keeping the show on the road, binding us closer together at a time when we most need that.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

The next speaker is Joan Burton TD.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Thank you. It is a great pleasure to be here again at the Assembly, of which I was an associate Member a number of years ago.

I have just seen on Twitter that Mr Farage has resigned because he wants to spend more time with his own life, or words to that effect. I am sorry—I misquoted him: he said that he wants to get his “life back”.

It is important that we look at the matter coolly and in an historic way. The period of 43 years before the week in which we commemorate the Somme is longer than the entire period from immediately before the first world war until after the end of the second world war. Nobody should underestimate how historic the vote was. If there are people on both sides who now argue that the outcomes appear to be very much different from what they expected, that is the democratic space that we can look at and negotiate around.

Pat the Cope Gallagher referred to Jacques Delors. Unfortunately, there is no Jacques Delors in the European Union. Instead, from the point of view of the European Union, there are people who sound both exasperated and rather venal in their approach to what the outcome might be in terms of the impact on the UK. That is very short-term thinking that does not benefit the high offices that some of the people giving expression to those sentiments occupy, but we have to work with what we have.

Proposals have been made to look in detail at each of the areas that will be seriously affected, which on the island of Ireland obviously means the areas on both sides of the border. People from the border counties on both sides have set out very clearly how difficult it is going to be to go back to what was there before, not only at a trade level but at an emotional level and in terms of contacts. In fact, for a lot of us, it is pretty well unthinkable and highly undesirable that there should be an actual land border.

10.45 am

A case has to be made that the EU will be a lot poorer without the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding all the differences that exist, the United Kingdom has given the European Union a lot of heft and clout in worldwide forums, not least in organisations such as the United Nations. In both Brussels and these islands, a lot of thought needs to be put into working out, probably over the next two years but for as long as it takes, how to get the kind of relationship that, for both sides, will enhance the lives of ordinary people working in jobs that they want to hold on to in businesses, farms and agriculture, which they want to see prospering. The situation should not be used to be vindictive or triumphalist, or as an

opportunity for political point scoring; instead, we should try to put something better in place—something that at least gives us a chance to work together again.

When the Berlin wall fell, countries were queuing up to join the European Union. Now, after the British referendum and probably an amount of thought, there might be quite a few countries queuing up to leave the EU. Things have changed and there is no point wondering whether we can put the situation back to exactly what it was. However, we need to try to establish some ground rules.

A lot of people here have spoken about agriculture. What will happen to animal health regulations? In the Republic and in the North, we have changed our regulations and systems to comply with the European point system in order to protect both North and South against animal diseases that would devastate our agriculture.

We need clarity on a series of matters, including workers' rights.

I am in favour of the European Union, although I see a lot wrong with it. However, on women's rights, the EU's position, certainly in relation to women in the Republic of Ireland, has been second to none. From 1973 on, the EU has stood for equal pay for women and for women's rights in a lot of fields. The position is the same for the rights of people with disabilities. A lot of the UK and Irish legislation in those areas is European in origin. We really need to look at the things that we want to keep and can share, although there will obviously be differences. The current situation is probably the greatest challenge that we have faced in recent times.

On racism, it is important that people who might not be familiar with the Republic understand that 11% of the population have come here since 2000 and the freeing-up of the labour market—they were not born in Ireland.

My constituency of Dublin West is probably the most diverse in the Republic, as 30% of the population were not born in Ireland or their parents were not born in Ireland—that is, either part of Ireland. We have heard about racism and about Polish children and people of colour being targeted, which is horrific. All the knights of the leave campaign seem to have ridden off and left the field to go and get their lives back. I wish them well, but we will have to pick up the pieces.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Lord Kilclooney is next.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Co-Chair, this is my first time at this organisation. I congratulate you and the other Co-Chairs on your appointments.

I was first elected in 1965, so I come from the middle of the last century and have seen a lot of politics in this island. I am a former Member of the European Parliament and I campaigned for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Economic Community. I was deputy leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, which negotiated the Belfast Agreement. As Sir Jeffrey Donaldson and Reg Empey will recall, the creation of this body was one of the things that we pushed very hard for in those negotiations, so I am delighted to be here for the first time, 25

years later, to see how it is operating. I am now a non-party Member—a crossbencher—in the House of Lords.

I live 12 miles from the border between the UK and Ireland and, as I drove down from the UK to Ireland yesterday, I was struck by the fact that this is my first time in Ireland this year and I began to think about the referendum and how it would affect the border that I drove across. I came here in one hour and 20 minutes, yet I travelled between two different countries.

As I listened to earlier speakers in this discussion, I was disappointed hear that they are trying to re-run the referendum campaign or even to challenge its result. It was a United Kingdom referendum, it is over, and we must now implement its decision. That is what the Government have said and what most party leaders have said. I am sorry that Sinn Féin does not wish to accept the democratic result, but personally that comes as no surprise to me. The referendum is over. The Commission in Brussels has said so, France has said so and Spain has said so. We cannot take Northern Ireland or Scotland out of the United Kingdom because of the referendum; nor can we do that with London, which is much bigger than either of the other two.

We have to look ahead at the immediate and longer-term implications. Mention has been made of the stock exchange. The stock exchange has not fallen. On Friday, the FTSE 100 was at its highest level this year. I do not know how people get these things wrong. Yes, the pound has fallen, but that is great for United Kingdom exports and, what is more, it is wonderful for those of us who live near the border, in Armagh, Newry, Strabane, Omagh and Enniskillen. The retail industry in those towns is profiting from the flight of people from the Republic of Ireland to shop in the border towns in Northern Ireland. I see Pat the Cope Gallagher nodding his head in agreement—may you send us up more euros as soon as possible.

There have been some very interesting comments about immigration. I do not think that immigration was an issue in Northern Ireland, although we have many Poles. In fact, more people from Poland than from the Republic of Ireland now live in Northern Ireland, which is an interesting statistic. Ireland cannot ride two horses—I hope that everyone read the article on that in *The Irish Times* on Saturday.

There has to be a period of realism here in Ireland as well as in the United Kingdom. Pat the Cope Gallagher was absolutely right that the Brexit decision is more serious for Ireland than for any other country in the European Union. We have to tackle that problem because I do not want to see Ireland having a problem—far from it, as one who lives a few miles from the border. However, the United Kingdom is Ireland's biggest trading partner. Also, Irish farm exports depend a lot on the United Kingdom market.

As I say, realism must prevail and I very much welcome the recent statements by the Prime Minister of Ireland, Enda Kenny, who called for calm reflection on the decision, because that is the way forward. Hysteria is wrong. There has been some hysteria over the past few days—people rushing to get Irish passports as if the United Kingdom was going to leave the European Union tomorrow. It is two or three years away. I know that some are getting passports because they want to get free healthcare when they go to Europe after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, but it is hysterical because they do not know where Ireland will be in two or three years' time and what relationship it will have with the

European Union. Realism can bring big changes that we have not yet imagined, so it must prevail.

Finally, the most important thing for us all on this island is to make sure that there is no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. That requires real co-operation between those of us who are British and those of us who are Irish, and those of us who are Nationalist and those of us who are Unionist. We need to improve the bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and between Belfast, Dublin and London. It is tremendously important that Belfast, Dublin and London work together to ensure that, in two years' time, we get the right result for the United Kingdom, the right result for Northern Ireland and the right result for the Republic, and no hard border.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

The next speaker will be Ross Greer MLA.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

Not quite MLA—I am an MSP.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay. It says “MLA” on my sheet, so I apologise.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

Thank you very much, Chair. This is my first opportunity to attend and address this body. Before I get on to the point that I would like to make, I will pick up on the discussions that have already taken place about turnout among young people.

The fact that the turnout among 18 to 24-year-olds was half the level of turnout among those in higher age categories is, of course, a tragedy. It is not a tragedy just for 18 to 24-year-olds; it is a tragedy for all of us. We have failed to engage with young people, and I say that as someone who fits comfortably within that age category. We have failed to connect with my friends, my networks and the people with whom I went to school and university. We do not connect with them. They have no interest in what we do and how we debate. We do not seem to relate to their lives. That is something for all of us across these islands to take on board.

I would make the specific suggestion that we look at the success of lowering the voting age in Scotland for the independence referendum and, now, elections to the Scottish Parliament and our local councils. That has shown young people—not just 16 and 17-year-olds but young people across the board—that we value their input. I would suggest that everyone here who is interested in improving young people's engagement with politics look at that specific example.

A number of other points have been made with which I whole-heartedly agree—I will not simply repeat them.

On immigration's role in the referendum, it is absolutely true that 52% of voters in Britain are not racists and bigots. The issue that we now have is that the minority of people who are racists believe that 52% of people are on their side. That is the issue that we now need to face and which in the last 10 days we have been facing on our streets and in our communities with

the people whom we represent. It is a serious issue. It will take us a long, long time to recover from what happened 10 days ago.

On the points that have already been discussed regarding Scotland specifically, I would like to take issue with what Jeffrey Donaldson said about Brussels saying, “It is over. They have made it clear.” They have not made it clear. Scotland’s First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has been received in Brussels as very few sub-state leaders ever are. She has met the President of the Commission and has had positive statements not just from the President’s office but from the leaders of most of the major parliamentary groups in the European Parliament.

11.00 am

Nicola Sturgeon did not go there on behalf of Scottish Nationalists or any one party; she went there on behalf of four of the five parties in the Scottish Parliament. With the exception of the Conservatives, the parties gave her a mandate to negotiate on behalf of Scotland, because, quite frankly, it is not over.

The public in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to stay in the European Union. We have more than five million European citizens who are not willing to leave. The First Minister’s mandate is to exhaust every option available to us. There are, of course, options short of Scottish independence. The one that has been mentioned most often—we are going to try and find a better name for it—is, at the moment, referred to as the reverse Greenland option. As we know, Denmark is in the European Union, but Greenland, which is part of Denmark, is not.

We are going to exhaust every option short of independence. If the Scottish public believes that the only way to secure their future in the European Union is through a referendum on independence, I would hope that there will be support—across these islands—for the right to hold a referendum. That is the future that we are now looking at. The most direct consequence in Scotland of the UK’s EU referendum is the high likelihood of a second referendum on independence.

Another outcome that is already apparent has been a strengthening of the unilateral relationships between Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. It was Edna Kenny who spoke on Scotland’s behalf at last week’s meeting of the 28 European heads of state. If we are able to improve the direct links between Scotland and the Republic, at least something will come of this.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Ross. We now have you down as an MSP. Thank you for pointing that out. I call Lord Bew.

The Lord Bew:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I will speak very briefly to pick up on Senator Feighan’s remarks about the recent Seanad debate on the Commonwealth. This morning, we heard a lot—quite correctly—from Minister Joe McHugh TD about the Queen’s visit to Dublin and the improved relationships between Ireland and Britain. Since that visit, I have been surprised by how little discussion there has been about Ireland rejoining the Commonwealth. I raised the matter about two or three years ago with a senior member of the Irish establishment. I said that Mozambique and Algeria wanted to join and although Ireland’s relationship is far

more intimate with Britain, it seems to show no interest. The reply of that senior and eloquent member of the Irish establishment was, “But those countries do not define themselves in opposition to Britain. We do.” I thought that we were moving beyond that point. If Ireland is still saying “A nation once again” to itself all the time, an obvious point is that there should be no surprise when the British say that, too.

More important, as everyone has said, it is vital for the future that the negotiations and the discussions occur in the best possible manner. There is no doubt in my mind that the Commonwealth is an institution that brings more soft power to Ireland or that there would be greater respect for Ireland’s material interests in the event that it seriously reconsidered rejoining the Commonwealth. There is absolutely no question but that we need to build on the warmer sentiment between the two islands at this difficult moment.

A proper debate in Ireland—the debate that began in the Seanad a few days ago—is a means of keeping those warmer good relationships going, and those good relationships are central to the best possible outcome and the complicated material details that will have to be faced, for example to avoid a hard border.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Robin Swann MLA is the next speaker.

Mr Robin Swann MLA:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I will be brief. There are many in this room who would love to rerun an election either on behalf of themselves or their party. I do not think that there is any point trying to do that here today, because that is not going to happen. To those who are arguing that it is not over, I say that it is. The democratic question on the ballot paper was whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. The question was not whether Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales should leave it.

My Assembly colleague, Mr McElduff, highlighted that 66.8% of West Tyrone spoke to remain. My constituency of North Antrim voted 62% to leave. The question that I would then put is: should North Antrim succeed or is a voice in North Antrim worth more or less than a voice in West Tyrone? The democratic process lies on the basis of that referendum. We have to respect the result, move on and implement it.

We have heard from all sections of politics here today that we have to look to the positive outcomes, start working for the result that the people deserve and ensure that we have the best deliverance for everyone. There are those in the Northern Ireland Assembly who are still fighting the referendum of 1998 and against the 71% who voted for the Good Friday Agreement. They have learned from that; they now operate it, but they still try to fight it as well.

Co-Chair, you asked for a few positive comments. I am glad that Minister McHugh has remained, because I note that in the Irish *Daily Mail* his ministerial colleague Simon Harris has, as Minister for Health, commented that Brexit could threaten the cross-border treatment of sick children. I ask the minister here today to refute that and acknowledge the work that has been going on in the last four years between the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Dáil with regard to children’s cardiac services in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital and that what can come out of this is the positive message that

Brexit will in no way threaten the treatment of our sick children in Northern Ireland. At this moment in time, we are sending 140 children a year to England for heart surgery instead of sending them to Dublin. That is the sort of positive work that I think can come out of this body and as a result of the negotiations that we come forward with.

Co-Chair, I want to make another positive comment with regard to Senator Feighan's remarks about Ireland joining the Commonwealth. As a former chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I want to say, Frank, that you will be very welcome, and we will do all we can to support your call.

That concludes my remarks.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Robin. The next speaker is Viscount Bridgeman.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you, Co-Chair. The minister has made very robust remarks about the border. Of course, that theme has been running through today's discussion, and I am thinking of remarks made by Mr Anderson and Alf Dubs in particular about the open border and the Turkish question. However, depending on the outcome of the negotiations that the UK is about to embark on, I think that with regard to immigration the Turks are not going to be the only problem. Can the Minister tell us whether the Government have given any thought to the social problems that could arise in the Republic as a result of the Republic's being used as a staging point for a large number of people trying to get into the United Kingdom via the—hopefully open—border?

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Willie Coffey MSP.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. First of all, I congratulate Minister Joe McHugh on his appointment as Minister for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid. Joe, your visit to the Scottish Parliament last week with President Higgins was extremely well received by all Members of the Parliament, and the President is to be congratulated on his address to the Members that day.

Delegates, Scotland's position on this matter is pretty clear: it is to remain in the European Union. As my colleague Ross Greer has pointed out, our First Minister has set out to engage with the European Union as a partner and ally that wants to continue that relationship instead of one that wishes to walk away from Europe.

On the question of the legal basis for that, which my colleague Jeffrey Donaldson has raised here, we can probably look back at a number of cases in European Union history in which there was, in fact, no legal basis for very much. Experts say that the treaties are hardly clear when it comes to legal matters, but I suggest to Mr Donaldson and others that the politics of the situation will override the lack of legal clarity.

We could look back at the situation with East Germany, which was admitted into the European Union without any legal basis. I therefore do not think that things are particularly clear, and it is important to distinguish between the lack of clarity in the legal treaties and the political process, which might recognise the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves.

I echo the comments made by my colleague Mr Paul Farrelly in relation to the European Union citizens who currently live in Scotland and, indeed, the United Kingdom. I plead with the United Kingdom Government not to use our European Union citizens as some kind of bargaining chip in a negotiation between now and the next couple of years when the UK and the European Union decide the terms of the UK exit. Surely to goodness we do not want to use people in that way. We want to respect their position and confirm that they are welcome to remain in our country.

Scotland considers that the referendum result is a material change in our circumstances, and while our Parliament gave the First Minister a clear mandate to explore all the options to protect Scotland's position in and relationship with the European Union, we have made it clear that another referendum on independence is now a distinct possibility for Scotland. It is important to explore every possibility, in law or otherwise, for Scotland to keep a close relationship with the European Union, but I remind delegates that the democratic will of the Scottish people must not be thwarted in this matter. Ultimately, the will of the people must win through. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. The next speaker is Steffan Lewis AM.

Mr Steffan Lewis AM:

Diolch yn fawr, Cyd-Gadeiryddion. Mae'n bleser fod yma heddiw i ymweld â chi ac i drafod y materion pwysig yma.

From a Welsh perspective, it was deeply disappointing that our country voted to leave the European Union, although on the up side it seems that the Welsh football team is doing its best to keep Wales in Europe for as long as possible. Long may that continue.

Colleagues have mentioned the growing discontent politically and the anti-politics feeling that exists in the UK, specifically in Wales and in England, too. That can only get worse, because the leave side in the referendum repeatedly made specific promises that swayed an awful lot of people to vote to leave the European Union. There were promises about the NHS having more funding because the UK would not have to pay its EU membership fee and there were guarantees that regional development funding from the EU to Wales would be guaranteed by the British state. However, those promises have since been broken, and others will evaporate quickly. I fear that, as they evaporate and it becomes obvious that the promises made by the leave campaign are not going to be kept, the anti-politics feeling will reach new levels. That poses serious questions for democracy, certainly in Wales and in England, too.

As the negotiations begin at some point and those promises are not kept, and as the growing feeling of discontent reaches high levels, it will be a big problem for the United Kingdom Government to explain to people in Wales, especially, why they are not going to get special treatment from the European Union. Arrogance was displayed during the referendum

campaign when leave campaigners sought to persuade people that the UK could have all the benefits of European Union membership without having to pay for EU membership, to contribute or to abide by any of the rules that it did not like. Of course, the European Union—rightly—is not going to stand for that. It is a post-imperial hang-up of the British establishment that it believes that it has a right to special treatment.

As I said, Wales voted to leave the European Union. I wanted it to remain, but the people have spoken and their democratic wishes have to be acknowledged. We have to negotiate the best possible deal for Wales, and in that respect I see no reason for delay in triggering article 50. It has become patently obvious to me that the only way forward is for the UK to have EEA or EFTA membership. That would be a ludicrous situation because, as has been pointed out, the UK would have to pay its membership fee and abide by the rules, but it would have absolutely no say. However, it is essential to us that we secure EEA membership. We are a net exporter to the European Union, unlike the United Kingdom, which has a trade deficit with the European Union. That is going to be a hard sell to all those people in Wales who voted to leave on the basis that we could pull up the drawbridge, stop immigration, stop paying the membership fee and stop adhering to European rules. As I said, those promises, which were made to people, are not going to be kept.

The Westminster establishment is embroiled in turmoil. The two major UK parties are busier tearing themselves apart internally than they are tearing the UK from the European Union. That is important because, even at the best of times, the UK does not demonstrate the constitutional agility to be able to deal with its constituent members and bring the Governments of the devolved nations together.

In the context of a leadership battle in the Conservative and Unionist Party and the imminent leadership battle in the Labour Party, it will be the people in the poorest communities in Wales who will be let down. While those two major parties are embroiled in self-interest, the communities that face great anxiety and uncertainty as a result of the referendum will be ignored.

On that point, as a Welshman, I would like to ask the Irish Government something. If we in Wales get our act together while Westminster is busy with navel-gazing, and we put together a distinct Welsh renegotiating position, I hope that the Irish Government will consider being a friend and ally to Wales within the European Union, as we redefine our relationship with that body. Heaven knows but the British state has never shown an interest in the Welsh national interest and it never will.

11.15 am

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay. Lord Empey.

The Lord Empey:

Thank you, Co-Chair. First, I want to make a point. In his opening statement, Brian McElduff indicated that people should be working together. Of course, we all agree with that, but I have to say to him that, if we want to get people working together, the first thing we should not do is call for a border poll because there could not be anything more divisive. There is no legal

basis for it in any event. If we want to stop people working together, that is the route to follow.

It is perfectly obvious that people are traumatised by the outcome, and that is perfectly understandable. However, if we call a referendum—and let us face it: the United Kingdom Parliament passed an Act of Parliament allowing for the EU referendum—there will be two possible outcomes. It therefore seems bizarre and, indeed, irresponsible that the Government do not have a contingency plan in place in the event of one of the possible outcomes.

That creates a huge problem and the first thing that has to happen is that the UK Government have to have a plan, and share that plan with Parliament and with everybody else.

As far as people on this island are concerned, there is talk of another body of some kind being formed. The first thing that might usefully be done is to establish what the existing architecture of our relations can do. We have this body. We have the North South Ministerial Council, which is meeting as we speak. We have various other North/South bodies. I would have assumed that that would be a useful axis in addition to the normal diplomatic relations between us to work on proposals. The question is: is the existing architecture adequate, or do we have to start creating more? If we create more, does that leave the rest of us irrelevant or will it bypass existing structures?

That is the most important thing because we now have to focus on the best mechanism for securing our economic prosperity. As Lord Kilclooney said, we do not want to see guard posts being re-erected. The referee's whistle has blown and there is no point in complaining that the ball is not in the back of the net because it is, so let us move on. Let us concentrate on how we can improve and protect our economic and other relationships between these islands and, particularly, on this island.

As somebody who was involved in the formation of InterTradeIreland, which is a major trade body, I would like to know what role such a body could have within the architecture that was agreed in strand 2 of our Agreement. We need to look at all those things before we start trying to create additional bodies that might complicate things.

If we want a positive way forward, this body could engage with both Governments. Minister McHugh could take a message back to his colleagues, and engage with both Governments to see what role BIPA could have and to ensure that the existing architecture is used fully before we resort to trying to create any more because that could complicate things.

As Representative Scott has said, there are people here from all jurisdictions in these islands, so let us use them and this body. I am sure that, if necessary, other committees that we have will focus on the outcome because at the end of the day that is the most relevant thing about this body today.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you for that very positive suggestion. The next speaker is Fergus O'Dowd TD.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

I live in the border constituency of Louth, and I travelled into Northern Ireland yesterday to places where the flags of different parties were flying and the people were extremely friendly and in good humour, and commerce was brisk. I could not have made such a visit in the

month of July 20 years ago. I acknowledge the huge progress that has been made both North and South in achieving today's peaceful relationship, which is hugely important and welcome.

We now have a challenge in terms of the relationship between the Republic and United Kingdom. Obviously, decisions have been made in the UK, which is their business, but I think that we now need to have the kind of common purpose that we have here today. We are from all parts of our two islands and represent different parties, but we need to use common sense about what we are saying.

I agree with the last speaker in that regard, particularly because 200,000 people are employed in the Republic in industries that export directly to the United Kingdom. The converse is true of the United Kingdom, because about 208,000 people there are employed in industries that export to the Republic. We therefore have a huge commercial and personal interest in ensuring that our relationships are working and improving, notwithstanding the huge challenge that we face. Trade between the United Kingdom and Ireland is worth €1 billion per week. We hugely depend on each other for tourism and are very much a part of each other.

My family history on my father's side is that we fought as Republicans in the war of independence; and on my mother's side it is that we fought and died in the second world war in the Royal Air Force. There is huge commonality between our two islands and we must work together. We have to learn to live with our history, but that does not mean that we cannot make significant progress in working together, which is what I welcome. I have a son who lives in the United Kingdom and is extremely happy there. We have a wonderful relationship with the UK.

Like Deputy Burton, I live in a county that has a significant number of immigrants. We looked to Britain in the past for how to have a multicultural society. We have looked to England for the magnificence of its democracy up to now. Whether we agree or disagree with the decision that the UK has recently made—obviously, we profoundly disagree with it here—we must work together. I welcome the Taoiseach's initiative in that regard. I am new to this body, but I would say that one of the big issues that we should concentrate on is the commercial and export relationships between Britain and Ireland. If we work in a constructive way and have at our next forum representatives of industrial and exporting companies from both islands, we will cut through the differences that will not help us.

At the end of the day, the special relationship between England and Ireland must continue. I do not agree with the suggestion of Ireland going back into the Commonwealth, but I do agree with using common sense and moving forward together. If we find that space—we here are the right people to do that either this week or when we meet again—we can look forward to a huge potential for both islands to have commonality and work together. That is the most important message.

We celebrated this year our revolution period between 1916 and 1922, but that is behind us now and we have learned from that progress and have grown. However, that fact does not divide our two islands but helps us to restore our historic friendship. The Queen's visit to Ireland was hugely important and had a seismic impact in many ways. It moved all of our hearts so that we want to work together in a closer and better way. I hope that that is what will happen following our very broad debate today.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Baroness May Blood.

Baroness Blood:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I will be brief. First, I want to pay respect to the expertise that is in this room; I am not an expert in this matter. I want to speak from on the ground. I listened to Barry McElduff talking about the vote in Northern Ireland. I voted remain; I wanted to remain but the vote went against me. As a democrat, I accept that—that is the way that the vote went. It was a vote for the United Kingdom and we all understood that.

One of the faults that I found in the run-up to the vote was that people were being asked to pay for their lunch before they had even seen the menu. Nobody on the ground knew what they were voting for—maybe all the experts in this room knew but people that I work among simply did not have a clue.

Let me give two examples: I spoke to two ladies in church who asked me about voting and they said that they were going to vote to remain because they wanted to stay in the United Kingdom. That was their understanding of the word “remain”. I also spoke to a group of older people who were all going to vote for leave because, they said, “Sure, they do nothing for us, anyway.” There was clearly a misunderstanding and people did not know what they were voting for.

I am a bit fearful now that we have voted for this lunch, but we are not quite sure what the cook is making up in the kitchen. I agree with those who have said that the UK Government knew that there was going to be either an out or an in vote and that surely to goodness they should have had plans ready to be put in place right away. However, that is not going to work as the plan is not there.

There have been a number of remarks made in this room about attacks. Those attacks will happen in working-class areas, and that is where the situation is most misunderstood. I am firmly behind Europe and I understand what the European Union has done—in Northern Ireland, particularly—so I am fearful of how the peace work will continue without its support. Many people have mentioned the two years of talks and that is grand among us, but two years is a long time to hold the ground, particularly in Northern Ireland, because there are always people who want to move into it.

If there is one thing that I would ask the Irish and UK Governments, it would be please to put out a message so that ordinary people can understand what is going on and what the future will be. There are so many people telling us that we will do this, do that or do the other thing—quite frankly, they are only making the situation worse. Finally, I finish by saying that I do not believe that this is a time for playing party politics.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, May. There is one part of the British Isles that is not in the European Union at the moment: the Channel Islands. They are represented here as Crown dependencies, but we have not heard from them yet. It would be good to get their perspective, so perhaps someone from the Crown dependencies could speak. Before that, I bring in Helen Jones MP.

Ms Helen Jones MP:

Thank you very much, Andrew. I have listened with interest to the different perspectives that have been put this morning. I say to colleagues that, before we look at the individual needs of our own areas, parties, or individual traditions, we need to raise our eyes to the big picture. What happened in the referendum—certainly in the northern part of England—was in some respects a howl of anguish from the poorest communities, who felt neglected and left behind. Politicians are to blame for that—all of us, let us be honest. A lot of the discussion was about immigration and we are to blame for that, too, because the fear of immigration is strongest in communities where there is very little immigration.

Before we sort out the nuts and bolts of the situation, as we are going to have to do, we need to raise our eyes to make clear that we have much more in common than otherwise. Our identities, as Fergus said, are fluid. Look at me: I am half-Irish and half-Welsh, and I was born and brought up in England. There is much more that unites us on these two islands than anything that splits us apart.

11.30 am

We need to say to our communities in these negotiations—and the negotiations will come—that the referendum made a decision; I voted remain, but I lost the vote and I have to accept that. In the negotiations, the job ought to be not to fight over petty differences but to get for our communities the best possible deal that we can. We should not indulge in a race to the bottom on job insecurity, on taxation, or on the denial of people's rights, which have been so long fought for, because that is not going to benefit anyone in the long term.

We can talk among ourselves, but first we need to give a message to the people we represent about trying to build a peaceful, inclusive community on these islands, because only when we get their buy-in can we possibly negotiate the details, which are complex and are going to take years. Otherwise, we rush into a beggar-my-neighbour policy and no one will benefit in the end.

I hope that this Assembly, where there are many people with experience of negotiating peace processes between communities that were previously fighting one another, can look at the situation and say, "Okay, what can we do to get the best deal for the whole of these islands?", because it is in no one's interest to do anything else.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Helen. Brendan Smith TD is next.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

I wish the Co-Chairs well in their work in this important body. Minister McHugh, in his introductory remarks, referred to the establishment of the British-Irish Parliamentary Body in 1990. I was a Member from 1992 up to the early 2000s, when there was a dramatic transformation in the relationships between parliamentarians on this side of the Irish Sea and our colleagues in Britain. At that time, the architecture of this body was 25 Members from Westminster and 25 from the Houses of the Oireachtas—from Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann—as it preceded the establishment of the devolved institutions.

The few of us still around who were Members in those early days will remember that, at that time, there was a lot of friction. There were tensions between the Westminster representatives and the representatives from Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann but, thankfully, with the good work that led us to the Good Friday Agreement, there has been a dramatic transformation in politics on these islands—particularly on this island.

Alongside and in parallel with the transformation of political life was the transformation of the lives of the people on the ground, particularly in the Province of Ulster and the adjoining areas. Right throughout this island, I know that the daily lives of people have been transformed. There is the movement of people for business on a daily basis. We travel North to South and South to North without ever thinking of the border. We shudder at the idea of barriers being re-erected that would bring us back to anything like those days.

I have the privilege of representing two of the southern Ulster counties in Dáil Éireann—Cavan and Monaghan—and I have to say that, on the weekend immediately after the referendum result, there was absolute shock and concern and real worry among the people there. People involved in farming and in the agri-food and hospitality sectors were all extremely concerned about the uncertainty that has now set in. We all know the difficulties that arise in the vacuum that uncertainty can cause, be it in political life or in business life.

John Taylor referred to the advantages that Newry, Enniskillen or Strabane might have. That is a very cyclical thing; we have seen that on the border far too often. I wish for nobody on either side to be dependent on currency fluctuations to have a thriving retail sector. We are at nothing if that is how the economy of our island is structured.

Last Monday, we had a special sitting of Dáil Éireann and, in that debate, I and colleagues in the Fianna Fáil party took the opportunity to outline clearly a few points that we believe should be prioritised. It is absolutely clear, as previous speakers have referred to, that the leave campaign had no plan for what to do if the leave vote was in the majority. We even saw that it did not have a plan to get through the count; defeat was conceded even before the count was near complete.

In the Dáil debate, I said that we need to get out a clear message that Ireland will remain a strong and committed member of the European Union. There can be no other message to our people. We believe that in public administration, both at the official level and at the political level, we have to make dealing with these issues a priority. The challenges and threats have to be identified, and there may be some opportunities in some areas that we have to identify and prepare for.

Both the Irish Government and the British Government have to get a clear message to the other European Union member states about Ireland's unique position and our economic reliance on each other. Fergus O'Dowd referred to the trading relationships on a weekly basis between our islands. There is huge interdependence between our islands, and there is another aspect that has not been highlighted enough. The Economic and Social Research Institute did an analysis of the economic effects of a leave vote, and one of the startling statistics that came from it was to do with the adverse effects that a leave vote would have on exports from Northern Ireland to us, which would be very damaging to the Northern Ireland economy.

We have to achieve success on the common travel area. That has been a core part of our two societies going back to the foundation of our state, and we cannot let that slip. When I go to parts of my constituency, I travel through Northern Ireland. When I leave Cavan to go to

Monaghan, I travel through Fermanagh three different times. I do not want to be stuck at a hard border each time I travel through my constituency. We have to ensure that that does not happen.

