

**BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-SEVENTH PLENARY SESSION**

Monday 22 October 2018

The Assembly met at 9.34 am

BRIEF INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS BY CO-CHAIRS

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the fifty-seventh plenary session. You have all been circulated with an up-to-date list of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly membership in your briefing packs, and we are welcoming the following new BIPA Members: Gavin Newlands MP, replacing Deidre Brock MP; John Blair MLA, replacing David Ford MLA; and from the States of Jersey, David Johnson and the new Associate Member, Simon Crowcroft, replacing Chief Minister John Le Fondré and Minister Kevin Lewis. We are delighted to welcome back John and Kevin to our plenary as observers. I have to inform the Assembly also that, in accordance with rule 2a, the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of this session: the Viscount Bridgeman, Vernon Coaker MP, Stephen Doughty MP, Vicky Ford MP, Rt Hon the Lord Kilclooney, Colm Brophy TD, Senator Gerry Horkan, Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD, Pauline McNeill MSP, and Dai Lloyd AM.

We have apologies received from Seán Canney TD, Kathleen Funchion TD, Pat the Cope Gallagher TD, Baroness O’Cathain, Conor McGinn MP, Stephen Hepburn MP, Andrew Bridgen MP, Mark Griffin MSP, and Steffan Lewis AM.

Just before I hand over to Andrew, we have just got some sad news that a former Co-Chair, Seymour Crawford, has died. He died yesterday in Ireland, and may we just formally extend our deepest sympathy to his family? Maybe Members may get an opportunity later on in the day, particularly constituency colleagues, if they want to say a few words.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Seán, and good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to formally welcome Members here today for the fifty-seventh plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Members will have received a copy of the proposed programme of business for the coming two days. During the next two days, we will resume our discussion on political developments with Brexit and continue our engagements marking the centenary year of votes for women.

We have a strong panel of speakers over the next day and a half, including two Ministers: the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, our Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We also look forward to hearing from the ambassador Adrian O’Neill, ambassador of Ireland to the United Kingdom, and he is going to speak about promoting diplomatic relations in the context of Brexit.

It is of the utmost importance that we continue to build on the strong links forged in this Assembly as we navigate the challenging months and years ahead. The Assembly will be formally welcomed today by Councillor Ayas Miah, speaker and civic mayor of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The elements of the Sligo programme marking the centenary of votes for women were very popular, and we will continue these discussions and hear from Maria Miller MP and Dr Mari Takayanagi on this important issue. The programme of business today will conclude with an address by the Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Tony Lloyd MP.

We expect today's session to conclude around 5.30 pm. This will give Members an opportunity to freshen up ahead of travelling to the reception at the Mansion House, to be hosted by the Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of the City of London. On Tuesday, we will hold the plenary session in the Attlee Suite of the Palace of Westminster. The Assembly will formally be welcomed by the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon John Bercow MP. Graham Stuart MP, Minister for Investment, Department for International Trade, has unfortunately had to withdraw due to conflicting commitments. However, we are delighted to be able to inform you that the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Tom Tugendhat MBE MP, will be addressing the Assembly.

There will be a short break between the two morning sessions, and during this time the Co-Chairs, myself and Seán, will invite Members of the Assembly to join us as we lay wreaths at the south window of Westminster Hall to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the ending of the first world war. After this ceremony, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will address our Assembly, and the Assembly will adjourn not later than 12.15 pm.

It is very fitting to have a plenary in this magnificent city of London, the capital city of the United Kingdom, as we discuss future challenges impacting not only on politics, but on all the lives of our citizens. My lords, ladies and gentlemen, I now formally move that the adoption of the proposed programme of business be agreed to. Is that agreed?

Programme of Business agreed.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, and I will hand over to Seán Crowe.

WELCOME BY THE SPEAKER OF TOWER HAMLETS

The Co-Chair (Seán Crowe TD):

I am now pleased to invite Councillor Ayas Miah, speaker and the civic mayor of Tower Hamlets. We share historic links with London and we are delighted to be attending this plenary in this wonderful, vibrant and dynamic city. *[Applause.]*

Councillor Ayas Miah:

Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As the speaker and the first citizen of Tower Hamlets, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to our borough—London's traditional east end and one of the UK's most culturally vibrant and diverse areas. The east end has long been a place where people have arrived in London for a better life, whether fleeing persecution or seeking a better life for them and for their family. In Tower Hamlets, most notable were Huguenot refugees, who created Spitalfields in the seventeenth century, Ashkenazi Jews, the original Chinatown in Limehouse, and more recently, in the twentieth century, the Bangladeshi, especially Sylheti Bangladeshi.

Today, one of the defining characteristics of our community is its diversity. In Tower Hamlets, 69 per cent of our residents are black and minority ethnic, and 43 per cent were born outside of the UK. In addition, the transformation of the Docklands, here in Tower Hamlets, means that it now houses the second largest business district in the UK, Canary Wharf, with further growth and rapid change ongoing.

Tower Hamlets is fortunate to be one of the London boroughs that border with the Thames. This reflects the history of migration, which, of course, includes the legacy of Irish immigration. There is a long and proud tradition of Irish community in the east end. In common with many of the immigrants who came to the east end, they worked in the clothing industry and many were weavers and worked in the docks. Generally, wages were low and they lived and worked in poor conditions. They then played their part in influencing moves for equality. The historian William Fishman said that in 1936 he was moved to tears to see bearded Jews and Irish Catholic dockers standing up to stop Mosley at the battle of Cable Street.

There continues to be a large Irish population in London, estimated at around 900,000. Additionally, it is estimated that as many as 6 million people living in the UK have at least one Irish grandparent—around 10 per cent of the UK's total population. Today, Ireland is the UK's fifth largest export market and the ninth largest source of imports. In 2017, the UK exports to Ireland were worth £34 billion and imports from Ireland were worth £21.8 billion.

We get on well in our part of the east end and I am delighted to welcome you today to an outward-looking borough to celebrate the relationship of cooperation between our two great countries. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chair (Seán Crowe TD):

Again, Members, on your behalf, I want to thank Mayor Miah for his contribution.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now expecting the arrival of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley. I think she is just about to arrive, so if Members could just wait for a few seconds, and hopefully Karen will be joining us.

9.45 am

ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, can I call the Assembly to order? Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to invite our first guest speaker of today, and that is the Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Karen will address the Assembly and then there will be some opportunity for questions. It is a great pleasure today to welcome the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley. *[Applause.]*

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, and it is a great pleasure to be with you in these magnificent surroundings this morning for the biannual plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and to have the opportunity to update you on the current situation in Northern Ireland. At the outset, I would like to thank the Co-Chairs, Andrew Rosindell MP and Seán Crowe, for their kind invitation to address you, and their warm words of welcome. And also, huge appreciation for Edward Beale and the rest of the team for all your hard work, without which, this plenary session simply would not happen.

Today, I want to talk to you about the close and special relationship that the people of the United Kingdom and Ireland enjoy. I want to talk about how those organisations, like yours, can help to deepen those bonds, and I want to talk about how we are working with our friends and neighbours in all the work we do on Brexit and work to restore a devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

This is, of course, my first BIPA plenary session since the Prime Minister asked me to take on the role of Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in January. Since 1990, this Assembly has played a key role in ensuring a strong link between the Houses of Parliament and the Irish Parliament. It symbolises the close collaboration and good working relationships with our friends and neighbours in Ireland and the whole of Ireland. You have brought people closer together, which is the basis of all that we want to achieve. Like most friends and neighbours, we do not always agree on everything, but I firmly believe that what unites us is far stronger and enduring than what might, from time to time, divide us. Politics, ultimately, is all about delivering for people, and this organisation has been at the heart of uniting the people of our nations, which can only be a force for good.

Much has been written and discussed about the UK and Irish relationship, not least against the backdrop of Brexit and the work to restore the Executive at Stormont, and, throughout all of this, we have continued to work incredibly closely together, while always, of course, in respect of Northern Ireland, recognising and observing constitutional proprieties. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach speak regularly on a whole range of issues, while I have a very close working relationship with Tánaiste Simon Coveney. I know officials in my department, and others across Whitehall, speak to their counterparts and neighbours in Scotland, Ireland and Wales more regularly than they have ever before. There is little doubt that the bilateral relationship

between our two countries is stronger than at any point since Irish independence nearly a century ago. It is only by that kind of trust and close working that we can make progress on Brexit, on devolution and on other important issues. That is what we all want to see continue, and it will.

The work of the BIPA is central to that, whether through your biannual plenary meetings and your committee work or your events and debates, you help to build the bonds that lay the foundation of the strong working relationships the UK and Ireland enjoy together. So, thank you for everything you have done and, I am sure, will continue to do in the years to come.

This year, of course, marks the twentieth anniversary of the Belfast Good Friday agreement. It provides an opportunity for all of us to take a step back and reflect on what has been achieved. The agreement was a historic landmark in the history not just of Northern Ireland, but of these islands as a whole. It was, as I said in April, a triumph of politics over the previous decades of violence, division and despair. Twenty years on, it is perhaps easy for some to lose sight of the magnitude of what was achieved by the participants in those talks 20 years ago. The Belfast Agreement is quite simply one of the most important documents in the complex, intertwined and not always happy history of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

As a result of the Belfast Agreement, the constitutional position of Northern Ireland, settled on the principle of consent and the Irish constitution, was amended to reflect that fact. Political institutions were established to accommodate and give expression to both the main traditions in Northern Ireland. Strong new bodies were implemented to foster greater north-south and east-west cooperation. Powerful protections for people's rights, culture and identities were embedded, and the policing and criminal justice systems were reformed to make them more accountable and widely acceptable across the whole community. Of course, the consequences of all of this is a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland that is, in so many ways, unrecognisable since the dark days of the Troubles, though we do, of course, continue to face a severe threat from dissident Republicans.

But, overall, Northern Ireland is a place transformed from where it was 20 years ago. Employment is at near record levels, with some 60,000 more people in work in Northern Ireland today than in 2010, while unemployment, at just over 4 per cent, is at near record lows. Northern Ireland remains the most popular location for foreign direct investment outside of London and the south-east, with the highest number of FDI jobs per head of any part of the United Kingdom. Since 2011, exports are up by 11 per cent and external sales, including to the rest of the UK, are up by 18 per cent. Tourism is booming, as anyone who has seen the cruise ships docked in Belfast this year will testify. And, of course, next year, the eyes of the world will once again be on Northern Ireland, as the oldest and most famous golfing championship in the world, the Open, is played at Royal Portrush.

All of these gains were hard fought—the result of years of painstaking discussions and negotiations—and we should never forget just how precious they are. So, all of us who care deeply about Northern Ireland have an overriding responsibility to do all that we can to protect, preserve and promote that agreement.

But, at the heart of that agreement, behind it all, is the principle of shared power, given effect through a devolved power-sharing Government. That, regrettably, and the deep frustration of so many, is what Northern Ireland has now been without for over 20 months. Let me be very clear about our position. The UK Government believes wholeheartedly in devolution for Northern Ireland. We want to see local politicians taking local decisions, fully accountable to a local assembly, and I believe we can get that Executive back up and running. After all, there is no sustainable alternative. There is no other arrangement that truly honours all that was achieved 20 years ago. When the most recent round of talks ended in February, I was as disappointed as I am sure you all were. Since then, I have been working tirelessly with all parties to re-establish a basis for talks and to try to find common ground. Both Simon Coveney and I have been working very closely, in accordance with the three-stranded approach to Northern Ireland affairs.

There are some who think it's easy: 'What's the problem? Call them all into a room and sort it out.' If only it were so. The reality, as you all know, is that no-one can force the parties together. Agreement cannot be imposed from outside. It requires trust, time, effort and it needs to come from within Northern Ireland and the parties. I remain convinced that an agreement can be delivered, but the parties need time and space to rebuild dialogue and agree a basis for re-entering the Executive. That is why I have introduced legislation to deliver precisely that. The Bill I introduced last week will create a temporary period where the duty on me to call an election will be disapplied. It will enable an Executive to be formed at any time. The legislation includes provisions to give greater clarity and certainty to enable Northern Ireland departments to continue to take decisions in the public interest and to ensure the continued delivery of public services. The Northern Ireland civil service have done—and pardon the pun—sterling work over the last 20 months, and they deserve our sincere thanks. This Bill will help them to continue to uphold Northern Ireland's vital public services. In addition, the Bill will enable me to make key public appointments, for example to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. But while we continue to make the necessary interventions to ensure good governance and the delivery of public services, this can never be a substitute for local decision making. That is why I will be engaging the parties urgently, along with the Tánaiste, in line with the well-established three-stranded approach, to work to find a solution that gets the Executive back up and running for the people of Northern Ireland.

Devolution is right for Northern Ireland, so that local decisions can be made according to local priorities. It brings people together from both main traditions in partnership, working for the good of the whole community in Northern Ireland. And, speaking as a member of the Conservative and Unionist Party, I believe that it strengthens the union in ways that no alternative arrangements can possibly achieve. So, I will continue to strive for the restoration of devolved Government with every ounce of energy I can muster. We owe the people of Northern Ireland nothing less.

We also owe it to the people of Northern Ireland to get the best possible deal as the United Kingdom as a whole leaves the European Union next March. So, let me say a few words about where we are. After we leave, the UK wants a deep and special partnership with the EU, and our negotiations to achieve that have now reached a critical phase. As the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons last week, now is the time for a clear-eyed focus on the few remaining but critical issues that are still to

be agreed. We remain confident of getting a deal—a deal that works for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Gibraltar and the three Crown dependencies. In recent weeks, negotiating teams have made real progress on both the withdrawal agreement and the political declaration on our future relationship. This means that the overall shape of the agreement on the terms of our exit is now clear, with agreed legal text on issues such as the implementation period, citizens' rights, and the financial settlement. And, as the Prime Minister set out last week, we also have broad agreement on the structure and scope of the framework for our future relationship, with progress on issues such as security, transport and services. I recognise that leaving the EU creates concerns. I know you hear those concerns from businesses and individuals in your constituencies. But respect for the referendum result is vital. The UK Parliament voted overwhelmingly to give the choice to the people of the United Kingdom as a whole as to whether to leave or remain in the European Union. The result was clear, and it falls on us to deliver that result, both for the 52 and the 48, because it is only by delivering on that result that we can uphold faith in democracy and in our politicians. That is why there can be no prospect of another referendum. The decision has already been made by the people and must be respected. It is, of course, the UK that chose to leave, and I understand that many of the positions adopted by EU in that regard reflect that reality.