We also have to get a message out that EU reform is needed. There is a disconnect between the EU and its citizens. We all know that we can be very strong members and supporters of the EU and still be critical of it and push for reform.

I think that Pat the Cope Gallagher mentioned the huge leadership of Jacques Delors. President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl also gave Europe leadership when it was needed. Unfortunately, that has not existed in more recent times.

Last week, the foreign ministers of the nine founding member states again went off and had their own meeting. If there are meetings, they should be meetings of all the member states, not of an exclusive club. Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande should not call a meeting with the President of Italy, either. Either a member is or is not a full member.

We have to get those few messages across very strongly.

Reg Empey referred to the need for a proper forum or using the present architecture so that we work North and South. I sincerely hope that the two establishment parties in the Northern Ireland Executive—Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party—and the other parties that are represented in Stormont will work with all political interests in the South, the Irish Government and the British Government to ensure that we address the real issues that will affect us throughout the island as a result of the decision of the British people to leave the EU.

The issue needs to be tackled head on by both Governments and all political interests. We cannot emphasise enough the huge interdependence between North and South, and between east and west.

Thank you, A Chathaoirligh.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you.

We still have a lot of speakers to get through, and I am very keen that everyone gets the chance to speak. We will carry on until 12 o'clock, after which we will have a brief coffee break. We will then have our next speaker. I ask everyone to be as brief as they can be. As I said, I am very keen to let everyone who wants to come in to have the chance to do so.

Before I bring in our friends from the Channel Islands to speak, I call Mark Durkan MP.

Mr Mark Durkan MP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chairperson.

My constituency of Foyle voted by 78.2% to remain in the EU. It was one of the top five remain constituencies in the UK. That was for natural reasons, as it is a border constituency in which people were very concerned about the implications of leaving the EU but also very appreciative of the benefits and access that EU membership has given us.

Obviously, we are glad to hear many people say that we have to avoid a hard border. We have to do that. I was not one of those who, in campaigning for remain, raised any serious scares about a hard border. I thought that many people were exaggerating when they spoke. Those people included Tony Blair and John Major when they came to my constituency, although I was not with them at the time.

Businesses in my constituency are concerned about the degree to which all sorts of complicated borderism could flow from a situation where Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, is out of the EU and the South is in the EU. They point to a time when, although the customs border was being dismantled, they still had to operate on a differential basis—for example, burglar alarm companies that were servicing people in Donegal had to use different equipment and show that they were using different tools. Businesses were able to move across the border and do the work—nobody stopped them at customs—but they had to source the work differently. They do not want to return to a situation where there are different standards that mean that they cannot trade in the way that they are used to because somebody might say, “My insurance might not cover me if something goes wrong with the product you’re giving me, unless you can show it’s to EU standard and unless you’re registered here.”

Such difficulties mean that people end up having to police a border themselves and do border checks on their own transactions not only in business but in their personal and social lives. Cross-border workers who live on one side of the border and work on the other were worried about the implications of the benefit changes that the Prime Minister had said that he had got, and they are even more worried about what the implications will be if the details in the future are not attended to. We can understand the reasons why people are not assured when they hear merely that there is a determination not to have a hard border. It is also recognised that it might not be people here who will fully control how hard the border is—permanently or in ways in which it must manifest itself from time to time.

I want to make a serious point about the Good Friday Agreement. I have heard people talk about being involved in negotiations on the Good Friday Agreement, and I, too, was involved in those negotiations. Let us be clear that the Good Friday Agreement took the common EU membership of the UK and Ireland as a given. That is why it is referred to in the preamble to the part of the agreement that is between the two Governments. It is a clear part of strands 2 and 3, and it is also in strand 1.

People should not entertain for too long the idea that the removal of something that everybody saw as part of the fabric of the Agreement makes no difference, because it does make a difference. If the current situation was followed by some of the people who led the leave campaign also removing us from the European Convention on Human Rights, which is also part of the fabric of the Agreement, that would make a huge difference, too. We could not pretend that the tyre was flat only at the bottom if we were left looking at a badly punctured Good Friday Agreement.

The Agreement promises that all its provisions and institutions will be interlocking. If some of the key features are dislodged, people will say that what is there is not the same thing. We should remember that the people of Northern Ireland voted in 1998 for the Good Friday Agreement in overwhelming numbers, along with the people of the South, and that the people of Northern Ireland as a whole voted to remain last week. Consent and the democratic will are meant to be at the core of the Agreement, and it is odd that the British Government say that the consent and the democratic will of the people of Northern Ireland do not matter when

it comes to membership of the EU, particularly when that is part of the fabric of the Good Friday Agreement.

That is why I called for the Taoiseach to set up a forum to draw together parties from the North and the South—they can be from the leave and the remain sides; whoever wants to go can go and whoever does not want to go does not have to go—to look at the implications. We must map for ourselves the issues and the challenges that are ahead; we cannot be left to tailgate on whatever happens courtesy of British politics, in which it is clear that people did not have a plan, a map or a satnav for where they now find themselves—they do not even know who the driver will be. We must do better for ourselves than being towed along when we do not know where people in London will take us.

11.45 am

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. The next speaker is Deputy John Le Fondré of Jersey.

Deputy John Le Fondré:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thank you for the invitation to comment on the Crown dependencies. For those who were not in Cheltenham in October, I point out that the Crown dependencies did a presentation to the Assembly to lay out our constitutional arrangements and the benefits and so on that we provide to the United Kingdom. That applies not just to Jersey and Guernsey but to the Isle of Man.

Broadly speaking, the Channel Islands are covered by protocol 3 of the UK treaty of accession, which will fall when the UK exits from Europe. At present, we are in Europe for trade, and that is about it. We already have essentially third-country status for certain aspects of our industries such as funds, so we have the relevant arrangements in place. That means that, crucially, our position will be impacted by the United Kingdom's negotiations with Europe. Obviously, we are keen that, broadly speaking, the current arrangements should stay the same if possible, and so we would like to be involved throughout the negotiation process, because we are impacted. We have had a form of confirmation that we will be involved and consulted in the negotiation process, for which we are very grateful. That includes recent comments by the Prime Minister at Westminster. The early signs are good, at political and official level.

It is worth pointing out that there is an impact on the United Kingdom as a whole. Jersey alone directs around £0.5 trillion of investment into the United Kingdom. The net impact from a taxation revenue point of view is approximately £2 billion to £3 billion in favour of the United Kingdom and we believe that we support around 180,000 jobs in the UK. Obviously, from that point of view, we think that it is important for both sides that similar arrangements to those that we have in place at the moment can continue, and we hope that they do.

On a more practical point, about 10% of our population is Portuguese and 5% is Polish. As a number of representatives have said, the status of EU citizens wherever they are will be important. Our position is that we would expect to see some form of grandfathering of the rights that everybody has at present. Obviously, we will see where that goes.

Another issue is that the Channel Islands are part of the common travel area, which has already been referred to. I reiterate that we are all linked economically, socially and culturally. We would obviously be very keen to be involved in any negotiations on the status of the common travel area and how it might evolve.

I will finish by making a personal remark, which is to reiterate a point that a number of Members have made. Working together, we all need to try to get the best position for the United Kingdom going forward. I hope that that helps.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, John. I call Deputy Al Brouard from Guernsey.

Deputy Al Brouard:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. Our comments are similar to those of Deputy Le Fondré from Jersey. From the overall perspective, trade is so important. Trade is a good messenger and a good bridge between sovereign states. We have an 800-year relationship with the Crown. It is rather like a marriage, in that there have been good times and bad times. We did not have a vote in the referendum but, as you are doing now, we take the hand that is dealt to us. We have not lived in the UK, but we have been able to successfully trade with the EU as a third-party country.

To refer to some of the comments that have been made this morning, you need to respect the vote as a given. You are stronger the more you work together. You need to look at the opportunities, especially for trade, and at the same time respect the sovereignty of the states. Access to markets is key for you as it is key for us in the Channel Islands. I think that there will be much to satisfy all sides in the coming negotiation. What leave means is what you end up with; it does not necessarily mean what we see today. The final position in several months or years is how it will be, and that is in your hands. How much you give, how much you take and how much you look at the bigger picture is really up to you, but there are good opportunities.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. I now call Danny Kinahan MP.

Mr Danny Kinahan MP:

Much has been said about the issue. I campaigned strongly for remain, but my constituency voted by 500 votes to leave. Northern Ireland, which I always want to put first, voted to stay, but the union that I am passionate about voted to leave. I am left in a quandary in every direction, but I make a plea for us to make this body and all the other bodies that we have work for everyone. We must concentrate on doing things better and on the opportunities, not on our differences. Much can be improved with regard to the relationships between each of our countries in the United Kingdom and between the devolved Governments. This body must concentrate on identifying the issues and opportunities so that we can build on them and help everyone in areas such as welfare and health. We can do many things better. It is better if I keep this short, so thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Danny. Senator Denis Landy.

Senator Denis Landy:

I will also try to be brief.

A number of people have spoken about how the outcome of the referendum will affect the citizen and why the citizen was lost in terms of the answers that they gave to people in churches, outside churches and in various places.

I started in politics about 40 years ago. A mentor of mine, a councillor at that time, gave me a line that I never forgot: “You must talk to Mrs Murphy with the two bags of shopping.” What that means is that people in this arena and at our level must continue to talk to the ordinary citizen on the ground every day to find out what their concerns are. In this case, we must find out what the confusion was. Why did they have the perception that they had of what the referendum was about? Why have so many people admitted since the referendum that, if they had known then what they know now, they would have voted differently? That represents a failure of the political system and of society itself to communicate. It also points to a failure in the party system, and suggests that trust in it is now gone.

I have been around long enough to remember around a dozen referenda in this country and I know that, generally speaking, if Fianna Fáil told its supporters to vote no, they voted no—the same goes for Fine Gael, Labour, Sinn Féin and any other party. That does not happen now. The previous speaker spoke of his involvement with the trade union movement—I take it that he is a Labour MP. People are making the opposite choice now, which is a big problem for people like us who are trying to pull this situation back from where it is.

However, in every crisis, there is opportunity. Our starting position must be the question of what we want the relationship to be between our two countries. To go back to Mrs Murphy, she will tell you that she wants to be able to travel safely between both countries without being stopped; that she does not want sterling to be a problem for her every time she travels; that she wants her husband’s cattle and other agricultural products to get easily to their main market in England; that she wants her niece, who lives and works in London, to keep on doing that without difficulty; and that she wants people from the UK, who make up the biggest section of our tourism visitors, to continue to come. That is what Mrs Murphy wants, and I think that she has as good a handle on this as any of us in this room has.

We are in a difficult situation. However, as members of two countries who need and want each other, the solution is in our hands and we have to go to whatever level to ensure that we get the solution that we want.

On a lighter note, I note that Senator Frankie Feighan will be buoyed up by the support that he got today at this forum—it is a lot more than he got in the Seanad two weeks ago.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

The next speaker is Darren Millar AM.

Mr Darren Millar AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair.

One thing that disappointed me was the poor quality of the debate in Wales and across the rest of the United Kingdom from the leave and the remain camps. There was scaremongering on both sides, and frankly both sides made promises that would be undeliverable at the end of the day. Some of those promises might well have swayed people towards one camp or t'other at some point, delivering a vote that otherwise would not have happened. That said, as many other speakers have pointed out, we are now in a situation in which we have voted to leave the European Union.

So far, nobody has touched on the fact that a lot of the responsibility for the vote lies with the European Union itself. The failure of Juncker and Tusk, in particular, to engage in a proper reform programme, the complete lack of democratic accountability in the EU and its perceived bureaucracy, the failure to deal with problems and crises that are on the horizon or being experienced in the eurozone, and migration in the Mediterranean and elsewhere were all cited to me by people on their doorsteps in my constituency as reasons for voting to leave.

We must remember that that sort of discontent with the European Union is to be found not just in the streets of my constituency of Clwyd West but in streets across Europe. That is why anti-establishment parties are continuing to grow in strength and why people are talking about Frexit, Nexit and Grexit all the time. Therefore, the onus lies on the European Union to prove its worth at the moment, but I cannot see it persuading those citizens who have already made up their minds after looking at its failure in recent years to deal with crises.

Many people have referred to the fact that many voted leave because of fears of immigration. I have no doubt that some did, but when I spoke to people who had already migrated to the UK, what I found marked was the overwhelming number of immigrants from outside the European Union who wanted to encourage their neighbours and friends to leave the EU because those individuals came to the UK on the basis of merit and usually to work. The problem that many people have with immigration from the EU is that it is unrestricted and not necessarily of great value to the communities in which it has taken place. We are kidding ourselves if we think that this was all about immigration or all about some of the other issues that people have touched on.

It always upsets me when I hear people complaining about younger people not taking part in the democratic process by actually voting. At the end of the day, young people were entitled and eligible to vote in exactly the same way as older people, and I do not think that we as elected representatives ought to be suggesting that older people's views are not important. Their age and experience and the wisdom that comes with all that are incredibly valuable, and I, for one, am delighted that older people turned out in their droves and made their views clear at the ballot box.

I am not as pessimistic as other people in some parts of this room appear to be; I think that the situation gives us new opportunities as a United Kingdom, and that it also gives Wales new opportunities. Alongside the negotiation of the exit from the European Union, I would like to see much greater focus from the UK Government on negotiating trade deals with countries around the world, and I would like to see the Irish Government supporting the UK in that. If we can do that, it will actually be a blessing not just for the UK and all its constituent parts but for Ireland as our biggest trading partner in the EU.

We have a very close friendship with the Republic of Ireland, and we need to continue to nurture that throughout this process. If we can stand shoulder to shoulder on wanting the best deal for the UK from this exit, it will be beneficial to everybody.

12 noon

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Darren. Very good. We have one final speaker—Margaret Murphy. I am afraid that we need to keep it really short. The Minister will round up with a couple of remarks but it will have to be very quick. There will then be 10 minutes—10 minutes only—for us to get a cup of coffee or tea and bring it back here. Do not linger outside, please—come back so that we can kick off straight away at 12.15, or 12.20 at the latest, because we have another session before lunch at 1 o'clock. Margaret—over to you.

Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony TD:

Go raibh maith agat. Tá an-áthas orm a bheith anseo inniu mar Theachta Dála nua do Chorcaí Thiar-Theas.

Co-Chairs, I congratulate you on your performance so far this morning and wish you well in the future. As a female, I am particularly proud of Kathleen. It is great to see you in such a position, Kathleen.

Being from the most southerly part of Ireland, I would like to talk about the effect that the leave vote has had on the confidence in the relationship between the very southern part of Ireland and England. We have a very good airport in Cork and our main tourist entrants are from the UK. Local people locally feel that that could end because of the weakness in sterling. There is a big lack of confidence and I am not sure how things can be improved—maybe if plans can be put in place to say what will happen or if things become clearer. On exports, particularly agriculture—we are a very agricultural constituency—things are very up in the air and the ship needs to be steadied. I hope that it will be steadied and that confidence about the relationships between the two places will come good again.

Go raibh maith agat.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Margaret. I invite the Minister to speak for a couple of minutes to round up before we close the session.

The Minister of State for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid (Mr Joe McHugh TD):

It will be two minutes. I know that we have heard individual responses but I have taken notes on responses and queries and I will input them into Government discussions. I thank you for them. I will not go over the sum of the parts because loads of individual analyses are going on in relation to particular outcomes and I do not think that that is what BIPA is looking to do as a body.

The overarching message that I am getting here today is that there is enthusiasm for trying to do things collectively. The people in this room have a massive amount of experience. I

thought that Pat the Cope was the most experienced, given that he started in 1979, but Denis Landy talked about 1976 in terms of his own experience and then Lord Kilclooney came in with the comment that he was first elected in 1965. We have massive experience in this room to enable us to delve into the important matters in relation to the outcome of the referendum. I am completely encouraged by that.

I am also confident that new people are coming in with different perspectives. I met the previous speaker, Margaret Murphy, a few weeks after she got elected to Dáil Éireann when she quoted Mark Twain, who said that the two happiest days in his life were the day he was born and the day he found out why he was born. Margaret informed me that the day she found out why she was born was the day she was elected to Dáil Éireann. On that note, it is important that we remember the privileged position that we all have as legislators in our own respective areas and that people are looking to us to deal with the outcome of this democratic decision. No doubt everyone will remember that.

I said that I would speak for two minutes, Co-Chair. My final point is that I am getting the feeling in this room that people want to roll up their sleeves. This body—this parliamentary Assembly—is fit for purpose, as far as I am concerned. There are officials who have been working in the Assembly for a long number of years who have the experience.

Reg Empey was right to say in his deliberations that we should evaluate existing bodies such as the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association, the NSMC or the North/South trade institutions. We have to evaluate whether we need to create a plethora of new groups. We have a good Assembly here that is unique because it takes in the Crown dependencies and a lot of other areas that other bodies cannot take in, and it encompasses the North and the South, the east and the west.

There have been a lot of very positive contributions this morning. Specific concerns and questions have been raised. Robin Bridgeman asked whether there was a solution other than a hard border. People in Ireland have been talking about our own ports and airports, where we already have robust visa checks. I know that possibilities other than a hard border are being considered. The weight of opinion in this room is that we should certainly look at new and different ways rather than have a hard border.

Darren Millar touched on the wider issues around the EU's responsibility. I am Minister of State for the Diaspora and Overseas Development Aid in a member state of the European Union, and I am confident about the EU. However, it must adapt according to changing circumstances. It will have to adapt to the change involved in the UK leaving and recognise the unique and established relationship involved in a United Kingdom and Irish bilateral infrastructure, for want of a better term, which is part of who we are. One of the earlier speakers said that she is Irish, Welsh and living in England—that sums it up for me.

Go raibh míle maith agat, and I look forward to seeing you in the not too distant future.
[Applause.]

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to all of you who have taken part in this very expansive and encouraging debate this morning. I have a feeling that we will be returning to this discussion at a later date. Certainly, there is another session tomorrow, but I suspect that we will be having this discussion for a long time to come.

We will now adjourn for 10 minutes and will reconvene at 12.20. Please bring your coffees back. Thank you very much.

The sitting was suspended at 12.07 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 12.30 pm.

BRITISH-IRISH FRIENDSHIP TODAY BASED ON ALMOST A CENTURY OF IRISH INDEPENDENCE AND THE PEACE SETTLEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

We are going to recommence—we had a very good discussion this morning, and we are going to continue now in that vein. We have Dr Martin Mansergh, who has kindly agreed to address the Assembly on British-Irish friendship today based on almost a century of Irish independence and the peace settlement in Northern Ireland. Obviously, there will be discussion and reference to the Brexit referendum.

I now invite our guest speaker, Dr Martin Mansergh—historian, former government policy adviser, Senator and Assembly Member—to give his opening address.

Dr Martin Mansergh:

Thank you, Co-Chairperson, and many congratulations on your appointment.

I feel very honoured to have been invited to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly at a very important time in British-Irish relations in the aftermath of the referendum. I have very fond memories of my own six-year membership of the Body between 2002 and 2008. I hope newly appointed Members will gain as much from the experience as I did.

The idea of such a body had its origins in the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies of 1981, after a communiqué between Heads of Government which spoke of “the unique relationship between the two countries”. It was referenced again in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, and came to life in 1990. Its first Co-Chairmen were Jim Tunney on the Irish side and Peter Temple-Morris on the British side, who has written about it in his memoirs. It has been a valuable meeting-point for parliamentarians in these islands, as a means of keeping up to date with the development of peace in Northern Ireland, the political situation in each of our countries, and all matters of mutual concern. It will obviously be of particular importance now in helping to find and support a new equilibrium in relations that minimises any bilateral disruption arising from Britain’s intention to depart the EU. Along with the North South Ministerial Council—which, as has been observed, is meeting today; and which, like the Committees of this Body, can meet as often as necessary—this Assembly and its Committees can certainly serve as a good part of any all-Ireland forum.

I was very sorry to hear of the recent death of former Northern Ireland Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew. He was proud of his Cork maternal family connections. He was responsible for the exploratory British back-channel contacts in the year prior to the IRA ceasefire, which Kevin McNamara, then Labour spokesman, had the good sense not to assail him for when they were revealed. Mayhew was also responsible for overseeing progress in inter-party talks in 1992, which provided important institutional elements later incorporated in the Good Friday Agreement.

During my time on the Body, it was fortunate to have among its British Members former Northern Ireland Office Ministers, such as Peter Brooke, Paul Murphy and Michael Mates. It still has Lord Dubs and Lord Mawhinney, and of course the veteran of the Northern Ireland Government of the 1960s, John Taylor, Lord Kilclooney.

Today, this Assembly contains former party leaders and senior officeholders, including Lord Empey, Mark Durkan and Tánaiste till very recently Joan Burton. The Body around the year 2000 broadened out to include Members from the devolved Parliament and Assemblies of the UK. The Secretariat as always is vital. Journalists covered proceedings well, and the after-hours aspects in attractive and varied locations provided for them an always memorable works outing.

The last 100 years between the islands of Ireland and Britain as well as between the two States, has been the story of a fundamental reordering of relationships, disruptive and conflicted at times, but culminating in historically unprecedented harmony, friendship and co-operation both between Britain and Ireland and on the island of Ireland, where even now from any point of view some of the divisive legacies of history have yet to be satisfactorily resolved.

2016 is the centenary of two centrally important historical events affecting these islands, both the subject of solemn and reflective commemoration. The Battle of the Somme, with its horrific slaughter of more than a million soldiers on all sides, is in many ways symbolic of the First World War as a whole, a war of attrition. While the sacrifice made by men of the 36th Ulster Division has always been strongly commemorated and is regarded as one of the foundation stones of Northern Ireland, soldiers from other parts of Ireland and other traditions were also involved and suffered great loss of life especially in the months that followed. It should be remembered that, on the Western Front at least, Irish soldiers like the rest of the British army were defending not an empire, but French and Belgian homelands, and Marshal Foch later paid tribute to Irish valour in the 1920s.

For a long period, the scale of Irish, other than Unionist, involvement in the First World War was virtually excluded from the national narrative, and was often not spoken of even in families. The fallen were seen as having been on the wrong side of history. In the past 30 years, there has been a transformation of attitudes. The exceptionally fine war memorial gardens at Islandbridge designed by Lutyens have been restored by the State, and will host a full-scale ceremony of remembrance next Saturday. Many ceremonies organised in Northern Ireland, such as the recent one in the Belfast docks commemorating the Battle of Jutland, have taken on an inclusive character, remembering Irish soldiers and sailors from all parts of the island, for which those in charge of commemorative activities in Northern Ireland are to be commended.

Irish historians today will readily acknowledge that the First World War and its aftermath provided a context for first the claim and then the achievement of Irish independence. The 1916 Easter Rising is the centrepiece from an Irish Government perspective of the decade of centenaries, which runs from the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912 to the coming into being of the Irish Free State on 6 December 1922, a year after the treaty.

50 years ago, in 1966, the commemoration of the Rising revolved round a single official narrative. Critics, even if they were Jesuit priests, were not welcome. This time round, there has been an encouragement of a whole variety of narratives, including the role of women—which we will hear about later—the innocent child casualties, the diverse cultural background of the participants and their wider support milieu, as well as accounts from the other side, such as the role of Trinity College and the recollections of a British officer, who was Irish, Henry de Courcy-Wheeler, who took some of the surrenders and then, about 40 years later, handed over some of the equipment that was surrendered to him to President Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh.

I was reading only a couple of days ago in the *Irish Field* how the prestigious Aga Khan Trophy, the highlight of the Dublin Horse Show, owes its origin to the influence of Judge William Wylie with the Irish Free State's first Head of Government W. T. Cosgrave in 1925. In 1916, Wylie had been the crown prosecutor in the field court martial of the 1916 leaders, but he probably contributed to saving the lives of both Cosgrave and de Valera. When General Maxwell asked him if de Valera, who was next on the list, was important, Wylie replied "No", and explained he was only a maths teacher.

The aim of the State commemorations has been to broaden sympathies, rather than to undermine loyalties. Naturally enough, the State is not neutral about its own existence. There has been tremendous public interest and engagement, and, as things turned out, the height of the commemoration helped to fill the hiatus caused by the delay in forming a Government till early May. The commemorative programme has had full State support, led by the President Michael D. Higgins, the Taoiseach Enda Kenny, and the responsible Minister Heather Humphreys.

There has been a desire to leave a permanent legacy, with a new museum in the GPO, the incorporation of the adjacent Kilmainham Courthouse into the Kilmainham Jail visiting experience, a tenement museum in Henrietta Street, and the conversion of the gymnasium used as a prisoner holding centre in 1916, virtually all that is left of Richmond Barracks, named, as was our Garda Training College in Templemore, after the Lord Lieutenant, a friend of Wellington, whose wife held a famous ball before the Battle of Waterloo.

My favourite 1916 anecdote relates to the visit of the British Prime Minister Henry Asquith to Dublin and to Richmond Barracks in early May, when he was becoming increasingly concerned about the negative public reaction to the executions. Talking to one young Dublin volunteer held prisoner, he asked him what he thought of the Rising now. He was much perplexed when the Volunteer replied that he thought it had been a success. Asked to explain, he said to the Prime Minister: "Well, if no, what are you here for?"

The other important legacy of the 1916 commemoration has been the opening up to the general public of digital access to the recollections of those who participated in the Rising or subsequently recorded for posterity by the Bureau of Military History in the middle decades of the 20th century as well as carefully vetted applications for military pensions.

All revolutions end in disappointment, but we are not too disappointed. As German President Joachim Gauck, who was involved in his own country's peaceful revolution has written, freedom as a goal is immensely attractive. Freedom as a reality brings not only happiness, but tribulation. The biggest disappointment of the first 40 years, despite significant economic and social development, was the inability to stem the flow of emigration. While most Irish leaders from O'Connell on, both pre as well as post-independence, wanted cordial relations between a self-governing Ireland and Britain, this did not happen consistently till much more recently, despite the free movement of people, except during the war, Britain being virtually the exclusive destination of Irish exports, and the Irish currency joined to sterling. This state of affairs was due first of all to difficulties in establishing full sovereignty, and secondly ongoing dissatisfaction with partition.

In terms of British-Irish relations, there is an interesting, though limited, parallel with recent events, in the sudden and unexpected decision of the Irish Government to declare a Republic and leave the Commonwealth, which took effect in 1949. Notwithstanding British disappointment with this decision, the important priority on both sides was to protect the

bilateral relationship and particularly freedom of movement between the two islands, since known as the common travel area. Lord Glentoran—a senior one—as a Unionist Minister of Commerce, got into trouble with his cabinet colleagues, when he proposed a free trade area across Ireland in the late 1950s. Later in the 1960s, tariffs were largely eliminated in the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement of 1965. Joint membership of the EEC further levelled the playing pitch, and meant that British and Irish Ministers and officials were meeting regularly in a multilateral context. While Ireland had separate interests relating to agriculture, structural funds and currency matters, there was greater convergence on justice and home affairs, labour law, and a shared opposition to fiscal harmonisation. Above all, the EU provided an example and a context for the peace process, when it came to be accepted that the close co-operation of both the British and Irish Governments was essential if the Northern Ireland conflict were to be resolved. The regular meetings, both bilateral and EU, between John Major and Albert Reynolds, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, and more recently David Cameron and Enda Kenny, helped develop a close understanding and give co-ordinated leadership.

As has already been stated, in the Good Friday Agreement continued EU membership of Britain and Ireland was taken as given. The combination of peace and the EU removed the visible border, and went a long way towards restoring the shared economic and social space that existed in these islands prior to the First World War. The visit of Queen Elizabeth in 2011 underlined the transformation of relations, and of course it was followed up by a reciprocal visit by President Higgins. A top concern now has to be to protect the gains of the peace process, including peace itself, taking account of the clear desire of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to maintain EU access as far as possible, without prejudice to the desire of a somewhat differently constituted majority to maintain their existing constitutional status. No opportunity should be given to raise tensions, still less reignite conflict. While this State is a committed EU and eurozone member, and it is important at this time not to send mixed messages, it may need to consider after British departure from the EU, by way of arriving at a new balance, how, when or whether it should strengthen its relations with Britain, bilaterally or multilaterally, and perhaps with other Anglophone countries which so many from Ireland have settled and worked to build. Thank you.

12.45pm

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thanks very much to Dr Martin Mansergh. We have some time now for comments or questions. I ask Members to be as brief as possible so that we can take a number of contributions. We will then give Dr Martin Mansergh the opportunity to respond at the end.

I call Jeffrey Donaldson, if he would like to start.

Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and I thank Martin for his very thoughtful contribution. I have got to know him over many years, from our respective involvement in the peace process, and I think he is absolutely right that none of us should seek to say or do anything that would undermine the progress that has been made in terms of the political institutions that exist. I would go even further and say that it would be a mistake for others to seek now to create a new kind of forum that could actually undermine the existing institutions, such as this one and the North South Ministerial Council. Of course things have changed, and I recognise that some of the

parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly have now left the Northern Ireland Executive. Obviously they will not be participating in the North South Ministerial Council and will want to find other ways of expressing a view. But I would be concerned that that could create difficulties, with some parties in and some parties out of a process of a dialogue. I think that that would be a matter of regret.

Finally, I welcome Martin's closing comments. They were very sensible and I think he suggests an appropriate approach. I hope that, as things settle down, people in both our jurisdictions will look at how our two countries can be closer together and, indeed, with others. We talk about our shared history but our shared history goes well beyond the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland and touches on many other places where we have much in common. I hope that pragmatic ways can be found to give new expression to that relationship—or perhaps renewed expression.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. The next speaker is Senator Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, Martin. I also thank you for the work you have done over the years. I served with you in the Senate from 2002 to 2007. I have just two questions. The Republic was declared by John A. Costello in 1949. What exactly were the arrangements before that, before we were declared a true republic? Secondly, you talk about other aspects of how to work the dialogue in the case of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. One surely should be looking at Ireland in the Commonwealth, but one aspect that has gone very much unreported is that for the last three years, we have had the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association every six months. We deal with cross-Border issues, such as tourism and energy and that takes place in Stormont and in the Seanad forum. Is that another way that could give it some teeth? It has gone unreported and here today, we should really let people know that this very important forum has been taking place over the last three years.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. Our next speaker then is John Scott.

John Scott MSP:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I just have a question in terms of British-Irish friendships. How does Dr Mansergh see the relationships developing, or being maintained, between Scotland and Ireland and indeed the other devolved Administrations?

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. I now call Danny Kinahan.

Mr Danny Kinahan MP:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thanks very much, Dr Mansergh—I welcome all the work that you have done. I also congratulate everyone on the various events held to mark both the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme this year. They have been very carefully and sympathetically handled. As for the two concerns that I want to raise, one has been touched

one by Sir Jeffrey, which is the need to include the Opposition in the North, and not just the Executive, in all future discussions. The second is the east-west linkage, which has just been touched on by John Scott. We have too much at Westminster of what seems to me a sort of “devolve and forget”, rather than recognising that Health needs to talk to each another, as does Education when it comes to exams and qualifications. There is a whole mass of things on which we still need to work together that do not happen. Can we please ensure that what is there is made to work better?

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Dr Mansergh, I might ask you to come back on some of those points now, and then we will take a few additional speakers, if that is okay. Thank you.

Dr Martin Mansergh:

I agree with what Jeffrey Donaldson said, so there is nothing really to add. Obviously all forums—including the one just mentioned now about the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association—need to be used, and if they need to intensify their activities, then they should do so. Given that we have these forums, which we did not have 20 or 30 years ago—there was virtually no North/South forum of any kind—we should make maximum use of them. I think we need to be a bit careful of frightening the horses, if you like.