10.00 am

For our part, we have made clear all along our determination to uphold the Belfast Agreement in all its parts. We are committed to avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, and we cannot accept any proposal that threatens the economic and constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom. Both the EU and the UK are in agreement that our future partnership is the answer to this and will provide the solutions in the long term, but, to cater for a situation where a future relationship is not in place in time, we accept that an insurance policy is needed for the people of Northern Ireland. Earlier in the year, we put forward a proposal as to how this could be done in the context of the backstop, but, as the Prime Minister has set out, two issues still remain. We want to find solutions to these and deliver a deal as soon as possible, and we remain confident of a positive outcome. So, we will continue to engage seriously and intensively with a strong commitment to resolving these outstanding issues, with a laser focus on delivering on the referendum result in a way that respects the constitutional integrity of our union, and, throughout this process, we will make sure that we protect the Belfast Good Friday Agreement in all its parts under all circumstances.

Working to prepare for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union has required unprecedented collaboration between the UK and Irish Governments, Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Governments of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar. It is only by continuing that collaboration, both in the run-up to March and after, that we will be able to make a success of Brexit, and I look forward to continuing to work with all of you to achieve that. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Secretary of State, for your address to our Assembly this morning. I am now going to open the discussions up for questions from Members of

the Assembly, and I am going to take a group, so, two or three at a time.

Rt Hon Ms Karen Bradley MP:

Can I borrow a pen, then? Can I borrow a pen, in that case?

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Certainly. I would like to begin with Senator Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, Secretary, and thanks for your contribution. I do acknowledge the close and special relationship that you mentioned and what unites us as being extremely incredible, as past Co-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and Chair of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and working very, very closely to bring Irish politicians together with British politicians from all sides—we have moved on in the last 20 years.

I am very, very concerned at the mood in the last few days, that you have 95 per cent of Brexit negotiations complete and there is a broad agreement on structures and the scope of the future relationships. Two questions I want to ask: one is that they are saying now that the backstop can be removed. How can you renege on a written deal, and could the UK ever be trusted again if they renege on a written deal?

Finally, I have said all along that—when the people of the United Kingdom voted for Brexit, I coined a phrase that the United Kingdom, or the British people, accidentally shot themselves in our foot. *[Laughter.]* But, as Eamonn McCann said—. The Good Friday Agreement is not up for negotiation, but, as Eamonn McCann said, a hard border could threaten a return to violence. Also we would be very concerned that any border, any insulation—that the people of Ireland would absolutely tear down that border with their own hands. That is what is coming from people—not from me, but from people on the ground. I cannot say it forcefully enough, and make it absolutely clear how concerned we are on the island of Ireland. Finally, I want to say that we want a good deal for our friends, the United Kingdom, we genuinely want that, but the Irish border is a situation, I think, that you are actually not taking into consideration. We are not choosing it to weaponise the argument; we are stating again how important it is in these discussions. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. We do need to keep the questions relatively short, so perhaps a little bit shorter than Frank's. Lord Empey next, please.

The Lord Empey:

Reg Empey, House of Lords. Can I ask the Secretary of State—? She referred to the difficulties of devolution, and I understand that and we all know that nothing is going to happen in next few months. She might also be aware of the huge and very concerning waiting lists in the health service in Northern Ireland, particularly on

cancer services, which are up to 30 times greater in some disciplines than in England, in her constituency. I would be appealing to her, on humanitarian grounds, to put a temporary Minister in place for health so that we can avoid a crisis this winter, and because people's lives are at risk. I am talking on totally humanitarian issues; it has nothing to do with politics. Temporary—we did it with the welfare reform, we can do it with health. Put somebody in place this winter to try to alleviate some of the suffering that might be about to occur.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. Before I ask the Secretary of State to respond, the final question of this round of three is from Colin McGrath MLA.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA:

Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Secretary of State, for your contribution. I would like to think that everybody in here believes in democracy and that the majority should be accommodated, and whilst I am not going to talk about the 56 per cent that voted for remaining, what I do want to talk about is how four out of the five parties in the North want talks. They want to see reform. They want to see resolution. They want to see full party involvement in the process. They want to see an independent chair. We were told that it would happen in the autumn, and I can see the colour of the leaves in my constituency, and know that we are very much progressing through autumn and we still have not heard of any talks process. I would like to get some assurance from you that you can give to the Nationalist community that you are the Secretary of State for everybody in Northern Ireland, and not just the Secretary of State for the DUP.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Secretary of State.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP:

Thank you. There are a number of issues there. Perhaps if I can start, Frank, with your points about Brexit—I will repeat what I said in my speech: the UK Government's commitment to the Belfast Good Friday Agreement is absolute. There is no reneging on any commitment to that agreement. We appreciate and can see the difference that that hard-won political declaration made and what it did for the people of Northern Ireland, and the people of the whole island of Ireland and everybody within the United Kingdom and Ireland, because it made such a tremendous difference and we will not go back on anything in that agreement. That is why we have been absolutely clear that we will not allow there to be a border on the island of Ireland. There will not be, in any situation. We will not allow there to be a border on that island, because it is a porous border; it is a border unlike any other. As I quote, time and again, there are more border crossings in the 310 miles between Northern Ireland and Ireland than there are on the whole of the eastern land border between the EU and its eastern neighbours. This is not a border like any other; it cannot be one that any of us want to see a change to, and that is why we are working to establish arrangements with the European Union that mean that, ideally, through the overall UK-EU relationship,

there is no change to that border, but, if it has to be done in a different way, then the UK Government is committed to that.

You talked about the backstop. I want to be clear and I, again, said it in my speech—we signed the joint report, as did the EU, before Christmas. The joint report is clear and the Northern Irish protocol within the joint report has many good things in it. It has, for example, agreement to the continuation of the common travel area, agreements on the single electricity market, agreements on citizens' rights. All of those agreements, all of those hard-won victories, are ones that the United Kingdom wants to see continue and we are committed to our obligations under the joint report, but the issue is around paragraph 49 of that joint report and, if we cannot resolve the issue of the Irish border over the overall UK-EU relationship, or by a tweak to the overall EU-UK relationship, then the backstop would apply, and, let us be clear, paragraph 49 says that the United Kingdom will ensure that it abides by the rules and regulations. I do not have the exact words in front of me, but it is very clear that the United Kingdom will ensure that the Northern Ireland border is resolved through the backstop. A suggestion has been put forward last week at the European Council regarding an extension of the implementation period as a way to deal with the border. We are looking at that. It is early days; it is a suggestion that has been put forward by the EU, but I want to be clear that we are committed to everything that we have agreed to in the joint report and we will ensure that there is no border on the island of Ireland.

Reg, you talked about devolution and probably, Colin, your question is in the same vein. As I said, there is no alternative to devolution and, Reg, your suggestion about appointing a Minister in much the same way as welfare was dealt with—well, of course, that was while there was a sitting Executive and there were additional talks that were going on around welfare reform. We are in a different situation now. I do not want to do anything that undermines the possibility of getting Ministers into Stormont. That is why I am bringing forward the legislation that we will debate this week in the House of Commons, where we will allow an Executive to be reformed at any time, which it cannot, of course, be at the moment; we would need to have legislation even if agreement was reached.

I do want to make the point, again, that I made in my speech: the Belfast Good Friday Agreement is very clear that this cannot be imposed from anyone else—that the desire to go into Government in Stormont has to be something the parties want to do. I am putting in place the best framework and conditions to enable those parties to go back into talks and to go back into Stormont, but it is not easy. If it were easy, then we would not have had so many issues and traumas that we have had over the 20 years, since the Belfast Agreement on devolution. But I am absolutely determined that we will achieve devolved Government in Stormont again. There is no alternative. Whilst I appreciate the concern you have on the specific issue around health, and I am concerned about so many things in Northern Ireland—the people of Northern Ireland do deserve better—that is devolved Government and they need their politicians to come together to make that work. We are working intensively to make that happen.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Secretary of State. Karin Smyth.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

Thank you, Secretary of State, and thank you for your time this morning. This is a unique body and we are very grateful for your time this morning. It is unique because it brings together people from across politics and across jurisdictions. That is something I just wanted to pick up on. When we leave the European Union, it has been estimated that the 20 or 25 meetings a day that happen in the European Union, across all areas of our mutual interest, will be lost. We talk a lot about the border in terms of the Good Friday Belfast Agreement, but a key part of that agreement was the recognition not only of mutual respect for different communities, but our recognition of mutual interest.

To pick up on Lord Empey's point about health, that is clearly an area, in a small population with declining expertise, particularly around specialist services, where it is in our mutual interest to work together co-operatively within those strands of the Good Friday Belfast Agreement that looked at those cross issues. So, my question, really, Secretary of State, is: what is the British Government doing now in terms of replicating those meetings along our mutual interests and how much consideration has been given in Government to making sure that we do not lose the ties that bind us around those very key issues?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Declan Breathnach.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

[Inaudible.]—is impacting on various non-contentious issues, particularly around education and social welfare. More and more people are gravitating towards the southern Government for help, particularly in that context, but also in the context of how it is impacting on our Government in relation to normal legislation.

10.15 am

I will say, for example, on the issue of minimum pricing in relation to alcohol, the devolved Government in Scotland has agreed it, we have agreed it, and there is absolutely no point in implementing it, from a southern perspective, unless it is done by a formed Assembly.

Lastly, in the context of Brexit, as it is certifiable that we are experts on referenda, and, indeed, in more recent years, we have had the independent Referendum Commission, will you not accept that, during the debate on Brexit, correct information was not given, that we all make mistakes, and there is a need to revisit it on behalf of the people? The weekend's march, I think, was a classic example of that, where we have a division and a need to revisit, because we are only damaging the two islands' economies?

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Fergus O'Dowd.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

I am from the same constituency as Declan in Louth, TD of a border constituency. I just want to say two things: one, I have always welcomed the engagement from Britain with the Irish Government, between the two national Governments, in finding a solution, particularly since the Good Friday Agreement, and it has been very helpful and very welcome. But, at this moment in time, tens of thousands of jobs are at risk because of the Brexit decision, and, obviously, that is a matter that the British Parliament and the British people have decided. But, I think that the point is that Ulster said 'yes', not 'no' in terms of Brexit. It said 'yes' to staying in the EU. The conflict that I see is that we have had two years in the North, where you have had no engagement in terms of an Executive, and you were talking there about how you are going to extend the period of time for greater engagement. But people in the South are getting very worried about Brexit, about the job losses and the issue of the border. It is becoming more divisive, I think, every day, for moderate people. Seeing the DUP, as we would see it, in many cases, holding the British Government to ransom—and there is no Nationalist voice presently at Westminster—is a recipe, in my opinion, for significant and adverse political short-term issues in the North and in the South.

I would just urge you to continue all the commitment that you obviously personally have, but I am very worried and concerned that enough is not being done, enough attention is not being paid, and that the parties that will not engage in the North—it is entirely unacceptable, given the very difficult economic, political situation that we are going into. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Thank you, Chair, and thanks, Secretary of State. A number of questions that I was going to ask have been raised by colleagues previously, so I will not prolong the time. Secretary of State, I noted your lauding of the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, and, in particular, you said that, in relation to the current impasse, agreement cannot come from outside, but, of course, you have unfulfilled commitments of your own, which are central to the current impasse and collapse of the institutions. So, those are things like the implementation of a bill of rights, the introduction of an Irish language Act; much like the desire of the majority to remain, these are issues that the vast majority of MLAs and parties in the North support and want to see introduced, and have taken to the streets to express their desire to see.

So, in terms of 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement, the core of that agreement, and I think we can all agree on this—and it was something that you failed to mention—is the principle of consent. Colin rightly mentioned the 56 per cent in the North who voted to remain; no-one in Ireland, North or South—both of us voted for the Good Friday Agreement—has consented to a Brexit that the EU Parliament's constitutional affairs committee has stated will require an altering of the Good Friday

Agreement, if it is to be implemented and carried out. So, that is, potentially, I would contest, Secretary of State, the biggest threat to our society in the North at the minute, despite you pointing to other ways.

I am sure, like myself and other colleagues, you will have noted the many consistent polls that are emerging, and we have often been directed towards polls in recent times for justification for the retention of the status quo. But all of the polls at present are pointing to an increased desire for a unity referendum, an opportunity for us to remove ourselves from the reckless pursuit that you and your Government are on. So, perhaps, again, in line with the Good Friday Agreement and the central component thereof, you would give us the opportunity and at least throw us a lifebelt to ensure that, if we really do not want a border on the island of Ireland—give us the opportunity to vote on that.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Secretary of State.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Thank you, Chair.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP:

Thank you. So, a number of points there, but there are common themes throughout, so, I will try and address as much as I can.

Karin, you asked, I think, about the meetings that are facilitated at the moment between the two Governments, but via the EU and the councils that meet. I am acutely aware of the fact that we need to ensure that bilateral relations with all of our European friends are stepped up. It has been very easy to have them prearranged and organised by another body. We need to make sure that they continue to happen, and I want to be clear that we are leaving the structures and institutions of the EU, we are not leaving Europe. Therefore, we absolutely have to make sure that bilateral relations with all of our friends, who are member states and non-member states in Europe, continue.

You will know that we had a meeting of the British-Irish inter-governmental council in the summer and we committed to have another of those meetings this autumn. One of the conclusions from that meeting was that we need to put in place structures that ensure that we can have that bilateral east-west relationship and ministerial engagement continue. So, we are working to find a suitable structure that both Governments can work with, so that we can ensure that that engagement continues, because it is absolutely critical that, bilaterally, we work together as two Governments.