Now, with regard to the history of John A. Costello’s announcement, Ireland’s membership of the Commonwealth had become very tenuous from the mid-1930s through to the 1940s. I think there were still civil servants attending a few committees of one kind or another, but the Irish Government had ceased to attend any summits and so on, and of course, there was the dispute over Irish neutrality. Certainly, the view of Churchill was that Commonwealth countries should participate in the war and were duty-bound to do so. The Irish Government of the time maintained their neutrality and had a different view. But it is the case that certainly, the manner of the Costello announcement—out in Canada—did take public opinion by surprise.

There is plenty of documentary evidence that de Valera, though he did not make a public issue of it, privately disapproved on the grounds that it was pulling down a remaining bridge which might be useful sometime in the future.

Scotland and Ireland, of course, have diplomatic relations. We have a consulate in Edinburgh, which in my observation and experience has been very useful. There is a good bilateral relationship between Edinburgh and Dublin. I personally regret—I do not necessarily dispute its necessity—the decision to close the consulate in Cardiff. I hope that in better economic conditions—and I think particularly in the situation we are now facing, it really should be done—the consulate in Cardiff will be reopened.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. Our next speaker is Brendan Smith.

Mr. Brendan Smith TD:

Thanks very much Co-Chair. Just a quick question to Martin in relation to his time as chief policy adviser to the Taoiseach. I heard the late Albert Reynolds and John Major separately speak about the great working relationships they developed. I think they developed them

while Mr Major was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr Reynolds was Minister for Finance. Subsequently, they attended summit meetings and EU Council meetings together and built up that good working relationship and trust. How important was that personal relationship—that trust between the two men? Was it a key ingredient in achieving the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, considering the serious backdrop and the violence that was prevalent in that period?

Dr Martin Mansergh:

I think it was a very important relationship. It started at a place like this—Ashford Castle in County Mayo—when Albert Reynolds was Minister for Finance and John Major was Chancellor of the Exchequer. That was when there was the initial agreement on the so-called Maastricht criteria for keeping budgets in line, and would have been back during the Irish Presidency in 1990. Both of them—perhaps to a much greater extent than their predecessors on both sides, who were Charles Haughey and Margaret Thatcher—came to the Northern conflict with a much less ideological approach. I know that Albert Reynolds—partly from a position of Christian principles—saw the ongoing deaths and slaughter as an offence to his principles and it was something that they really should try to bring to an end and stop. They met quite frequently bilaterally. I remember going to one meeting, for example, which was at an international rugby match at Twickenham. They had the meeting first and then went down afterwards. Happily, that was an occasion when Ireland won by one point, but without losing respect for each other. They also had quite a stormy relationship but it worked through, and certainly to the end of Albert's life, he maintained a high regard for John Major, which was reciprocal. If I might be allowed this comment, I do think that in recent years, over various constitutional issues in the UK, John Major has been playing very well the role of elder statesman.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

At this point, we have three other speakers. Is there anybody else who wishes to indicate to speak? We will take all the contributions together. Mattie McGrath is the next speaker.

Mr. Mattie McGrath TD:

Co-Chair, I too congratulate you and your fellow Co-Chair and wish you well in the BIPA. I have served for the last five years and have enjoyed it. I am delighted to welcome back today my Tipperary and former constituency colleague, Dr Martin Mansergh. I appreciate, as we all do, his words of wisdom and thank him for his huge and pivotal role in the peace process. That is widely accepted and known, so I am delighted to meet you again Martin, and look forward to your continued advice. Thank you.

1.00 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. I call Mark Durkan.

Mr Mark Durkan MP:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and congratulations to you, and thanks to Martin. Sir Jeffrey made reference to the range of institutions and fora that already exist. Of course they do, but that has not meant that on coming to different issues, we did not need different negotiations and

different forums of discussion, including different inter-party talks at Stormont or elsewhere. The proposal for a forum to be convened to allow parties from North and South to get together to consider the implications is there not to rival or undermine any of the existing fora such as this, which could contribute to the situation. It is to make sure that distinct consideration is given—not least given the changed Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution—to making sure that the parties who represent all those on the island who are entitled to citizenship can look at the full implications for the agreement itself, and for all the interests that we are meant to represent and serve. That is why it is there; it is not to rival anything, but to complement and complete, and possibly commission the sort of quality advice that the Scottish Government are now doing for themselves in respect of their interests.

As somebody who contributed very strongly in the negotiation of the agreement, and was there for a lot of the detail around strand two, the number of bodies and their areas of scope, is Martin conscious that many of the existing bodies have done their work using EU funds and EU programmes, and that those have been some of the more successful areas of work? They also have had some limited productivity, because they have been given limited roles in other areas. There are implications for people looking at whether we will have the same totality of agreement after a Brexit as we have had before it. If we do not consider those issues now, in the name of not frightening the horses, it could be a dereliction that we will greatly regret later on.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. There are one or two more speakers. I call Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Martin, it is always a pleasure to hear your contribution, and thank you very much for what you said today. Given your close involvement with the peace process, is there anything you would say about the contribution that Mo Mowlam made as an individual to that process? Are there any lessons from that process that we should bear in mind today?

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Joe Carey is the next speaker.

Mr Joe Carey TD:

Can Martin explain, in relation to the Good Friday Agreement, his view on the assumption that both Ireland and the UK had membership of the EU, and the impact?

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you. I believe Viscount Bridgeman was looking to come in as well.

The Lord Bridgeman:

This is a strictly personal view, but after the historic visit to the battlefields in October two years ago, a group of us—from all parties from the Irish side—had a discussion, which was entirely dispassionate and historically based, of the events of the Easter Rising, hour by hour. It was a most fantastic debate, but what came out of it was not only the executions, which of

course were dreadful, but the introduction of the conscription Act, although it was never put into effect in Ireland, which was very interesting.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Anyone else who wishes to speak should indicate now. Otherwise, I will ask Dr Mansergh to respond.

Dr Martin Mansergh:

I will take the last point first. Undoubtedly, the overall impact, which is sometimes attributed to the Easter Rising alone, of course is attributable not just to the rising but to its aftermath. There were official executions, and then there were one or two very unfortunate unofficial executions, like Sheehy-Skeffington and a couple of journalists. Then there was the deportation of a lot of people—not all of whom had actually been involved—and then, as you say, conscription. Conscription kind of hit at the heart of the argument about home rule. The argument on home rule, the Act having been passed, was that Ireland is on the cusp of freedom. How could you be on the cusp of freedom if you were being subjected to conscription?

I mentioned the Battle of the Somme being part of a war of attrition, and in a sense, what brought the war to an end is, all over Europe, different elements revolting against it. The Russian Revolution was the most spectacular example of that, but people's endurance eventually gave out. That eventually, of course, happened to Germany in 1918, with the American troops pouring in.

Of course it is a matter of decision for the different political parties as to what forums are used—both existing and any to be created—to deal with the aftermath of Brexit. I would say once things get into detail, they could be quite hard work, because there will be a lot of detail to be worked through. I do not want to take a position. I am just addressing the point about a situation where, on the Nationalist side of the argument, it looks as if we are trying to use Brexit to advance an all-Ireland agenda—the agenda of a united Ireland—rather than dealing with the fallout and how best constructively to maintain relations.

If I can interject—though it was not part of a theme, it is important and may have got lost—one of the candidates for the Tory leadership, Theresa May, gave a press conference yesterday or the day before, where she said she was dropping her request to repeal the European Convention on Human Rights. That was integral to the agreement and would have caused a lot of problems on this side of the water. She said the reason she was dropping it was that there was not sufficient support for it, but I think that is a positive development.

I had a high regard for Mo Mowlam. The most courageous thing that she did—this would have been against the advice of Downing Street, and certainly against the advice of the vast majority of her officials—was when she went into the prisons and met the Loyalist prisoners. There would have been no Good Friday Agreement unless the situation of prisoners, both Republican and Loyalist, were addressed. I think that visit brought home that reality, especially to Downing Street, and quite a good bit of the discussion in the last 24 hours of the negotiations was on the subject of prisoners. She was a courageous woman, not always appreciated by her various interlocutors or public servants. Some of the NIO seemed to prefer the sort of patrician style that they had had under the Tory Government and so on, but I thought her attitude was refreshing. She would kick off her shoes, hand round the jelly babies

and so on. She really did work at it with a will. I think there were times she was a bit short-circuited, shall we say, by Downing Street in latter stages, which was not very fair to her. Of course, she did have growingly serious health problems, unfortunately, but she certainly made her contribution. She was the Secretary of State in the crucial period between May 1997 and the Good Friday Agreement, and for about a year or so afterwards. In my own memory of various Secretaries of State, she and Peter Brooke would be my favourites.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thanks very much, Dr Mansergh. I will say a sincere “thank you” to Dr Mansergh for his excellent presentation.

That brings to a close our morning session; we are going to adjourn for lunch. I would like to say a sincere thanks to everyone for co-operating with both Co-Chairs and for the excellent discussions that we have had this morning.

I have been asked to advise everybody that there is a group photograph to be taken in the hotel reception before lunch, so I ask Members to go straight to the reception area of the hotel and then to adjourn for lunch. We are back here at 2.30 pm. Thanks.

The sitting was suspended at 1.09 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.40 pm.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND IN THE 1916 RISING AND WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Our Co-Chair, Mr Andrew Rosindell MP will be along shortly, so I will chair this session. It is a huge privilege for me personally to chair the session, which is about the role of women in the First World War and the Easter Rising and War of Independence. I am pleased to invite our next guest speakers, Dr Fionnuala Walsh and Ms Sinéad McCooile, to give their addresses on the role of women in the First World War and the Easter Rising and War of Independence. I also thank them for their patience and co-operation, given that they moved their slot to a later time. We sincerely thank them for it. Dr Fionnuala Walsh will begin with her presentation on the role of women in the First World War, followed by Ms Sinéad McCooile with her presentation on the role of women in the Easter Rising and War of Independence. When they have both concluded, time allowing, we will take contributions and questions from the floor. Could everyone give a very warm welcome to Dr Fionnuala Walsh?

Dr Fionnuala Walsh:

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you today. It is a great honour to address the Assembly. I will give a brief introduction on the role of women in the First World War. When I first started studying this topic, approximately five years ago, there was little public or academic interest in the area. Many historians and others assumed there was little to investigate, that Irish women played little role in the events of the Great War. The late Keith Jeffery described Irishwomen's participation in the war effort as a kind of "historically hidden Ireland", while as recently as 2008, historian Caitríona Clear observed that Irishwomen and the war remained obscured in the historical shadow.

The reasons for this neglect were manifold and complex, ranging from the marginalisation of women's history, a perceived lack of sources, and, most significantly, the politically motivated desire among many to minimise Ireland's involvement and active support for Britain in the First World War. As will be evident from Dr Martin Mansergh's address, this has changed greatly over the past few years and it is now widely accepted that marking and commemorating the participation of Ireland in the Great War in no way minimises the central place of the Easter Rising and the War of Independence in our history. The role of women is an important part of this history and can illuminate much about Irish society during these years and Ireland's relationship with Britain.

Recent research has demonstrated that the response of the Irish population to the outbreak of war in summer 1914 did not differ greatly from that of the British people. The prevailing opinion appeared to be that British, and Irish, involvement in the war was necessary to prevent a German invasion, which was considered a real threat at the time.

2.45 pm

The historians Senia Paseta and Adrian Gregory describe the immediate impact of the war as the creation of an "unprecedented unity, both within the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Great Britain". However they qualify this to state that the unity was "suspicious and conditional" and that while the demands of war brought Nationalists and Unionists together, the antagonisms had not disappeared entirely.

The mobilisation of the Irish population was not confined to the voluntary enlistment of approximately 210,000 Irishmen in the British Army. A parallel war service developed on the home front with thousands of Irish women becoming involved in activities to support the war effort. For example, approximately 6,000 women from the island of Ireland joined Irish detachments of the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance Association. Many of these trained as nurses, with over 500 Irishwomen helping wounded soldiers near the front in Europe, while the remainder served in military hospitals in Ireland and Britain. Others knitted socks and prepared parcels of comforts for soldiers and prisoners of war, so many that a shortage of needles was reported in Dublin in winter 1914. Some 6,000 Irish women were also enrolled in the Irish War Hospital Supply Depot. This organisation collected sphagnum moss from bog land and made it into dressings to serve as an alternative to cotton wool.

All this activity was voluntary and unpaid, demonstrating a real commitment on the part of the women involved. Women from all classes and religious and political backgrounds participated in these activities. Although Red Cross membership was more common in urban areas, there were branches in every region of Ireland. The proportion of women involved with the British Red Cross and the St John Ambulance Association was similar to that for Great Britain. A combination of motives influenced the Irish volunteers, a mix of personal, political and associational. Some hoped to prove the right of women to the vote through their war work or to demonstrate support for either the Unionist cause or John Redmond's national volunteers. The majority however appear to have simply wanted to do their bit to help with the crisis.

Many had a family member serving in the armed forces, and so it may have provided some consolation to be able to contribute in some way themselves. For example, Marie Martin, a Dublin Roman Catholic, enrolled with the Red Cross in September 1914, following the enlistment of two of her brothers. She served in Malta and France. Her nursing work appeared to provide solace and comfort after her younger brother, Charlie, was killed on active service in December 1915. Emma Duffin, a Belfast woman, also served with the Red Cross. Her brother was a British Army officer and her four sisters all volunteered as nurses. She described her motives for enlisting in a letter to her mother in May 1915:

“I am glad for I think it is the right thing to do, you will feel that that you are being of some use, and it makes me independent till the end of the war anyway, and I daresay I will get to like the work, everyone seems to, it will certainly be interesting.”

Her reasons for enlisting clearly combined a sense of patriotic duty with a desire for independence and personal fulfilment. The sense of it being “the right thing to do” was very common, with many women feeling almost compelled to do something related to the War. Isabella Cleland from County Antrim inserted a note with her completed British Red Cross service record, outlining how she had seen an advertisement in a local newspaper for volunteers. She described how she was “well pleased with the privilege of doing a little bit”. Another Irish member, Emilie Gilmore McCaw from Belfast, summed up her war service as follows:

“I first went when I could and did all I could”.

Hundreds of Irishwomen also served with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and the Royal Naval Service. The majority of these women were Roman Catholic and working class. Members were likely motivated by a combination of economic and patriotic factors. This was also true of the Irish munitions workers. Approximately 2,000 people worked in the five factories in Ireland, the majority of them women. Thousands of Irish men and women also

migrated to Britain to work in its munitions industry, playing a vital role in the war effort. Irishwomen replaced absent soldiers in other sectors, including the civil service and the railway industry, and there is some evidence of a shift in attitudes towards women's capabilities as paid workers. The greater need for female labour combined with the Government imposed industrial controls and the significant wartime growth in trade union membership also led to some improvements in wages for Irishwomen. However, the high pre-war unemployment and the absence of conscription in Ireland meant that the war had a less dramatic impact on women's paid work than in Great Britain.

What was the lasting impact of the war for Irishwomen? In 1918, the vote was finally granted to women in Britain and Ireland, although restricted to those over 30 and fulfilling certain property requirements. Many contemporaries viewed the achievement of suffrage as a reward for women's war service. However, women in Ireland faced difficult times, with employment shortages and the tense political situation. The Irish munitions workers were demobilised almost immediately and experienced significant difficulties finding subsequent employment. Emigration was, once again, the only option for many. Women were encouraged to return to the domestic sphere, with marriage and motherhood remaining society's expected primary goals for women.

However, the war had left a lasting impact upon many of the women who lived through it. For those bereaved by the war, it was particularly difficult to adjust to the post-war world. It has been estimated that approximately 35,000 Irish men, who enlisted from Ireland, died in active service in the war, leaving bereft families behind. Many never fully recovered from the loss of their loved one. The Countess of Fingall described in her memoir her difficulty in coping with the losses her social circle had sustained:

“The world we had known had vanished. We hunted again, but ghosts rode with us. We sat at table, but there were absent faces.”

The experiences of Irishwomen during the First World War were very similar to those of women in Great Britain, with their public roles ranging from nursing wounded soldiers to producing weapons of war. Although opposition to the war grew after the Easter Rising and became particularly apparent with the anti-conscription campaign in 1918, significant numbers of Irishwomen nonetheless played an active voluntary role in the war effort right up to 1918. The outbreak of war in 1914 resulted in an unprecedented unity between disparate communities on the island and between Ireland and Britain, a unity that could not, however, survive the tensions and turbulence that followed. A more divided Ireland emerged in 1918. The participation of Irish people in the war effort and the mass mobilisation of the population to Britain's cause was overshadowed for many years by the other events of the decade, but for those who lived through the war years, their lives were changed forever.

Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Go raibh maith agat, Dr Fionnuala Walsh. Now, we will hear Ms Sinéad McCool on the role of women in the Easter Rising and the War of Independence.

Ms Sinéad McCool:

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you very much for having me here to speak today. It is a great privilege to be able to talk about this subject, which I have been talking about for a

number of years. I started in the early 1990s working in Kilmainham Gaol. I recently realised that I have been working on this since 1991, which gives me a real flavour of changes. This morning, the idea of talk having an impact was discussed. Over time, fora such as this result in schemes receiving funding. Much of the work I did during the 1990s, from the time of the peace process, was with Co-operation North, where I spoke to groups over time. Bit by bit, the conversations changed the narrative and it became, as the delegates said, easier to discuss things. Since the decade of commemorations, we have found it easier to do exhibitions that are more inclusive. Although my specialty is on women in the Nationalist cause, the most recent exhibition put together by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is an all-Ireland exhibition and includes women from all sides who took part in the 1916 Rising.

The women's Declaration of 1912, which is available online through the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, shows that 234,034 women pledged loyalty to the Union with Great Britain. This group is an area that has not been explored. It seems strange that, even up to five years ago, the material Dr Fionnuala Walsh mentioned was not open to interpretation because, as so often with women's history, the notion was that it did not exist and was not in the major repositories. However, we have found that much of the material did find its way into archives and libraries but, for financial reasons, was not catalogued. Because the scholarship has not existed and people have not searched for this information, it was not made available and was pushed down the list. Earlier, Dr Martin Mansergh mentioned the Military Service Pensions Collection of our Military Archive. It is very important, given that it is one of the few places in the world where the military retained records that tell our story.

This is the context in which new material has come to light, and we have discovered that 300 women took part in the Easter Rising. While it seems a small number of people, we must consider the Rising in the context of the time, which predated votes for women. When the Proclamation of the Irish Republic addressed "Irishmen and Irishwomen", it was a revolutionary thing to do. Much has been said about the Proclamation. People have asked whether so many women went on to remain politicised right through the rest of the century because of the Proclamation which proclaimed the Irish Republic in 1916.

It is important to remember, particularly in the context of what the delegates have been discussing today, that many people who became involved in the Rising had been drawn into politics - and I call it "politics" deliberately here. While there were those who avowed extreme nationalism, many of them had come through the trade unions, protests and strike action. They were also involved in philanthropic activity and assisted the workers who were locked out in 1913 and in other strikes. They had joined an Irish Ireland movement and became increasingly interested in the Irish language. They were involved in Irish sport. Women were involved in "little hurling", camogie, and there was Irish music and Irish dance. When they came together into fora where they met people with like interests, many of them became radicalised.

Often, families came through and became involved in politics. The same happens today. The women who became involved in the Rising went out under the guise of routine manoeuvres. The organisation that was formed in 1914, Cumann na mBan, the Irishwomen's Council, was attached in some way to the male Irish Volunteers. This meant some women did not become as involved as they might have liked, because they were waiting for orders from their male captains. In some cases, they were not accepted. Some of the delegates who know Irish history know that Éamon de Valera did not accept them at Boland's Mill. Ned Daly did not want to use women in the Four Courts, until he received a direction from the General Post

Office, GPO, which was where the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic was located.

We talked about women being couriers and intelligence gatherers at the time. One woman, Molly Adrian, cycled in and out from this area to Dublin city in order to go to the GPO and receive her instructions direct from the Provisional Government. For many years, we assumed she just did it once, however, in recent years it has come to light that she did it on a daily basis up until the middle of that week.

The Irish Citizen Army was an organisation that came from the labour movement, and was established by James Connolly, to create a force to protect workers. The women involved in the Irish Citizen Army were given equal rank. They had a slightly different role from Cumann na mBan and sometimes, when one hears about certain women involved in the Rising, the ones which give the great soundbites and who were arrested and held for long periods of time, they were members of the Irish Citizen Army. There was also an organisation called the Hibernian Rifles which was attached to the Ancient Order of Hibernians. They had a group called the Clann na nGael girl scouts. For many years we did not know who the people were in one of the famous photographs of the group of women from 1916. They were Clann na nGael girl scouts, many of whom were forbidden to take part when their parents discovered that this manoeuvre was actually a rebellion. We know much about this based on first-hand accounts in the Bureau of Military History statements which Dr Martin Mansergh described earlier.

One of the things we must remember about the time was that the organisation that was putting it together was a group called the Irish Republican Brotherhood. By its very name, one would assume there were no women members. It may surprise people to know many of the women who were married to the leaders, including those who were executed and those who were not, did not know about what was going on. We know from a first-hand account from Áine Ceannt that, although she had the meetings in her house, she did not know the plans for the Rising. An audio file of this account is available online from the Irish Military Archives. When she was questioned later on, she said she thought warfare would commence only if it were provoked, which was the belief of most people. Sinéad de Valera, better known as the President's wife when Éamon de Valera became President, wrote in her memoir, which was originally written just for family, that she thought she was "wanting in understanding" not to have anticipated the Rising. However, she was not alone.

3.00 pm

Two women were sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. One of them was Kathleen Clarke, who went on to found the Republican Prisoners' Dependents Fund, an organisation to help all the women and children who were dependents of men who were arrested in the aftermath of the rebellion. One of the reasons it became so significant was that it was run by Michael Collins when he was released from Frongoch. I hope, for the Welsh members here, I am pronouncing it properly. Another IRB member was Una Brennan, who is seen in one of the photographs and who has emerged as a character in the 1916 Rising. I refer to the particular photograph because, for many years, the photograph existed of a group of men and it was said that they were volunteers from Wexford. There are two women in the photograph. However, for many years, every time the photograph was used, the women were cut out of it, starting with the newspaper at the time, in 1916. There has been much talk in Ireland about the airbrushing of women from history and we have discovered that they were being airbrushed out by the British press at the very time of the Rising. One of the explanations

given has been that it was very difficult to explain the idea of a woman, referred to as “a woman” in the official documentation, giving the surrender alongside PH Pearse.

One of the things we know about the women is that they galvanised very quickly. They were not arrested in very great numbers. Originally approximately 70 of them were arrested. The intelligence from the Royal Irish Constabulary did not identify the women. In a private message, General Maxwell described them as “silly little girls”. He said the claim that they were members of the Sinn Féin ambulance corps did not stand up to scrutiny and he released them. He released them out to become, as we have described, Ireland's secret army. The huge numbers of women who became involved in the War of Independence used this great network that had been created in the aftermath of the Rising. The internment camps where the men were imprisoned have become known to us as the “universities of revolution”. Similarly, their wives at home started to create their own network and connectivity between people who had Nationalist leanings. This is why it escalated so rapidly in those years from the period of the 1916 Rising to 1919, when the War of Independence began.

I want to refer back to the idea and perceptions we have of women at the time and strip out all the material that we have discovered since. The newspapers at the time recorded what women were doing. A very interesting article written by a Red Cross nurse described how she was watching the action. The title of the article is fearless under fire. In it, she writes:

“The Irish rebellion is remarkable for one fact not so far recognised in England, namely, the very prominent part taken in it by Irish women and girls ... These Irish women, who did their work with cool and reckless courage, unsurpassed by any man, were in the firing line from the first to the last day of the rebellion. They were women of all ranks, from titled ladies to shop assistants, and they worked on terms of easy equality, caring nothing, apparently, but for the success of the movement.”

Reading this as a modern person, one does not see the significance in the same way. Those who are well versed in the thinking of the time would know that for a titled lady even to speak to a shop assistant outside the confines of the shop is remarkable. When I first read this, in the early years, it was in a 1916 commemoration book and it was reproduced in its entirety. It was attributed to a hostile source. When I read it, I thought the content was not particularly hostile, however, in a commemoration book in the 1960s a Red Cross nurse was seen as hostile. Now, we look at it and see one woman looking at another group of women. What is incredible about this particular account is its accuracy. For many years, we knew women were couriers. The joke is that if everybody who said they had been in the GPO during the 1916 Rising stood on O'Connell Street, they would take up the entire street. There is always a criticism that people were claiming they had been active in the Rising although they were not. However, over time, by speaking to families, reading family accounts and examining the material recorded in pension files, we have discovered that people were assisting the action and could have been seen as supportive, for example by hiding arms and providing food. An example is Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, who was referred to earlier, and whose husband was killed trying to prevent looting. Although the Sheehy-Skeffingtons did not agree with the Rising, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington brought food to one of the garrisons.

When we first read the accounts in the pension files and certain people came to light, they were talking about leaving the GPO 30 and 40 times during the week. The idea that they put themselves at risk and continued to go in and out of the GPO is incredible, now that we know how many civilian casualties there were. Many of the civilian casualties were in certain areas of the city, and many of them were children, whereas the women who were on duty were very discerning in their movements around the city. One of the women brought a copy of *Irish War News* out to be printed. It is very interesting because of the nature of who the

Rising leaders were. Volume 1, No. 1 still exists, and it is an account of the Rising as it happened.

A very significant person who has always dominated our history books, and who, in some ways, is still probably one of the most interesting of the characters, is Countess de Markievicz, who was condemned to death but given penal servitude for life, because she was a woman. Her role in the Rising was as second in command in St Stephen's Green and the College of Surgeons. For a long time, people saw her as the most significant of the women. In fact, this role was given to her by Michael Mallin who was in command there. Her role was actually to bring supplies to the different garrisons because she could drive. A lady by the name of Dr Kathleen Lynn, a Church of Ireland rector's daughter, had the highest rank of the women in the Rising, as chief medical officer of the Irish Citizen Army.

When people talk about the work of key women and the major effect it had in creating the revolutionary spirit, it is very important to remember the importance of galvanising support. Earlier, the huge anti-conscription campaign that took place after 1916 was referred to. There was a day called Lá na mBan, the day of women, in June 1918, when women signed a pledge stating that they would not take the job of a man who was put out of his work on the basis that he had refused to go to war and that they would support the families of men who were not going to join the war effort. This was a major occasion for galvanising women, and women workers, across the spectrum. When the time came for money to be raised in America, an organisation called the White Cross was established in 1920. It dealt with 100,000 families that were affected by war. This is one of the major things that women did at the time.

Alongside the military activity of our War of Independence, an underground government was established. All of the delegates have worked in the political sphere and know the amount of work one must do politically, particularly if one is involved in a government department. This was set up in Ireland alongside Dáil courts and police stations, all administered by women. It is interesting that although women were judges in the Dáil courts, later, under the new State, they were removed from jury service. There was a complete shift in the aftermath of the revolution. We must remember that women who were involved in the fight for independence came through causes such as social justice, workers' rights, children's education and the need to feed hungry children. It is very important that alongside that they were promoters of cultural activities.

My talk has been very much a whistle stop tour of what went on during the War of Independence and the 1916 Rising. One of the things we know about the War of Independence is that approximately 50 women were arrested at the time, whereas we know that women were the eyes and ears of the organisation. During the Civil War, more than 1,000 women were arrested, and it greatly hampered the progress of the republicans. The Irish Government knew who had been central to the work of the War of Independence and who to arrest.

Countess de Markievicz "left her class", as they described it at the time, to join an armed rebellion. She was known as the "Rebel Countess". She was imprisoned after the Rising, several times during the War of independence and, later, during the Civil War. Her story is almost like the tabloid story of today. She dominated the headlines. She turned her back on her beautiful home place and focused her life on her ideal. She was the first woman elected to Westminster. However, because of Sinn Féin's abstentionist policy, she did not take her seat, and Lady Astor is recorded as the first woman MP. I highlight Countess de Markievicz at the

end of my talk because she was born in London, in Buckingham Gate, a short distance from Buckingham Palace. She is very important because, at the time, she was seen as being a Polish national. At one point during the War of Independence, the Government considered trying to deport her back to Poland. However, the part of Poland which her husband had once owned had become part of the Ukraine, and nobody would take her. When we examine multicultural Ireland and Europe, and when we tell our history, it is very important that we talk about it in its complexity. The whole move in England, Ireland and elsewhere, has been to change history. It has become like a pick-and-mix sweet shop where people can select things and forget about the linear element, what leads to what and the way things evolve.

All the delegates sitting here would probably be well versed in history, due to the nature of what they have become involved in. However, when we talk to people at their doors, or try to get them to vote or engage with politics, it is always important to see how things have affected them. When we were planning the commemoration, it was important to highlight the woman with the Polish surname who lived in London. It helps the new Irish to have a sense of belonging. During the centenary, we have celebrated the role of women because so many more women have been involved in politics. There was a gap from the time of Countess de Markievicz until the 1970s before we had a woman at the Cabinet table here in Ireland. Those years, about which we know so much, the generation we have come to know so well because of the archive and the material that has been left behind, were revolutionary in so many ways in Ireland, Europe and across the world. We have much to learn from the period about all of our histories.

Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Go raibh maith agat Sinéad McCoole. I had hoped that we would have time for comments or questions. Unfortunately, we do not, as we are running behind schedule. I sincerely thank Dr Fionnuala Walsh and Ms Sinéad McCoole. Possibly, we could return to the subject at another plenary meeting, given that it is such an important issue. The presentations were excellent and very insightful. Often, the role of women is forgotten in history. Again, I thank the speakers for coming here and apologise that we do not have more time for the topic. Hopefully, we can return to it. I will hand over to Mr Andrew Rosindell MP to chair the next session.

TOURISM AND INTERCONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE TWO ISLANDS

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to invite our next guest speaker, Mr Patrick O'Donovan TD, the new Minister of State for Tourism and Sport at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, to speak about tourism and interconnectivity opportunities between all the peoples of these islands. The Minister is always welcome here, of course, as a valued Member of BIPA until only recently. Without further ado, I welcome Minister Patrick O'Donovan and call on him to give his opening address.

3.15 pm

Patrick O'Donovan TD (Minister for Tourism and Sport):

Go raibh maith agat go mór, comh-chathaoirligh. Thank you very much, Co-Chairs. I am delighted to be here at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. This is my first term in the Dáil. I spent five years here. I see Deputy Carey is having a good laugh at the moment—you will hopefully spend five good years here as well. This is a great Assembly and I really enjoyed my time here. I got to meet some very interesting people and I made very good friends out of it. I hope you will have a good session here in Malahide over the next couple of days.

Earlier, sympathy was expressed to the Members from the United Kingdom on the passing of MP Jo Cox. I would like to be associated with those remarks and to extend my sympathies to her family on their bereavement.

The reason I am here is that I was recently appointed as Minister of State for Tourism and Sport—a job that I am really enjoying so far. At the outset, I should acknowledge the presence of Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland, Shaun Quinn, CEO of Fáilte Ireland, John McGrillen, CEO of Tourism Northern Ireland, and John McGrane, director general of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. Those are the agencies that my Department will typically be dealing with in the promotion of tourism both from within the jurisdiction and from wider within the island of Ireland.

Everybody in the room probably knows that relationships are at an all-time high between the islands of Britain and Ireland. From my point of view as Minister for Tourism and Sport, it is important that that continues. There is no doubt that we have a huge reliance on the British market in terms of the development of our tourism product. Last year, British visitors accounted for more than 41% of the total number of overseas visits to Ireland, which was a record 8.6 million. Considering the size of the population of this state, it just goes to show how extensive and important the tourism product is. Figures for the first five months of 2016 show that visitor numbers are being maintained at an exceptionally high level, with 209,000 additional visitors compared with the first five months of last year. They contribute an estimated €885 million to the Irish economy and they represent over 25% of all visitor income from tourism. It is very clear that the relationship between Britain and Ireland, not only the political relationship but the basic economic relationship, can be easily enunciated through what is happening in tourism in this country.

Obviously, there are uncertainties now, but as the Taoiseach has said in recent days, in the aftermath of the British vote on Europe, the Irish Government will do everything we can to

ensure that the implications have the least possible impact on the tourism market and on the free travel area that exists between Britain and Ireland. Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland, who is here with us, was in London last week to meet key industry figures and to ensure that the tour operators both within Britain and from wider afield were fully up to speed and au fait with the Irish Government's position and, indeed, with the positions of both jurisdictions, north and south of the border—as you all know, Tourism Ireland was established under the Good Friday Agreement. As I said, the Taoiseach and the Irish Government are committed to doing their utmost in the upcoming discussions to maintain the common travel area and to minimise any possible disruption that people would be subjected to as a result of the change.

That is critical for the development of the tourism product, which was very clear in the aftermath of the collapse of the Irish economy in 2008. When the Government came into office in 2011, we identified both agriculture and tourism as two key areas we could invest in to ensure that the economy recovered. We did a number of things to grow tourism beyond the Dublin region, such as abolishing the travel tax; introducing a special rate of VAT at 9% in the hospitality sector; and giving Shannon airport its independence. Those measures have all contributed to making the success that we now enjoy today—tourism figures are at an all-time high and records continue to be broken.

The Taoiseach and the Government have said that there will be no changes in the operation of north-south bodies such as Tourism Ireland. His statement made it clear that the maintenance of the strong spirit of partnership that has developed since the Good Friday Agreement will be a priority for the Government.

As well as that, as you are probably all aware, we have a common British-Irish visa scheme, which was rolled out last year and has proved to be successful. In the Department of Transport, through Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, the Department of Justice and the Department of Foreign Affairs, we are looking at how that can be developed further to ensure that we have, as a group of islands, as easy a route into our jurisdictions and countries as possible, for people to enjoy the hospitality, tourism and the products for which we are renowned across the world.

On top of that, the Government have set out a number of key priority areas in relation to the development of inward investment into Ireland through our ports and airports. Any of you who flew into Dublin will have seen the change that has taken place in Dublin airport over the last number of years. That is very clear to be seen and traffic volume there is at an all-time high, with obvious challenges for the future. In the last number of months, we have seen that the Dublin-London route remains one of the busiest in the European Union. It is estimated that this summer there will be an increase of more than 14% in air access and sea capacity between Britain and Ireland compared with the same period for 2015. The Government obviously do not engage in the specific commercial operations of individual airlines or ferry companies, but we have a very clear role in the maintenance of the facilities that are available in our ports and airports. Our capital investment for the next number of years will outline the Government's expansionary plan in those areas.

The local Members of the Oireachtas will know that, over the last number of years, we have developed own brands in tourism—many of you who have visited Ireland in a personal capacity will have seen them. Specifically, the Wild Atlantic Way, which starts in west Cork and goes right up along the west coast of Ireland to Donegal, has been an enormous success. That has been fostered recently with the development of Ireland's Ancient East and the

Dublin brand “A Breath of Fresh Air”. We are trying to offer something different to the discerning visitor to the west and east of the country.

From a personal point of view, we have identified a corridor down the middle of the country, starting in the border regions of east Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, and terminating down in north Cork. I am very anxious to see our local development companies, our LEADER companies and our local authorities coming together to make pitches for the growing number of people coming into Ireland annually to experience our tourism product.

The Department’s policy is called “People, Place and Policy”. We hope to see tourism grow to a stage where we have in excess of 10 million visitors annually by 2025, looking after 250,000 jobs in the economy with a growth rate from the current position of 205,000. That ambitious plan was set out by the previous Cabinet Minister in the Department, Paschal Donohoe, who is now the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. We aim to avoid the experience we went through between 2008 and 2011 and to put strong foundation stones in place in our tourism industry to ensure we have a robust industry.

One challenge is the dispersal of people coming into the country. Infrastructurally, the capital plan, including the extension of the motorway from Gort to Tuam in Galway, will help, as will continuing investments in our rail network. For this Assembly, the relevant example is the investment that Irish Rail—Iarnród Éireann—and its northern counterpart are making. On top of that, we have four greenway investment proposals submitted to the Irish and Northern Irish authorities. In the short time I have been in the Department, I have seen massive interest in the development of greenways across the country. Every county and parish in the country will certainly want to get their hands on that next wave of infrastructure.

Greenways are a sustainable way to take the tourist product into the heart of the country and communities across the country. For those of you who are not familiar with them, they are essentially pathways on old disused railway lines, on the banks of rivers, on the banks of canals, sometimes on the hard shoulders of old roads, that allow people to walk and cycle into the heart of rural communities very safely while at the same time being integrated into a wider public transport network. They have been very successful. The Department and my colleague, Minister Ross, are very conscious of that. He is looking at how they can be further elaborated and further developed out into other parts of the country.

Those are just a few flavours of where we are with tourism and the development of the tourism product. We came through a difficult time and broke new ground in terms of visitor numbers, but we must constantly develop our product and be on the lookout for risks and threat. We have to give the visitor—both the domestic Irish holidaymaker and the inward visitor into Ireland—a better experience than they had the last time. They are challenges but, working with the representative organisations of the tourism industry through ITIC, I am very conscious of the point of view of the person at the end of the day who pays for and consumes the product. They should get the best value for money and have the best possible experience. They will hopefully go home with a sense that they can tell their neighbour, their family member or their work colleague of the experience that they had in Ireland—we all hope it is a positive experience.

There are great opportunities ahead from a north-south point of view to develop the product further. I look forward over the next while as Minister of State for Tourism and Sport to playing my role with the state agencies, with my counterpart in Northern Ireland, Minister Hamilton, and with everybody who has an interest: the stakeholders, the hoteliers, the people

that own bike shops and everybody who has something to offer and everybody who has asked to meet me since I became Minister. I will certainly listen to them and include their views and their aspirations in developing this fantastic industry.

I thank Assembly for the invitation. It is great to be back here. I wish the Assembly well. It is an important forum. The first time I attended was down in Cork in the Rochestown Park. When the Taoiseach addressed the Assembly, he encouraged us not to get overly worried about the politics and the discussions, but to make a big investment in the fringe because you meet people from other jurisdictions, Assemblies and Parliaments and strike up relationships and understandings with them. I have used the offices of Members of the House of Commons in Westminster to sort out constituency problems on a small number of occasions, and I would encourage people to use this Assembly and this forum to build a better understanding of our differences and similarities.

This Assembly has a long, proud tradition. It has lived through difficult periods in our past, but it is now experiencing a time that I never could have envisaged when I was a youngster looking at Brian Mawhinney on RTÉ News. Little did I think that this Assembly would be working on economic development and furthering opportunities for these islands. On that note, thank you very much. Go raibh maith agat.

3.30 pm

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank the Minister for his presentation. I now open it to the floor for questions and comments.

Mr Danny Kinahan MP:

Thank you very much for telling as all about your work, Minister. I am slightly biased because I have Belfast International airport in my constituency in the north. We often feel that our airports are at a disadvantage because you have such a good and successful airport here in Ireland. It has various advantages given to it by the Irish Government, such as air passenger duty and future new runway. We in the north feel that we are at a disadvantage. Working with Tourism Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland, could you look at the disadvantages of our airports and how you can start helping us? You market very strongly in Belfast to get people to come to Dublin to travel. We lose 52% of our air travellers to Dublin, which is a success for you but which eats into our success and jobs. Will you sit down and see how we can have better, fairer competition between the two of us?

Mr Patrick O'Donovan TD:

I come from Limerick in the mid-west. We have had our own challenges with Shannon airport, the international airport in our area. For a long time there was a feeling that Dublin airport was hoovering up all the traffic into its jurisdiction—Cork would feel the same. That being said, the agencies have a fund, albeit small, to invest in encouraging people to come in on a regionalised basis and to ensure that regional access is maintained. I know that Ireland West Airport Knock, for instance, experienced large growth over the past number of years. It is obviously a huge difficulty to try to get airlines to service such areas and to get people to come into those areas. From the Department's point of view, the difference between the two state agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, is that Tourism Ireland is looking at the

whole island, and they have been very conscious of that. That is why, from a Fáilte Ireland point of view, the development of the Wild Atlantic Way was critical in regionalising the growth in tourism. We do not want an unbalanced tourism product. On top of that, a regional focus is at the centre of the new Government's programme. For the first time, we now have a Department of Regional Development, Rural Affairs, Arts and the Gaeltacht. One of the main thrusts of the programme for government is to ensure we have a much more regionalised balance.

In relation to the specific problem that you raise, I would have no problem with talking to the agencies that come under our remit to see whether there are ways in which we can co-operate further. I was previously a member of the Oireachtas Transport Committee, and I know that Dublin airport has very ambitious plans. It is the largest airport on the island and a key part of driving the economy. That being said, I agree that there is a need for a regionalised focus. In the programme for government, we have identified our regional airports as critical pieces of infrastructure that need investment. I would have no difficulty whatever in bringing the topic up with the two agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We don't have a lot of time, so we are going to take three speakers at a time and the Minister will respond to them in one go.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP:

Congratulations, Patrick. You will certainly be missed by this Assembly. I wish you the very best in your new role as a Minister. You may be aware that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 enshrined in law that people have a general right of access to all land, pretty much without exception, in Scotland—I stress that it is responsible access. The greenways proposal you mentioned earlier sounds like a really exciting and encouraging way to overcome some of the difficulties that there have been in Ireland in recent years. I am reminded of a case a couple of years ago, of the Enniskerry walkers in County Wicklow, who ended up in court over access to the land. Do you see that possibility as being one that might solve those particular problems and open up access to the land in Ireland?

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Congratulations, Patrick. What adverse impacts will the fall in the value of sterling have on the huge number of visitors from Britain, which you mentioned? You referred to free movement of people, which is a vital interest for us and for Britain. Where I come from—Kerry—as you know, we are very concerned about that, because the biggest number of visitors we receive is British visitors. Can our hotels, particularly in the capital city, rise to the occasion and offer better value than they currently offer to match the situation?

Baroness Harris:

Thank you, Chair, and congratulations Minister. It is nice to see you here. Very briefly, you did not mention anything about rail, I think, and I wonder whether you have any plans for laying down any tracks like the excellent DART service here in Malahide?

Patrick O'Donovan TD:

Willie Coffey will be very familiar with the development of greenways, which have, I suppose, been developed over the last number of years in a piecemeal way in Ireland. In my own county, we have a greenway that starts on the old west Limerick, north Kerry part of the Great Southern and Western railway. Unfortunately it terminates at the Limerick border because of the difficulties associated with landowners.

Minister Shane Ross and I want to see a situation developing in which an awful lot of those issues are ironed out by city and county managers, or CEOs as they are called now, at a much earlier stage. Local authorities would be the driving force behind applications for funding under what is called smarter travel. A substantial amount of money—in excess of €100 million—was identified by the Government for smarter travel in the programme for government. City and county managers would have an awful lot of the planning, local dialogue and local consultation done at this stage, before an application came to the Department for funding. You are spot on: we have had difficulties before in relation to the development of greenways, where they have been bogged down in the courts. We parliamentarians do not want fat rubbed on to the you-know-what of a pig, in the sense of legal fees for solicitors and barristers taking local authorities and Government Departments to court over the development of infrastructure. The Department is conscious of that and is working on it.

Paul Coghlan asked about the value of sterling. There is no doubt that the Government are very concerned about the outcome of the UK referendum, but there has been some recovery in the value of sterling. Obviously, this will play out in Brussels, Dublin, Belfast and London. Certainly, as a member of the European Union, with our 26 other colleagues, we will obviously be pressing very hard to ensure that the impact on the Irish economy is minimised.

I feel very strongly about the availability and cost of hotels. From 2004 to 2008, the cost of hotel rooms in Dublin spiralled out of control—I have spoken about that publicly at tourism conferences. We cannot go down that road again. Hotels must be clear that we will not have and cannot afford a situation in which either domestic Irish holidaymakers or inward travellers come to Ireland and experience what happened between 2004 and 2008. That being said, we have to come to terms with the shortage of hotel accommodation in Dublin—Dublin City Council will have to come to terms with it in its development plans. It is not acceptable when the next available hotel room for someone arriving in Dublin is in Drogheda or Carlow. We want to avoid the bad impact that has on the tourism product and our reputation.

Baroness Harris mentioned the DART experience. That is a fantastic piece of infrastructure. If you get a chance—I hope you will—to venture into the city centre, you will see that our two Luas tramway lines are being connected. That cross-city initiative is a major piece of capital investment by the Government to join the two lines. It will also bring the two mainline stations, Heuston and Connolly, together, along with the park-and-ride services out in west Dublin. There will be future development as well through the north of the city.

The Government are conscious that there has been underinvestment in rail, especially over the past number of years when the economy imploded, but we are in a situation now when the capital programme has been worked out. Rail is certainly something we would see to the fore.

Declan Breathnach TD:

Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. My question is directly to you but equally to the panel dealing with tourism. Would you comment on the need for the seamless promotion of tourism both north and south by Fáilte Ireland and Northern Ireland Tourism, whereby we would jointly market the region, north and south, in the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor, with specific mention of what Danny referred to, namely the use of the international airports—Dublin and Belfast City and Belfast International airports—to market the region?

The Lord Kilclooney:

Thank you, Minister, for that excellent address. To pursue an issue raised in an earlier question, you mentioned the major importance of the tourist industry to the Republic of Ireland, and how the most significant part of that tourist trade comes from the United Kingdom. In reply to that first question, you did not say how the problem will be addressed, because we now have a major reduction in the value of the pound sterling.

Of course, there are two options. The Republic of Ireland can leave the European Union or can rejoin sterling, but at the moment apparently those are not options that you are considering in Dublin. You did say in answer to the question that you would pursue the matter further in Brussels. What on earth can Brussels do about this?

The Lord Glentoran:

We have our own Northern Ireland Tourist Board and I think there is a great number of shared sporting tourist opportunities in the island as a whole. I wonder how you are working with, and whether you have a successful relationship with, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I am thinking of the future British Open golf championships coming in 2019. We have major events of one sort or another, north and south, all of the time: rugby, soccer and many others, including sailing events on the water. Given in particular the new economic problem that John Taylor, Lord Kilclooney just mentioned, I wonder how your relationship is facing up to that.

3.45 pm

Patrick O'Donovan TD:

Thank you. Declan Breathnach raised the issue of joint marketing north and south of the border. I suppose that is covered by Tourism Ireland, an all-Ireland body established under the Good Friday Agreement for that purpose. Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, south of the border, would work very closely with them, as would our northern counterparts in relation to the marketing of the island.

In that vein, that corridor that you are referring to, Declan, from Belfast to Dublin, which I know goes through your constituency, is an area that has obviously got huge potential. I note that recently the United States Vice-President came home to Carlingford. The imagery that was beamed across the United States and further afield of that beautiful village certainly did tourism in County Louth no harm at all. There are opportunities as well in relation to local authorities along that corridor, particularly south of the border. Fáilte Ireland has recently announced a major capital grant scheme that is in the order of €200,000 to €5 million. If local authorities in Meath, Louth, Fingal and Dublin City have specific projects they want to pursue in relation to capital investment, I know Fáilte Ireland are anxious to see local

authorities in particular come forward with such initiatives. In response to Lord Kilclooney, Ireland has no intention of either leaving the European Union or of introducing sterling, so you can rest assured.

In relation to how the matter will be pursued in Brussels, the exit mechanism is by negotiation between the United Kingdom Government and the European Union, of which we are a member state. The 26 other member states and ourselves will certainly have a negotiating role with the United Kingdom. That is why this matter will be thrashed out further in Brussels.

Lord Glentoran referred to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and specifically mentioned the British Open. I agree that there are great opportunities to work closely with our Northern Ireland equivalents. Again, that is driven primarily by the relationship between Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland and under the umbrella that is Tourism Ireland. Wearing my other hat, there is, of course, another great initiative coming down the line and that is the rugby world cup, and hopefully we will be successful in achieving that. The bid for hosting it has been put in from the island of Ireland. I think there is great potential for us to show the world how we have travelled a long journey as an island to now being in a situation in which we can bid for something as significant and important as the rugby world cup. I know the state agencies and the two Departments both north and south of the border, and indeed the sovereign Governments, will be very supportive of that.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We have time for one quick round of questions then we have to move on.

Joe Carey TD:

Thank you very much. I welcome you, Minister, and thank you for your presentation. You made reference in your address to the success of the VAT rate. As we approach another Budget, do you favour the retention of the 9% VAT rate for the hospitality industry?

Darren Millar AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your presentation. Reference has been made to the value of the pound and the way that it has fallen recently, post-Brexit. It has been lower than this in the past, notably two years ago, but I wonder what opportunities that might present to Britain, and therefore to the Republic of Ireland, in terms of attracting the lucrative north American visitors who seem to spend so much more than everybody else when they come over to these islands? In relation to joint tourism initiatives, I know there is clearly a close working relationship with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board but what about the Visit Wales initiative from the Welsh Government? Clearly there is a common interest in Celtic tourism and marketing and I do not seem to see much collaborative work between the Governments to take advantage of that. I would like to see a lot more and I wonder what your thoughts might be?

John Scott MSP:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and can I also congratulate Patrick on his re-election and his appointment as a Minister. I want to deal with the specific issue, following the recent meeting at Cheltenham, when it was suggested that a tourism opportunity might exist in developing

relationships between racecourses in Ireland and Scotland. I have spoken to the owners of Ayr racecourse and others and there would be a willingness in Scotland to explore and develop business tourism based around horseracing. Business networking and conferencing combined with the racing could be a natural fit between Scotland and Ireland and my constituency and would be supported by our Ayrshire and Scottish chambers of commerce. Would you add your support to such an initiative?

Patrick O'Donovan TD:

Thanks very much, Co-Chair. Deputy Joe Carey asked about the VAT rate. My personal view is that it should be retained. It has been very important in our region—the mid-west region—and you are a representative in the county next to mine. It should be retained. It continues to be of critical importance to the hotel industry outside of Dublin, of that there is no doubt. However, I say again that we must be very careful that we do not fall into the trap that this country fell into between 2004 and 2008 when competitiveness and value for money went out of the window and the quick buck came in. That cannot happen, and if it does we will be in serious, serious trouble.

My view is clear. We have had discussions in the Department about this already in advance of the Budget. From the Department's point of view, we want to retain the VAT rate as it is, but we are conscious that the punter—the person coming into the country, the domestic tourist, the overnight commercial visitor and the person visiting their granny in hospital—must have value for money. There is no question about that.

Darren Millar asked about the value of the pound, north American visitors and opportunities for the Celtic nations. I would welcome that. It would be a fantastic initiative, particularly with the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and here. There is a fantastic opportunity for a Celtic experience, and parts of northern France could probably be added in. There is a Celtic festival that circulates between the Celtic nations. It was in Carlow earlier this year and has been a great success. I will certainly take up the opportunity of working with my opposite numbers in the devolved Assemblies in Wales and Scotland and with the UK tourism Minister to look at regional opportunities. I look forward to that.

You mentioned north American visitors. In north America, we aggressively market Ireland as an island and new opportunities and markets are emerging. Britain would have a much stronger case than we would, which is why the common visa entry system, which was developed last year for China and India, provides massive opportunities for this island when considering that the combined population of China and India is 2.25 billion, with the largest burgeoning middle classes of anywhere in the world whose spending power is enormous. There are great opportunities for these islands and regional parts of Britain. I would have no problem working together on that and if you want to contact me about it afterwards, it would be great.

John, thanks, and thanks to all Members for their well wishes. I appreciate that. You mentioned the possibility of developing links between racecourses in Scotland and Ireland. Again, I see no reason why that could not be taken up by all the islands and why there could not be greater co-operation between Horse Racing Ireland and our opposite numbers in Britain—in Scotland and Wales and in England as well—to make sure of the best opportunity. People who go to horse-racing meetings are discerning punters, for want of a better word. The person sitting behind you is no stranger to racecourses across the middle and

north of England and he would be a great advocate for promoting British horse-racing as well as Irish horse-racing. I will mention that to Andrew Doyle, the Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture with responsibility for horse-racing. I have responsibility for horses that jump, but not for horses that run. I get dressage and show jumping and Andrew Doyle gets race horses. This is certainly something I will refer to him and I will ask him to look at it with a view to seeing whether there are opportunities for greater co-operation with Horse Racing Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, which oversees the development of horse racing.

Tony McLoughlin TD:

Minister, you spoke about greenways and I wondered whether there is scope for co-operation between, say, Fermanagh District Council and Leitrim County Council about a green way in Manorhamilton and Glenfarne: a cross-border greenway. I know that you have recently announced funding and would you encourage cross-border greenways to follow on from others that have been successful?

Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

Just very quickly in relation to tourism, let me first thank the Minister for his contribution but, more particularly, for his commitment to the retention of the 9%. I met a group of hoteliers in the north-west straddling the border at the weekend and they are concerned because they believe that after the good work over past years if the VAT rate were increased above 9% you would have the law of diminishing returns. We can pay credit to those who were responsible for it, but how does it work in real terms? A huge increase in the bed nights—about 36% in that group—and an increase of 46% in terms of euro and sterling.

That is not the only reason. We should familiarise those who are here from other parts of mainland Europe and the islands with what I believe was a major contributing factor to the increase in these figures: the Wild Atlantic Way. It makes a huge contribution, and if you want to see the most important part of it, I suggest that you see it in Donegal—the Alaska of Ireland—when you have the opportunity.

Barry McElduff MLA:

Thank you, Co-Chairs—go raibh maith agat. Comhghairdeas to Patrick as well on his appointment as Minister. My question is whether we are making the most of the uniqueness of the GAA and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann from the point of view of attracting visitors and enhancing the visitor experience when people come to the island of Ireland. Is there even greater untapped potential? Are any figures typically available for the economic contribution that Fleadh Cheoils and big matches—hurling, football and camogie—bring to this place?

Frank Feighan TD:

Thank you, Minister. We have a difficulty in my own county. I was chair of Lough Key Forest Park Action Group. We have a huge £12 million or £15 million investment in Lough Key Forest Park, but in three of the five towns in County Roscommon, because of the Celtic Tiger and the recession, three of the hotels are closed. We have the tourist facilities but we do not have the actual hotels in the three towns. They will never be built. Nobody will come in to buy a hotel that is closed and rebuild it; they just won't do it, because they could buy a lot of other hotels through NAMA around the country. Can you foresee any tax incentive or

maybe a Government grant on a pilot scheme that would get some hotel rooms into those towns? The whole tourist facility could be built around a hotel in the towns. These are towns that had two hotels in them when I was growing up. I really think those smaller towns need to be addressed.

Patrick O'Donovan TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. Tony McLoughlin asked about the potential for cross-border greenways. The simple answer is yes, I see the possibility for that. Waterways Ireland is another cross-border body that has a role in the development of greenways. The greenway that you spoke specifically about may very well be an old disused railway line—I am not sure—but the answer is yes, I see a role for greenways. At the end of the day, if you look at the success of Waterways Ireland in co-operation across what is no longer a physical border, it has been very successful in promoting our inland waterways. I see the development of greenways under the auspices of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and our equivalent in the north, looking at this in a much more organised way than at the moment. It needs to be drawn together much more strongly than at the moment. We developed our road network under the auspices of the National Roads Authority very successfully.

Because of the demand for future greenways—the interest in them is growing at an absolutely astronomical rate—we are going to have to put some sort of structure in place for the roll-out of money and of a plan. I envisage that being done through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. The Minister at Cabinet, Shane Ross, sits on the North South Ministerial Council, so if there are opportunities for greenways to be developed across the border in the same way as roads, I see that as the avenue forward.

In relation to what Pat the Cope Gallagher said, I welcome the fact that the support for the retention of VAT is so strong. I am not the Minister for Finance, so I cannot give a commitment that it is going to be retained, but from my point of view it should be. With your former colleague Dinny McGinley—who I know is a very good friend of yours, as well as a former TD for Donegal South-West and a former Member of this Assembly—I experienced the hospitality of Donegal last year when I holidayed in Gweedore. You will be glad to know that I'm going back again this year to Dunfanaghy, so I am getting a good diet of the Donegal Wild Atlantic Way.

4.00 pm

In relation to the VAT element, what is important is that the hospitality industry is so labour-intensive. The VAT element is a big cost at the start, before the door is opened. From that point of view, when the Government made the decision to reduce the rate, it was criticised by some of the people who are the most vocal proponents of it now. It was heavily criticised at the time because the cost of it had to come out of somewhere else. It has now won universal acclaim, which is great, but the investment that the state is making there is being made at a cost. That cost must be a two-way street. For that, there can be no deviation from the fact that the person coming into the country or the domestic tourist cannot in any way be getting ripped off. We have to be very careful that we do not go down the road we went down before, where we lose competitiveness and costs spiral out of control.

Barry, thank you very much for your comments. I suppose, on the uniqueness of the GAA and Comhaltas, there is no doubt about it: they are both a massive domestic tourism generator and a massive international tourism generator. We had in my own area recently Féile Peile na

nÓg, where we had clubs from south London. It was remarkable—the diversity of young people who are playing our national games now in places you would not imagine, who have no connection whatsoever to the island of Ireland and who are experiencing the hospitality of families in west Limerick, north Kerry and north Cork through Peile na nÓg, a fantastic initiative through Féile and something that really should be heralded as a great element of community-based inward tourism, domestically and internationally, with teams coming from outside.

The Department and Fáilte Ireland in particular really recognise the value of Comhaltas and the Fleadh Cheoil. The Fleadh Cheoil is a movable feast. It is probably one of the largest music festivals now in Europe, if not even further afield, and it makes an enormous financial difference, whether it is held in Ennis, Cavan, Clonmel or Listowel. From my point of view and from the Department's point of view, we had the Ard Stiúrthóir of the GAA in recently, and I know the GAA are very conscious of their role in the community, and the Department is very conscious of the GAA's role in the community. That is why, over the last number of years, through Sports Capital and an initiative that I launched recently for women's Gaelic players, the state has invested very heavily in the GAA—and rightly so. We will continue to do so.

Frank mentioned hotels that are closed and hotels in provincial towns. I know exactly what you are talking about, because in my own town the hotel has been closed for a number of years. Luckily, it has now been taken into ownership and is going to be reopened. But this is part of what I am talking about in relation to the middle corridor down the centre of the country, from Cavan and Monaghan right down through the Shannon basin and into north Cork. I have spoken at length in the Department and to Fáilte Ireland about the fact that there is a whole area in the middle of the country, sandwiched between Ireland's ancient east and the Wild Atlantic Way, where I see CEOs of county councils taking a much greater role. That is why recently I asked the Department to sit down with the County and City Management Association and look at initiatives that can be brought forward for capital investment. We now have the money, through Fáilte Ireland. What we are looking for now is the projects to bring that in.

You mentioned Lough Key Forest Park. I would encourage other people to look at the likes of Lough Key Forest Park, and I would encourage the Roscommon County manager or CEO—as he or she is called now—to look at initiatives within their own county boundaries and to ask, “How we can maximise?” Part of County Roscommon is on the main road from Dublin into Westport, no more than my own county, where tens of thousands of people are passing through on a daily basis at the height of the tourist season. You have to put in place a product that will encourage them to stop. The people who will do that best are the local people through the leadership of their local CEO in Roscommon County Council, Limerick County Council, Longford County Council or wherever. Now, under the Local Government Act, there is a provision for economic development within local authorities, and county managers need to be held accountable as to what they are doing to promote tourism.

I view the tourism product, through Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, as every bit as important as—probably even more important than—IDA and Enterprise Ireland in terms of foreign and direct investment. As I said recently at a conference, when any person gets off a plane in Knock or in Shannon from outside this jurisdiction, that is foreign and direct investment. The minute they put their hand in their pocket and spend money, they are an FDI company on two legs, as far as I am concerned, and they need to be looked after. Fáilte

Ireland and Tourism Ireland are doing it effectively, but it is now up to county councils, leader companies and local representatives to get that done even more.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, that brings us to the end of the session with the Minister of State for Tourism. I would like to thank Patrick for his insightful and comprehensive address and wish him every success in his new role in the Government of Ireland, looking after tourism. We look forward to continuing to co-operate as we have done today, and wish you every success for the future. I will now hand over the Chair for the rest of today's session—the next hour—to Kathleen.

PANEL DISCUSSION ON SHARED INTERNATIONAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

Thanks, Andrew. We are moving into the panel discussion on tourism promotion, so if people had questions that they did not have the opportunity to ask, they might be able to do so in this session. We have just heard from the Minister of State for Transport, Tourism and Sport about the many opportunities for tourism growth and the importance of interconnectivity between the two islands. We will now have a panel discussion with the relevant tourism promotion bodies north and south of the border, and with the British Irish Chamber of Commerce.

The format for the session is that the four speakers will have about five minutes each, and then we will take contributions at the end. The first speaker is Mr John McGrane, who is director general of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. I invite him to come forward to make his presentation on shared international tourism opportunities in Britain and Ireland.

John McGrane:

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, Minister, Co-Chairs and parliamentarians of all Houses. It is an honour to speak to you this afternoon. Thanks for inviting me.

My brother lives in Annagassan, which is a small fishing and farming village on the Louth coast. In fact, on a clear day, if you look out the back window, you can probably see the coast. It is typical of many an Irish village that owns its own tourism proposition. Annagassan is a very famous Viking settlement and the local pub puts on a Viking experience. It presents that show over a pint and a pie to busloads of tourists who come in from America, Britain and lots of other places through Dublin, typically. They take the road up to Annagassan—it is about an hour's drive—and have the Viking experience, and then they get back on the bus, drive back to their hotel and that's more or less it. If they looked out of the back window of the pub in Annagassan, they would have the most beautiful perspective across Carlingford bay to the Cooley peninsula, Carlingford village, and the Mourne mountains and, a little bit to the left of that on the north-west side, to the whole historical area around Newry, Banbridge and further north.

The Vikings did not stop at the border. I am not really sure why we expect our tourists to. Some themes I heard in the previous session resonate with some things I am going to talk about. Sometimes we do not need major policy interventions. We just need to connect people so that they can work better together, which is very much the theme of my talk.

Your other speakers from organisations that we hugely admire—the three tourism agencies on this island—will speak to you more about the detail of tourism as an industry in its own right, particularly, I am sure, in relation to leisure tourism. I will give you a slightly wider business perspective from the point of view of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. We are an organisation dedicated to one thing—trade. We are dedicated to trade between all parts of these two islands, and to ensuring that everybody understands how valuable it is and that nobody messes with it.

Tourism is a highly valuable industry. Worldwide international tourism growth is faster than average economic growth as emerging markets in Asia and maturing markets in the west see more and more people able to afford to travel for leisure or, indeed, on business. Strategically and economically, tourism is extremely valuable to Ireland because, unlike foreign direct investment for instance, it spreads throughout the island into the parishes, highways, byways, towns and villages of the country, rather than just to our urban cities and locations across these two great islands.

Tourism is a highly fragmented industry with very large players such as the Guinness Storehouse here, the Titanic centre in Belfast and the many iconic attractions across Britain, and much smaller operations such as tour operators and local family bed and breakfasts, right down to individual tour guides. That fragmentation makes it tricky to apply a uniform strategy right across the sector, but means that there are very low barriers to entry. Tourism creates work and business opportunities for individuals and families just as easily as it creates opportunities for large hotel chains and the like.