On the matter of, Declan, your concern about lack of devolved Government, clearly, the Westminster Parliament is sovereign over the whole United Kingdom, but there are issues that are devolved, and that touches on the point that, I think, Niall made about Irish language and rights issues in Northern Ireland. Now, we have always

taken a position as UK Government that, where a matter is devolved, it is not reserved, it is not right for the UK Government and UK Parliament to bring forward legislation to impose a solution on a devolved area. That is true in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland. Now, I share your frustration that decisions that need to be taken have not been taken by Ministers in Stormont because we have not had Ministers in Stormont for 20 months. That is not good enough for the people of Northern Ireland. They deserve their locally elected politicians making the decisions for them. But the answer is not that Westminster imposes decisions as it sees fit, the answer is that the politicians come back round the table and do the right thing. I am not going to comment on decisions that the Irish Parliament has made around minimum pricing, or the Scottish Parliament. That is not a decision that the UK Westminster Parliament has taken, it is a matter for those devolved administrations because, quite rightly, that is not a reserved matter.

You referred to the point of the second referendum and, Niall, you referred to the principle of consent. I would say it is the principle of sufficient consent and consensus that we need to see. For change, there needs to be support from the majority represented by both communities. It is probably worth just reflecting on the fact that the Unionist community voted by a majority of about 60 per cent to leave the European Union. Now, that puts up other debates and matters for discussion but, overall, yes, Northern Ireland voted remain, but the Unionist community, according to the polls, voted, about 60 per cent, for leave. So, I would just—

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

There are those polls again.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP:

I would just say—*[Interruption.]* These are polls that have people saying how they voted. So, I would just caution on the idea that, actually, the principles of the Belfast Agreement—. The principles of the Belfast Agreement are clear—it is about sufficient consensus, and there are two communities in Northern Ireland. Much of what the European Union has put forward, in terms of suggestions around the backstop, is not acceptable to the Unionist community in Northern Ireland as it is not acceptable to the British Government, and that is why we are working to find a backstop that works for everyone.

And a point on the second referendum, can I just gently make the point that we had a people's vote? It was a higher turnout than any general election for many, many years. It was a majority by over 1.4 million people. Over 1 million people more voted to leave the European Union than voted to remain, across the whole United Kingdom. As a Government and as a politician who believes that we need to get—. Respect for politics and politicians is in danger. We need to make sure that where the people have spoken, we respect that decision. Now, I do not believe that having a second vote is going to resolve that situation. It will either mean that there is a bigger vote for leave, and I personally think, from my knocking on doors, there would be a bigger vote for leave, but, if it was the other way around, how would that resolve the situation? The fact is, the people spoke. We had a people's vote, and the people voted overwhelmingly, on a very high turnout, that they want to leave the European Union.

That is what we will deliver on, as the British Government. The UK Government will deliver on that vote of the British people.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Secretary of State. Now, we have an enormous amount of people who want to come in, and we are very time limited. I hope the Secretary of State can, perhaps, stay just a little bit longer than we originally intended, to get everyone in.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP:

I will try.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will try our best. I am going to call lots of people in one go, but please can you speak for a short period, because otherwise it means that some people will not get the chance to speak at all? Lord Murphy.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy of Torfaen:

Thank you, and I wish you well, Karen, in the deliberations in Northern Ireland in the months ahead. Two very quick questions. One: should we have an independent chair for the negotiations in Northern Ireland? Secondly, on Wednesday, the legislation before the House of Commons for Northern Ireland—there are amendments likely to be put down: one by Mr Baker, I believe, on Europe, and possibly amendments on abortion and same-sex marriage. I would be grateful for your views on those amendments.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Peter Fitzpatrick.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Thank you very much. I would like to thank the Secretary of State for her presentation. My main concerns are—. There are five main parties in Northern Ireland, and I want to ask you this simple question: are the five main parties in Northern Ireland engaging with your good self? I know you said that they need time and space. I think 20 months is more than enough time and space. The people in Northern Ireland feel let down, especially with Brexit and these negotiations going on at the moment. They feel as though they have no voice. The question I want to ask you too is: are you engaging constantly with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, and also Prime Minister Theresa May? I know you stated that you are working very closely with Simon Coveney. Are you meeting the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister on a regular enough basis? Coming from the border constituency of Louth, we have the same concerns as the citizens of Northern Ireland. Our main concerns, too, are that a lot of people live in the South, work in the North and vice versa; the movement of people; the movement of goods; the security operations; trading; dealing with immigration; and dual passports. Now, I welcome that they accept that Northern Ireland deserves an

insurance policy to help the people in Northern Ireland, but please, please—20 months. Someone is not engaging. Can you please publicly state who is not engaging? I think 20 months is more than enough time and space.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Steve Aiken.

Dr Steve Aiken MLA:

Secretary of State, as a chartered accountant and a qualified chartered accountant, you will have noted from the renewable heat incentive inquiry there is a considerable amount of discussion about the fact that the Northern Ireland civil service accounts seem to be qualified with monotonous regularity. Do you think the Northern Ireland civil service is actually fit for purpose to be able to deliver what you are proposing through Parliament?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Brendan Smith.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I welcome the Secretary of State's presence. You quite rightly referred to the historic landmark and the achievement 20 years ago with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. You mentioned the powerful protections built into that agreement for people's rights. Surely, in a democracy, one of the most important protections is to have an executive or a government to implement the will of the people. You also referred to the trust, time and effort that brought about the Good Friday Agreement. You may recall in Queen's University on 10 April last, on the twentieth anniversary, we had powerful presentations from Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, Bertie Ahern, Paul Murphy and others. The one message that I got from those particular meetings that day was the fact that allied to the trust, the time and the effort was the generosity and understanding shown by negotiators on both sides, particularly at Government level and at Government leadership level. In your talks at the minute, is there any evidence of those attributes of generosity and understanding being applied by the negotiating teams, to try to end the impasse and bring back a devolved Government? I have to say, Secretary of State, unfortunately, in your contribution earlier, there did not seem to be any sense of urgency in getting the Executive and the Assembly back up and running. That has to be achieved. Thank you, Co-Chair.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Margaret Murphy O'Mahony.

Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony TD:

Thank you, Chair. We are off again. First of all, I would like to welcome you here this morning, Ms Bradley, and, as a female parliamentarian, I congratulate you in your role, and it is great to see a female in such a powerful position. Ms Bradley, I

represent the most southerly constituency on the island of Ireland, and through all the talks of Brexit, it is nearly always the northern counties and the border counties that are taken into account. So, I just want to ask you: are you aware of the effect that a bad Brexit, for the want of a better word, would have on southern Ireland, especially in Cork South-West, where I represent, where agriculture, fishing and tourism will be very, very badly affected if things are not sorted?

10.30 am

Also, with your comments earlier on the National Assembly, and as my colleague, Deputy Smith said, there did not seem to be any urgency in your tone with regard to getting this sorted. I think the people in Northern Ireland are being very unrepresented at the moment, and it is actually very unfair on them. Their everyday lives are going on and yet, there is a major lack of representation. So, with respect, I really ask you to go up a gear and try and get this sorted. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Secretary of State.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP:

Thank you. I will try to get through those quickly. Paul, you asked about an independent chair. I have been clear that I will look at all options with regard to the best way to deal with this matter, but you will also know, I am sure, from your discussions and your great experience in this area, that there are concerns about an independent chair, and not all parties are as enamoured as others. But we are looking to see whether there is somebody who is the right person who could bring the parties together. You asked about the legislation; I mean, the legislation has been deliberately drafted to have very narrow scope. What we want to do is enable the civil servants in Northern Ireland to continue to be able to make the decisions, the necessary decisions they have to take to allow public services to continue to be delivered. This is not about changing policy, though, this is about reflecting the policy of the previous programme for government and the Executive, and ensuring that those decisions can be taken while we have that short time frame when there is no requirement to call an election, so that there is space and there are the conditions for the parties to come together.

I would just say to both Margaret and Brendan, I apologise if you think my tone was not urgent enough. The fact we are bringing this legislation through; the fact that we are putting in place the legislative conditions to bring the parties together; the fact that I meet and speak to all the five main parties on a very regular basis, trying to find that thing that will bring together, that dialogue that we can get going; that way we can get the parties in the room together; the way we can get them to understand that they have more in common than that which divides them; the way that we can bring them into the right frame of mind and the right place, is my absolute priority. And it is what I spend most 3 o'clock in the mornings doing, in fact, as well as working days, because it is absolutely clear that it is not good enough for the people of Northern Ireland to have been without Government for as long as they have been. This is not acceptable.

Steve, you are trying to tempt me, I think, there with questions. I will just say as a

qualified accountant that it is clear that sometimes qualified accounts are not necessarily because there is anything untoward, and the European Union accounts have been qualified for quite some time, I think we would all agree. But there will be accounting reasons and matters of materiality and other matters that may lead to accounts being qualified, not perhaps that there is something to be too concerned about.

I would agree also with the point about the speeches we heard at Queen's University. There were some magnificent speeches at that event; it really did remind everybody. I hope it gave everyone a pause for thought of just what has been achieved.

And finally, Margaret, I agree with you that the impact of Brexit will be across the whole of the United Kingdom, but also the whole of Ireland, and whilst my own constituency does not have the benefit of fishing—being in the centre of the country—we do have agriculture and tourism, and it is absolutely right that getting Brexit right is good for the whole of the United Kingdom and good for the whole of Ireland. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Paul Farrelly.

Mr Paul Farrelly MP:

Thank you, Chair, and welcome, Karen. I did not vote for the referendum-paving legislation, nor to trigger article 50 regardless. And I remember in 2016 we posed jointly in north Staffordshire before the referendum, campaigning for a 'yes' vote. My question, therefore, to you is simple: would your personal preference be that, in the future, the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, participated in a friction-free customs arrangement with the European Union?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Paul Givan.

Mr Paul Givan MLA:

Thank you, Mr Chairman. Thank you, Secretary of State, and I commend you for your efforts; I know it is easy for some of my colleagues to take cheap shots that you should do certain things, but I agree with you. It should be a matter for those locally elected officials in Northern Ireland to come together to resolve issues. [*Inaudible.*]—and we appreciate that and wish you every good will as you find a resolution. To that end, I agree: relationships are best served in Northern Ireland through an Assembly. That is how we represent our people—all of our people—and we work through issues that divide us to find common ground, and we should do that. I would be quite happy to call a meeting of the Assembly tomorrow. We will nominate for the position of First Minister; we will fill our Executive positions; and we will wait to see if other parties would actually step up and take the responsibility they have to represent the electorate. So, we would be prepared to do that. I suspect there are others who may not wish to nominate. That is a matter for them.

In respect of the issues around Brexit, can you, Secretary of State, give an assurance that Northern Ireland will not be carved out of the United Kingdom through any backstop; that we will be very much, according to the Belfast Agreement, part of the United Kingdom until and if the people of Northern Ireland vote otherwise; and while we stay within the UK, that there will be no internal barriers of any sort, whether by regulation or in any other description between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom through the Irish sea? Can you also give an assurance that the UK's negotiating position will not be dictated by any so-called threats of Irish dissident Republicanism or paramilitary in respect of a border in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic? And the inflammatory language that has been used by the Taoiseach and other Irish parliamentarians in respect of those issues is causing hugely detrimental impacts to the relationships North and South, and they should reflect on the language they are using when it comes to that particular issue.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Lord Kilclooney.

Rt Hon the Lord Kilclooney:

Secretary of State, welcome today. As one living near the border, and as a Unionist responsible for strand 2 negotiations in the Belfast Agreement, I find during the discussion this morning confusion between the term 'hard border' and 'border'. Can you assure us that whether there is a Brexit agreement or no Brexit agreement, the border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland will continue?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Joan Burton

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Thank you. What I want to ask you about is, given the uncertainty caused for business interested in investing in Ireland, North or South, and possibly also, I presume, in the rest of the UK, caused by the Brexit impasse at the moment, can you give an indication—you spoke about a transition period—of what the transition period is likely to be? And will you use the good offices of your Government to try and allay the widespread fear and apprehension that now applies through most of Ireland, through the island of Ireland, about how Brexit is going to impact. We heard last week about the unfortunate case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in Scotland. Luckily it seems like a one-off, but I think everybody shuddered at the idea of what would happen in the context of the current uncertainty being replaced by, if you like, a hard Brexit where we were all left in a complete state of uncertainty. You have indicated as well that more than 90 per cent of the detail appears to have been agreed. It would be helpful, I think, if you could give us an indication of exactly what has been agreed and what has not been agreed, because it is really, really difficult to continue business and economic progress and investment if the current uncertainty keeps going. So, could you give a timeline on your proposed transition period?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Joan. Willie Coffey.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP:

Secretary of State, you said in your remarks that you want to see an EU withdrawal deal that works for England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar. Ultimately, who will decide if that deal works for Scotland? Will it be your Government, or will it be the people of Scotland through their elected Scottish Parliament?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Senator Paul Coghlan

Senator Paul Coghlan: Thank you very much. Your words and your answers—some of them—are very encouraging, particularly that so much of the deal is agreed already, with 5 per cent or whatever outstanding. I think we want to see no border between east-west as much as north-south on the island of Ireland. You might comment briefly on that. Rather than risk a ‘no deal’ and a breakdown, surely in a democracy we must always allow time for a vote, particularly given the passage of time and as things continuously change that change would continue to occur, but more importantly than all, now there are full facts or new facts that were not available to the people of Britain when they voted initially.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP): Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs: Chair, I am going to do something unfashionable: my question has already been asked, so I will forgo the opportunity of thinking of another one.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP): Right, okay. Finally, Ross Greer, and that will, I am afraid, be all the questions we will have time for in this session.

Mr Ross Greer MSP: Thank you, Chair. Secretary of State, I was reassured by what you said around respect for devolution, but it has left me still wondering: the Scottish Parliament passed the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Legal Continuity) (Scotland) Bill with the votes of around 80 per cent of MSPs from four or five parties, expressly so that we could continue to legislate for devolved issues post Brexit, so why is your Government trying to have that Bill struck down in the Supreme Court?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP): Secretary of State.

Rt Hon Karen Bradley: Thank you. So, there were a number of points and I will try and cover as many as I can. Paul Farrelly, yes, we did, we campaigned together for Remain; I have been open about the fact that I was a campaigner for Remain, but neither of us managed to persuade our constituents, did we? And that is the result. And I know that you are one of those MPs who did not want to give them their say. I did vote to give them their say, and I truly believe that when you ask people how they

want to vote, in a binary choice, you have to respect that decision and deliver on it. But I do want to see frictionless trade; I want to see frictionless trade between the UK and the EU. That is why the proposal we have put forward for the future relationship delivers on that, and that is why the proposal we have put forward—the UK Government has put forward—is the only proposal that delivers on the three issues that I consider to be the matters that matter to my constituents and probably yours, from knocking on doors in our respective constituencies, which are that we deliver on the result of the referendum, that we ensure that we have an independent trade policy, but that we also have no borders on the island of Ireland or down the Irish sea because that is not good for anybody, and that is why we are working to get that future relationship agreed, so that we can deliver on that.

Paul Givan, you talked about Northern Ireland not being carved out. I think there are a couple of points that I would make. First of all, the Belfast Agreement is clear: Northern Ireland is not a hybrid state; it is a matter of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland if they want to be a full member of the United Kingdom—a full part of the United Kingdom—or a full part of the Republic of Ireland. That is a matter that the people of Northern Ireland have the ability to make that decision on. It is clear at the moment that they want to be part of the United Kingdom and that means a full part of the United Kingdom. I would refer to paragraph 50 of the joint report, which I think is just as relevant as paragraph 49, where it is clear that both the European Commission and the UK Government signed the joint report and very clearly said that there would be no new regulatory barriers between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and there would be unfettered access to the UK market for Northern Ireland producers.

The border, yes, Lord Kilclooney, there will still be a border in that there is a difference in terms of kilometres versus miles per hour, different currency and different arrangements on taxation, but we agree that that is also a border that needs to remain open so that people can travel, and that is why getting agreement on the common travel area is so important and getting agreement on the single electricity market is so important. Those are matters that are agreed in the Northern Ireland protocol of the joint report and that is why we want to deliver on those.

Joan, you asked about the implementation period. We were clear and the Prime Minister was clear. I think it was probably in her speech at Lancaster House where she first talked about wanting there to be just one change for people and business as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union and that the way to achieve that would be through an implementation period. In the withdrawal agreement that we have agreed, there will be that implementation period, so, although the United Kingdom will legally leave the European Union on 29 March 2019, and we will leave at that point—Parliament has voted for that—we will also continue to respect the rules of the European Union in terms of trade for the period of the implementation period, so that there is only then one change for business, so that when we go into our new relationship, which we want to be on 1 January 2021—that is when we want this to be—there is no need for any backstop or extension of implementation period, or anything else that has been put forward. We want this to be a new relationship that starts from 1 January 2021. The Prime Minister has said, and the Brexit Secretary has said, that they consider that we are 90 per cent of the way agreed on the withdrawal agreement. I would suggest you perhaps tune into the House of Commons later, where

I believe the Prime Minister will make a statement and perhaps give more detail on that point.

10.45 am

Willie, you asked about how this will be agreed. There will be a meaningful vote in Parliament, and we have committed that there will be a meaningful vote. So, as and when a deal is agreed, it will come back to Parliament, there will be time for debate, and then there will be a vote for all Members of the House of Commons to have their say on the deal.

The other Paul— There were three Pauls in this group; that is very impressive. Yes, east-west and north-south are equally important. It is important that we have that frictionless trade. That is why we have put the proposal forward that we have. And, Ross, I know there are issues regarding those matters in the frameworks that are currently devolved, but they are actually powers that rest in Brussels. We agreed that through work through the joint ministerial council, which I am a member of. It would be great to have a Northern Ireland Executive so that Northern Ireland Ministers could sit on that joint ministerial council as well. But Ministers from the Scottish Government and Ministers from the Welsh Government do sit on that council, and we do agree matters in that committee and we do agree matters at that point. I think that covers just about everything.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay. Right. Well, ladies and gentlemen, can I, on your behalf, thank the Secretary of State for coming to address us this morning, and in answering so many and so many varied questions relating to Northern Ireland and also relations between the UK and Ireland in relation to Brexit? Karen, we thank you for taking the time and for spending a bit longer than you intended. We thank you for your continued support and interest for the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and, on everyone's behalf, we wish you well with your continued work in Northern Ireland and for your continuing endeavours to strengthen the relationship between our two countries. Thank you very much indeed. *[Applause.]*

Okay, ladies and gentlemen, we will now take a short coffee break, and I would ask members to be back before we welcome our next speaker, in approximately 10 minutes. Thank you very much.

The sitting was suspended at 10.48 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.07 am.

ADDRESS BY THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO IRELAND

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am pleased to invite the Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Ambassador Adrian O'Neill to address the Assembly today. Ambassador O'Neill was appointed at an interesting time as the UK prepares to leave the EU, and we welcome the

opportunity to hear from him today on the challenges and opportunities that he has experienced, particularly in the context of Brexit.

I now invite the Ambassador to give his address and then there will time for some questions. *[Applause.]*

H.E. Adrian O'Neill: Thank you, Seán, and Andrew as Co-Chairs, Members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, good morning to you all. At the very beginning I would like to associate myself with Seán's earlier condolences in regard to the death of the late Seymour Crawford, a man who served his constituents of Cavan-Monaghan with great distinction for many years. I think in many ways he embodied the task of reconciliation in the work that he did on a cross-border basis and, of course, made a sustained contribution to this body, so *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam*.

A renowned British wit once said that the speeches to be wary of are those that those begin with the sentence, 'I am just going to say a few words', but I will still take the risk of making that claim while giving you the assurance of leaving reasonable time for questions and contributions from Members of the Assembly. First of all, thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. It is my first Assembly meeting to attend as Ambassador and thank you also to Co-Chair Andrew Rosindell for the hospitality extended to us all last night in Romford. It set the scene very well for what is an excellent programme here in London. I was pleased to be present for the address by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I know that the Tánaiste greatly appreciates his close working relationship with the Secretary of State, Karen Bradley, and we in the Embassy also value the excellent contacts with her advisors and officials.

The theme of my remarks today is promoting British-Irish relations in the context of Brexit. Given current preoccupations, Brexit will inevitably be a significant focus of my remarks. However, I am also conscious, as is my good colleague Ambassador Robin Barnett at the British Embassy in Dublin, that in the years ahead Brexit must not be allowed to suck up all the oxygen in the Irish-British relationship. Yes, our immediate priorities are clear: an orderly Brexit, including no hard border on the island of Ireland and the restoration of a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland. But there is also so much else to do to protect, develop, and indeed to celebrate the depth and breadth of our bilateral relations, albeit in a different future context, as the UK and Ireland choose different paths in regard to our connection with the European Union. But for now, we cannot ignore the large Brexit elephant in a modestly sized room with narrow doorways of egress. We meet today in the aftermath of the European Council last week, which disappointingly could not mark decisive progress in the negotiations. Despite intensive discussions, and the best efforts of the negotiating teams, from both the EU and the UK there has yet been no agreement on a withdrawal deal. A number of key issues remain open, including the protocol relating to Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the issue of the backstop arrangement or the insurance mechanism to ensure that in all circumstances there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland. A well informed body such as this Assembly, which has made such a contribution over the years to the peace process, will need no detailed explanation from me as to why any hardening of the land border in Ireland would be very bad news indeed.

During the Brexit referendum the Irish Government made its position clear, and while we regretted the outcome of the vote, we fully respected the decision of the British people. Since then, our objective has been to secure an orderly Brexit that protects Ireland's vital interests, in particular to protect the peace process in Northern Ireland. Whether you were in favour of Leave or Remain, the regrettable reality is that the UK decision to leave the EU has the capacity, if not properly managed, to disturb the delicate and complex balance of the Good Friday Agreement and disrupt the still fragile peace process of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. None of us want this to happen, but we must be alive to the risks and manage them accordingly. We should be in no doubt that the prospect of Brexit, especially a hard Brexit or a no deal Brexit, is now causing genuine anxiety in Northern Ireland, the border counties in the south and the island more generally. Indeed, it is widely accepted that the concerns around Brexit, compounded by the absence of power-sharing institutions have already led to some fraying of community relations in Northern Ireland and the anxieties are not only about the administrative complexities of achieving frictionless trade, they are more fundamentally about the disturbance of people's lives and livelihoods, they are about a fear of a regression to a very troubled past. In addressing this challenge the goal of both Ireland and the EU has been to simply conserve what has been achieved in the last 20 years, an evolving peace process, a Good Friday Agreement that has transformed life for the better and an open and invisible border that is both a cause and a manifestation of that transformation, nothing more and nothing less.

For the Irish Government there are no constitutional agendas at play here. For the principle of consent, the Good Friday Agreement found a way of managing the highly contested issue of sovereignty in Northern Ireland. Rather than allow this binary issue to determine all progress the agreement focussed on the common ground, where agreement *was* possible. Shared political institutions, parity of esteem for both identities and allegiances, human rights and equality guaranteed for all. Accordingly, the Irish Government has been very careful to keep separate the immediate tasks of managing the fallout from Brexit and the long-term constitutional destiny of Northern Ireland. The latter would continue to be solely governed by the principle of consent set out in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. We know that Prime Minister May is very sincere in her commitment to protecting the Belfast Agreement and avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland. Accordingly, the Irish Government warmly welcomed the agreement reached last December between the UK Government and the EU-27 that in the absence of other agreed and long-term solutions there would be a backstop arrangement in place reflecting the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland, which would maintain full alignment with those rules of the internal market and the customs union which now, or in the future, support North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 Agreement.

11.15 am

In March the Prime Minister wrote to President Tusk and committed that a legally operable version of the backstop would be agreed as part of the withdrawal agreement and at the same time the UK and EU negotiators published a joint document which indicated that a backstop solution would apply 'unless and until another solution is found'. Neither in the December or March texts are there references to time-limited backstops. Since the backstop is designed to operate in all circumstances, the prescribed time limit would rather defeat the stated purpose. We are now in the last weeks of the Brexit negotiations. For the Irish Government the overriding priority is

now to finalise the withdrawal agreement between the EU and the UK and to do so in a way that is consistent with the solemn commitments previously made in December and March. As the Taoiseach said last week in Brussels, this is important both in terms of substance and trust. So with the withdrawal agreement we must have a durable, workable and legally operable backstop that guarantees that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland. Should this require the possibility of extending the 20-month transition period by a further brief time, Ireland would agree to such an extension. However, this would not obviate the need for a legally sound backstop arrangement to be included in the withdrawal agreement. I do not minimise the challenges in the weeks ahead on reaching an agreement between the UK and the EU. However, 35 years as a diplomat has taught me that we must always maintain the duty of hope. As John Hume once said,

“When people are divided, the only solution is agreement.”

It is in that spirit that we will need to meet the challenges of the weeks and months ahead.

I often reflect that we Irish love an anniversary. Earlier this year, and as the Secretary of State already alluded to, we had the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement and it was marked in Belfast, here in London, Dublin, Washington and elsewhere. That agreement was unique in so many ways, not least in its overwhelming endorsement by the people in referenda North and South and in its incorporation as an international agreement between Ireland and the UK which is registered at the United Nations. The agreement remains the cornerstone of relations between these islands and the anchor for our continued shared peace process. It was a solution in 1998 and it remains the template now and I pay tribute to everyone, including this very Assembly and its Members, who have played their part in its ongoing implementation.

Another anniversary approaches in December, and that is the 25th anniversary of the document which led to the first paramilitary ceasefires and enabled the inclusive talks process that ultimately led to the Good Friday Agreement, namely the Downing Street Declaration, signed by the later former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and former Prime Minister, Sir John Major. The declaration was a profoundly brave political act, a leap of courage by both governments out of their respective comfort zones, in the interest of peace.

And it was no coincidence that it was John Major and Albert Reynolds who presided over the ground-breaking declaration. Major and Reynolds knew each other well from attending meetings of the European Union as finance ministers. When both were elevated to the premiership their relationship was already built on trust and mutual respect and they could then hit the ground running in Northern Ireland. I strongly recommend re-reading the Downing Street Declaration: its emphasis on healing divisions between both traditions in Ireland is as important today as it was then, as is the phrase ‘totality of relationships’ across these neighbouring islands, reflecting the complexity and diversity so evident in the membership of this Assembly.

The declaration speaks of the Irish and British Governments being

“determined to build on the fervent wish of both their peoples to see old fears and animosities replaced by a climate of peace.”

Before going on to talk of allowing

“the process of economic and social cooperation on the island to realise its full potential for prosperity and mutual understanding.”

Our two governments and our parliaments, as the co-guardians of this process of peace, reconciliation and normalisation, must remain steadfast to these ideals and objectives today. The peace process is just that, a still fragile process, far from complete, where our job is to keep lifting barriers between people and not wittingly or unwittingly putting up new ones.

We will all be severely tested in the coming weeks and months as we face the two challenges of Brexit and the now 22-month long absence of a power-sharing executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland. This prolonged vacuum in partnership politics in Northern Ireland is a source of considerable concern to the Irish Government. That vacuum contributes to a sense of drift and cynicism which undermines the ongoing work of reconciliation at community level. The power sharing institutions in Stormont represent the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, they belong to the people and all parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly have a collective responsibility to discharge their democratic mandates in those institutions. And as was emphasised in the Downing Street Declaration and formalised in the Good Friday Agreement, the two governments are duty bound to work together to convene, to facilitate and encourage the parties to come back to the negotiating table. Tánaiste Simon Coveney is therefore working together with Secretary of State, Karen Bradley, to provide a basis for urgently resuming the talks process in Belfast. The July meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in London recognised the importance and urgency of that task and the conference is to meet again in Dublin before the end of the year. Also at the July Conference meeting the Tánaiste and Minister David Lidington also agreed to look at the arrangements and structures for ensuring continued close cross Government work between Ireland and the UK after Brexit.

Once the UK leaves the European Union, British and Irish officials will not meet on a daily basis in Brussels. The opportunities for routine bilateral exchanges on the margins of EU meetings will no longer be there. We need to ensure that our inter-governmental processes and structures are sufficiently robust to compensate for this soon-to-be deficit of connectivity in Brussels. The Irish Government has been conscious for some time of the challenge of maintaining such bilateral links after Brexit. At Chatham House earlier this year the Tánaiste Simon Coveney, floated an idea of regular cross-government meetings between Dublin and London, involving our respective premiers and key ministers on both sides. This concept has since been endorsed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as part of a very good submission they made to Chairman Tom Tugendhat and his House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. Minister David Lidington also welcomed the proposal when he spoke at our Embassy reception at the recent Conservative Party Conference.