Other speakers will give you more on leisure tourism, but I want to talk for a few minutes about the less frequently mentioned segment of business tourism. A lot of it is not spoken about because people do not know much about it, but it is reckoned that as many as 1 million people visit Ireland on business every year alone. It is the reason why the Dublin-London air route is the second busiest in the world, second only to Hong Kong-Taipei. Business people frequently come here, spending more, but under the radar of our broad tourism propositions.

Let us take the example of Google in Dublin. Google employs about 4,000 people. They sell Google ads to people all over Europe, and every week they bring in planeloads of those customers to get inducted in the Google way. If you take those business visitors who spend a week in Dublin and surrounding parts and the mummies and the daddies and the grannies and the aunts of the 4,000 people—two thirds of them non-national—who work in Google in Dublin together, Google alone accounts for 35,000 visitors to Ireland every year. You can map that across the many other multinational firms who are here.

If you take our conferencing industry, it also takes in tens of thousands of people, and that is before you talk about visitors to our universities and research centres: people who come here all of the time, a little bit under the conventional tourism radar, but they spend well, stay a bit longer and add value to our hotels and attractions and restaurants and venues. Indeed, one of the aspects of the Brexit situation that is now upon us is that some of the trade that goes to UK universities—British universities—may be unseated as research spending by other countries in UK universities may decline somewhat. There is an opportunity for people to think about how that gets picked up rather than falling to other markets altogether.

The week we are in, there is no doubt that the most immediately relevant point in terms of all of our affairs, including the tourism sector, is Brexit. One of the best contributors to Ireland's tourism sector—you just heard it spoken about a few minutes ago—has of course been the reduction in VAT and the elimination of travel tax, but the strength of sterling has also been a hugely important factor in the prosperity of our tourism sector over the last number of years. The UK's decision to leave the EU, no matter how long that process will take and on what terms ultimately, has already led to a decline in the sterling exchange rate against the euro: it is effectively the same as passing on a price increase of anything up to 20% to our visitors here, and it makes visiting the Republic of Ireland from the north or from Britain or anywhere else with that currency less likely.

Of course, the opposite also applies: it makes the north and Britain better value for euro-holding businesses and we are absolutely in favour of the taking the opportunities that that presents. But a wider strategic concern is that any long-term weakening of the UK economy on the back of Brexit or any related effects is a bad thing for all of us, because, as Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute has calibrated, a 1% decline, for instance, in UK GDP correlates to a 0.3% decline in the Republic of Ireland's GDP, so nobody gains here from anything that might be adverse to the interests of the British economy. We need to work together to deal with any consequences that come down the line from that. For instance, there is talk already that certain airlines may reduce their capacity at airports in the UK. That would be very bad for the Republic of Ireland just as much as within Britain and Northern Ireland, because any reduction in the infrastructure that enables people to fly and travel, whether on business or leisure, is a bad thing for us.

On the flipside, there are some opportunities. Education tourism is a very large sector in the UK—language tourism and other such things—and those things may well be redeployed to universities and education facilities in the Republic of Ireland, not on a winner-takes basis but on a shared endeavour basis, because we are joined at the economic hip in these matters. Our interests—certainly our endeavour as a British Irish Chamber of Commerce—will be to work equally with businesses across both islands to look at where, by sharing resource, we can minimise adverse effects for any single set of resources on either side.

Increased foreign direct investment into Ireland is already on the radar—it is already happening. I know: I spend half of my time on the ground in Britain, and a lot of the firms I am talking to are actively saying, “Who should we talk to about coming into the Republic?” We say, “Let's talk about having a footprint in both.” In Ireland's case, we also need to get ready for those situations by fast-tracking things like hotel capacity and housing capacity, which the Minister just spoke about.

Our new diplomatic corridor with Scotland can also offer significant advantages. Ireland's consulate in Edinburgh has been strengthened and the British embassy in Dublin has seen the arrival of the Scotland representation unit in the form of John Webster and his team. That dialogue between those two units in Edinburgh and Dublin is already giving rise to discussions about tourism opportunities to open up the Celtic arc that is Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Wales, and to produce joint itineraries for visitors from other markets who can enjoy thoroughly the shared experience of our great culture, our sports, our music, our brilliant food and our service offerings as well.

4.15 pm

To get the best out of those opportunities, we need to plan the infrastructure upgrades that let the people in—the airports; the second runway in Dublin; and the direct flights from third markets like China. Indeed, there is an opportunity to look at sharing capacity with a place like Manchester, where direct flights to China are just about to come on-stream. Our experience of working with Manchester can teach us about that market, and our experience of serving the US market can help Manchester to act as a hub, along with Dublin, to channel the best of opportunities through both cities and both hubs, for the benefit of all.

We also know that things like the Titanic Centre in Belfast and Guinness Storehouse in Dublin attract fantastic numbers of people—1.4 million to Guinness Storehouse and upwards of 500,000 to the Titanic Centre. We need more of those iconic attractions and we should plan them together, because they take time to come on-stream.

There will be a spillover effect from what may happen to London. Any decline in London's attractiveness to other visitors through things such as freedom of movement restrictions will be bad for London and we will take that pain, too, because Ireland enjoys a spillover of visitors who come to London from third markets in Asia and elsewhere and bolt on a trip to Ireland. It is very much in our interests that we make sure that we are not pulling apart from each other at this time but working together.

One of the areas where we can make sure that we do not drift apart is by working with our public representatives of the two Governments to reinstate and reassure the joint visa arrangements that enable people who come to one side to visit the other side as well. That has been a really important piece of the collaboration. It has been worked on by our agencies on both sides and by the two Governments, but some of those arrangements may be subject to review and we need to lobby hard and fast to make sure that we retain them.

Just as our food and agribusiness sector on both islands may be faced with shock through the arrangements that are coming upon us, so too we need to look at how we can help our tourism industry on both islands to withstand any sudden changes. The good news is that we are filled with potential as to how we might go even further than we've achieved already.

Just three quick things. In Ireland, we have a saying: "Ní dhéanfaidh aon ní buillí ag tarraingt le chéile". It means: "Nothing beats pulling together". Our tourism industry is so fragmented that, alongside being under-capitalised in cash terms, lots and lots of folks are running small businesses that are not connected to each other. Simply by getting them to work better together, like my friends in Annagassan and the Cooley peninsula and Banbridge, we can help them achieve more than the sum of their parts. That connection capital can often make up for the lack of cash capital that typifies those often family-sized businesses.

I have worked first hand with tourism groups in counties and towns who don't work with their adjacent counties and towns, simply because they're so hard-pressed to manage their own franchise. Our work as a Chamber is to open out the connections between those local, brilliantly run volunteer units and say, "You can be more, if we can help you to work together."

The second point is about governance. In such a fragmented sector, you do not really need to have all the different units looking after their own separate patches. Let me give you an example. I worked on the Dublin tourism taskforce a couple of years ago and we looked at the best-in-class cities that Dublin competes with for weekends and short breaks. They all have a better way of working than we had. They all have a matrix of public and private partnerships and dialogue that marshals the efforts of both and enables the projects of both to be driven forward effectively and with great oversight. That's an idea that we still have to embrace in Dublin. We lost an opportunity through not having a single mayor, but it doesn't stop us from aggregating into one strategy the four current separate strategies of just one metropolitan area.

Meantime, we can do the best we can. I am very proud to have led a campaign recently that successfully saw Dublin's normally very fractious 60 county councillors agree for once on a single planning issue, which was to designate the streets and district around our National Concert Hall as the National Concert Hall quarter. It was a simple idea. The planners, who I respect, said, "We can't do that, because if we give it to one district, everybody else will want one, too." My answer was, "Give them one, too." We now have the National Concert Hall

quarter, which significantly raises the marketability for business and pleasure of that great district in Dublin.

The last quick point, is about data. In an era when everybody carries a mobile phone and most people know they're being tracked on it and are happy to be tracked for benign purposes, we really need to think about a national and indeed a two-nation initiative that allows data to be collected from the people who visit us. We know more about the movement of cattle on these islands than we know about the movement of tourists. It's time we used our modern technology to allow us to understand the preferences and experiences of visitors so that we can build the best experiences and the future for all.

Very lastly from me on this, a word about the UK. We need to be very clear in our thinking now. What's bad for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is bad for Ireland, and of course the reverse is also true. The British Irish Chamber of Commerce will work to fully support negotiations between the Governments involved and the EU to get the best exit terms for the United Kingdom from the EU, including full freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital between Britain, the Republic of Ireland and a borderless Northern Ireland. But the road will be tough and lengthy. In the meantime, business deserves our active and practical support, so we will be proactively assisting tourism businesses throughout the UK and Ireland to partner in the sector, along with businesses of like mind, so that they can share the joint opportunity to look after our native tourists as well as possible, as well as those who visit us from further afield. We look forward to assisting our state agencies, which do a remarkable job, and to working with your good selves as public representatives to bring forward the opportunities that lie ahead. Go raibh míle maith agat, or thank you very much.

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

Thank you very much, Mr McGrane. We are now going to invite Mr Niall Gibbons, the CEO of Tourism Ireland, to make his presentation.

Niall Gibbons:

Joint Chairs and distinguished guests, thank you for the opportunity to address you again. My name is Niall Gibbons and I am the chief executive of Tourism Ireland. As Members will know, Tourism Ireland is the agency that was established as one of the six areas of co-operation under the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998. The principal objectives of the company are to increase tourism to the island of Ireland and to support Northern Ireland in realising its tourism potential. Tourism Ireland operates in 23 markets across the globe in delivering its marketing campaigns, and works closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland to ensure that our promotional themes align with their development priorities for the industry at home—an integrated, collaborative approach.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of Shaun Quinn, the CEO of Fáilte Ireland, and of John McGrillen, the CEO of Tourism Northern Ireland, who do an awful lot of work in supporting us in our mission overseas. I also acknowledge John McGrane, the director general of the British Irish Chamber of Commons, of which Tourism Ireland is a very active member.

Tourism is a vital industry for both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. It is one of our largest indigenous industries and is deep rooted in the fabric of society. It is responsible for

more than 4% of GNP and employs almost 220,000 people across Ireland—more than 10% of all employment. Similarly, tourism is a significant economic driver for Northern Ireland, where it is responsible for in excess of 5.2% of GDP and supports more than 43,000 jobs—one in every 18.

The year 2015 was a record-breaker for overseas tourism in both jurisdictions, with more than 8.6 million people arriving in Ireland—an increase of 14%. The revenue generated by overseas visitors to Ireland grew last year by almost 19% to €4.2 billion—an additional €661 million. The number of overseas visitors to Northern Ireland grew last year by 10% to almost 2 million. Revenue generated by overseas visitors to Northern Ireland grew by 8% to £484 million. Growth is continuing into 2016: we currently only have data available for Ireland, but it is showing tourism growth of 14% in the first five months of 2016.

The British market is very important. Great Britain is the largest single market for tourism to the island of Ireland, delivering 47% of all overseas visitors and 30% of tourism revenue. In 2015, the island of Ireland welcomed almost 4.5 million Great Britain visitors—a 10% increase over 2014—and the number of visitors from Britain grew a further 16% in the first five months of 2016. The corollary is that Ireland is also a significant market for the UK. It is the fourth largest market in terms of visitor numbers, with more than 2.5 million Irish people visiting the UK last year, contributing £933 million to the UK economy.

In marketing the island of Ireland overseas, Tourism Ireland's major promotional effort is focused on those markets that offer the best return on investment. In addition to Great Britain, North America and mainland Europe are top priorities, and 2015 was a record year for visitors from the latter two. In fact, Ireland now welcomes 10% of all American visitors to Europe, which is a remarkable proportion when you consider the competition from countries such as Italy, France, Spain and Germany. Growth continues into 2016.

We undertake an extensive programme of promotions in Australia and high-potential emerging markets such as China and India. Each year, Tourism Ireland focuses on a number of major promotional themes, as well as undertaking specific marketing campaigns. The Wild Atlantic Way has captured the imagination of visitors from across the globe. In January, our new advert for Ireland's Ancient East was launched in key markets across the world. The Causeway Coastal Route has proven very popular with visitors from all markets. We continue to promote the route this year, seeking to attract new and repeat visitors. We have a busy programme in place throughout the year to highlight Northern Ireland's year of food and drink in 2016 with Tourism Northern Ireland and industry partners. We are also highlighting Dublin's new campaign, "A Breath of Fresh Air".

Screen tourism is another important focus for Tourism Ireland, leveraged by the amazing success of "Game of Thrones" in Northern Ireland and "Star Wars" along the Wild Atlantic Way. This year marks the seventh year of Tourism Ireland's global greening initiative, where more than 240 iconic landmarks and sites around the world are turned green to celebrate St Patrick's day, generating millions in publicity for this island.

In terms of air and sea access, as an island destination the importance of convenient, direct, non-stop flights cannot be overstated. There is a proven direct correlation between access and growth in visitor numbers. Tourism Ireland operates an effective access strategy, working with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland, airports, airlines and ferry operators to identify opportunities for case-making for new or extended air access services from key markets. Co-operative marketing

with key partners is a major focus of our promotional platform. Last year, we did co-operative marketing involving 77 individual campaigns with 27 different airline carriers in 16 markets around the world, with the result that air and sea access capacity levels were at record numbers again.

This summer, air capacity to the island of Ireland is projected to grow by 9%, while air capacity from Great Britain is projected to grow by 30%. During this summer season, there will be in excess of 535,000 seats every single week to the island. There is a busy programme of co-operative marketing with air and sea carriers in place, and we will continue to work with partners to identify and help close gaps in air services, stimulate new flights and promote new and existing services.

Part of our success has also been the digital footprint. Tourism Ireland has invested in developing a significant digital footprint over the years, and that has yielded considerable marketing efficiencies and created opportunities to promote the island of Ireland to new audiences. In fact, Tourism Ireland is now the fourth most popular tourism board in the world on Facebook, with 3.6 million fans. They have an average of 220 friends each, giving us in excess of 600 million digital connections around the globe to connect with our message. We are the second largest agency in the world on Twitter, and we are the second largest on YouTube, with 25 million views of our videos in the past year alone.

The strategy has positioned the organisation to work with a number of high-profile partners, including mass media and entertainment conglomerates, such as Disney on “Star Wars” and American broadcasting giant HBO on “Game of Thrones”, as well as such stars as Liam Neeson, Richard E Grant and a host of well-known international bloggers and broadcasters.

In addition to working with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and other agencies, a practical example of how we work in partnership to capitalise on shared opportunities is our co-operation with VisitBritain on the British-Irish visa scheme. Tourism Ireland and VisitBritain signed a memorandum of understanding in April 2014 to work more closely together, particularly in long-haul markets. The British-Irish visa scheme announced by the UK and Irish Governments in October 2014 provided further opportunities in developing growth in markets such as China and India. For example, last autumn Tourism Ireland joined VisitBritain’s roadshow in India, highlighting the British-Irish visa scheme in nine cities across India. Tourism Ireland’s 2016 sales mission to China, which I was on last month, was joined by a delegation of 15 enterprises from across the island of Ireland, as well as representatives from the UK and Irish visa offices.

Under the British-Irish visa scheme and the short-stay waiver programme introduced by the Irish Government in 2011, certain visas issued by the authorities of the UK are recognised for the purposes of travel to Ireland. Tourism Ireland launched a campaign to highlight the visa waiver programme in the middle east last year, targeting GCC holidaymakers to the UK in their key holiday period of August and September. That scheme is a major success in that area and is due to expire in October 2016. VisitBritain has made places available for the island of Ireland industry partners at high-profile promotional events that they run overseas, such as ExploreGB and Destination Britain. Tourism Ireland has also co-operated with relevant parties in Northern Ireland to develop proposals for the GREAT UK Challenge Fund.

Following five consecutive years of growth in overseas tourism to the island of Ireland, Tourism Ireland is determined to work alongside the industry to maintain the positive

momentum and to grow visitor numbers further in 2016. This just gives a flavour of some of the things that are going on. There is a whole range of things that I was not able to cover today and regions that I was not able to touch on, but I will be happy to discuss them during the Q and A session. I thank everybody here who has given us support. It is great to see all our friends from the UK. We have regular dialogue over in the UK, particularly with our St Patrick's day reception in the Houses of Parliament. It is great to see so many friendly faces here today. I look forward to seeing you all at dinner this evening. Thank you very much indeed.

4.30 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

Thanks very much, Mr Gibbons. I call on Mr Shaun Quinn, the CEO of Fáilte Ireland, to make his presentation.

Shaun Quinn:

Good afternoon everybody. Thank you, Co-Chair and Members, for affording me the opportunity to take part in your discussions this afternoon to talk about tourism. My organisation—for those of you who are not aware—is a Government agency that is responsible for the strategic and sustainable development of tourism across the Republic of Ireland. We operate to a very broad statutory remit of responsibilities that includes supporting R and D, enhancing skills, investing in visitor experiences and developing brands such as the Wild Atlantic Way. We work hand in glove with our colleagues in Northern Ireland such as Tourism Northern Ireland and John McGrillen, and with our sister agency, Tourism Ireland, in its overseas marketing effort.

I will be brief, as I do not intend to cover any of the territory that has already been gone over. Previous speakers have underscored the economic importance of tourism in the island of Ireland and, indeed, between Ireland and the UK. Tourism is, undoubtedly, a significant generator of what we call foreign earnings—I will not rehash the figures—and any strategy or policy measure that facilitates overall growth in tourism to the country, whether it is from Brittany or Beijing, should be supported, particularly because of its low import content.

Tourism's contribution across these islands extends far beyond the big figures and the macro-economic impact. Tourism opportunities, shared or otherwise, are interwoven right across society. For example, depending on locational factors, tourism can play a pivotal role in sustaining employment in many rural economies across these islands—economies devoid of opportunities from indigenous manufacturing or large-scale multinational companies.

Tourism opportunities can, equally, play a significant role, especially in terms of boosting local and regional development. Tourism offers valuable job opportunities in urban and rural locations. From a policy perspective, its importance can be recognised in its contribution to generating what could be termed “medium-skilled employment”. Often times, in the drive to target the hi-tech and biopharm companies for their high-end and sustainable employment opportunities, one can easily forget that, invariably, in the working population, there are many who may not be equipped or, indeed, well suited to those sectors.

Tourism supports a nation's culture. We know from our own research that today's visitor is seeking an immersive holiday experience that offers the opportunity to live like a local, get

under the skin of local customs and traditions, and experience aspects of a culture that are authentic and intriguing. In an increasingly globalised world where big brands love homogeneity, tourism promotes, in ways, what is different and unique about a destination, and helps to promote indigenous culture for the benefit of visitors, local citizens and a country's sense of identity.

In Ireland, tourism also supports peace, offering opportunities to explore neighbouring cultures and traditions, break down barriers, facilitate greater mutual understanding and normalise relations. Since the advent of the peace process, we have welcomed more and more visitors from Northern Ireland not just to the neighbouring counties across the border but to the most southerly tourist hotspots on the island. Visitor flows to Northern Ireland from the Republic have been equally impressive.

In the same vein, peace supports tourism. There can be little doubt that the success of the peace process in Northern Ireland has encouraged and increased visitation to the island of Ireland from across the globe. The island destination—if I might call it that—has so much more to offer and engage a visitor on holiday than the constituent parts of the island could probably offer independently. Yet, for all those benefits, tourism remains perceived in the corridors of power—north, south and east of where we are today—as something of a Cinderella industry. Tourism just happens. It will take care of itself. Well, I think that tourism happens to be more important than that, as is evidenced by your agenda here today.

On sharing tourism opportunities, I make four observations. My colleague, Niall Gibbons, has just spoken about the co-operation between Tourism Ireland and VisitBritain in seeking out opportunities in new and developing markets. That makes sound business sense. Today, many competing destinations are vying for a slice of the large and rapidly growing Asian markets. The investment required to stand out in these markets can be substantial and quite prohibitive, not least for relatively distant and peripheral destinations such as Ireland and the UK. Looking ahead, one would wonder whether it might be possible to build on the current co-operative efforts. Could there be a deeper collaborative model to developing specific markets of interest where the joint appeal of a two-destination vacation is strong among potential visitors? Are there opportunities for an agreed market development strategy to benefit both countries?

Secondly, on these islands, the contribution that tourism makes to supporting local communities and regional development is as relevant in the Highlands of Scotland, the valleys of Wales and the Cornish coast as it is to the Causeway coast in County Antrim and the Wild Atlantic Way here. Each region is facing similar circumstances and each is individually grappling for solutions in splendid isolation from one another.

In that vein, are there not opportunities for those charged with developing tourism at a sub-national level to exchange ideas, insights and learnings from across borders, and perhaps even develop collaborative visitor strategies where that might be appropriate? Thirdly, within the island of Ireland, the opportunities to share in inbound tourism growth are there to be captured. We are still only merely scratching the surface. The island of Ireland approach to developing tourism has much to offer. There is the immersive appeal of quite distinct cultural and heritage offerings north and south. There can be a tendency, for a variety of reasons, to highlight what is common, north and south, and maybe the time is right now to explore and expose the rich tapestry of cultural diversity on the island. Would that not more likely generate greater curiosity among visitors and, in turn, more in the way of shared tourism opportunities?

In parallel, there is also the potential from working collaboratively to exploit the infrastructure and asset base that already exist in Northern Ireland and in the south. That is well exemplified in the current bid to host the rugby World cup in 2023. Rather than that being a once-off mission, are there not opportunities to formulate and implement a coherent strategy for identifying, bidding for and hosting large-scale events, be it sporting, cultural or corporate, right across the island?

Finally, there is the potential for continued shared tourism growth within the island itself, from north to south and vice versa. As I indicated, the peace dividend looms large in that regard. Increased visitor flows in both directions not only boost local economies but enhance familiarisation and deepen understanding and respect for all traditions.

Admittedly, this trade continues to ebb and flow back and forth, depending on currency fluctuations and perceptions of relative value. Critically, it is also facilitated in no small way by free movement across the border, something that will no doubt be to the fore of the minds of many in the context of forthcoming negotiations with the EU arising from Brexit.

In conclusion, Chairman, there is no reason why the future for shared tourism opportunities cannot be very bright. Admittedly, the possible implications of Brexit, though they are by no means clear at this stage, are casting something of a shadow on the immediate prospects. There are some legitimate fears that we hope will not materialise.

It is well to note that tourism between these islands did not just take off in 1973 with entry to the EEC, nor has it suffered since 1979 as a consequence of differences in currency. In truth, there is so much in our joint history and everyday business that binds us and still bodes very well for the future.

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

Thanks very much, Mr Quinn. We are moving to the final speaker in this session and then we will open it up for some comments and questions. I would like to introduce Mr John McGrillen, who is the CEO of Tourism Northern Ireland to make a presentation.

John McGrillen:

Joint Chairs, distinguished guests, thank you for the invitation to speak to you this evening. My name is John McGrillen and I am chief executive of Tourism Northern Ireland, formerly known as the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. We, like Fáilte Ireland, are the tourism development authority for Northern Ireland.

Our principal objective is to maximise the contribution that tourism makes to the Northern Ireland economy. Tourism Northern Ireland fulfils this role by focusing on a number of areas. That includes product development and business support. We also work, in terms of destination development, to help small businesses work collectively together, as we referred to earlier. We are also responsible for marketing Northern Ireland, both in the domestic marketplace and here on the island of Ireland. In fulfilling that responsibility, we work very closely with a wide range of stakeholders. We work with a range of Government Departments in Northern Ireland. We also work with Invest NI and Translink. We work with the airports and Northern Ireland Screen. We work with the 11 new local authorities in Northern Ireland and we also work, when the opportunity arises, with VisitBritain, and, as

Shaun said, we work collectively with Fáilte Ireland to promote opportunities where mutual benefits arise.

We are a relatively small organisation. We currently employ 130 people. We have a budget of about £19 million and have a small office here in Dublin, where we employ six people, who work principally in promoting and marketing the Northern Ireland tourism offer to the population of the Republic of Ireland.

The tourism industry in Northern Ireland is a vital segment of the economy. It currently contributes about £750 million to that economy, £500 million of which comes from outside Northern Ireland. That makes tourism one of Northern Ireland's largest export businesses. It contributes to the creation and maintenance of jobs in every part of Northern Ireland, and as Shaun said, it supports sub-regional economic growth and provides employment opportunities to sections of society that might otherwise not have that opportunity or might find it difficult to secure employment. Today, it accounts for 5.2% of our GDP and directly and indirectly employs about 55,000 people. Last year, we had 2.28 million out-of-state visitors to Northern Ireland, which made it a record year for tourism.

The GB and Republic of Ireland markets are very important to the Northern Ireland tourist economy and account for over 70% of all visitors who arrive in Northern Ireland. In 2015, Great Britain accounted for 1.3 million visitors to Northern Ireland, while 320,000 people visited from the Republic of Ireland. The performance of those two markets has varied substantially in the past year, with Great Britain seeing an increase of 10% in both visitor numbers and visitor spend, while from the Republic of Ireland, we saw a 16% decline in spend and an 18% decline in the number of people who visited Northern Ireland. I suppose that is the corollary of the exchange rate issue: where the Republic may have benefited from strong sterling, we have seen the impact of that in terms of the numbers of people who have visited Northern Ireland from the Republic. I suppose that has also been impacted by the differential in the VAT rates that we talked about—we have got a VAT rate of 20%, compared with the 9% here. That undoubtedly impacts upon our competitiveness in comparison to our counterparts in the Republic.

In order to address some of those issues, we recently set up a Republic of Ireland market recovery taskforce. That group consists of senior people from within the tourist industry, principally based in the Republic of Ireland but with business interests in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Those taskforce meetings are facilitated by the British ambassador, who hosts them in his residence. In the longer term, we would argue that the Republic of Ireland is still a major opportunity for Northern Ireland tourism, because at this point in time, almost two thirds of people who live in the Republic of Ireland have yet to spend a night in Northern Ireland. There is real potential there that we feel we need to tap into.

We work very closely with a whole range of people, as I said earlier. We enjoy a close working relationship with all of the tourism bodies across Britain and Ireland. We work particularly closely with Tourism Ireland to ensure that there is complementarity in the work that we are doing on business and product development, and that it is aligned with the opportunities identified by Tourism Ireland in the various marketplaces across the globe. Currently, the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy is developing a new tourism strategy for Northern Ireland, and the key goal within that is to double the out-of-state spend to £1 billion by 2025. Tourism Ireland forms a part of the strategy steering group, as it will have a major role to play in the delivery of that goal.

4.45 pm

A key element of that strategy will be the development of an experience brand for Northern Ireland that will complement the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Dublin, to allow us to secure the opportunity that the international marketing work that Tourism Ireland is doing has realised and to complement the work that Fáilte Ireland has already been doing in that area. I have to say that Shaun and his team have been very helpful in sharing their experiences with us as they learn from the products that they have been developing over the past two to three years.

Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and ourselves have also collaborated over a number of years in the area of business tourism, through such initiatives as “meet the buyer”, where businesses north and south meet overseas tour operators and on shared platforms at business tourism conferences internationally. We also collaborate where it is beneficial to proactively market sectors on an all-Ireland basis. I think golf—someone mentioned the British Open—is a really good example of where we can do that. We also have a memorandum of understanding with VisitBritain. While recognising Tourism Ireland's lead role in promoting Northern Ireland overseas, this allows for internationally recognised products, such as the Giant's Causeway and Titanic Belfast, to have visibility on VisitBritain's websites. We are also involved in the sharing of market intelligence and insights collated by the VisitBritain team. In addition, we also have a very good working relationship with the other UK agencies, such as VisitScotland and VisitWales, on information sharing. Quite often we share best practice through visiting each other's jurisdictions.

Just to say a little about the potential impact of Brexit, it is very difficult for all of us to know what the impact is likely to be in the medium to long term. In the short term, it may help Northern Ireland to recover some of the lost market share in the Republic, as recent exchange rate movements have rebalanced the negative moment that we have seen in the opposite direction over the past two years. The exchange rate movement could potentially see growth in GB visitors to Northern Ireland increasing further in the short term.

In the longer term, the agreement around the UK-Ireland visa waiver scheme, the common travel area and any border arrangements will be critical, as, from a tourism perspective, restrictions on freedom of movement may deter visitors from crossing the border. Given that Dublin airport is the main access point for visitors to Northern Ireland from outside the UK, the impact on our future performance could be significant.

Finally on that point, someone raised the issue of infrastructure. The development of infrastructure is critically important—particularly the infrastructure along the Belfast-Dublin corridor. The development of the linkages both by bus and by rail between Dublin and Belfast will be critical. Belfast international airport also acts as an access point to the north-west part of the island, so I agree with Shaun's view that we should be looking at these things in a complementary manner to see how we can best facilitate the growth of tourism across the island.

That is just a taster of some of the issues that we face, and like my two colleagues I am more than happy to pick up on any questions that you have in the Q and A session.

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

I thank Mr McGrillen for his presentation. We have about 15 minutes left in this session, so we will take a number of contributions and come back and ask the speakers to respond. Can people indicate if they wish to speak?

Rt Hon Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, and thank you to the four gentlemen for their presentations. I have two brief points. First, on inland waterways, I know that it requires a fair amount of spend, but if we are looking at new ways to open up this island for tourism development and to regenerate many rural communities in the wake of that, I think we need to be doing more to increase the inland waterways network. In Northern Ireland, we have Lough Neagh. It is a major potential recreation source that is totally underutilised. There is ongoing work to connect the Ulster canal to the Erne-Shannon system, but there is the potential—we should be doing this—to bring the Lagan navigation system from Belfast to Lough Neagh, so that eventually a visitor could board a boat in Belfast and go all the way to Limerick on the inland waterway system. Just think how many counties that would assist to open up their tourism potential. This needs to be a greater priority.

My second point—it is a parochial one, so forgive me—is that Hillsborough castle is soon to open as a major tourist and visitor attraction. As you know, it has been the venue for many historic Anglo-Irish events and much more. With Historic Royal Palaces in charge there now, I can see big gains for our local tourism sector from Hillsborough castle. I want to put that on the radar of Tourism Ireland and the chamber of commerce, because it could add significantly to the visitors we are attracting to Northern Ireland and it is a big opportunity for Northern Ireland to attract more visitors from the south.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I'd like to compliment the speakers on their excellent contributions. May I ask Shaun in particular how the very necessary increase in the number of hotel rooms in Dublin is proceeding? Where is it at, and how do you see further growth?

Secondly, may I ask the panel—those it is relevant to—to jointly encourage the Government to introduce some tax breaks to allow closed hotels across the country, which Senator Feighan referred to earlier, to reopen? That is very necessary. The Minister, Patrick, referred to the corridor down the middle, reaching into Cork and Limerick. As we know, a number of former hotels there have closed. We could do with something happening to encourage them or allow them to reopen, under new management or whatever.

Brendan Smith TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I welcome the presentations. I support Jeffrey with regard to the Ulster canal; it has great potential if it is restored. Work has commenced on a small stretch of that canal on the Cavan-Fermanagh-Monaghan border. The Irish Government is funding that project. The remainder of the project—the restoration north of the border, and indeed south of the border as well—will need huge investment. Where is that on the priority list of the various development agencies and the relevant Department north of the border?

Senator Catherine Noone:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. Just a quick one. The point about hotels and hotel prices has been brought up a few times—I have had a bee in my bonnet about it for a few years. Should we be looking at a charter, or something like that, for Dublin hotels? It is all good and well saying that we need to make sure that the domestic tourist, the commercial visitor and so on get a good price, but how do we actually control that? Are there any policies of which you are aware to control it in other countries? The market dictates the price, availability and all the other factors, so I would be interested to know if there are any models elsewhere. Clearly the VAT rate is required for hotels around the country, and I would be a really strong advocate for keeping the 9% VAT rate for hotels, not even just in rural areas but anywhere outside Dublin. How, in real terms, do we manage that and manage the tourism product so that it is not damaged by the price of hotels in Dublin?