I am conscious too of the importance of relations between all administrations on these islands, and the valuable work and discussions that take place in the British-Irish Council. I have been very impressed by the quality of discussions at the Council summits over the past year in Jersey and Guernsey, and I look forward to being present at the forthcoming summit meeting in the Isle of Man. In the last year Ireland

has expanded its consulate in Edinburgh and the Government has also announced the reopening of our consulate in Cardiff. As Ambassador I hope it does not stop there as there are opportunities for enhanced outreach all across Great Britain, as I have discussed with Mayor Rotherham in Liverpool and Mayor Burnham in Manchester in recent months. And, of course, we have our parliamentary links, with the Assembly bringing together Members from many chambers across Britain and Ireland.

As I speak today I think of the late, founding co-chairman of this body, Lord Peter Temple-Morris, whose memorial I was honoured to attend during the summer. A great champion of Irish-British relations in more difficult times, he wrote in his memoir of this Assembly and how, as he put it, its golden rule was that everything should be conducted on the basis of complete equality, with the imbalance of history and associated chips on the shoulders on both sides disappeared. He wrote that, because of this, it was amazing how we all got on together from the outset. And when I speak to Members of the Assembly, whenever I do in more recent years, it is the same feedback constantly received, it is the friendship and the warmth of the relationships despite the many different perspectives that the Members come from. The task that Peter Temple-Morris spoke of in 1990 is our task again today, but we start from a position of strength, with the friendly relationships in this room, with the continued and very operational links between the two sovereign governments, the links between all the different administrations of the British-Irish Council, our cultural, sporting and people to people links and the overall positivity of bilateral relations, especially in the last 20 years. We need to build on these strengths as we navigate our way through what I am confident will prove to be transitory stresses and strains from current debates.

I might conclude with a few thoughts on other important aspects of Ireland-UK relations. Since the beginning of this decade we have worked together to carefully and sensitively commemorate the major events of a century ago, including the Easter Rising of 1916 and the sacrifice of so many across Britain and Ireland in the First World War. In March, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson and Conor McGinn co-hosted a very thoughtful discussion in Westminster on the life and legacy of John Redmond, champion of both Home Rule and of Irish men donning British Army uniform in World War I. Next month I will attend my second Remembrance Sunday ceremony at the cenotaph as we mark the 100th anniversary of the end of that terrible conflict. This summer, Speaker Bercow welcomed the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann and a delegation of female TDs and Senators to unveil a portrait of Constance Markievicz in the Palace of Westminster, the first woman elected to Parliament. And this summer also saw their Royal Highnesses Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall include in their programme of events in Cork and Kerry a visit to the home in Derrynane of the great Irish parliamentarian, nationalist leader and internationalist advocate of human rights, Daniel O'Connell. In coming years we will need to apply the same inclusiveness and sensitivity as we mark events such as the first meeting of Dáil Éireann, the Irish War of Independence, the treaty which followed, the civil war and the partition of the island. Let us make sure we commemorate these events as wisely and as generously as we have done with those in recent years.

Let us also continue to promote the bilateral trading relationship which makes Ireland the UK's fifth largest export market, supporting up to 200,000 jobs on each island, and making the London-Dublin route the busiest air corridor in Europe and the

world's second busiest. Let us continue to celebrate our cultural and sporting links, historic and contemporary, exemplified by Ireland's all-island ladies hockey team making it to the World Cup final in London in July and a woman from Belfast, Anna Burns, winning this year's Man Booker Prize. Let us work together with urgency and determination to bring back a power-sharing executive in Belfast and let us work towards an orderly and responsible outcome on Brexit, with the vision, courage and generousities of those who made possible the Downing Street Declaration and the Good Friday Belfast Agreement.

So I want to thank this Assembly for the work it does and I want to encourage you all to continue to do what you can for this relationship in this critical period ahead. These weeks and months are key moments for parliaments and parliamentarians on these islands and I and my Embassy team look forward to continuing to work with you.

Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you very much, Ambassador. I now invite questions, I have got a list of people already, Stephen Doughty first.

11.30 am

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

Thank you, Chair. Ambassador, I thank you very much and thank you for the kind remarks you made about the consulate in Cardiff, we are all absolutely delighted to have it back open in Wales.

I am very clear, Ambassador, I am not going to vote, as a Member of the House of Commons, for any deal that risks the peace, stability or economic futures of any of these islands and I think one of the things that was clear from the Secretary of State's remarks earlier on was that she does not recognise that she has a minority government and that create risks for obviously the Northern Irish legislation this week, but also for the Brexit process overall. So I just wondered if you could say a little about what the Irish Government understands and indeed the rest of the EU-27, about the other voices in parliament, those not of the Government, those not of the front benches, who believe there are different ways forward through this chaos, and indeed the voices of those who were heard so loudly on the streets in London this weekend.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Ambassador, do you mind if I take three questions? You are okay. Lord Murphy.

The Lord Murphy:

Thank you, Co-Chair and I thank Adrian for a superb analysis of the current situation and for the work that you have done over the last 30 years. You touched in your address on the fact that the Good Friday Agreement is an international treaty between Ireland and the United Kingdom and that the two Governments are joint guardians of that agreement. The point about that is that this is bilateralism at its most intense. And my regret, to be honest, over the last number of years is that I understand the Irish

position where you have to be part of the 27 but no one knows better about the intricacies of what happens on the island of Ireland than the two Governments and so I hope that in the months ahead there may be more bilateral discussions, delegated maybe from the EU—for example, Committee B went to Ireland North and South a fortnight ago on security issues and citizenship and on both those occasions there is no question that the only solutions will be bilateral agreements. So I hope that we can extend that and emphasise that the relationship between Britain and Ireland is completely unique and that that should in some ways be a delegated matter from the European Union.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Senator Paul Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Thank you, Chair, and Ambassador we thank you for a most interesting talk. You started by mentioning the late Seymour Crawford and I would like to be very much associated with your message of sympathy there to his family. Quite a number of years ago when this body, of which he was a proud Member, met in Dalmahoy outside Edinburgh and he had a very bad back. I drove to Monaghan to collect him and drove him there and funnily enough we were there on a Saturday night, maybe we had started on a Saturday night rather than a Sunday, but he was a very devout Presbyterian, as many of you will know, and he assumed I was probably an equally devout Catholic, but anyway he discovered that there was no Presbyterian church around about and he said there was no Catholic one either. He said, “I tell you what we are going to do, Coghlan, we are going to split the difference. I have discovered an Episcopalian one down at the end of the avenue.” So I ended up there with him on a Sunday. *[Laughter.]*

But anyway, Ambassador, you spoke warmly about relationships and it is very necessary that we foster them, and I think it is very important for this Assembly that post-Brexit we do everything, Chair, to strengthen this. Just as equally—and I said this to the Secretary of State—that we do not want a hard border in Ireland, equally, Ambassador, the relationship East-West is almost as important and I would be interested to hear you maybe give a few words on that. Thank you very much.

H.E. Adrian O’Neill:

Okay, thank you. Firstly in relation to Stephen’s question I suppose I have to be very conscious now here that I am a diplomat and in terms of observing all the proprieties, I suppose the reality is that governments negotiate with governments and therefore we have to basically take our lead in a certain sense, in terms of what the policy of the UK Government is and particularly in relation to the Prime Minister. Obviously we monitor events very closely in terms of Parliament, we are as fascinated as anybody else by the analyses that we read about likely alignments in terms of any deal being brought back to Parliament and we do acknowledge the fact that the landing zone for getting a deal through Parliament is quite narrow. Obviously we are monitoring all of that, we are reporting as best we can to our headquarters on it but basically our relationship government to government is with the UK Government and that is who we have to deal with.

As I said as well in relation to, for example, the march on Saturday, obviously it was a very significant march and again we will be reporting back to the mother-ship on that. But once the referendum occurred here we had to proceed on the basis that Brexit is going to happen, that is the assumption we must make. We are not saying it is inevitable but it is the working assumption that we have to make and our objective in those circumstances is, as I said, to achieve the most orderly Brexit and one that protects Ireland's vital national interests, and the existential interest in that regard is in relation to the peace process, Good Friday Agreement and maintaining an open and invisible border.

But to come to Senator Coghlan's point, another one obviously as well is to keep the UK and the European Union as close as possible in terms of an economic partnership because the closer they are then the easier it will be to maintain that really very strategically important trade and business relationship between our two countries. I think now the estimate in terms of trade and exports of goods and services across the Irish Sea on a reciprocal basis is now estimated to be something like over €70 billion per annum. Ireland, I think when we joined the European Community we exported something like 50% of all exports to Britain, that is now down to about 17%. But in particular sectors, like agrifood you can double that and 17% becomes 35%. So there are some sectors where the British market is still obviously extremely important for us and it is a two-way street of course, because as I mentioned in my remarks, Ireland is the UK's fifth largest export market. The UK actually has a very healthy trade surplus with Ireland and the sixth largest UK export market is China, but Ireland is ahead of that by a large margin, something like up to £12 billion more in exports to Ireland than China. Sometimes when I mention that fact to people who are ardent champions of division of global Britain and so on it comes as a bit of a surprise, but there you are. So the point you make, Senator, about the strategic importance of that east-west trading relationship is absolutely right and therefore we have a vital interest in getting a very good outcome there as well in terms of frictionless trade.

And then to Lord Murphy's point in relation to more bilateralism and more bilateral engagement—absolutely, we fully recognise that. I think the Irish Government's objectives in these negotiations is very much to ensure that, as I said, we protect our national interest in those negotiations between the UK and the European Union but equally that we ensure that in the far side of those negotiations that the bilateral relationship between Ireland and the UK remains as good, as positive, and as friendly as it has been in recent years. We certainly do not want that relationship to be collateral damage as a result of these negotiations. For example, at the end of July before going on leave I totted up the number of incoming ministerial visits, Irish Ministers coming to Britain which we had over the previous six months, and it amounted to 30 and that intensity is continuing. There is an awful lot of ongoing bilateral contact, including on the issue of Brexit, so it is not that we do not talk to UK Ministers around Brexit, we do, there are very good contacts. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister talk and meet quite regularly, Simon Coveney has very regular contacts with David Lidington, Minister Donohoe speaks very regularly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the issue of Brexit. The place where the negotiations take place are in Brussels between the UK and the taskforce representing the EU-27, but that does not mean that there are not bilateral conversations and exchange of views between London and Dublin.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Ambassador.

Declan Breathnach has a tiny question.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

Recognising that we have two Ambassadors in the room and lending to it what Senator Coghlan has said, I think it is terribly important that we get a commitment from both yourself and indeed Ambassador Barnett that serious representation would be made to both Governments to ensure the strengthening of BIPA into the future. I have seen, as a Member of this organisation since 2016, the importance not just of the social communication but indeed the sharing of information and the opportunities to expand in a post-Brexit situation those relationships. This body needs both Ambassadors' commitment to encourage both Governments to strengthen this organisation, and would you comment on that?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Declan. Senator Terry Leyden.

Senator Terry Leyden:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. The Ambassador is very welcome and he has tremendous experience of Anglo-Irish discussions over many periods in the Foreign Service.

I would also like to share sympathies to the family of Seymour Crawford. I served with him on this body and he was terribly committed to it and he would be very proud to know this is happening today here in London.

In relation to the situation regarding Brexit I just want to say to you that in 1965 there was negotiated the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement between the Irish Government, it was Sean Lemass and Howard Wilson here in Britain—that was pre-EEC 1973. My view is that the backstop, of course, is the minimum that can be received during the negotiations but I believe that the terms of the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement should be re-enacted and I believe, because of the sensitivities and the degree of trade, €1.1 billion at least a week, that there should be a special economic zone within the European Union, embracing the United Kingdom and Ireland. In a sense, a special arrangement that can be negotiated. Because I appreciate the sensitivities of the backstop in relation to the DUP particularly in Northern Ireland, but I do not want them to stand in the way of that either by the way. I do not think they have any mandate to stand in the way of the backstop. They were not elected to stand in the way and they are a minority as far the people of Northern Ireland are concerned, let's be quite clear about that. They should not blackmail the British Government to prevent a backstop from happening. But beyond that I feel there is also a need to consider the possibility of having a United Kingdom-Irish special trading zone within the European Union. That would mean that the Republic of Ireland would have free access to 500 million people in Europe, that Northern Ireland and the UK would have other special arrangements, but basically they would have a free trade zone between

the United Kingdom and Ireland. That to me would be one solution and I believe that a bit of good will in the European Union could bring this about. I think it would resolve the issues that are very serious indeed. So I have put this forward before and indeed the Ambassador in Dublin, Ambassador Barnett, is aware of this and I hope that you are aware of my personal views on this, but I think I have also conveyed them to Mr Barnier in Brussels and I hope that it will come about in that regard. I think it would be a tremendous, successful outcome to the present negotiations. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Terry. Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh, agus a ambasadóir Ó Neill as an gcur i láthair. Ambassador, thank you. My Seanad colleagues will not be surprised at all to hear me mention the issue of the increase in applications for Irish passports coming certainly from the North. There has been a steady increase over a long period of years but it has obviously been exacerbated as a result of the referendum vote. Last year there was over 82,000 applications for Irish passports; this year at the end of May it had already reached 50,000 so it is anticipated that it will exceed last year's numbers, as it has done over the last series of years. You mentioned the increase in the consulate infrastructure here in Britain and I just wonder have you seen an increase in passport applications coming from those who are entitled here in Britain and if there is any advance preparatory work put in place to deal with the consular needs or indeed the more political and citizenship needs that might come from, I suppose, an inevitably increased population that your officers and your services would be engaging with. *Go raibh maith agat.*

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Ambassador.

11.45 am

H.E. Adrian O'Neill:

Very good. In relation to Declan's question about the strengthening of BIPA, BIPA is an inter-parliamentary body and therefore ultimately I suppose the decision in relation to whether you intensify work or how you do it and so on is fundamentally a question for the parliaments themselves. I do not think there will be any difficulty or any problem in relation to the Government should you arrive at such decisions in terms of the Government supporting that and putting whatever resources they can in to support that. Certainly speaking on my own behalf and in terms of the Embassy we regard the summit meetings which take place in the UK as a very important rendezvous moment every year in terms of British-Irish relations and we are always very happy to work with the BIPA secretariat to support them logistically in any way we can. I have a number of colleagues who are with me today and so on. So certainly from the Embassy's point of view I can say that we regard BIPA, as I said, as a very important forum in terms of that kind of broadening and deepening of that totality of

relationships and the meetings that take place in our jurisdiction, we always put a pretty significant investment in in terms of resources and in terms of working with the BIPA secretariat to ensure a very efficient and hopefully enjoyable occasion as well. I am sure Ambassador Barnett would say the same in respect of the British Embassy in Dublin in relation to meetings that take place in Ireland. But I am sure that the Government would be happy to have a dialogue with the Assembly in relation to other things or ambitions that you might have.

Senator Leyden's question in relation to some kind of free trade zone between Ireland and the UK, there is no doubt that we will have to ramp up our bilateral processes of engagement, as I mentioned, after Brexit. And one thing which the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference is now very seriously looking at is some ideas—you would have maybe summit level meetings on a regular basis involving Taoiseach, Prime Minister and if not an entire Cabinet, a series of Ministers, and so forth. I think in that context there will be a lot of ideas and suggestions and proposals coming forward about how we strengthen the relationship in the new circumstances we find ourselves in. In that process I think ideas like that you have mentioned there are ones which no doubt will get serious consideration. I would however say, I am not an expert in this area, I would never claim to be an EU expert but I know that there are constraints in terms of once you are in the European Union you are subject to European trade policy and so forth. So the room for manoeuvre in terms of Member States being able to do their own thing and operate separate trade arrangements outside of the common commercial policy is quite constrained but that does not preclude at least the idea being given some thought and to see what potential there might be there.

And then the last question from Senator Ó Donnghaile, yes, you are right, we have seen a similar increase in passport ... I think we had also about 80,000 last year here in terms of passport applications in GB. I have not brought the up-to-date stats with me but that is showing no sign of falling off. I think we have had roughly a doubling in demand in terms of passport applications in GB from 2016. We have also had a very significant increase in citizenship applications. People who apply for passports are already citizens. If you were born in Ireland or if you have a parent born in Ireland you are automatically a citizen. If you have a grandparent born in Ireland you have to apply first for citizenship, through what we call the foreign birth registration process, and the applications I think in terms of foreign birth registrations in Britain have gone up something like tenfold since 2016, now admittedly from a very low base and so on. So yes, you are right, that is obviously putting some additional demands on us and happily we have got some additional resources from headquarters to assist with the processing of those applications; but happily we are also moving increasingly towards online applications for passports so now people who are renewing their passports do not have to submit a paper application any more, that can be done online. It is much more efficient and does not require you to get witnesses to sign passport applications and so on. So renewal passports have already moved online, the plan for the department is within the next year first-time applications will also be moving online. So progressively location will not be a factor or an inconvenience in terms of applying for a passport and that should assist us a great deal.

Senator Terry Leyden:

Sorry, just one point, Chairman. I was not speaking about a bilateral between the

United Kingdom and Ireland, I am talking about a recognised arrangement under the Brexit deal—that is what I am talking about. And by the way, there are special arrangements between Norway and Sweden. Switzerland has enormous opportunities and they are not in the European Union at all, so let's be more imaginative about what we can do in an agreement to leave because we are the most affected. The European Union is part of us, we are part of the 27 but, as far as I am concerned, a good deal for Britain is a good deal for Ireland and that is what I will be supporting, very much a good deal for the United Kingdom on the basis it is good for us.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Okay, Terry, thank you. I have nine questioners now coming in so I do not want to cut anyone off, I think everyone wants to put in questions, but can we try and limit our contribution at the start of the question. The next person is Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, I will be brief. Minister, I appreciate you talked about the cross-government meetings I think that is very worthwhile. Just regarding the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, it has been a huge success since its formation in 1990, and what more can we do to put it on a more stable basis? Could you have meetings every month instead of plenary, every month? I know it is up to the two Governments, the UK Government and the Irish Government and many more, but I think we could work an awful lot better with the British-Irish. And just finally, I have to say, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, there is an admiration, I can say, for the way she has dealt in the last two and a half years, it has been very difficult, I do not agree with her all the time, but have you met with the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn? And what are his views on Brexit?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

There is panic breaking up from the secretaries up here in relation to monthly meetings!

Next, Lord Reg Empey.

The Lord Empey:

Thank you, Chair. Could I ask the Ambassador two points: he said that Irish trade to GB was 17% of total exports. Could he elaborate as to what percentage of Irish exports go via Great Britain to other markets? And the second point is what is the Irish Government's definition of a 'hard border'? We keep hearing references to a hard border; are we talking infrastructure here and if we are, who is going to erect it?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Reg. And the next one is Viscount Bridgeman.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you, Co-Chairs. Ambassador, did we miss a reference to the significant all-Ireland Rugby side which is currently proving such a thorn in the flesh of particularly English rugby? *[Laughter.]*

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I will also take in Fergus O'Dowd.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

That is a good question. I would just like to congratulate our Ambassador on the clarity of this address, the issues that he raised about the backstop and also the huge importance of the continuing relationship between Britain and Ireland, that is hugely important for many of the connections; the business connections, they are absolutely ... they run into the tens of thousands or even millions. So I think we do not want our relationship to get worse because it was very bad for a number of years. Now, it was never better up until the Brexit decision, so the question I have really is for all us—what can we do to ensure that notwithstanding the economic and the political diverges that is and will take place between Britain and Ireland as a result of Britain leaving the EU. We must strive earnestly and continuously to keep up our excellent relationships in business and in every other respect. But I just think a moment of truth for us all is where are we going after this? Because we are separating in many ways and notwithstanding our wishes, our intentions and our beliefs we are going to diverge and we will be going for new markets, as the British will, there will be new relationships. The relationship we have had with Britain in terms of ministerial contacts at the EU, civil service contacts have been absolutely super, super excellent. Our best friends have always been Britain and we believe we have been their best friend but I think we need to maybe channel one of our next events on this issue—how do we continue to cooperate notwithstanding the changes that are and will take place. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Ambassador.

H.E. Adrian O'Neill:

Thank you. In relation to Senator Feighan's question in terms of greater intensity of meetings in BIPA and so forth, I suppose that is a matter of judgement for yourselves in terms of how much more you can do. I am very conscious that parliamentarians are extremely busy people and you have lots of pressures coming at you from different quarters. The very fact that you devote, when you take into account the length of the meetings and the travel, two and a half days to come here, do that twice a year in terms of these summits, that itself is a very significant commitment. And, of course, then in-between you have the various Committee meetings as well. So I think it is already a pretty substantial commitment, whether you can do more I think has to be a collective decision for yourselves, an assessment for yourselves. Perhaps in terms of modern communications, maybe modern communications can be availed of more, that you are doing more virtually even if you are not meeting in terms of how you engage with each other, maybe that might be worth exploring. But, as I said, I would hesitate offering recommendations as to how you can use all your free time in terms of extra meetings.

Lord Empey's question in relation to the land bridge, I think at the moment something like 80% of Irish exports that go to continental Europe come through Britain. Britain is the land bridge for that. So in terms of what happens at the ports and how smooth and frictionless the ports operate is obviously of enormous significance. And in terms of defining 'hard border', I suppose that is any infrastructure, related checks and controls, I think is the usual definition. I would point out as well, however, that there is also a regulatory border which could have potential implications in terms of, for example, North-South cooperation. I think the UK Government did an exercise about a year ago in the context of its engagement with the task force where it listed all existing areas of North-South cooperation which to some extent or other rely on a common regulatory framework provided by the EU, and I think they came up with a list of over 150 such areas of cooperation. That would be potentially impacted if the UK was no longer part of that shared regulatory space. So there is also the challenge around then how do we maintain that level of North-South cooperation when the UK is no longer part of that regulatory framework.

12.00 pm

Viscount Bridgeman, just to say that I was conscious in writing remarks of the need to be diplomatic so I thought it would be a bridge too far if I referred to Ireland winning the Grand Slam on St Patrick's Day in Twickenham. *[Laughter.]* But now that you have given me the opportunity to do so I am happy to say it was perhaps, in my 14 months, probably my greatest day since I arrived. *[Laughter.]*

Deputy O'Dowd asked about where are we going afterwards and the challenge that would be there. I think there is undoubtedly a big challenge. How do we maintain that same momentum in terms of bilateral relations when the UK is no longer part of the European Union? I think there is a good deal of thought and consideration going into that in terms of what we must do. As I mentioned, the idea of new inter-governmental structures is part of that process. But I think in fairness, as well, within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin there is a real wish to facilitate any ... if there is additional infrastructure or resources that are needed here in Britain, certainly at the moment my colleagues in Dublin and the Tánaiste is very receptive to hearing about that. As I say, we have reopened our consulate in Cardiff. Brexit was definitely a key consideration in doing that, we have strengthened our resources in London and in Edinburgh and we are also looking as well in terms of the Northern powerhouse, the North of England, and everything that is happening there, and whether we should be looking seriously at some on the ground presence up there as well. I know from talking to UK colleagues that the UK Government has also increased significantly its resources in the Embassy and Dublin and is doing so in European capitals more generally, recognising that kind of paradoxically the UK being outside the European Union actually will require a greater engagement by the UK directly in capitals with EU Member States.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thanks very much.

Again, can I encourage just questions, please. Vicky Ford is next.

Ms Vicky Ford MP:

Thank you. It seems to me that to make progress on the backstop it would really help to get some more clarity on the long-term vision of what we hope our relationship to be for frictionless trade north-south, east-west and across the Channel.

Before coming into the British Parliament I chaired the Internal Market Committee in the European Parliament where we used to spend a lot of time looking at the practicalities of how you kept that frictionless trade across the borders within the internal market and practicalities like fighting anti-fraud, anti-corruption, anti-competitive companies. It seems to me the more work we can do on looking at the practical networks of cooperation such as anti-fraud cooperation, continuing to work on anti-competitive companies, continuing to work on market surveyors, that having work on those practical elements will help to find some of that vision going forward. Do you agree?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you. And Brendan Smith.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, Ambassador, I very much welcome the clarity of your presentation on east-west relations and the Brexit issues as well. I am very glad that you paid tribute to my late constituency colleague, Seymour Crawford, we both served on this body from early 1993. I visited his home last night to pay my respects and on the wall of the bedroom are quite a number of the family photos from the early days of this body, 1993 and 1994, and unfortunately other esteemed members such as Kevin McNamara and Michael Colvin and others have gone to their eternal reward as well. I do not know if there is anybody, maybe Alf Dubs, of Members now that were on this body in its early days. But I have to say you referred to the work of Peter Temple-Morris, the founding Co-Chairman along with Jim Tunney. Those were very difficult days north, south and east, west and thankfully we are in a much better position today, and that is not taking away from the work that we need to achieve and the progress that needs to be made.

And could I say to you, Ambassador, just that the British Government have given commitment and guaranteed funding for contribution to EU cross-border programmes such as Erasmus, such as the PEACE programme. I would very much like an assurance that those issues would be kept on the agenda. Those programmes might seem small in the overall context but they are extremely important for so many communities, particularly the disadvantaged communities and regardless of the picture, and we know all that—the macroeconomics, we have to ensure that the micro elements are given the attention that they need as well. And so I would just like an assurance on that.

Ambassador, you mentioned the Tom Tugendhat Committee and their proposals in relation to intensifications at a bilateral level between Dublin and London. That is a thing that we could pursue with the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Oireachtas as well.

Thank you, Co-Chair.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

John Scott.

Mr John Scott MSP:

Thank you, Co-Convener, and also thank you, Mr Ambassador, for your excellent presentation. Mr Ambassador, you spoke of the bravery of John Major and Albert Reynolds in achieving the Downing Street Declaration. Lord Murphy has also spoken of the need for the British and Irish Governments to work more closely on a bilateral basis to resolve the impasse the negotiations have now reached. Is there a possibility that if the United Kingdom and Ireland could reach an agreement over the border situation, the EU might be happy to accept that and be more happy than they have been in the past? And would there be any support for that change of emphasis, as hinted at as well by Terry Leyden, the need is there. Mr Ambassador, is it a time for bravery again?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am just going to allow Colin McGrath to ask a question.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA:

Thank you very much, thank you, Ambassador, for your presentation, it has been good to hear it. You mentioned earlier about a certain respect of elephants in small rooms and maybe to take a different angle on that, has consideration been given to the impact that Brexit is having on the talks process in the North? It would be fairly well accepted within political circles back home that there will be no resolution to get Stormont back up and running again until the Brexit issue is dealt with, but has any consideration been given to the possibility of a no deal scenario and what impact that would have on relationships within the North and maybe from the British Government if there was more acceptance that that was an issue, rather than saying that they are trying desperately hard to get things up and running again. That honesty might allow a bit of space to allow people to get around the table and start discussing whilst we wait for a conclusion of the Brexit issue.

H.E. Adrian O'Neill:

Okay, well, first in relation to Vicky's question I suppose obviously there will be a need post-Brexit in terms of working a whole series, lots of discussions, working away on a practical basis and tackling issues, including on a bilateral basis, but I have to say all of that will be sub-optimal. None of that will, I think, replicate the efficiency and the effectiveness of current arrangements in terms of within the EU framework, but we are where we are. The difficulty as well is if you have to do all of these things on a bilateral basis the inputs that will be required will be very substantial so it is not going to be as efficient or I think as effective as what we have got. But obviously what we need to address and what the Governments identify as being priorities need to be addressed and will be addressed.