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

I invite the panel to come back in on those questions, and we will then have a number of other questions.

Shaun Quinn:

Co-Chair, may I comment on the question raised by a few speakers about Dublin hotels? For those who are not familiar with the situation, the number of visitors to Dublin has increased by 33% in recent years, whereas hotel capacity has reduced by 6%, so hotels are operating pretty much at full tilt for much of the year. It is a consequence of the free market that rates have gotten quite high. They have been rising successively over the last four or five years. Incidentally, they are really only back to where they were—at the end of last year, they were back to where they were at the peak, if you like. There is a real danger at this stage that with continued price inflation, they might become uncompetitive against our competitor cities internationally.

We have done an analysis of the situation, and we found that about 5,500 bedrooms are in planning at the moment. Unfortunately, most of that will come on stream between 2018 and 2020, so we are facing a pretty tight environment in the meantime. It is only a few years since some commentators were telling us that we had too many hotels in Dublin and should shut them down. These things take time, but the reality is that it is only as of this year that it is becoming economic to build a hotel as opposed to buying one off the market. It is just changing now.

There have been issues with the economics of hotel construction in the city of Dublin, with competition for new office blocks—the return that you can garner from a square metre of a hotel versus an office block. We have taken some steps in the past month to reduce the minimum requirements for hotel construction in terms of bedroom size, to make it more economical for developers. We will monitor the situation again in around four or five months to see how many of those 5,500 rooms are coming on stream. Outside that, there is not an awful lot to do.

We are currently very active—we are working with Tourism Ireland on this—in encouraging more business outside Dublin. There may be a problem for Dublin, but it is an opportunity for the rest of the country and the rest of the island. We are very keen to support that through tour operators, and we are doing that. There are no initiatives in other destinations that come up

against the same problem, and intervening in the market is not really an issue, but we have the growth of Airbnb and suchlike, which has helped to alleviate the challenge. I hope that has given you some understanding of the issue.

John McGrane:

Just to add to that from a wider business perspective, we are in some danger of talking ourselves into a problem that is not quite as substantial as it sometimes appears from the anecdotes about a busy weekend, a festival or something like that. If we compare Dublin with other major capitals—some of them fairly close, some of them further away—the pricing still stands up reasonably well. Bear in mind the fact that some other cities charge city taxes, bed taxes and lots of other things, whereas if you get a bed in Dublin, that is the price. As Shaun said, more capacity will come in, but that takes a bit of time.

One other factor to bear in mind is that what we define as Dublin is often not the same as what the visitor is prepared to define as Dublin. If you go to lots of other international venues, if you are in the radius of that venue, you regard yourself as being in the venue. It is unique to Dublin that we think you have to be between the two canals. That is not necessarily the case anymore. There is lots of great product further out and, indeed, a little bit further out again.

Mr Danny Kinahan MP:

Some of you may be used to my questions, particularly Niall and John. Earlier, I asked the Minister about how we counter the successful expansion of Dublin airport and help both Belfast International and Belfast City airports, as well as Derry airport.

Another issue that I have been pushing is that we do not seem to be looking at the shooting and fishing in the whole of Ireland. That could bring in £40 million. Have we started to look at that as another method of bringing people to Ireland?

Lastly, we need to get more nights spent in Northern Ireland. If you go to “Game of Thrones” sites and others, most people say that they fly into Dublin, come up, do the Giant’s Causeway and one other thing. We should be trying to get people to spend more time in Northern Ireland so that we get more from it.

Frank Feighan TD:

I want to piggyback on a few other questions. An observation: we would be in huge trouble, certainly in the Dublin region, if it was not for Airbnb. A lot of my colleagues in the Dáil simply cannot get rooms in hotels now if there is a major concert or football match. We need to highlight Airbnb even more, because the capacity is there and it could get us out of a lot of problems with capacity. I am delighted that Airbnb was mentioned, but a lot of people are not aware of it. I started using it when I was going to London and other cities and could not get anything at a reasonable rate. I find it very convenient.

Following on from what Danny Kinahan said, what about angling? When I was growing up, fishermen came from the UK to Ballinamore, to Boyle and to Strokestown. We seem to have lost that market. Did we price ourselves out of it, or is there a problem with the fishing stocks in the rivers and lakes?

Thirdly, regarding the Shannon-erne and the Ulster Canal, Waterways Ireland has my full support. It has worked incredibly well, north and south. I am concerned that there seems to be overcapacity. We have a lot of berths but not enough boats. I understand that a lot of the leasing companies, certainly at that end of the Shannon, move boats back to France effectively, and it is just not there. I know that they brought back a few but we need a lot more boats for hire, but at an economic rate. We have a huge infrastructure capacity—both Governments are putting a lot of money into capacity—but if the boats are not there at a reasonable rate, people will not come into the country to hire them.

5.00 pm

Darren Millar AM:

To what extent have the panellists considered faith tourism as an opportunity? I know there is a growing interest in pilgrim routes and so on across the world because of the success of the Camino de Santiago. In the part of the country that I represent, we have the north Wales Pilgrim's Way that stretches from Holywell to Bardsey island. I know you have some pilgrim routes here in Ireland. To what extent have the dots been joined up, as it were, to ensure that those routes are cohesive across the British Isles? Is there a particular strategy that could be developed on that?

Willie Coffey MSP:

Most of the tourists who come from Scotland to Ireland and vice versa now face an extra drive journey of about 100 miles as a result of P&O closing its Troon to Larne service. Was there any engagement with or lobbying of P&O about the impact of that decision? It seems to have made quite a difference here, particularly in recognition of the huge investment in the A8 from Larne south, which I have used many a time on my way to Donegal. Was there any assessment of the impact of that?

The Lord Kilclooney:

My question is for John McGrillen from Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland the reduction of corporation tax is estimated to cost the Northern Ireland Exchequer about £250 million. The abolition of airport passenger duty would cost only £55 million. It seems to me that the latter would be a better thing to do for the economy of Northern Ireland. Has Tourism Northern Ireland pushed the idea of abolishing APD to Stormont? If so, where is the problem at Stormont?

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

Thanks. I will pass back to the panel now for their final answers and comments before we wrap up.

Niall Gibbons:

Thanks very much. I will go back to the question about Hillsborough castle. Hillsborough is on the agenda—I was up there before it was transferred to Historic Royal Palaces. It is an amazing opportunity, particularly in markets like the United States, to have something that sits in the royal collection in Ireland. Almost all of our staff have paid a visit at some point in the past 18 months as it was going through the big investment phase. It will be on journalists'

itineraries and will fit very well into the media profile and the type of people we are trying to attract from the United States. It is well on the agenda.

On the share for Northern Ireland airports, so to speak, we work very closely with Belfast City, Belfast International and City of Derry airport, and with carriers, trying to encourage them and to promote existing routes. A practical example is that Ryanair is launching a new service into Belfast International this winter. We will have promotional programmes in place on two routes: Berlin and also from Milan into Belfast. That is a great opportunity for Northern Ireland to make big inroads into the European markets, which are actually the fastest growing markets into the island of Ireland, by the way, and provide unparalleled access or opportunities for Northern Ireland particularly. Those two particular routes we welcome, and we will be doing joint campaigns. I met Ryanair last week and signed off on those, so that is encouraging.

On angling, shooting and fishing, we are very much into niche areas, and we do need campaigns from time to time. We have had people attend the Country Life and Angling Game Fair at Blenheim Palace from time to time. It depends on how much interaction we get. They are fairly small but we always welcome people coming to us and we will do joint activity with operators in that space if the campaign and the timing are right.

I am very happy to discuss spending more nights in Northern Ireland. One issue that we have talked about in the past three to five years particularly is that we need more direct air access into Northern Ireland. In the absence of that today or tomorrow, we need to get more tour operators that already programme in the Republic of Ireland to include Northern Ireland in their inventory. As of last year, 775 tour operators had signed up to the programme in Northern Ireland. That will go up to about 900 by the end of this year, which means that almost all tour operators that have been programming in the Republic of Ireland in the past will have an all-Ireland section to their sale. That, again, will generate more nights. The big challenge then is to sell two nights instead of one, which would have a huge impact. We are very keen to develop that sort of incremental business.

The points made in relation to Ulster canal are very important. That is a huge development project, but I think the whole area of water-based tourism is something that we have a huge capacity to exploit when that development is in place. The whole island of Ireland sits very well in that people can navigate from the very top to the very bottom. We need projects of scale and that gives us the opportunity to market overseas.

Airbnb has a very small presence on this island at the moment. We hope during the course of the next number of months to encourage more members to sign up. That probably is the only opportunity we have in the coming three years to get additional bed capacity, particularly in the Dublin area.

Faith tourism is something that we have picked up in the past two to three years in the southern states of the United States. The big change in the US profile of visitors is that, 10 years ago, 70% of them had an ancestral link, but it is now only 30%. Our growth is coming from California and the southern states. Working with the tourism people in Downpatrick, we have now put 5,000 additional people through the doors, through small tour operators who specialise in faith-based tourism in the southern states of the United States. I think we can create more opportunities in that space.

John McGrillen:

On infrastructure support for the development of waterways and the Northern Ireland Executive, the key issue is the potential return versus the investment required, which will be significant. We need work on demonstrating the return on the investment if we are going to get significant resource put into that—we are competing for budgets with roads and other pieces of infrastructure. We will keep that on the agenda.

Niall mentioned staying in Northern Ireland and driving up the number of tour operators. We have been doing that collectively with Fáilte Ireland through “meet the buyer”, to try to make that happen. One of our challenges is developing suitable accommodation outside of Belfast. When you go to the north coast, it is not that easy to find the accommodation that can facilitate one or two coaches. We are working with Invest Northern Ireland on that.

In terms of faith tourism, we are looking at the context of wellness and spirituality. We are looking at linking faith tourism and spirituality to people’s wellbeing. Niall has done a lot of work with the St Patrick’s centre. Talking to me about St Patrick, someone said to me, “Just because you like Christmas doesn’t necessarily mean you love Jesus.” How we take the St Patrick’s theme and integrate it with other things to give a greater hold that we can exploit is something we want to look at.

We have discussed air passenger duty with our parent Department. The Department has looked at the cost of delivering APD and the overall cost to Northern Ireland versus the benefits of tourism. That piece of work, which was done independently by a team of accountants, suggested that there was not a net benefit to Northern Ireland. I understand that the current Finance Minister will revisit that because he believes it is not necessarily the case. We would welcome that because anything that will drive greater connectivity will certainly be beneficial from our perspective.

John McGrane:

On Lord Kilclooney’s point, my daughter spent the weekend in Northern Ireland and had a most pleasant holiday, taking in all the sights. She pronounced it an extremely good experience.

On the point of the airport tax and the corporation tax play-off, our view is that Northern Ireland can benefit substantially from both a reduction in corporation tax and a reduction in travel tax. The experience in the Republic bears out both of those points. I know it creates challenges to balance the sums, but our experience is that it is well worth shooting for both.

The Co-Chairperson (Kathleen Funchion MD):

I thank our four speakers for being here today with us, for their presentations and their follow-up contributions on a very important topic. That concludes the plenary for today and we will be suspended until 9.30 am tomorrow. I thank Members for all their contributions and co-operation today.

Adjourned at 5.14 pm.

Tuesday 5 July 2016

The Assembly met at 9.39 am.

**DEVELOPMENTS IN BRITISH-IRISH RELATIONS:
EU REFERENDUM IN THE UK (DEBATE CONTINUED)**

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Friends, I think we might make a start, depleted as we are. I have been asked to be the acting Co-Chair this morning, as Andrew Rosindell has had to head back to London. The first item is to continue the debate on the implications for British-Irish relations of the referendum result on EU membership. It is a continuation of the debate we had yesterday morning, and I should like to see who first wants to contribute. There is no bar on speaking again if you spoke the last time, although people who have not spoken at all will get precedence—if we spot them. Does anybody want to start off or reflect on the debate yesterday? I shall give you a moment or two to think about that one.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

I think that yesterday was a very useful debate, in that, especially for us in Ireland who were not privy to all of the media coverage of the debate prior to the referendum, we got an insight into where people stand, and I think that that was useful. The contribution this morning that I want to make is just that, when we were having our discussion yesterday, there was the potential that the Government here had indicated that it would set up a forum to discuss the Brexit outcome between the North South Ministerial Council, which seems to have been shot down, or was dead in the water, before it was discussed. Given some of the conversation here yesterday, I think that this forum should play a major role in discussing beyond today the relationships. We should offer up to the Government here and also to the Stormont Assembly the idea that we should play that role, and to Westminster and to the other Parliaments the idea that maybe they should consider us as the vehicle for that debate. That would be challenging—we would have to increase the number of meetings and the output of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly just to be able to deliver quickly, rather than as we do sometimes. Later on, for example, I will be giving a report that started in 2014. I do not think that people can wait, but I think that we have the authority if we want to call in experts or hold hearings with various people. Maybe, if we started that work, we would be some way along the route to producing some type of report by our next meeting in Cardiff—not necessarily a completed one, but one on what people's views are and what the implication of the referendum result is.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Senator Leyden, where are you?

Senator Terry Leyden:

Thank you, Co-Chair. First of all, congratulations to the selected Chairs of this organisation. I was here five years ago and I must say that there is a far better atmosphere here than there was in the past—it is much more focused on a united approach in relation to the islands of the United Kingdom and Ireland and the adjoining areas of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man. It came as a complete shock to the Republic of Ireland when the United Kingdom voted quite decisively to leave, or decided to walk out of, the

European Union. It is a major decision after 43 years of very successful membership of the European Union.

I happened to be delegated the responsibility in the 1990s for the Single European Act, which was the free-trade decision, on which, I must say, the Irish and British Governments worked very closely together. I do not recall any situation where the United Kingdom representatives—or the Irish representatives, for that matter—were ever overruled by fellow Europeans. There was a very good, positive dialogue in relation to free trade. There is a massive free-trade area—practically the largest, or one of the largest, in the world. I just cannot understand the situation—after all the effort, all the contributions and all the involvement of previous Prime Ministers, from Margaret Thatcher on. I recall when we were told by the French that we were not going to join back in the 1970s. Then we were delighted to join, and it has been very beneficial, certainly from the Republic's point of view; I really believe, from the United Kingdom point of view, that the UK has benefited, too.

In a referendum in the Republic, we have an independent panel that gives both sides of the argument in a fair and balanced manner. I did not see such an organisation operating in the United Kingdom. All I heard was that £350 million per week would go to the health services, and a big bus went around the place. That was the main message that was going through. There were no real counter-arguments being made about the contribution that had been made by the United Kingdom Government, the representatives in the Parliament and, in particular, the Council of Ministers. I also cannot understand why Lord Hill has decided to depart, even though there are over two years left in the negotiations. However, that is his decision. I presume that a new appointment will be made because it is vital that the commissioner is there to represent not just the UK, but other interests.

9.45 am

I recognise the generous support given by the United Kingdom Government to the Republic of Ireland when we were in enormous financial troubles. We will never forget that—that is our duty and responsibility. It is quite clear from both the Government and Opposition parties—all parties in Leinster House—that we will do our utmost to support the orderly departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union on the best possible terms, because that is in the interests of the United Kingdom and particularly in the interests of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Nobody wants to see the border returning to what it was in the past.

I agree with Aengus Ó Snodaigh that this is the organisation, and I am delighted that the Governments, or whoever, has decided that another parallel organisation will not be established. This organisation represents the very best of experienced parliamentarians from all over this region—people who have experience and no vested interests, who have clearly served in the past in ministerial capacities and in different roles, and who bring enormous knowledge and experience to the table. I really believe that the different committees will work together and individually to take evidence, get information and find out exactly how we can have a really well-organised, orderly departure. We will retain and maintain our close friendship with the United Kingdom, and we will do our utmost on its behalf in relation to the negotiations—from the point of view of the Government, the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach and everybody else.

I will just say again: we have the shared islands, we have contributed both ways and there is a move, and I welcome it. Indeed, I welcome the support from Ian Paisley in calling for

everyone in the North to apply for an Irish passport—that is very welcome indeed—and I hope that we set up a dedicated passport office in Dundalk, Monaghan or Cavan or somewhere else.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Belfast.

Senator Terry Leyden:

Well, I do not know whether we should go beyond that, now; we do not want to cause any more problems. Another interesting point is that there are hundreds of thousands of people in the North and the South and in Britain who are eligible for a British passport, if things get difficult in future. That is the other side of the coin. Many people will be joint holders of both British and Irish passports, but that is only a detail. I was concerned when I heard some people saying that European citizens in Britain would have to review their position. That is very worrying at this stage.

I will finally say that the people in charge—the Presidents in the European Union—are being extraordinarily unhelpful and very dismissive in their statements and attitude. I would say that their attitudes over the last while have contributed to the vote in the United Kingdom. They have certainly distanced themselves from ordinary people. They are unelected but they speak authoritatively as the emperors of Europe. Well, they are not the emperors, and Britain has probably taken action as a result. Thank you very much.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you. Pat the Cope Gallagher, please.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

Thank you, Chair. This is just an extension of what I said yesterday. I believe that the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly can play an extremely important role going forward, whether prior to or after the invoking of article 50. I think that everyone here, irrespective of their background or their politics, appreciates that the decision, which we must respect, in the referendum almost 10 days ago is one that must be accepted. The British Prime Minister has said that the outcome would be put into effect, and it will affect all of us. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly represents all shades of opinion from mainland Britain, the islands and the island of Ireland. Therefore, it is my view that, if there is not going to be a separate forum, the role of the Assembly should be enhanced. It should meet more often and I dare say that possibly those who provide the services—and this is no reflection on them—will need more help as well, so we will have to have more officials from both sides working with us. I personally—and I have spoken with my colleagues in the Fianna Fáil party—would be of the view that this is something to discuss with the leader of our party and that we should recommend to him and to our parliamentary party that the role of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly should be extended over the course of the next two years and should meet more frequently. I believe that, as politicians, we will reflect the views of those we represent, and that we will do so in the best interests of our colleagues in the UK and here in Ireland. We have a duty to our people to do this. We have come a long way over the last number of decades, by way of economic progress and job creation, and we want to continue that. We might think that we will be around for ever, but we are only the custodians, and we

have a responsibility to future generations to do what we believe is right for them. I am very buoyed by the good relationship that there is between all of us, and I think that we can build on that. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. I call Declan Breathnach.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

I would just like to concord with the last three speakers. When I spoke yesterday in support of the Taoiseach's proposal for a Northern Ireland forum, I said that it was my belief that this body would be the best conduit to deliver and explore the issues that affect all of the people on these two islands. I believe that the way to go is to have an enhanced role for the committees within this body to bring in all of the organisations that have expertise in relation to the impact of Brexit and, indeed, how we can co-operate in developing the islands. Without being repetitive, I believe that we should explore that; certainly, as Pat the Cope has said, we will explore it from our party's point of view. There is absolutely no point in reinventing the wheel: this is a forum that could be expanded to ensure that all the interests of the two islands are met, both in the EU context and out of it.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you. I call Mark Durkan.

Mr Mark Durkan MP:

Thank you, Chair. I am going to break the run; I do not concur with what I have heard up until now regarding the idea of there not being another forum to do a very particular job, alongside the very important work that this forum has to do. I fully agree that this forum has to work harder and creatively in relation to managing the consequences and the outworkings of Brexit, minimising the difficulties and trying to come up with some of the answers to the gaps. For instance, we know that a lot of the North-South work that is undertaken in various bodies actually relies on EU funding and EU programmes. Reg Empey referred InterTradeIreland yesterday, and a lot of its work actually relates to maximising EU programmes and EU measures. We have to make good those gaps if we are going to end up without EU funding and EU programmes, which have become so much a part of the North-South currency and a key part of the east-west currency, with INTERREG programmes, et cetera, operating across the Irish Sea, as well as across the border here. There is a lot of work for this forum to do. Funding-wise, we know that there was a UK loan to Ireland, which is being repaid and has to be repaid, so it might be an idea to look at earmarking some of that money as a funding stream for some of those measures, to make good some of that work in the future. I think there is a lot that this forum can do, both to manage the difficulties and to create some new possibilities.

However, there is a compelling need for a forum to be convened by the Taoiseach on an all-Ireland basis to deal with issues that I believe this forum cannot properly address. When articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution were changed under the Good Friday Agreement, new statements were made about people's identity and citizenship. People are deeply worried about whether that changes things, and if it does not change them overnight, whether it will change into the future. I will take the example of Ian Paisley Jr saying to people, in a cynical

way, “Get an Irish passport; if you can get two, why wouldn’t you? It means you can travel in Europe and you’ll have the European health cover.” Citizens in Northern Ireland thought that an Irish passport would get them the student-fee concessions in Scotland; well, it did not—it turned into a residence test, and that was what was used. Our Irish citizenship was different from somebody else’s Irish citizenship. Somebody who campaigned for Brexit along the lines of saying, “We can’t have people coming here getting welfare because people shouldn’t take out when they don’t put in”—a theme that David Cameron and others then took up—is now saying, “You can use an Irish passport so you can get all sorts of things out of the EU in circumstances where you’ve left the EU”. There is going to be a reaction, and there are going to be difficulties. There is a duty of care that parties in Ireland have to all of the citizens of Ireland, as stated in articles 2 and 3, which we need to exercise.

We cannot say that this body is enough; nor can we say that the North-South structures that exist are enough. First, the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association meets in a very limited and desultory way and is not capable of doing these things. Secondly, on the North South Ministerial Council, the First Minister yesterday was reported as having vetoed a forum. I am saying that the existing channels are all that is needed, and there can be phone calls when phone calls are needed. Let us be blunt: given the way the negotiations worked out, the existing channel that is being talking about—the North South Ministerial Council—has a limited remit, because that was all that the Unionist parties would agree. Now we are told that apparently it can do everything and will be able to deal with all of the issues, when, during the negotiations, we were told that it could deal with only a very few issues. The North South Ministerial Council works on the basis of the First Minister having a veto not just on the outcomes, but on the agenda. We are being told by somebody who campaigned for Brexit and who refuses to recognise that there are serious issues that she can veto a forum in which the rest of us could address some of those issues in a responsible way. She can veto that by relying on arrangements that mean that she can veto the very agenda. That is not good enough. I think she had some neck to do what she did yesterday, and I just wish the Taoiseach had some backbone.

We have had North-South fora before. The New Ireland Forum worked. All parties were invited, and although not everybody went, it worked and made a contribution. The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was similar. There was a National Forum on Europe, which was chaired by Maurice Hayes. Again, all the parties were invited. Whenever the constitutional convention operated down here, all the parties in the North were invited and could appoint MLAs and while not everyone did, that worked. It did not undermine anything and it did not rival anything; it made an important contribution, and it allowed people North and South on this island to share issues together that they needed to share creatively.

I will make a final point aside from all the institutional stuff, the questions of co-operation and the damage that has been done to strand 2. Reg Empey will remember this very clearly. When we were negotiating the Agreement, there was the whole tension around strand 2 and strand 3, with Unionists saying, “You don’t really need a strand 2; if you’ve a healthy strand 3, North-South will be all right as part of that.” I am a bit worried about some of the discussion this morning, as people seem to be saying that if we have a few things happening at a British-Irish level that we like, that is enough and everything else will fall into place. Well, it will not work like that.

The biggest point about which care needs to be taken is the whole question around the principle of consent. In the reaction to last week’s decision, some people threw out the idea of a border poll, and other people slapped that down as a knee-jerk gimmick. However, the

Good Friday Agreement provides for the possibility of a referendum on a united Ireland. If there is a negotiated Brexit or a new UK-EU treaty, will that treaty specifically provide for the possibility of Irish reunification, or will we be left with people saying that that is a dilemma or quagmire? We do not know. There is no provision for one part of a non-EU state to opt into an EU state. That would have to be a whole new negotiation. In the same way, people tried to claim that Scotland going independent would have to have a whole new negotiation with the EU. Would there have to be a whole new negotiation for the North? Would there have to be a new negotiation for Ireland's membership of the EU, given the fact that Ireland was changing as a member state?

Those are issues about which fundamental care needs to be taken. As a Northern Nationalist, if I am not part of an arrangement that is taking care of those issues, I am not going to be able to answer the claims and the nonsense that come from the dissidents in the future. That has to be done, and we have to take real care. As well as doing all the important and positive work that people have rightly said that this forum should do, there are other issues to be addressed at other levels.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

I call Joan Burton.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I think that we should look at this issue in terms of its complexity and, in particular, the relationship of all of the different entities that are here and the different parts of the British-Irish areas that are represented. We should also look at the relationship with the European Union. I agree with what Mark Durkan has said. I think that, at the moment, we are actually missing the significance of what positions the European Union may take.

10.00 am

I would say that, if there is a role for this body as a representative body that includes parliamentarians from all the different areas represented, it is to make a statement and provide clarity on what the likely negative impacts are going to be. As I said partly yesterday, the European Union was founded to end conflict and create a situation in which the kind of wars that we have been commemorating do not happen again. By and large, notwithstanding serious conflicts in certain parts of western Europe over the last 50 years, that has been very successful. We are talking about a peace situation in Ireland that came about as a result of a referendum and we are talking about the European Union having played a significant part in being party to supporting that, along with the United States. It was the broadening out of the peace process that provided the mechanism for people to come to agreements. The funding is very important.

There is one other point that I have to make after listening to the contributions that people made yesterday, which everyone seemed to be agreed on—from Lord Kilclooney to all the other speakers. I assume, because nobody spoke against it, that it is something on which we can all agree, and that is that there should not be a hard border on this island. I think that everybody said that—if I did not hear somebody who diverged from that, I apologise.

There are a couple of risks to what has been achieved between Britain and Ireland and between North and South on this island. The withdrawal of funding streams for peace

processes would be very damaging, and potentially disastrous, particularly at a community level. There are areas of very high unemployment where, inevitably, the provision of resources and community services is being done partly through those funding sources. In the withdrawal situation of Brexit, it is critical to know what is likely to happen. Will local governments replace those sources, or will they simply vanish?

The second issue is of the hard border and, to be honest, I think that most people who are familiar with the border and who have used it, particularly during the height of the difficulties and the Troubles, will know that a hard border is everybody's nightmare scenario. I do not think that that awareness is there on the part of the European Union; I genuinely do not think that it is something that is in view.

There is a lot of tit-for-tat going on, and a lot of the comments made by people like the President of the Commission, Mr Juncker, have been seriously unhelpful to everybody. We are talking here quite frankly and, to be perfectly honest, if other people are considering their positions, he might do a little bit of reflection himself. Comments such as his are not going to help us to avoid drifting back into a zone of danger, where young people in their teens and their 20s want to strike a pose and do something for different flags. That is what I think everybody innately recognises is the danger of a hard border.

Obviously, the negotiations are enormously broad: they will cover everything and anything. However, if this Assembly is agreeable, maybe through the Co-Chairs, that there are key points that we can identify as being significantly important in the negotiations—and as we are meeting in Ireland on the island—we can make the message really clear in the public discussion that a hard border is to be avoided. In turn, that message ought to be conveyed, perhaps by the officials and the officers of the Assembly, to people in Brussels that for most people who are dedicated in terms of politics, a hard border would be unthinkable and undesirable and downright wrong.

I think that we should re-stress what Europe has achieved in terms of the money flows, but I think that we should let people know that a hard border is something they should not be contemplating. I worry that, once they are addressing broader ranges of things, forces in the European Union would inevitably say, "Well, the logic of that is we must have a border". Maybe the role of this Assembly is to argue, "No, we don't need that kind of border". To be frankly honest, I do not think that some kind of a tech border meets the position either. Somebody said that yesterday that Google or Facebook will handle this, but Google and Facebook will not handle this. The last thing they will be able to do is handle this situation; it can only be settled by agreements between the different parties.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. Senator Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, Co-Chair. When I first got involved in politics, a friend of mine who was a barrister told me that, any time he went into a meeting, the fight was never what the fight was about. I suppose that, every day I get up in politics, I realise the same.

Look, we are in a very serious crisis and it has to be dealt with with cool heads. Five years ago, we were in a serious crisis in this country and everybody was shouting in with advice:

“Burn the bondholders” and “Give the two fingers to Europe”. The Taoiseach, along with the Labour Party, worked together, and I think that we are in a much better place because of that. We are now in a place that we are in the heart of Europe and, actually, we can be serious decision makers—we can influence what happens for the island of Ireland, for Great Britain and further afield.

I think that the Taoiseach was well capable of building those relationships. I do not know what happened at the meeting yesterday, and I am disappointed that we did not have a sort of all-Ireland approach. However, I think that we now have to look at this body trying to ensure that we can work together and get the best solution for the island of Ireland and for the United Kingdom—and, dare I say it, for Europe, because this is a crisis.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has a huge role, and I think that all the Governments now should get together to see whether there is a role for us. Yesterday, I mentioned that in terms of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association. Okay, it does not have any teeth, but it is there and it has met every six months in Stormont and in the Oireachtas for the past three years. I do not want to not use the phrase, but it is like the alcoholic uncle at a wedding—people say, “Keep him away”. However, it is there, it has met and it has done a lot of work.

I really think that either this body or the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association should get a lot more teeth. We are in a crisis, and I do not think that, if we want to work alone, we will get the best deal for the island of Ireland or the United Kingdom. We have to work together, and I believe that this Assembly or the Association could be the way forward. What we need now is cool heads—maybe not as much backbone, but cool heads.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

I call Ann Jones, to be followed by Lord Kilclooney, Deputy John Le Fondré and Viscount Bridgeman. That is where we stand at the moment.

Ms Ann Jones AM:

Bore da, Co-Chair. Thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

This is my first meeting of the plenary and I listened with interest yesterday. I think that this organisation is probably more crucial now, as it enters into a crucial and challenging period, but I think that it should provide a conduit for all of us to go back to our constituent legislatures and assist with negotiations as we move forward on an ever-changing route-map.

As was said yesterday by my colleague, within the Welsh Government Carwyn Jones has indicated that he will be attempting to ensure that we have a full seat at the negotiation table in order to protect the Welsh people. I am more interested in the East-West diversion of the economy in terms of how we would now protect the trans-European network route, which runs through my individual constituency and is important to the Welsh economy. We need that to survive and we need to be able to move forward, because we need to have a strong economy that will allow us to replace some of the programmes that we heavily relied on from European funding. As we move further and closer to the final exit from the European Union, we will see those funds drying up, and I have no confidence that the UK Government, of any colour, will be able to provide the moneys that we will need.

I wonder whether, from this plenary meeting, we could put together a statement that we could all use and take back to our Governments, and be able to keep updating that with the way in which the route-map is changing. In that way, we could move together both collectively and individually, because we are all different but we are all equal in that we have to survive and move forward for our constituents. I was just wondering whether there is an opportunity for a formal statement and a formal set of words that we can all join in, and that we can all then use as the negotiating tools within our Assemblies. Diolch yn fawr iawn—thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Lord Kilclooney, please.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Co-Chair, the United Kingdom is now leaving the European Union and that is a big challenge to us all in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the regions of England, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. It is of great interest to us all, but I have to say from listening to the debate yesterday that the main concern must be in the Republic of Ireland. I think that it will be hit more than anyone else by the decision of the United Kingdom people to leave the European Union. The United Kingdom is the Republic's main trading partner. It is the location where most of its agricultural exports are sent, and yesterday something was raised that had not occurred to me—the Republic's tourism industry is going to be severely hit by the depreciation of the pound sterling.