Brendan mentioned the PEACE programme and Erasmus and other programmes like that which both parts of the island have benefited very significantly from and there

was in the December report, the joint progress report from the EU and the UK that was agreed last December, a very specific reference to the EU PEACE programme and to the UK examining, giving serious consideration to maintaining that programme after the UK leaves the European Union. So I think there is a willingness on both sides to envisage a future iteration of the PEACE programme. I think likewise, the UK has given similar indications in relation to Erasmus and Horizon 2020 and other programmes like that that it wants as part of the future negotiations but this would be very much part of the future negotiations rather than the withdrawal agreement, but to look at the UK continuing to be able to participate in those programmes, that would be a matter for negotiation and obviously there will be a price tag attached to that presumably and all of that, but that is certainly for negotiation in terms of the future relationships.

I know there has been already a very good contact between the Foreign Affairs Committee, which you chair, and Tom Tugendhat's Committee and I know from talking to Chairman Tugendhat that he is deeply committed to intensifying the bilateral relationship between Ireland and the UK and he recognises that in fact Ireland is a really important bilateral relationship in foreign policy terms as he sees it, not just for reasons of the peace process but lots of other broader reasons. And I know that is some work that he is very keen to do and I know he will be talking to the Assembly tomorrow and I think that should be a very interesting presentation.

John made reference to, perhaps in relation to the negotiations, that Ireland would have a very courageous role to play in perhaps assenting to something that might constitute some kind of definitive breakthrough. The point I would make there is that these negotiations are between the UK and the EU-27 and the taskforce represents the interests of the EU-27, not just Ireland. Obviously they will listen because we are the country that is most directly affected in terms of the issues that we are talking about on the island of Ireland. Obviously the taskforce will listen very carefully to what we have to say. But when they come to making a judgement and a decision for example, about the extent to which any proposal might compromise the integrity of the Customs Union or of the Single Market they are not just going to take Ireland's view on that, they will be making assessment and a view on behalf of the EU-27 as a whole. You can take it that there are Member States, quite a few Member States, who have very strong views about that under no circumstance should—whatever deal is agreed—compromise the effectiveness of those two core EU policies. So it will not be just a question, basically, of what Ireland is satisfied with.

Colin, you are probably closer in terms of the political dynamics in Northern Ireland at the moment than I am. I certainly have no doubt that the outcome of the Brexit vote in Northern Ireland and the divergent views from the different parties on that certainly was a contributing factor to a deterioration of relations within the executive. I would not say it was the issue that collapsed the executive, but I think it certainly was a contributory factor. And my sense is from here, from talking to people, is that it would certainly be easier to get the talks up and running if we had a stable trajectory around Brexit, that people had a sense that Brexit is now on a stable trajectory and so forth, that would certainly probably assist parties coming back to the table, which is not to say that I think no effort should be made to try and get that process back up and running as soon as possible. I think the Irish Government does really feel a sense of urgency about this. We are very conscious that the current vacuum and static on the

ground, things do not just remain the same, you are getting a kind of deterioration in community relations and increased polarisation. The more time that elapses I think the more difficult the task will be, so I think there is a real sense of urgency and even if it was the case that you did not move immediately into round table talks with all of the parties, if there was to be a facilitator involved perhaps that facilitator could at least begin the process of bilateral contact and listening to parties and perspectives and there will be at least something to show to the people of Northern Ireland that we are heading in the right direction.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Okay, just three more questioners, I am conscious that the speaker for the next session has been outside for the last 15 minutes, so the last three are Vernon Coaker MP, Lord Kilclooney and Peter Fitzpatrick.

Mr Vernon Coaker MP:

Thank you very much and, Ambassador, thank you very much for the usual excellent presentation. Can I just build on what John Scott and Paul Murphy have said, Ambassador; no one disputes in here that of course it is a negotiation between the UK and the EU but obviously the big stumbling block, at the present time, is around the border and all of us want that resolved as best as possible. And Paul's point that he continually makes, and many of us make in the British Parliament, is the brilliance of the Good Friday Agreement is the joint guardianship and the principle of consent in Northern Ireland itself. I think it would be extremely helpful, as do many of us, were the British Prime Minister to go to Belfast more often, to go to Dublin more often to actually extol and give a real sense of that urgency and the need to understand how a consensus can be brought about in resolving that issue to the benefit of everyone and in respect of all the various agreements and traditions that there are.

12.15 pm

That is why I think Paul was asking, not to undermine the EU negotiations [*Inaudible*] because as I keep reminding people, Ireland will remain a member of the EU and wants to put the EU first. It is not its job to negotiate how Britain leaves the European Union, but surely it would be helpful for Theresa May, as the British Prime Minister, to meet with the Taoiseach and just have a better understanding, a better feel and a better way of demonstrating the sense in which she understands the delicacy and the sense of difficulty that there is around that.

I just ask, Ambassador, as far as you are aware, are there any plans for the Irish Taoiseach to meet with the British Prime Minister to talk about what may be done and how that can be done in a way which respects everything that Britain and Ireland have done with respect to Northern Ireland and the context of the Good Friday Agreement as well as the context of Brexit? Because I think, personally, it is something I would expect to be done, even if it did not lead to any outcome, but I would expect the British Prime Minister to be in Belfast, be in Dublin, to be talking to everyone, being seen to be urgent, being seen to be there. Not just inviting people into Downing Street, but out there, talking to people and trying to understand and get an agreement, because it is so important to everyone.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Vernon.

Peter Fitzpatrick.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, Ambassador, thank you very much for your presentation. My name is Peter Fitzpatrick, I am a TD from the border county of Louth. Theresa May states that 95% of Britain's exit of the EU has been agreed but—there is always a but—the Irish border is a major stumbling block. Our Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, has issued concerns that violence is going to return back to Northern Ireland, in the wake of a hard border.

Ambassador, you issued a letter to the Irish community in the UK recently, and you reassured that there would be no hard border. In fairness to you, you are doing a lot of travelling across the UK, you are working very closely with the UK and Irish and you are working very hard with the culture, the economics and the political ties between the UK and Ireland. What I want to know is are you still going around the UK and are you still writing out letters telling them there is going to be no hard border between Ireland and the island of Ireland? Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Lord Kilclooney, last but not least.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Ambassador, thank you for your presentation. It is well known that Brexit will damage the economy of the Republic of Ireland, more so than any other European Union country. This is recognised by Dublin. The respected *Spectator* magazine this week has the front page heading, 'Will Ireland leave the European Union?' Now we know that Ireland is going to have to increase dramatically its contributions to the Brussels budget, we know that Irish farmers are going to have reduced CAP payments. Will the issue of Ireland leaving the EU be considered? Because that would solve all the talk about the border.

H.E. Adrian O'Neill:

Okay, thank you. Vernon's question first: it would not be appropriate for the Ambassador of Ireland to the United Kingdom to be telling the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom how active she should be or what her travel plans should be in relation to Northern Ireland. I take the point; I suppose we are used to the past, from different phases in the past, of Prime Minister and Taoiseach meeting very regularly, in London, in Dublin, in Northern Ireland, in terms of firstly negotiating the Good Friday Agreement and then implementing the Good Friday Agreement. There are some outstanding elements in the Good Friday Agreement but the large part of it has been implemented and maybe therefore that kind of high profile, heroic phase of the peace process, we have moved beyond that and we are in different circumstances.

What I will say, is that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach do speak by phone quite regularly, they do meet. As it happens, for reasons we know, the European Council is meeting more frequently than it normally does and that provides an opportunity for the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister to have substantive bilateral meetings on the margins of the Council, as they did last week and as they did in Salzburg a few weeks before, and both of those meetings were very productive and constructive meetings.

In relation to Peter, I suppose if I could give assurance, if I give a prediction that there will be no hard border in the island of Ireland, I probably would be better off working for Paddy Power than the Irish Government. *[Laughter.]* In terms of the newsletter to the Irish community in the summer, on all sides there was a commitment to avoiding a hard border on the island, there is no doubt about that. That was the commitment that was given in December and was given in March. The task that we had after that was to translate those commitments into legally operable text that would be in a draft treaty and that treaty is the withdrawal agreement. I think the difficulty that we are encountering is actually then translating those political commitments into draft text in a treaty because in a treaty there is no scope for fudge, you have to be clear and you have to be precise. So I think the challenge that we have and the challenge that the negotiators will have over the next few weeks is to try and bridge that remaining gap in terms of how do we translate those clear political commitments into draft legal text that delivers a legally sound backstop arrangement in the withdrawal agreement. I think there are very bright people working for the UK Government, there are very bright people working in the Commission Task Force and hopefully, over the next few weeks, they will be able to bridge that gap.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

What about the Taoiseach's comments about the violence returning back to Northern Ireland?

H.E. Adrian O'Neill: I think what the Taoiseach was doing was reflecting concerns that are on the ground in Northern Ireland. I noted the Secretary of State quite rightly this morning talked about the fact the threat from dissident republicans remains severe. That they have not been able to carry out too many operations, thankfully, is due to the fact that the PSNI and Gardaí cooperation is so good that they are keeping very close tabs on them, but their intent remains the same. Where there are opportunities they will carry out attacks. So the threat remains severe, the Chief Constable has told us that as well. The Chief Constable has also said that if there was any border infrastructure that would represent a threat to his officers because then they would be called upon to protect that infrastructure.

So I think the Taoiseach's remarks are not about the Taoiseach predicting it, the Taoiseach is saying that there are those concerns—they are being expressed by the Chief Constable, they are being expressed by a woman who lives in Inniskeen in County Monaghan, whose father was killed in an attack on a customs post back in 1972.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I would like to thank the Ambassador—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Mattie McGrath TD

I think Lord Kilclooney—

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Brexit, our exit?

H.E. Adrian O’Neill:

Oh, Sorry, Lord Kiclooney [*Inaudible.*] Yes, sorry. [*Laughter.*]

A Member:

You are running away from it.

H.E. Adrian O’Neill:

I am, running away from that question. It was interesting that opinion polling on Ireland remaining part of the European Union has been consistently strong, even during the years of the financial crisis, when a lot of people in Ireland might have felt that the EU perhaps did not give us the solidarity in terms of the bailout and so forth that we should have got. Even though the love affair for a while went a little bit sour, even despite that, opinion polls in Ireland remaining in the European Union remain very high. And in the aftermath of the UK referendum those percentages actually increased, they went from the 70s up into the latter 80s. You are right, happily, because of our economic circumstances in recent years we have become a significant net contributor to the EU budget. That will probably increase again after the UK leaves. But still, I think the Irish people’s assessment in relation to the balance sheet in terms of Ireland’s membership is still overwhelmingly positive.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you very much, Ambassador. Apologies again for the length it went on but we will now call on the next speaker. [*Applause.*]

12.26 pm

THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY IN ADVANCING EQUALITY

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will swiftly move on to the next session. We are considerably over time, so I am afraid that this session will cut into the lunch hour. However, it is an important topic, so we will press ahead as fast as possible.

At our Sligo plenary, we marked the centenary of votes for women. That was an engaging topic for Members, and I am pleased that we will continue those discussions today.

I welcome the Right Honourable Maria Miller MP, who is the Chair of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, to address us on the challenges that women face today. Members will have a brief period afterwards for questions.

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP:

It is an enormous pleasure to be here and to have been invited to address you in Canary Wharf today.

We are a complex set of countries, nations and islands and, although we can hold votes to leave institutions such as the European Union, we cannot change our physical geography or undo the thousands of years of history that we have between us. We have to work harder to understand each other, and I applaud the work of this Assembly in doing just that. It feels entirely right that I am here, because promoting cooperation through dialogue is your mission, and that is the only way that we can achieve more equality. We have already proved that a more equal society cannot be achieved by legislation alone.

It is easy for some commentators and parliamentarians to dismiss equality matters as an add-on and as something that we do when we can afford to do it, that is nice to do, and that is not core to parliamentary business. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. In Canada, Justin Trudeau's Government demonstrate how Governments can take gender equality issues right to their core to be more effective in their work.

Equality matters to our quality of life, who we are and what we stand for. It also matters to the economy. Let us take the workplace as an example. In the United Kingdom, we have 1 million over-50s who want to work but cannot find a job, a gender pay gap of more than 30 per cent for women who are over 40, and pools of economically inactive women in areas of the country in which there are acute shortages of labour because our labour market is still based on a 19th century model of work that does not work any more. Disabled people face unacceptable and often unlawful barriers to reaching their potential in the workplace, and Muslim women are the most likely people in the United Kingdom to be out of work. A lack of enforcement of equality law and discrimination are holding our economy back and making us more reliant on migrant labour, which will perhaps not be in such plentiful supply in a year or so.

12.30 pm

As individuals, we are elected to make our communities better places for not just people like us but everybody, regardless of their sex, sexuality, race or religion. That is difficult because we are human beings, too, with our own beliefs, aspirations and ideals. Our role as politicians is to balance all that, which is not easy, and we have to take into account the beliefs and ideals of our fellow parliamentarians.

The truth is that equality is heinously complicated. It is about balancing sets of competing rights that sometimes apparently conflict. The laws that we pass in our Parliaments are important, but they can leave questions unanswered. That is where the courts come in.

Let us take as an example the Ashers Baking Company case, which has now received a final judgment from the Supreme Court, overturning a Court of Appeal judgment. It has made it clear that the services of baking a cake were not withheld because of the sexuality of a customer and that the cake shop owners' rights not to be associated with promoting a message that they did not agree with were lawfully held. The judgment clarified the law and it has created discussion.

We need more test cases to identify where the boundaries of equality laws lie in practice and to establish how competing equality rights are dealt with in practice, rather than leaving those issues open and sometimes subject to highly ill-informed debate.

There is not just one case of competing rights; there are many others, particularly when it comes to areas of women's rights. Most notably at the moment, settling the debate on the rights of trans women and access to single-sex spaces is an important issue that we need to deal with. To leave those issues apparently unanswered potentially undermines the law and people's confidence in it. That is one reason why my Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission to consider whether enough emphasis is being put on such test cases.

One hundred years ago, I would not have been allowed to be here talking to you as a parliamentarian, because women were first given the right to stand for election just over 100 years ago. In that respect, 21 November is an important date in the UK calendar. All year, we have been celebrating the fact that it is 100 years since women were able to not just stand for election but vote. Those first steps to a more equal society were important. It has been a remarkable few months hearing the stories of the struggle for suffrage in a way that we have never heard them before and having an opportunity to reflect how far our country has come when it comes to the role of women in politics.