There are therefore many real problems now besetting the Republic that need to be addressed. The initiative there must be taken, in the first instance, by the Government responsible—the Government in Dublin. It must now respond to the United Kingdom decision to leave the European Union with its proposals for resolving the challenges that now face the economy of the Republic of Ireland. When that initiative is taken by the Dublin Government, then we, as a parliamentary body, can consider those proposals.

In the context of our own regions within the United Kingdom, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must also address the issues facing them. For example, if we are going to lose the benefits of being in the European Union, the block grant must now be increased to Wales and to Scotland and to Northern Ireland for community services. Then we have to decide, as devolved institutions, how agriculture and fisheries are to be addressed in the context of not being in the European Union. Therefore, there are many challenges, not just for the Dublin Government, which I think is No. 1, but also for our own devolved institutions.

As I said yesterday, as someone living right on the border, I do not want to see a hard border. In that context, we in Northern Ireland and the Republic must meet together to see how we can resolve that challenge to our relationship. I repeat, however, that I think that the first initiative must be taken by the Dublin Government to bring out its proposals of how to resolve the challenges to their society. Then, once we have that, I think that this parliamentary body is a wonderful institution to consider the proposals from Dublin and from the devolved regions.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much indeed. Deputy John Le Fondré, please.

Deputy John Le Fondré:

Thank you, Co-Chair. From what one has heard both today and yesterday, it is stating the obvious that the decision to leave will have a profound effect on everyone represented in this room today, not least the jurisdiction I represent—Jersey.

10.15 am

I want to work through a thought process. Obviously, by the end of the process, we are looking for the status quo and where we are at the present—on trading goods and to cover our grandfather rights for EU citizens, as many of us will have to sort out. We are also very interested in ensuring that the common travel area will be maintained. That work, however, likely to take two years, and what I think is really critical is that, during those two years, the jurisdictions affected, particularly where the UK is negotiating on their behalf, stay fully informed as issues arise so that we can all plan and we can all feed back as part of the process.

At present, my understanding is that there are strong indications that the UK is very willing to do that. Certainly, I know that Jersey itself has been working very hard to make that happen, but it strikes me, building on what I have heard today—particularly about not working alone—that such an approach could be achieved effectively by the creation of some sort of formal mechanism for regular consultation on the issue between the UK Government, the devolved nations and the Crown dependencies.

That is obviously a matter for the relevant Governments, but I wonder whether, if the Assembly thought that that was a good idea, it could be conveyed back to the relevant parties so it could be built on and considered at the relevant levels back in Westminster or elsewhere. I wonder whether that is something that this Assembly could consider.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much indeed. Viscount Bridgeman.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you, Lord Chair. I want to take up Joan Burton's point very briefly. There are two reassuring points, as far as they go. The first is the very positive statement by Joe McHugh, speaking as a Minister and therefore presumably on the authority of the Government, about the need to keep the border soft. The second point is that it is known that the Taoiseach and David Cameron were on the telephone very early on in the piece, and one must presume that the border was very high on that particular agenda.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you. Barry McElduff.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Go raibh maith agaibh, a Co-Chathaoirligh.

An all-Ireland forum remains a good and viable idea and is, indeed, a necessary thing. I repeat that the majority of people in the North of Ireland voted to remain in the EU. The subject will not be got rid of in just a sentence or two.

I would be party to our resisting being dragged out of the EU against our will. I do not speak for the people of England. I do not have a mandate from the English people, but I have a mandate from people in County Tyrone, which is in Ireland—the North of Ireland.

I have to say that my discourse with young people in the past couple of weeks has told me that we are in a very serious situation. I have been at football matches and I have been at community events at which young people have been asking questions about what is going on. For the first time in a long time, I have detected in young people anger about things that are happening against their will.

The all-Ireland forum needs maximum buy-in; it must not be vetoed and invitations should remain open to everyone. However, I do not think that it is acceptable—Members can call this controversial if they want to—for Arlene Foster to have had her “Out, out, out!” moment yesterday at Dublin Castle, and I think that the implications of border hardening do not bear thinking about.

One of the families who campaigned for remain was the McAnespie family from County Monaghan, whose son, Aidan McAnespie, was shot dead by the British Army at Aughnacloy checkpoint as he made his way to a Gaelic football match. They campaigned for no hard borders.

Recently, there has been the negative development of a levy on heavy goods vehicles coming from the South of the country into the North—a levy of £1,000 a year on lorries that cross the border—which is a move in the wrong direction.

We need that all-Ireland forum and—of course—BIPA should play a meaningful role in helping to bring that about. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much, Barry. Next is Willie Coffey.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I remind delegates again that we in Scotland are not looking for a good exit deal, but for a political solution in order to stay in the European Union. Any help from our Irish colleagues that would give effect to that mandate from the people of Scotland would be very welcome, in terms of reciprocating the help that you might be offering the UK to leave. It is important that the United Kingdom Government engage with all the jurisdictions and Assemblies to make sure that there is no repeat of the process that led to the four Conservative Party wishes—which everyone has, I think, forgotten now, and which proved to be completely irrelevant. When a UK exit deal is made, it must be done with the agreement of all the constituent Assemblies and Parliaments, if it is to have effect.

It would also help this Assembly if there were to be some kind of representation here by someone from the United Kingdom Government rather than just people continually making statements in the media as part of a leadership campaign. It would be respectful to this Assembly if somebody were to address it to give the current view of the United Kingdom

Government. We have had some marvellous contributions from Members from all the jurisdictions, but absolute silence—nothing—from anyone from the UK Government. That really has to change in order to give this Assembly the respect that it deserves.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. Lord Empey.

The Lord Empey:

Thank you, Co-Chair. First, we are at a very early stage, and it is inevitable, with the upheaval in London, in particular, where there is, in effect, a caretaker Government and a caretaker opposition, that we are not in an ideal situation. The key movers will be the two Governments that have negotiating capacity and responsibility. That, of course, does not mean that everybody else should sit idly by: I said yesterday that this body and other structures have roles to play.

Deputy Burton asked whether there is agreement in the room about the nature of avoiding a hard border; I have no reason to believe that there is not agreement on that. I do not think that any of us want to go back to seeing dragon's teeth on the roads, and so on. Through a combination of co-operation from the Government here and its agencies, technology and various other things, we ought to be able, with human endeavour, to find a way of avoiding that, because it sends a signal about all sorts of negative things that we have moved away from, and we do not want to go back there. I would have thought that there would be common ground on that.

I listened very carefully to what Mark Durkan said, and I understand a number of the points that he made, but I have yet to be convinced that establishing another body will necessarily achieve all the things that he wants. I do not dispute that they need to be addressed, but my fear is that another body would be set up and that some of us would not be there, so I am not altogether convinced that that it would be helpful. It could work against the point that Deputy Burton was making.

However, I must say to Deputy Burton and others that I have been dismayed by the attitude and comments from President Juncker, which have been most unhelpful. He seems almost to be revelling in the opportunities that the situation has presented. It is all very well for him—he does not have downstream consequences to worry about, whereas people here do. It would be useful if, through the various diplomatic channels that are open to Governments, that particular message were to be transmitted back to him.

I know what Senator Leyden—I think—meant when he used who used the word “emperor”, which was quite a colourful phrase. It is that very attitude that, in my opinion, contributed to the vote on 23 June going in the direction in which it went.

In other words, we need to take great care in setting up other bodies. They may end up with people seeing them as us climbing into some sort of political saddle. We can look back to bodies that existed in the past with not everybody being on them. This Assembly has a role: everybody here is connected to a Parliament or other body. There are other structures. I do not accept that the North-South structures that exist under strand 2 cannot play a role—they can, but Governments have ultimately responsibility. It is they who must negotiate. It should not be beyond the wit of man to find the necessary solutions. Perhaps we are a little too close

to the situation. People need to think and to see, and when it is clear that we have in place Governments that have the authority to negotiate and test their attitude at that particular stage, things may change. I reiterate Deputy Burton's point: there is unanimity here that we do not want to go back to the past in terms of concrete borders and so on.

10.30 am

I say, to conclude, that I hear the point that was made about funding. A number of the North-South bodies did inter-trade. Ireland used Erasmus and other European programmes, although we must remember, of course, that the European money has long since passed its numerical peak—it is a lot less now. It was, at its peak, about 3% of Northern Ireland's public expenditure, but it is now very much below that. I think that in percentage terms Wales probably now gets more than any other part of the UK. More money is now going to eastern Europe, and we understand why. Nevertheless, it should be possible to negotiate on that, so it might be useful to have, at some point, a paper with the actual amounts that go through our Assemblies, which have a mixture of funding streams—partly European, and partly funding from the institutions that we represent. That might be useful work for some of our committees. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. The last speaker is Ross Greer, please.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

Thank you, Chair. I associate myself with Willie Coffey's comments; Scotland is not looking for an exit path, but for renegotiated terms of membership. That is not just the position of the Scottish Government—it is the position of almost all the rest of us.

On the UK's exit, there has been a large amount of discussion of article 50 and the timing of its activation. It is understandable that a number of our European partners want article 50 to be activated as soon as possible—largely for their own domestic political reasons. It has been quite clear from discussions this weekend that it would be detrimental for the UK Government to activate article 50 before appropriate discussions have taken place between all the Governments on these islands, and a joint approach agreed. As soon as article 50 is activated, we start a two-year timescale that cannot be reversed. Unanimous agreement of all other member states would be needed to extend that timescale, but it is not realistic to expect that. One very useful strong message from this Assembly would be that article 50 should not be activated until appropriate discussions have taken place between the Governments and other appropriate bodies on these islands.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (The Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. I think that our timing is pretty good. I will make a couple of comments. In reflecting on yesterday's and this morning's debates, I say that there is something to be said for sleeping on it and having another go at a subject. Certainly, having another go has sharpened up the contributions this morning, which I think is very good. Many useful suggestions have been made, and some have pretty much majority agreement—for example, that there must never be a hard border. Some suggestions have not been universally agreed, but are important. All that I can say is that we are sure—I can speak on my own behalf and that of my Co-Chair—that we will take all the suggestions on board and see what

specific suggestions can be progressed through the workings of the Assembly in the autumn, when we have a plenary meeting.

I cannot do the debate justice and summarise the whole thing; it has been a complicated debate over two days. There are issues that the Assembly will have to come back to, to discuss how we can take them further. We have a little time—although November seems a long way away, it is in parliamentary terms almost tomorrow, given that the summer recess is coming.

It has been a very useful debate, and I thank you all for contributing.

COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS): “VISA SYSTEMS”

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

We turn now to the Committee reports, particularly the report from Committee B on visa systems, which is a big piece of work.

I call Aengus Ó Snodaigh to present the report.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Committee B was tasked with a job which, in some respects, has set the stage for the result of the referendum—to look at the visa systems in Europe, a subject which we initially considered in 2014, and it has been a job of work to get it together. I particularly thank my Co-Rapporteur, Baroness Harris, and the Clerks who helped us meet the deadline of submitting the report before today’s plenary session.

We met in and visited various areas. In the early stages, we met representatives of the European Commission in Brussels, since when we have met representatives of the British and Irish Governments, UK Visas and Immigration officials and representatives of Garda Síochána. Just last Saturday we met a number of immigration officials and members of the Garda Síochána in both Fishguard and Rosslare. A number of organisations also presented us with written evidence. I thank all those who contributed to the report.

The recent referendum vote to leave the EU is likely to have an effect on visa policies. Our inquiry was launched over 18 months ago and mainly concerned the common travel area, so we were not able to focus on the potential effects of the UK leaving the EU. That was not a part of the evidence we received. Our report touches on that specific subject only briefly, as it was raised in a number of recent discussions with officials. The Committee has therefore not reached detailed conclusions or made detailed recommendations in that regard. We have instead taken more detailed evidence on it and I think that an overall view on its net effect should follow a future inquiry on it by Committee B.

As I said, our report examines the various visa systems in the EU, with a particular concentration on the operation of the Schengen area as well as of the common travel area. Much of the evidence and discussion focused on the common travel area, which far predates the EEC, the EU and the EC. For that matter, its origins go back to 1922, when this State was being formed. It provides for nationals of the UK, Ireland and the Crown dependencies to travel freely within that area. We heard that much could be done and should be done by the British and Irish Governments to enhance the understanding and awareness of the common travel area among the people travelling to it and within it. That could be done by simplifying

the rules relating to the area and improving public guidance. However, given the lacuna that we are in following the referendum, some of those steps might need to be postponed until there is at least an understanding about where we are going. That needs to happen in the near future, once we know what is happening with the common travel area.

On Saturday, Baroness Harris and I met in Fishguard and in Rosslare, and we focused on the security at entry and exit points to the UK and Ireland and the processes that are in place to check people travelling between the two countries. We were encouraged to find well-established relationships and systems in place for intelligence and information sharing between the officials not only on an official level but also on a personal level, as the officials had each other's mobile phone numbers to share information, such was the co-operation between them.

We concluded that there was some merit in considering the allocation of additional resources to smaller entry and exit points to ensure that the right balance is struck between security, the checking of all passengers and the identification of people who are travelling—or attempting to travel—illegally in the common travel area.

In the report there is also a discussion of the British-Irish visa scheme which was introduced in October 2014 and allows visitors from China and India to apply to have their visas recognised in both jurisdictions. The scheme has had a very positive effect on tourism, particularly in this State. The figures on how beneficial it has been to Britain were not available but we believe that it has been beneficial. The scheme has allowed people in those countries to apply to the British and Irish consular services and embassies for a single visa. We have recommended that the scheme be extended to other countries as the service is deemed fit, and that possibility is being considered.

We received little evidence that non-membership of the Schengen area has had a negative impact on either country. It is felt that the interests of both Ireland and the United Kingdom, in terms of border security, migration and, most importantly, the continued successful operation of the common travel area, would be best served by not being members of Schengen.

Finally, although I will not comment in detail, in this part of our inquiry the Committee has welcomed indications both prior to and during the referendum that both Governments wished at the time, and officials wished subsequently, to see the common travel area continue regardless of whether the United Kingdom decided to leave the EU. I think that that was quite positive. One of the matters that we need to explore in greater detail is how the common travel area can be retained and enhanced in the future. Go raibh maith agat.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much; that is a very comprehensive report. I invite contributions or comments, if there are any.

I call Mark Durkan.

Mr Mark Durkan MP:

I thank both rapporteurs for an excellent report, and I apologise to them and to the other Committee Members that I was not able to attend the Committee meeting on Sunday. It is an

excellent report and brings out—perhaps more than we appreciated before—the fact that the common travel area, as we now describe it, has not been the constant, deliberate thing that we sometimes make it out to be. At times it has happened out of desire and default, but for all sorts of good reasons, and it is obviously facing strains now. I do not want to get into any of the bigger structural questions. As Aengus said, an awful lot still needed to be worked forward in any event, regardless of the outcome, but it is more complicated now because of the outcome.

I want to make two small points. I know that the first issue is close to your heart, Co-Chair: the question of refugees. The Syrian refugees I have met in my constituency cannot go over the Border to meet their neighbours, friends or relatives who might be there. It is a ridiculous situation. As we are talking about a common travel area, and Governments and so many people have got behind the idea of bringing in and welcoming refugees, it is a bit much then to say, “Well, you can’t actually cross the border now that you’re here”. We should be able to find a sensible facility that will not jeopardise anything else.

Similarly, there are other visitors who come here. We have the British-Irish visa scheme, which works very well for Chinese and Indian visitors and is good for all sorts of reasons. But it is a bit daft that similar arrangements do not exist for so many people in this country who work on things such as the Chernobyl Children’s Project and bring children here. There is a Chernobyl Children’s Project in Donegal, but the children who go into Donegal are then not allowed to come into Derry because they do not have a UK visa and it is not worth that charity’s while to spend the money, time and effort to get a bespoke UK visa just so they can come in and take the concessions of swimming, bowling or cinema in Derry. We have been through this with the Home Office and with others. A sensible and sensitive arrangement should be possible when we know that people are here on a short-term stay, it is absolutely controlled and it is done in charity, so that the common travel area can be truly common. When it concerns people who we have all made such an effort to bring here for those very good reasons, we should not put up a barrier to them.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. Are there any other comments?

Aengus, do you want to respond to Mark’s comments?

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

I welcome Mark’s contribution, and he has been in contact with the rapporteurs to express those very practical points. That is why we said that, as we go forward, we need to enhance the common travel area. That is the key point. There are practical difficulties for, for example, workers and sports stars who come to our islands but cannot move as freely as they should be able to do. That includes refugees. As stability arises in the next number of years, once the outcome and implications of the Brexit vote are settled, we can work on those practical issues to ensure that the common travel area serves its purpose. In our discussions, the officials said that they were looking at extending the British-Irish visa scheme beyond just China and India by ensuring that they have systems in place in other countries that can be shared to make it easier for tourists to our islands to cross the internal borders that they do not see but which exist and require separate visas at the moment. The points have been taken on board. When we submit the report to our respective Governments we will ask them to examine those recommendations.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much. In fact, as is the normal case, the joint Clerks will arrange to send the report to the British and Irish Governments for it to be noted and taken further.

Thank you for that. Perhaps I may now hand over to the Co-Chair.

10.45 am

**PROGRESS UPDATES FROM COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN (A, B, C, D) AND
GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE REPORTS**

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you very much, Lord Dubs. We are moving on to the section on the committee reports. I will ask each committee chairperson to give a brief update on the work of their committee. I call on Deputy Joe Carey, chairperson of committee A.

Committee A (Sovereign Matters)

Mr Joe Carey TD:

I am delighted to provide a progress report for Committee A, on Sovereign Matters. I am very honoured to have been formally appointed as the new chairperson of Committee A. I thank my predecessor, Senator Paul Coghlan, for his hard work and fair approach in the role. I hope to take forward his good work with the committee.

Since the conclusion of the committee's inquiry into cross-Border crime and policing, we have received several responses to the addendum produced at the last plenary, from the Irish Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Northern Irish Department of Justice, HM Revenue and Customs, HMRC, and the Northern Ireland Office.

The Committee last met in Belfast in February, where we met with Mr Niall Gibbons, CEO of Tourism Ireland, and discussed the shared benefits of cross-Border collaboration in promoting tourism in the island of Ireland; the committee's work on cross-Border policing and illicit trade, possible BIPA reforms and future areas of inquiry for the committee.

Subsequent to this meeting, a questionnaire about the current functioning of BIPA and suggestions for improvement was circulated to all BIPA Members, and the completed questionnaires, plus Co-Chair Laurence Robertson MP's 2014 paper on BIPA reform, were used to inform the drafting of a paper on potential areas for reform, which has been put forward for consideration by the steering committee at this plenary session.

Committee A plans to examine the potential consequences of the UK exit from the EU with an eye to identifying what the best outcomes for British-Irish relations would be in certain key areas. We hope to have a meeting in early to mid-September in that regard.

I look forward to working with all the members of Committee A on this important and relevant work in the coming months.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you, Deputy Carey. We will move on to Committee B. The chairperson, Mr Andrew Rosindell MP is not present. Baroness Harris of Richmond will give the update from Committee B.

Committee B (European Affairs)

Baroness Harris of Richmond:

Thank you, Co-Chairperson. Mr Andrew Rosindell could not be here, but has asked me, in his absence, to update the plenary on the work of Committee B. Since the Cheltenham plenary, the co-rapporteurs for the visa systems inquiry, Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh and I, have been working hard on completing the inquiry and producing the committee's report, which the plenary was presented with this morning. I thank the Co-Chairperson for accepting it and the nice words she said. This included holding further meetings with the British and Irish Governments and a short, but interesting, visit to the ports of Rosslare and Fishguard on the way to this plenary to see the mechanisms in place for visa checking and border security. I repeat our thanks to both our clerks, who worked extremely hard to get the report ready. As we had to meet *en route*, they worked hard to put the bits of the report into what we had already written.

At the committee's meeting on Sunday, other than agreeing to the visa systems report, the committee agreed that, following the outcome of the recent EU referendum in the UK, its next inquiry should be on the effects of British-Irish relations of the UK leaving the EU. The committee was conscious of not overlapping inquiries into this subject by other BIPA committees and, therefore, it is still considering the exact scope of the inquiry. However, it is likely that the terms of reference will include some follow-up work related to our visas inquiry; examining the effect of leaving the EU on the Common Travel Area, CTA, Schengen and visa policy; the effects on Irish influence in the EU; Article 50 negotiations; transitional arrangements and the role of Ireland; and the effect on the Crown dependencies and Gibraltar. It is likely the inquiry will take approximately one year and will include evidence taken from both Governments as well as other stakeholders and a possible visit to Brussels to get the EU perspective.

That concludes my report.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you very much Baroness Harris. We will move on to Committee C, and the chairperson, Senator Denis Landy.

Committee C (Economic Affairs)

Senator Denis Landy:

In 2015, Committee C continued to gather evidence for its “Report on Preventing Youth Unemployment through Education and Training”. The committee focused on education and training as key measures to allow young people reach their full potential. The committee held a number of meetings to build on the knowledge gained through meetings on the issue in 2014 and the early part of 2015.

In July 2015, the Committee considered the European perspective on youth unemployment, when a delegation travelled to Brussels on a fact finding mission. They met with a number of MEPs, the Irish Permanent Representative to the EU, the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Skills Ms Marianne Thyssen, the EU Commission Director in charge of Europe 2020 and the Secretary General and staff of the European Youth Federation.

On 2 November 2015 the Committee heard from senior officials from the Irish Departments of Education and Skills; Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation; and Social Protection, as well as SOLAS, the State training agency. In addition, senior officials from a range of employer representative organisations, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the National Council of Ireland engaged in a lively and productive round table discussion.

The Committee adopted its report at a meeting held on 15 November 2015 and the report was adopted by the Assembly on 17 November 2015 at the UK BIPA plenary session at Cheltenham. The report’s recommendations were received very positively, particularly given that it is an issue of increasing significance in all member nations. The Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement discussed the findings of the report with a group of senior civil servants from Ireland and Northern Ireland at a meeting in December 2015 dealing with cross-Border co-operation in education and training to prevent youth unemployment and promote job creation.

The Committee met again in London on 18 February 2016 to hear a topical address from Mr John McGrane, director general and Mr Iwer Baecker, country division head for Ireland, of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, on Ireland–UK economic relations. The committee also agreed to conduct a new inquiry on “The implications of the projected growth of online sales for the key sectors of the economies in the BIPA member countries”. A work schedule is being drawn up and work will commence on the inquiry.

That was the committee’s intention up to the result of the Brexit referendum. The new members of Committee C, of which I am one, met on Sunday. We agreed to consider the economic implications of Brexit. Many ideas were put forward on that occasion, so we decided to meet again yesterday. Following the meeting, we decided to focus on the economic implications for the agri-food sector in particular. The new inquiry for our committee will be on the implications of the outcome of the UK EU referendum on the agri-food sector in these islands. This is the work we will set out to do from here on.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you very much Senator Denis Landy. We are moving on to Committee D, and the chairperson is our Co-Chairperson for today, Lord Alf Dubs.

Committee D (Environment and Social Affairs)

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you Co-Chair. Committee D's most recent report was on the Irish communities in Scotland, and was adopted at the last plenary session. We had a number of responses to it which are available. I will not go through them all. The report came out fairly positively.

The Irish community in Scotland is making an important contribution and there has been pretty successful integration. There are some issues regarding discrimination and disadvantage, which still exists but is getting better. On sectarianism in sport, the Scottish Government noted that while positive steps are being taken by football clubs to address the issue, more remains to be done. While it is not totally finished, things are getting better.

The other report we produced was on Travellers, Gypsies and Roma. We received responses from various organisations and it covers a wide range of issues. We received responses from a number of British and Irish Government departments.

The committee met. We have some new members. We decided our first project would be to examine child health, in particular child obesity, which we felt was a problem in all the jurisdictions. We will start after the summer. Provisionally, we decided that after that we would examine the role of schools and education in promoting community cohesion and integration.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you very much Lord Dubs. I thank all the chairpersons and Members for their committee work during the past months. We have a number of government responses regarding the work of the committees, which was circulated to Members electronically. I would like to note that Members have received those. Is that noted? Noted. Would Members like to raise any issues or make any contributions on the responses? No. I will pass back over to Lord Dubs, who will go through the annual report 2015.

ANNUAL REPORT 2015**The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):**

The steering committee agreed to the draft annual report 2015, copies of which have been circulated. I would like the plenary session to take note of the 2015 annual report. Is that agreed? Agreed. Thank you very much indeed. We will now take a short break until 11.30 am

The sitting was suspended at 10.56 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11:34 pm.

LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

We are now going to have a session with Senators James Reilly and Jerry Buttimer, who have agreed to address a plenary on their shared experiences as the former Minister for Health, and Chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health, respectively. Dr Reilly will speak on his involvement in progressing key pieces of health legislation that impact on peoples' lives, followed by Jerry Buttimer outlining recent pre-legislative scrutiny conducted by the Committee; so it is quite important. I do not think that we have had a session like this before, but I think it is a very good idea. James, I think you are going to speak first, are you? Thank you very much for being here.

Senator Dr James Reilly:

How could I refuse a man called Lord Dubs, and me a Dub? *[Laughter.]* Good morning everybody, and thank you very much for the privilege of addressing you. Even though I have been introduced as the former Minister of Health, I will speak of my time with children too, because that is a hugely important area. As I have said more than once, health may be what brought me into politics, but children are what kept me here.

There is no point in talking about this unless we give the background on where we were as a nation, with the worst economic crisis that the country had ever faced and all that entailed, such as the cutbacks in budgets and reduction in services and pay, and quite a bit of social upheaval, yet not as much as many other countries in a similar situation had to face.

The focus of my approach was to improve the patient's experience, and we had policies around bringing in universal health insurance, which was the method that we chose to bring in universal healthcare. That is something that everybody else in these islands understands because they have it, but we still do not. We have a private and public service, so if you have insurance, then you will be looked after, and if you do not, you could wait a long time, with consequences for your well-being. We sought to address that, but, in the interim, we also had to improve a service that had had its spending quadrupled in the previous 14 years but had not actually improved its delivery of care. Our emergency departments had the worst waiting times they had ever experienced, and, of course, you look to your neighbours and see their experiences, and we had knowledge of the special delivery unit, which was set up in the North of Ireland. We set up a similar unit here, using the same individual and expertise, and that did result in huge improvements.

We are here to talk about legislation, and there was lot of legislation passed with a big focus on primary care and constructing primary care centres. There was a need for a Health Insurance Act to regulate some of the disparities that enabled new entrants to the market to take advantage of the situation, to the detriment of the existing insurer, which had a higher number of older people. Even though we had, and have, community rating — meaning that everybody pays the same, regardless of age or illness — “gaming” was still going on.

We promised that we would set up a new children's hospital, and I was very pleased to cooperate with Edwin Poots in the North/South Ministerial Council and have him nominate a member of the board for the hospital and a member of the development board, to give it that all-Ireland emphasis, because we are a small country, and a population of six million does not allow us to have experts on some of the rarer conditions that affect children and adults, but in combination you can certainly achieve that.

Healthy Ireland is a big issue for me, because, as a politician, I feel — and I have said this elsewhere, not name-dropping, but at the UN and the EU — that politicians were guilty of the populist short-term gain, rather than looking at the longer-term policy that, from the public's point of view, may not be as exciting, but which would gain hugely in improving and saving lives. Of course, when I talked of that, I talked of our time in the EU presidency and the tobacco products directive. I never speak about tobacco without mentioning that 6,000 people die in the Republic of Ireland every year because of that product, and 700,000 Europeans die every year. This would all be preventable if people did not smoke, and of course 78% of smokers commence smoking under the age of 18, so they are already addicted by the time that they reach what, in the old days, we called the age of reason. Clearly, they need protection. That made a huge impact, and I believe that our plain packaging legislation, which we got huge support for right across the Chamber, will save countless thousands of lives in this country, and, as it expands in the UK and France and elsewhere, it will save millions of lives in the future.

One of the things that I want to talk about, because it involved myself and Jerry, is the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. This is an issue that six previous Governments had ignored and run away from; we promised that we would not. There was a strong sense that nobody wanted legislation, but we put together an expert group and it was very obvious from their deliberations that legislation would be necessary. This is an interesting area, because of the strong emotions that it provokes, and everybody has their own view, very deeply and honourably held.

We put together the process for developing the legislation, which was a difficult thing to do because of the coalition between ourselves and Labour, and I pay tribute to Alex White, who was the junior Minister at the time and represented their interests. After a lot of toing and froing, leaks and stress, we managed to come up with legislation that was acceptable to both sides of the coalition. Then we had to sell it to our members, and I think I met almost every single member of the parliamentary party, because there were many people who had grave concerns about this. Indeed, when the legislation went through the Chamber, we lost five of our TDs. An integral part of that was the work done by Jerry Buttimer on the pre-legislative area, which allowed people from all walks of life to make a contribution and have their voice heard, when they might otherwise never get a chance. I will let Jerry speak to that.

I said at the outset that there were other areas that I feel are hugely important, and when I was Minister for Children, we progressed the early years quality agenda and established a second free preschool year. This gives children, particularly those from a disadvantaged background, a much better chance at life because, as we all know, middle-class families and better-educated working-class families place a value on education and know how to help their children in the preschool years. Others, from disadvantaged backgrounds, often do not.

Indeed, even those who come from better-off backgrounds do not always place the same emphasis on it, and there could be other reasons why the family is dysfunctional. Children who have experienced this elsewhere have been shown to come to school with the same reading and social skills as children from more advantaged backgrounds, and that is critical to their future development.

One other hugely important issue that we addressed — and it required a lot of toing and froing behind the scenes, although it never really took off in the public's imagination — was the removal of reasonable chastisement as a defence for inflicting corporal punishment on a child. With that now gone from the statute books, it more or less means that corporal punishment is banned in the Republic of Ireland. In conjunction with that, we have put in place a whole series of supports for parents to help them manage their children without having to resort to what is, I suppose some people might say, physical abuse. I will not get into the long pros and cons of it, but we have a much wiser and more informed society, and I think we are all the better for it.

The other area that I believe is critically important, which is still doing its work and has relevance to the North of Ireland — I am not quite sure about the rest of the UK — was the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and all the horror stories that arose from it and that will come out through that process as women tell their stories.

It is a very complex story, involving the whole of society and our attitude to women who had children outside of wedlock, what was done to them and how they were treated. They were virtually incarcerated, with their rights removed from them. To give a flavour of how we as legislators can truly change peoples' lives for them, what ended this practice was the introduction of the single mother's payment. That allowed single women who bore children to support them and support themselves, and all of the orphanages and mother and baby homes disappeared within a very short time, which clearly sent the message that people wanted to keep their babies.

Another area that I want to speak to, which is not through the Oireachtas yet, is the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill. This gives people who have been adopted the right to know where they came from, who their parents were and any relevant family history. That is still being worked on, but I think that we cracked the major problem with it before I left. The Department is working away, and, while I do not want to pre-empt the new Minister, it should be published in the next few months.

The last thing I will say is that even though we were in the midst of economic turmoil and our focus was in getting people back to work and getting our economy back on track, we did not ignore the social needs of people and the social reform agenda. One of the big things that I am sure Jerry will mention as well, is the marriage equality referendum. I know that people have different views, but this is a much more inclusive Ireland — a much more tolerant Ireland. What impressed me, as Minister for Children at that time, more than anything else was the number of young people who came back to this country on planes and trains and boats. Many of them could not afford it, but they wanted to be here to vote. What that says to me — and I am sure that it is the same in the rest of these islands — is that our young people are the future: they are hugely important. It demonstrated to me that they are not only interested in equality, they are interested in their country. They want to be part of forming its future; they want a voice, and we need, as politicians, to ensure that they have that voice.

With that, I will finish and hand the floor over to Jerry. I will be very happy to take questions about the nitty-gritty mechanics of how some of the more difficult social reforms, which beleaguered our society over several decades, were eventually dealt with. Thank you.

[Applause.]

11.45 am

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you for that. Perhaps we can have questions at the end and Senator Buttimer can come and do his piece now, please.

Senator Jerry Buttimer:

Good afternoon everybody, and thank you for the invitation to be here today. James was modest about his ability to steer legislation through, because, in his case and the Government's case, it was not just about social legislation, it was about the voice of social legislation. In the annals of the last Dáil, in the midst of probably the worst economic crisis in our country's history, it was the Government that brought perhaps the most profound legislative change to how the Houses of Oireachtas did their business. I contend that, in the new era of politics on this side of the border, with its ability to get things done, the last Dáil and Seanad will be seen as a very good place to have been.

The decision by the last Government to change the overarching way in which legislation was formatted and drawn up makes the formation and drafting of legislation far more open and transparent and gives Parliament a high visibility among the general public and the people who we engage with, such as the NGOs, Churches and media. I will come back to the media in a minute. To be involved with that, as the Chairperson of a Committee that dealt with a range of social issues, made us do two things. First of all, it put the Committee system at the heart of what parliamentary democracy should be about, and, secondly, in the context of different political viewpoints, it allowed us to sit down and plan how we would work out a programme to implement and draw up hearings on a variety of issues. That was positive, and with Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin of Sinn Féin, Billy Kelleher of Fianna Fáil, Séamus Healy, Jillian van Turnhout and my own party colleagues, there was huge cross-party engagement, and I can honestly say that our pre-public meetings and our private business were robust, but we agreed on a course of action. Voices were heard and suggestions and opinions taken, and we arrived at a consensus. It was a much better way of doing business than I had experienced at previous Committees that I had been involved in, and I mean no disrespect to the former Chairpersons.

You can look at the context of post-2011, but if you go back to pre-2011, is that in the past — I am sure that you are all familiar with this in your own roles and positions — it was predominantly civil servants or parliamentary draftspeople with the Departments who drew up legislation and presented Bills to parliamentarians for discussion. That was the norm in our Parliament, perhaps up to the point where we had some discussion of constitutional

reform or something to do with, as James mentioned, the eighth amendment, which is the right to life of the unborn. The approach of the last Oireachtas profoundly changed that.

Another important thing that we did, and I hope we can develop it further, was in the appointment of chairpersons to public bodies, hospital groups or boards. They had to come before the Committee, not to be endorsed, but to have their testimony heard so that they could make recommendations to the Minister. In some cases, there were recommendations made where the Minister was told that there was an issue, perhaps with person X's approach or that they did not have the competent knowledge. I would like to see that happening, so that if we felt that a person was not up to the job, then we, as parliamentarians, should say that we will not appoint or ratify them.

James spoke about the protection of life during pregnancy, and I will speak predominantly on tobacco. That was a huge piece of work. There were six days in January and May of 12-hour oral hearings that culminated in the Bill being published. The important point is that, for the first time in my lifetime, and since 1981, you could have both sides of the debate being heard in Parliament and people being asked for their opinion and invited into Parliament, into the Seanad Chamber in our case. I have a great image of the final morning; we had all of the Churches and Atheist Ireland making their presentations with neither rancour nor divisiveness, just assertive, strong opinions in Parliament. That was, I think, a positive result of the pre-legislative scrutiny taking its place and the suite of work that we can do as parliamentarians.

If you look at what happened with protection of life during pregnancy, the Government made a decision to legislate, and they handed it to the Committee. We formulated our approach so that it would encompass us hearing from everyone: medical experts; legal experts; pro-life and pro-choice sides of the argument; the Churches; people managing local hospitals; obstetricians and perinatal obstetricians, so that nobody was left out. There was a clamour of people — and fatal fetal abnormality is a very tragic and sensitive area — but because the constitution that we worked from did not allow for that referendum or legislation to change, we did not bring in those people. I know that that caused upset, but, as a Committee, we took the view that there was no point in going beyond our remit. From that end, I think that we served a purpose in that we showed that you can have a debate on a social issue that is sensitive and divisive, with polarising views, in Parliament.

If you look at the other Committees in the Houses of the Oireachtas — for example, the Justice Committee dealt with a variety of legislation and gave it pre-legislative scrutiny, which was very necessary for drugs and the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 to name just two.

One of the most profound pieces that we dealt with was the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill, and I really pay tribute to James, not just because he is a party colleague, but because he had the courage to bring this Bill to the House. For those of us who grew up at a time when women were forced to emigrate or travel to England for termination of their pregnancy, or they were put in a home and banished from society, to hear women coming into our Parliament and retelling their stories of how they were treated and how, in later life, they had met their son or daughter and it had changed their life positively, again illustrates that the Houses of the Oireachtas or Parliament are the people's representatives. We need to remember that we are here on behalf of the people whenever we work on amending, creating

or even not passing legislation. That morning stood out, because it allowed the voice of the people to be heard. The social legislation is a central tenet of what I am speaking about, where there was pre-legislative scrutiny and involvement and participation by people who had never been heard. Whether you agree or disagree with their views, it is important that they had the opportunity to come and have their views heard.

We meet in this hotel, which is where the Constitutional Convention was heard for almost two years. The idea came from Eamon Gilmore, the former Labour Party leader, and it should be continued. I know that we speak in the realm of the Citizens' Assembly on the right to life, or the eighth amendment, as we call it, and I have no hesitation in saying that we should have parliamentarians as part of that Citizens' Assembly and that we should have a Constitutional Convention because it worked.

I encourage you to read the papers by three academics who were involved in the Constitutional Convention: Jane Suiter, Dr David Farrell, and Conor O'Mahony of University College, Cork. The Constitutional Convention comprised 66 citizens who were picked at random and 33 parliamentarians, dealing with a wide variety of issues, from parliamentary reform to, as James said, marriage equality. That was the platform on which the marriage equality referendum took place, in relative calm and tranquility. As you know from a couple of weeks ago, in a referendum campaign, anything goes. The truth gets lost, and the other side comes up with different arguments that get headlines.

The fundamental task here is to look at the legislation that we brought in on public health which is known as the plain packaging of tobacco, but, of course, it was not about plain packaging. It became a battle, at one level, between the Irish Parliament and “big tobacco”, and secondly — something that I find rather curious — we had people from the US Congress who wrote to us making representation, as well as MLAs in the North who had a very big vested interest in the tobacco industry. It was in Ian Paisley Junior's constituency, or maybe Sammy Wilson's, but they wrote to us because they were totally opposed to the packaging legislation. At one level, that shows the pull of “big tobacco”, but it also posed the question of whether we, as parliamentarians, should engage with the tobacco industry as part of pre-legislative scrutiny. In this case, we did. The overarching aim of pre-legislative scrutiny is to facilitate consultation and public consultation with — and I hate this phrase — “key stakeholders”, the key people who are interested and want to see either their own side win or to see profound change in public health.

That was important, because any Bill that goes before Parliament for adoption or debate should have pre-legislative scrutiny. The normal process is for the Minister of the Department to brief the Committee in private before a public session, and in this case, the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tony Holohan, who is an exemplary public servant, was always committed to and wanted to be part of the process. The next stage was to invite, through public advertisements in the media and online, written submissions from interested groups and individuals on the proposed legislation. That was one of the most amazing lessons that we learned about pre-legislative scrutiny, because it opened up a Pandora's box of everybody wanting to have their tuppence-worth heard, to borrow the cliché. So, whether it was a senior citizen in Cork or the Chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Dublin, we heard from all sides in written submissions.

Based upon those written submissions and the expressions of interest from participants who appeared before the Committee, we distilled the list to have a series of public meetings with the people who we felt were relevant to the legislation, including, in this case, the tobacco industry. Members of the Committee also put forward names of people and groups that they thought should be part of pre-legislative scrutiny, and that was important because — and this goes back to all politics being local — it allowed them to bring in members of their own constituencies, and it showed that parliamentarians are able to look after the people by hearing the views expressed.

12.00 noon

The important point is that it meant Members were fully involved, briefed and informed. There was information, there was public discourse and consultation and there was a crossover of information, which meant that key observations were considered that led to the Bill being changed. The Children First Act 2015, the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act 2015 and the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013, were all the result of Bills that were changed as a consequence of pre-legislative scrutiny. I think that the drafting of legislation is in a better place as a result.

Another important point that should not be lost is that Parliament now allows for public hearings on legislation, and that gives us a space that did not exist previously, prior to Committee, Report, First or Second Stage of a Bill, for intensive scrutiny of any given subject or topic. It might last three weeks or a month, depending on the Bill before us, and it culminates with the Minister drafting and publishing the Bill before going into the Chamber of the Dáil and the Seanad for passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

These are some of the groups that we met with prior to the tobacco legislation: An Garda Síochána; the Office of the Revenue Commissioners; the National Tobacco Control Office; health advocacy bodies, charities, youth organisations and retailers; and we also held direct talks with the tobacco industry and the smokers' lobby group. The benefit of meeting with such a wide range of groups is that each of them has a different perspective and the task of the Minister and his officials is to marry them all together, which is something that they do quite successfully. We present a report of our hearings to the Minister, and sometimes it is heard in the Dáil, or, as it goes to its Second Stage, the Chairperson gets an equal amount of time with the Minister to present the report to the House.

In this case, a wide variety of views were heard in the Committee on whether we should meet with the tobacco industry, and we decided that it would be better to engage with them in an open forum, where we could challenge their assertions and concepts on smoking. It was a very robust engagement, but I believe that the Bill is all the better as a result. The Minister deserves credit, because tobacco packaging has been described as the last billboard for the tobacco industry, and the legislation that has just gone through will now force the industry to show with greater clarity just how devastating the effects of smoking can be on people's health. It was one of the most entertaining things, because the tobacco industry tried to meet with everybody. You definitely would not think that tobacco was an issue, and the amount of money and resources that it put into its campaign was astounding.

The report of the Committee's work on pre-legislative scrutiny should be a stand-alone item before the legislation is passed in the Dáil Chamber and Seanad, because the recommendations are wide-ranging. Some go beyond the scope of the Bill and look at the wider policy, be that public health or justice, and they require teasing out by the wider Oireachtas before the Bill is published, so that they can hopefully be incorporated when further initiatives are taken in Tobacco Free Ireland.

In conclusion, I thank you for the invitation. I am a very firm advocate of pre-legislative scrutiny, because it gives us, as Members of Parliament, a better sense of what legislation is about; it gives us a greater role in it; and it results in a better Bill. You also need a Minister who is prepared to take a bold and courageous step and take a Bill to pre-legislative scrutiny. Not all Ministers do that, of course, but I want to commend James for the work that he did, as well as Alan Shatter, Frances Fitzgerald and Charlie Flanagan who were the ones who dealt with it most. Thank you for your invitation. I wish you well in the deliberations. Go raibh maith agat. *[Applause.]*

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much indeed for two interesting and fascinating talks. Any comments or questions?

Senator Catherine Noone:

I want to pick up on a point that Jerry made when he said that it is not just because James is a party member that he complimented him on his work. As a fellow member of the same party, I am very proud of the work that you both did over the last number of years. We have to acknowledge the huge role played by the Labour Party, but it was particularly brave of you two men, in a party like ours, which is traditionally very conservative on issues such as the protection of life and gay rights, to do the work that you have. Naturally, I am well disposed towards both of you, but it is important for me to say that.

I also compliment Minister Reilly on the second free preschool year. As a general election candidate speaking to people on doors, I found that it was one of the most talked about matters amongst young families trying hard to make ends meet. It was a really helpful initiative to introduce. Minister Reilly's steely determination on plain packaging has been exemplary; that is another issue that I feel really strongly about.

To conclude, do you feel that we are adequately equipped and up for the fight, should the tobacco industry decide to sue us down the line? Will we be able to stand up to the lobby and industry in a very real way and defeat them if there is litigation? There may not be, but I am interested in your thoughts on that. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

We have two or three other people who would like to comment. Would you like to have all of the questions in one go?

Senator Dr James Reilly:

Yes, perhaps we could do them in banks of three?

Ms Helen Jones MP:

Thank you very much, Chair. Speaking as someone from across the water, it has been wonderful to watch the transformation that has gone on in Ireland in past years. To see the equal marriage referendum as such a joyous occasion was incredible. I have two questions. First, to James: why did you go for a national insurance system for health, rather than one paid for out of taxation? When you assess the cost of the various systems, those paid for out of taxation tend to come out the cheapest per head everywhere. I wonder if it was because you could not get public buy-in?

Also, I am Chair of the Petitions Select Committee in the UK Parliament, which is a relatively new Committee. We have tried various ways of public engagement, as well as formal hearings. As an example, we have round tables, we have tried web chats and Twitter. Some work, some will not, but it is our job to try them out. Jerry, have you experimented with different ways other than formal hearings and, if so, what did you find to be the successes or failures?

Senator Paul Coghlan:

I would like to compliment my colleague Jerry Buttimer. I think he did great pioneering work and what he started is now standard practice in pre-legislative scrutiny. I come from the more conservative wing of the broad church that is Fine Gael, but I salute their work. James handled things sensitively. I agreed with him very much throughout on tobacco. Maybe I did not agree with him totally on everything else, but we never fell out over anything and I do not think we are going to do so either. I salute what you have done; well done to both of you.

Senator Dr James Reilly:

I want to respond to Catherine. I am delighted that you raised the issue of tobacco because it was a hell of a fight, and I do not think that many people realise the shenanigans — for lack of a better word — and machinations that went on. The tobacco companies have an income that is much greater than our GNP. They never like to fight face up, they always come from the side and the back. When I was addressing the EU Environment Committee about this, the tobacco representative said that he wanted to be transparent and open. I asked him how many lobbyists they had in Brussels and he could not tell me. I was able to tell him that one company — one company alone — had 166 lobbyists for 700 MEPs.

Jerry mentioned the letters that came from governors and congressmen that, more or less, intimated to the Taoiseach that we would suffer greatly in our American economic relations. We even had a letter from the Governor of Virginia. I do not want to slander anyone but I think it was him. He is subsequently behind bars for other reasons. *[Laughter.]*

When we went to the public with this, we knew that the tobacco industry would never send somebody to fight its fight openly; it would come through organisations like Forest Éireann. Forests are the lungs of the world, and the cynicism of naming a pro-smoking group 'Forest' is just astonishing. Of course, it denied any funding from the tobacco industry but acknowledged that it got its funding from Forest in the UK — which is funded by the tobacco industry. Then, the retailers put it out that they would suffer and that there would be problems for them, so we had to keep coming back to the core argument.

I addressed a Dutch cancer society and looked across the room and saw all the usual "suspects" for lack of a better word, including the Asthma Society, the Thoracic Society and the cardiovascular heart foundations. I pointed out to them that the one thing they did not have, which we had, was the children advocacy groups. When I was Minister for Health and was pushing this, it was always on the basis of protecting children; it was not about a nanny state. We are not anti-smoker; we are anti-smoking. We will support smokers in trying to give it up. We have a duty of care to our children and there is absolutely no question or doubt about that.

I got some money for the Irish Cancer Society and Luke Clancy to do a study. There were ads on British TV of young children playing with cigarette boxes — showing that they are nice and that they make you want to hold them and have them. Of course, this is subtle advertising; it is the last bill board. The society showed this effect and then gave them the plain packaging showing the horrible gangrenous feet, the lungs, and the poor young man in his mid-30s in Australia who was healthy but who is now nearly a skeletal figure after being diagnosed a few months ago. They said, "Yuck, who would ever want to smoke". So, young people are influenced by these things, and the tobacco industry knows that. It has a long history of not telling the truth. There is the famous video clip from the early 1960s in which tobacco industry representatives get up seriatim — one by one — at Senate hearings and say that they do not believe that this product harms people, knowing full well what they knew then but what the rest of us did not know.

The point I am coming to is that the amount of lobbying against us was unheard of in Europe. In America, a lot of senior congressmen were against us and, around the world, we had actions taken against us by farmers from as far away as Indonesia. Their tendrils and their tentacles spread everywhere.

In answer to your question, Catherine, we are 100% up for litigation. We were acutely aware of it from the outset and before I made any public pronouncements on the matter I had a long chat with the Attorney General and made sure that we had our legal team in place. The oldest trick in the world, when you have deep pockets like they have, is to employ, one way or another, every senior counsel that is any good in the country to represent you so that those counsel cannot then represent the Government because of conflict of interest. We had all that closed off before we moved.

Secondly, and most importantly, the fantastic support in Europe and, in particular, the UK and France for this was brilliant. The Australians said to me at the World Health Organization, "We are the guys who made the tackle but it is about the guy who picks up the ball afterwards and starts the movement". The net effect is that what we have started in Europe now is unstoppable and people across the globe are considering taking this move. This means that no matter how deep the pockets of the tobacco industry are they cannot take on every country in the world. They just could not do that; they do not have the money to do that. They can crush small countries like Ireland, or so they think, and they tried that and threatened us.

I said to Danny Kinahan last night that I do not think Irish people are much different to many others — if you try and bully them out of something, they will resist you like hell; if you ask nicely, they might give it to you. Threatening the Irish sovereign state to stop producing this legislation within 10 days or else was a serious miscalculation on behalf of Japan Tobacco

International and its legal team. Consequently, I believe that we have Norway looking at this along with 12 other countries including South Africa, India and even China. It is an unstoppable movement and I believe that, of all the things we did, this is one of the ones that will bring the greatest benefit for many years to come. When you think of the figure, it is astonishing. It is like the population of Amsterdam being wiped out every year because of tobacco, and the only reason is that tobacco companies want to make a profit. We are well prepared for it and I am absolutely confident that we will win out.

12.15 pm

Helen Jones mentioned a national insurance versus tax-based system, and we had a long discussion about that. We are a party of the entrepreneur as well as believing that the private sector can provide real value. We looked at the system in Holland, Germany and lots of other places, and it works there. From an ideological point of view, I am committed to free healthcare for people when they need it, not when they can afford it. That is where I am coming from.

The reason why we chose this model is that following long experience of what is virtually a tax-based model in the HSE, it has not yielded anything remotely like the results we should have got. We quadrupled spending in a 14-year period and ended up with a mess. I am not trying to score political points here. Everybody has their view. I know that other people who would prefer the tax-based system, but our experience of monopolies in this country is not good. Vhi Healthcare had the monopoly on private health insurance, and all we saw were costs going up over the years and no attempt to address the issue. In fact, before I left I had organised with the Vhi — and I do not know what happened subsequently — that it would bring in clinical audit for the first time. In other words, it would send a consultant to the consultant who is treating and ordering tests to challenge him on, for example, why a test was ordered when it was not necessary, tell him that we would not be paying for it and that, furthermore, if he did it again we would fine him. We had an individual in one part of this country who took €1 million out of the Vhi in one year. I do not care how good you are, you cannot do that volume of work and create that sort of income unless we are paying far too much or your practice is peculiar. I think that this is a huge part of what has to be done. We have all had anecdotal stories of people going into private hospitals and being told, "While you are here, we might as well do a few other tests. Do not worry about it, the Vhi will pay".

In answer to your question, the NHS has worked tremendously well in the UK. We looked to that and to 1948 and Aneurin Bevan and that out of the ashes of the Second World War you created something wonderful in the NHS. It is not perfect and nobody is saying that it is. With our system and our history, I do not know whether it is something that would work here, but others will have a different view. My bottom line is that I am proud of the fact that I made it a huge issue during my entire time as Minister for Health that we want people to be treated when they need treatment, not when they can afford it.

In relation to what Senator Coghlan had to say, I think it is relevant to today's meeting and to all the people who are here. We are a broad church in Fine Gael; there is much more that unites us than ever divides us.

I think that goes for all the people on these islands. I hope it is something that we will always keep to the fore in the difficult times ahead. We know that we face challenges, but I am a great believer in turning challenge into opportunity and adversity into advantage. If we keep talking, cooperating and collaborating, all our futures can be much brighter. That is not to say that we have not got really serious challenges ahead. Thanks.

Senator Jerry Buttimer:

I will be very brief, Chairperson. In answer to Helen's question regarding the Petitions Committee, in our case it has not been as successful as it could have been in the power to act and in the rules around the petition that can be seized upon by the Committee. If we are to have citizen interaction, then, in my opinion, the rules around the Petitions Committee need to be looked at. Obviously, you cannot have everybody making bogus remarks, comments, claims or seeking to have certain types of hearings, but I think that pre-legislative scrutiny has, in one way, diluted the need for the Petitions Committee around legislation or the workings of the Houses of the Oireachtas. In our case, the difficulty that we have relates to the role of, for example, the Minister of Health with respect to the HSE that runs the health system. Sometimes, there is a grey area around who has responsibility for a particular topic to be discussed or investigated. This is something that we may need to look at in the future.

Going back to your comments about how to make it more relevant, in our case, it is a new Committee that was just formed in the last Dáil. One thing that the present Oireachtas has done quite well is that we now have a dedicated Oireachtas channel on Sky and RTÉ which allows people to watch proceedings all day. It might be, as Pat Rabbitte famously said, for insomniacs but it still allows that to happen.

The second thing we have done is to have a very proactive social media team in the Houses of the Oireachtas around Twitter and Facebook, and that is very important.

Another thing that has worked quite well for us is that prior to the publication of a Committee report, there is now the option for the Chairperson or the rapporteur of the Committee to do a dedicated video presentation for streaming. I believe that live streaming of our proceedings has worked. There is now far more engagement with the public on a variety of issues that was not there before. Part of that engagement is about pre-legislative scrutiny working well, but we have a road to travel. I know that, in your case, you have made profound changes in how you operate your business for the betterment of your Parliament. It is important that we travel on that road of making us not more accountable but that we bring the legislation or work that we do into the homes of people. There is now a variety of ways that we can do that. I thank Senator Coghlan for his quantitative journey within the broad church of Fine Gael.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

We are running a bit over time, but we have one more colleague who wants to ask a question. Can we have a brief question and a brief answer?

Mr Robin Swann MLA:

I am returning to a subject I raised yesterday regarding North/South interaction in children's heart surgery. Following my query here yesterday afternoon, the joint North/South Health Ministers announced a €57 million investment in Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. Prior to that, Minister Harris indicated that Brexit may be a threat to an all-island health model or to inter-island cooperation. Would you agree with that, James?

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

I will be soft on time if the questions and answers are short. Senator Wilson, last one.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson:

Very briefly, I congratulate Kathleen on her appointment as Co-Chair of this august body. There has been a lot of love-bombing going on in the broad church of Fine Gael this afternoon and I do not want to add to that. I congratulate my colleagues on their contributions. There have been many successes over the last five years and there have been many sad times as well, but we will not go into them at the moment.

I have two brief questions. First, to Dr Reilly, what consequences will Brexit have on cross-border cooperation regarding health services? Secondly, Jerry, will you elaborate a little bit more on the Petitions Committee in the Houses of the Oireachtas? Our colleagues from the North and from Britain do not really have such a Committee. Thank you.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Brief answers, please.

Senator Dr James Reilly:

Yes, no, maybe. Sorry. *[Laughter.]*

Very briefly and in response to the Right Honourable Mr Swann, and it is the same answer to Diarmuid Wilson as well, the bottom line is that there will be difficulties but that they are not insurmountable. We can look at these as problems and make them big problems or we can look at them as challenges and turn them into opportunities. I definitely believe that the all-Ireland element around the children's hospital is something that must be maintained and I see no reason why that would change. In any event, we all know that it is going to take quite some time to unravel all this. The uncertainty around it will cause economic problems on both sides. At the end of the day, if we see and understand the benefits that we have already identified and keep pursuing them, I do not believe that it will derail these issues.

Senator Jerry Buttimer:

In answer to Diarmuid regarding the Petitions Committee, first, politicians could not submit a petition. It allows any individual to submit a petition or request to the Committee on any particular topic, for example, on the treatment of people by the health service or on the role of the Electricity Supply Board regarding energy. Those are two that I am familiar with. The problem we have is that, for example, the Committee may not be charged with that responsibility because of the rules in Standing Orders. It could, for example, send the petition or request on to the Ombudsman for Children. I think that the Committee needs to

have greater clarity around its role. I might be wrong on this, it is a personal opinion. However, it is an important part of the work that we can do.

You could argue about what could be submitted to the Petitions Committee. For example, whether an issue is sub judice or contains inflammatory or derogatory language would be part of the consideration that the Committee must make.

The other point is that we have not taken the Petitions Committee out on the road. To be fair to Seán Fleming, when he was Chairman of the Environment Committee and flooding happened in many parts of the country, he took the Committee out to the regions. I think that the Petitions Committee could do that. Part of the difficulty that the Petitions Committee has is that, and I do not mean this to be derogatory, you predominantly get cranks writing in and hijacking the process when other people should get a hearing. I am sure that Helen will have the same difficulty.

12.30 pm

My final comment is to compliment Diarmuid on his new politics in the Seanad. It is about parliamentarians arriving at a common-sense approach in matters of creating business of the Houses of the Oireachtas. To be fair to Diarmuid, as the Fianna Fáil whip in the Seanad, he has done a good job so far. I know he is not into the love-bombing but we should give him praise for that. *[Interruption.]* Yes. Actually, the interesting point, Chairman, and I will finish on this, is when we talk about doing politics in terms of our Houses of the Oireachtas, North/South relations, east-west relations, or wherever. I was at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) until this morning where you have the east versus west still not changing its ways.

I want to congratulate Kathleen and you, Chairperson, on your appointments. I was very privileged as Chairman of the Health Committee to bring the Committee to Stormont and to have the Health Committee in the North come down to us. It is a fantastic way to do business, all of us working together on the one island, building bridges and creating an all-island approach to health in which we can work together and build new energies. Diarmuid, I think that the Petitions Committee is one of the ways to work on that.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

Thank you very much indeed. I am sorry to have had to bully you to be brief. It is the first time that BIPA has had a session like this on legislative developments. I want to thank you very much. I think it has been pretty interesting, with a lot of good stuff, and I am grateful to David Melding, our colleague from Cardiff, for suggesting a session like this.

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Members, we are nearly at the end of this fifty-second plenary sitting so I thank all our speakers, everyone who gave presentations and contributions over the last two days, and Members for being so cooperative. We have had a lot of debate and discussion. I would also like to thank everyone who works in the background; an event like this does not just happen. I thank everybody here at the Grand Hotel in Malahide and staff from Westminster and the Oireachtas who work so hard behind the scenes, and our two joint-Clerks, Tara Kelly and Dr Robin James, for all the work and preparation that they have done. On that note, I am going

to pass over to Lord Dubs for the last one-minute contribution — he said — and then we will conclude business shortly. Sincere thanks to everyone for the last two days.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Lord Dubs):

I thank our Irish hosts for putting this on, for the content and the excellent way in which everything has been managed and administered. Our thanks to you. In all the years of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, it is difficult to find a more important time for us regarding the challenges we face. We really have a lot of important things ahead of us and I believe we are going to make an enormous contribution in the future to the difficulties consequent to the result of the referendum in Britain. So, get ready for a lot of hard work and thank you. *[Applause.]*

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Lord Kilclooney:

I beg to move

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Madam Co-Chairman, I want to start by congratulating you and your fellow Co-Chairmen, Lord Dubs and, of course, Andrew Rosindell yesterday, on the way in which you have chaired this meeting. You have been great moderators for debate.

I first entered politics in 1958 after the IRA campaign on the border. That really provoked me to take an interest in my country, Northern Ireland. After I entered politics, and living near the border, I was struck by the fact that there was a border, that it had caused IRA violence, that the Belfast and Dublin Governments were not speaking to each other and that there were obstacles. The Irish constitution was an obstacle because it did not recognise the existence of Northern Ireland. How can you talk to someone if you say they do not exist? It was a very simple problem. After that, I decided to try and work towards helping to create friendship between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

In Dublin, an estate agent emerged called Jim Deegan who operated a practice from South Anne Street and who was chairman of the central branch of Fine Gael. He and I made contact and decided that we should have a joint meeting of Fine Gael and the Ulster Unionist Party because, at that time, I was chairman of the Ulster Unionist Council in Belfast. There was uproar in Belfast. I was summoned to the headquarters of the Ulster Unionist Party and told that I must not go ahead with this meeting in Dublin and that if I did so I would be expelled from the Ulster Unionist Party. I decided that we must improve relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic and I went ahead with it irrespective. We had our joint meeting, a very friendly meeting, in Dublin and as a result of that I came back to Belfast and nothing happened. A week later, I heard that the central branch of Fine Gael had been expelled from the Fine Gael party. *[Laughter.]* That is the way life goes on this island.

Then, in 1966 we had the 50th anniversary of what we are marking this year. At that time, it was the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, which led to terrible riots in Belfast. Some people here may remember that. What a contrast it is today, 50 years later, when the sensitivity of the Somme and the Easter Rising have been dealt with without any unpleasantness whatsoever. To see the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh, a neighbour of mine, at the battle of the Somme site this week was quite amazing. I could not have imagined that many years ago.

Then we move forward to 1972 when I was Minister for Home Affairs in Northern Ireland. It was during the worst period of the Troubles and 10 people were being killed every week. I was shot by the IRA with eight bullets through my jaw and my body. I was still determined, after a year in hospital, to fight for friendship between Northern Ireland and the Republic. That is why I was pleased to be here at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, for the first time, to see how things have advanced.

Lord Trimble, as leader, Lord Empey and I negotiated the Belfast Agreement. Reg was in charge of strand one and I was once again back to my subject as leader of the delegation on strand two, the North/South relations, of which this is a product. I well remember one of the first sessions. David Trimble could not be there and I, as deputy leader, had to lead the Ulster Unionist delegation — Reg may remember this incident. Senator Mitchell said that we must agree the agenda before the talks could begin. The Dublin Government was represented by the then Foreign Minister, David Andrews. I said that recognition of Northern Ireland as a state was fundamental and that the Irish constitution must be changed. If that did not change, then there was no way that you could have cooperation between the two. David Andrews jumped up and almost hit the roof. He said that in no way would that item be on the agenda. To me, it was fundamental if we were going to make progress. Senator Mitchell asked what we were going to do, and I said that I was withdrawing the Ulster Unionist delegation from the talks. Out we walked; that was at 10.00 am. We stayed in Stormont Castle all that day until 5.00 pm when we were summoned back and told by Senator Mitchell that Foreign Minister Andrews had now agreed that the issue of articles 2 and 3 in the Irish constitution could be on the agenda. From that day onward we made progress on this island.

I want to say how much I have appreciated the atmosphere of friendship and the cooperation and dialogue that has taken place here this last few days. I want to thank Amanda, and Veronica from the Irish delegation, for the way in which they have organised it. I thank all those who have made us so welcome here. We thank Ireland for the way in which they have received those of us from the various parts of the United Kingdom and from the Crown dependencies — I never know the diplomatic word to use for Jersey and Guernsey. I am sorry that the Isle of Man is not represented here, as that would have been nice. It is not a member of the European Union and it would have been interesting to hear its attitude.

As someone just said, we have a very big issue ahead of us over the next two years which affects us all. I look forward to the next meeting of the Assembly in Cardiff when I hope we will have some good Welsh singing and where we might even see the European Championship cup, after tomorrow. In the meantime, may I say congratulations, it was lovely to meet you all and I propose that we now adjourn the Assembly. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Ms Kathleen Funchion TD):

Thank you very much Lord Kilclooney. I wish everyone a safe journey home. I declare the 52nd plenary session of the Assembly closed and we will next meet again in plenary in Cardiff in November.

Adjourned at 12.39 pm