Over the past 100 years, Parliament has sometimes led public opinion on equality, which was the case with equal marriage, and sometimes lagged behind with laws to protect people—I am thinking of online abuse in particular.

When it comes to making sure that our Parliament walks the talk, the picture is very mixed. I was elected in 2005, but I was only the 265th woman of any party to be elected to the House of Commons. When I became a Cabinet Minister, I was the 38th woman to do so—the 11th Conservative woman—which shocked me. In the UK, women have been outperforming men for more than two decades at all levels of education, but few have found their way into helping to determine the priorities of Parliament and Government.

In the UK, we have passed some of the best and most progressive equality laws in the world, but we have not used the opportunity to reform the place that makes those laws. There are few parliamentarians who, as individuals, would argue that Parliament should not be a more equal place and who would continue to say that there are not enough women with the skills to be an MP. Indeed, the leadership of the biggest parties in Parliament told my Select Committee that Parliament would be a better place if there was a 50:50 men and women split in Parliament.

The problem is with the levers that must be pulled to make that change happen. They are opaque and outdated. The political parties are doing a great deal to change their processes to get more diversity in their candidates who stand for Parliament, but Parliament itself is lagging behind, and it remains a place that many women would not consider as a place to work. The Cox report on bullying and harassment in the House of Commons, which was published last week, has made important recommendations about how to change the processes but, above all, it has been clear that we need to change the culture. We should all reflect on that because, in whatever country, Parliament needs to be a place that demonstrates equality in practice, and the report that has been published needs to be adopted in full.

In the UK, the Women and Equalities Committee was established in 2015 by the House of Commons to give equality issues more profile in Parliament and to see whether the laws that were passed were working in practice. I have had the honour of chairing that Committee since it was set up, and we have been prolific in the work that we have done. I believe that, because the Select Committee's work is based on evidence, it has credibility and that, because it is cross-party work, it has strength.

I believe that the Committee's existence has created a momentum for change in the area of equality that was lacking previously. I will give an example of that. For 17 years, parties of all colours had debated the need to update sex and relationship education, which is a very controversial issue in the UK and, I am sure, further afield. Individual committees and MPs had called for change but when, in a report on sexual harassment in schools, the Select Committee published a recommendation that could not be overlooked, we managed to pass a change in the law that makes it compulsory for all school-age children to receive sex and relationship education. I believe that that was directly a result of the uncovering of that sexual harassment in our schools.

The Women and Equalities Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into abortion law in Northern Ireland, because we have a responsibility to hold the UK Government to account on its international obligations and adhering to the treaties that it signs in the areas of equality. The UK is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, of which the UN holds regular reviews. A UN CEDAW report has set out that the Government could be failing in its international obligations as a result of current access to abortion in Northern Ireland, so the Committee has launched a Northern Ireland abortion inquiry to look at that specifically. We are currently inviting evidence, the deadline for which is 10 December, and planning our inquiry. We encourage everybody to use that opportunity to make their views known. We are evidence led, and the Committee welcomes all views and will consult widely by seeking written evidence and face-to-face evidence in Northern Ireland.

We know that the issue is sensitive. Abortion law is a devolved matter, but international treaty obligations are not. If we can look at the issue impartially and take evidence, I hope that the Committee can help to find a way forward. If we are to create a more equal and fairer society, we need to work together to learn from each other. In effect, international treaties undoubtedly require us to do that.

I was pleased to be approached by the Scottish Parliament to convene a session in

which Chairs of like-minded Committees across the United Kingdom will come together to talk about equality issues. Obviously, the Northern Ireland Assembly Committees are not operational at the moment, but I really hope that we are able to do that in the not-too-distant future, because a fairer and more equitable society benefits us all. We have the opportunity to work together, and I hope that we are able to do that.

I look forward to answering your questions.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank Maria Miller very much. The first question is from Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

I, too, thank Maria Miller. You really are changing the culture. I will bowl a more difficult one. Maria talked about the gender pay gap. Is not the only way to deal with pay gaps and inequality to put all earnings and income tax returns in the public domain?

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I call Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony—is that right?

Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony TD:

I knew that you would get there eventually.

I welcome Maria Miller here this morning and thank her for a very interesting talk. I stress at the outset that I have never in my political life come across any difficulty that was caused by my being a woman. I suppose that a lot of that is down to my colleagues in the Oireachtas. People think, however, that although a woman's place might not specifically be in the home, childcare and house issues should be down to women.

I told the following story at BIPA in Sligo: I was elected in February 2016, along with two males, and I was asked, "What's going to happen at home with your children now?" The two lads were not asked that question. The mindset is wrong from the start. Does Ms Miller have any ideas about how that could be changed?

Ms Helen Jones MP:

I thank Maria Miller; it is nice to see her here. I am also the chair of a Select Committee, and I would say that our scrutiny is only effective if the Government is prepared to listen to the issues. In a report that the Committee did, we found that one of the biggest barriers to women in Britain enforcing their rights was the rise in employment tribunal fees. That was particularly the case for women in low-paid and insecure employment. Would what we do be more effective if, as well as the Government paying more heed to the recommendations of the Select Committee, we had post-legislative as well as pre-legislative scrutiny?

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP:

I will attempt to answer all those questions in turn. Lord Dubs was absolutely right to say, as he did in his opening comment, that we are changing the culture. However, I do not think that we have achieved that yet in our place of work; we need to continue to work on that.

When it comes to the specifics of the gender pay gap, we have to get right the balance between privacy, given that people do not necessarily want to have their income released for all to see, and the accountability of businesses. The Government have just put in place a gender pay gap reporting mechanism under which companies with more than 250 employees have to publish information on their gender pay gap. That has put the issue on the agenda. Although the Government's approach to gender pay gap reporting does not go as far as Lord Dubs suggested we need to go in this country—something much more akin to the way that the matter is dealt with Norway, for example, where all income is set out for everybody to see and where culturally that is not an issue—it is a small step towards not only increasing transparency but putting the gender pay gap on the agenda. My Select Committee said very firmly that we should have gender pay gap reporting for smaller firms. I think that the threshold in Scotland is 200 employees. There is more to do, but we have to put the issue on the agenda.

Margaret Murphy O'Mahony talked about changing the mindset around care. She is absolutely right: if we parliamentarians do not do that, we will be in trouble, because the millennial generation tells us overwhelmingly that they would take a pay cut or move to a less demanding job if they could not get the right balance between work and family life. It is not just millennial women who are saying that, but millennial men. If we are not to see a significant downshift in our productivity, we must give the next generation the opportunity to balance work with their home and family life better. If we do not, they will take action themselves, which I believe will harm our productivity as a nation.

My Select Committee did a report on parental leave. We have the notion of shared parental leave in the UK, but we need to go much further to make it effective. At the moment, only a handful of parents take up shared parental leave. Why? Unsurprisingly, it is because they worry about their employers thinking that they are not committed to their jobs. That sounds familiar to me, as someone who had three children while working. It is something that women have had to deal with for many years, and now men are having to deal with it, too.

12.45 pm

Helen Jones talked about the importance of Governments heeding select committee reports. I will applaud her to the rafters on that; I absolutely believe that that should be the case. Indeed, the Institute for Government—I am not sure whether its representatives are here today—would point us towards a report that it did on select committees that showed that about two thirds of Select Committee recommendations are taken up by Government, but it tends to be done in a rather hidden way, sometimes a few months after the event.

With regard to tribunal fees, obviously the courts have had their say on that, and we now have a situation in which access to tribunal fees has for many people been overturned. That is important. Helen Jones's point about post-legislative scrutiny is also absolutely vital, although I do not think that there is anything stopping Select Committees doing that. That goes back to her point that we need Governments to heed the advice that is coming from them.

Ms Pauline McNeill MSP:

I thank people for the work that is being done in the devolved Parliaments. I represent Labour in the Scottish Parliament and I cover the social security, housing and equalities brief.

If it were not for the quota system that Labour adopted in the early years of the Scottish Parliament, I would probably not be sitting here. I know many women who could say the same. The Scottish Parliament used to be third in terms of representation of women, but we are now well below 10th, which is sad. What does Maria Miller think about quotas in political parties?

She rightly identified that the gender pay gap is far too wide. There is, of course, a knock-on effect in terms of a pensions gap. I am sure that members are familiar with the position of the women against state pension inequality (WASPI) campaign. That campaign came about on the back of an equal rights issue for men, but women still bear the brunt of low pay, low pensions and, probably, universal credit. Do you agree that we need to get across the fact that not only is the gender pay gap an issue, but the gender pension gap is, too? Women with pensions will be poorer than men with pensions if we do not start to recognise that something has to be done about the pension gap as well as the pay gap. To all intents and purposes, the two are the same thing.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Does Maria Miller agree that the equality and human rights framework in Northern Ireland in particular would be enhanced if there were implementation of the Equality Act 2010 and a bill of rights, which was guaranteed in the Good Friday Agreement? The lack of a bill of rights has been regularly criticised in United Nations reports.

Ms Jayne Bryant AM:

Since its inception, the National Assembly for Wales has had the principle of equality at its core and, in 2003, the Assembly became the first legislature in the world to achieve perfect gender balance. That percentage of women dropped to 45 per cent at the last election, however, so there is certainly more to do.

We have gender equality in the NAW delegation here, and our Deputy Presiding Officer, Ann Jones—who is present today—and our Presiding Officer are women. Whether it involves gender equality across Parliaments, boards and elsewhere in public life, I believe that diverse representation makes for better decisions.

I am the chair of the Standards of Conduct Committee in the Welsh Parliament, and we have been working hard across the parties on our dignity and respect policy and on our report, "Creating the Right Culture". It is crucial that we work together across institutions, so I would welcome a commitment to our working together on how we can achieve that in our institutions in order to make real change.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

The last few decades in the Republic of Ireland have brought enormous changes, especially social changes, with people voting for same-sex marriage and, recently, to end the ban on abortion, and with the Dáil passing transgender legislation. There have been tremendous advances.

Recently, we have been tentatively discussing the idea of gender-based budgeting. I know that the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have made moves in that regard. What is the position of the UK Parliament on the issue? Gender-based budgeting could be valuable in terms of identifying how money is spent, given that traditional accounts just assume that "he" also means "she".

However, we would learn more about how resources are distributed between girls and boys in areas such as sport, and in terms of the broader issues around pensions, incomes and the gender-based pay gap. Certainly, for us, that is a significant problem in some areas. I think that a lot of us would be interested in seeing greater cooperation between the Parliaments and Assemblies in order to make progress on a systematic basis.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

On a similar point, we have talked about our work in BIPA and the cross-jurisdiction implications of abortion policy informing your own work. Following on from Joan Burton's point, I think that the other international treaty that is pertinent here is the Good Friday Belfast Agreement and the areas of North-South cooperation that it brought about. As we were reminded this morning, there are 150 areas of North-South cooperation. After the result of the referendum in the Republic of Ireland, British and Irish women living in the North will obviously be able to access services in the Republic. That is a profoundly new situation for both the Stormont Government and the position in Northern Ireland that I hope that the Committee will be able to take note of.

Rt Hon Maria Miller MP:

I will attempt to answer all those questions in turn, but please shout if I miss any out. Pauline McNeill talked about the importance of women in Parliament and the quota system in the Scottish Parliament. One of the Select Committee reports that we have done on women in Parliament in Westminster came to the conclusion that the quota system might be a route that we should go down if significant progress is not made. I say that tentatively because I think that although the parties have grasped the issue the Parliament itself has not done so. That is why I am particularly looking for Parliament to reform and become a place that more women want to go to; if that does not happen, we will create a situation in which people go somewhere where they might not enjoy

working, and that is not good. We know that women are much more likely to have shorter parliamentary careers than men, not only because of external factors but because of the nature of Parliament itself.

Ms McNeill also referred to the importance of pensions and recognition of women's pension situations. That situation has overwhelmingly been caused by women being forced into low-status, part-time jobs, and one of the things that my Committee has been calling for is a reform of the workplace to ensure more good-quality, flexible jobs. In this country, the proportion of jobs that are flexible and which pay more than £20,000 is minute and because of the inflexibilities in our labour market, we are forcing women into relatively low-quality employment with little progression, which has a knock-on effect on pensions.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh talked about a bill of rights. I am not somebody who can talk about that, as I am not an expert in human rights and am certainly no expert in that area of law. Therefore, please forgive me for passing on that question and leaving it to somebody much better qualified than I am to answer it.

In response to Jayne Bryant, I have to say that I am a bit of a Welsh girl myself as I was brought up in Bridgend. As someone married to a person who is Scottish and Canadian, I feel that we are a bit of a multi-ethnic family. I had the great pleasure of meeting your Presiding Officer and what struck me about the Welsh Assembly was that because it was set up very recently it has taken to heart the issues that are facing people, whether they be men or women. I am not surprised that you have achieved gender balance, given how your establishment works. I think that we need to look very carefully at the Welsh Assembly and, indeed, the Scottish Parliament to find out why you are getting this a lot more right than we are. After all, this is about more than just political parties.

Joan Burton talked about the importance of recognising the changes that are going on in the South of Ireland and, indeed, in society in general. They are challenging changes that we have to attend to. I also believe enormously that we need to show respect for devolution and for the nature of the agreements that have already been put in place. Abortion and same-sex marriage are devolved issues. As I was the Minister responsible for same-sex marriage going through under David Cameron's Government, I am very aware of the devolved nature of the agreement. That is not to say that, in looking at our international obligations, Committees such as mine should not take full account of progress—or the lack of it—in those areas, but we need to work together. It is no good trying to impose policy from Westminster—I simply do not think that that would work, because of international agreements. I hope that a collaborative approach, rather than the imposition of policy, will make things happen.

Finally, Karin Smyth MP talked about the cross-jurisdictional nature of certain issues. She is absolutely right, although I would not want to think that things that have happened in the Republic have to be a mirror image of what is happening in the North. We are all here today because we believe in respecting the views of others. It is very easy for us as parliamentarians to become entrenched in our views. Perhaps social media—or the media itself—has something to do with that.

When we talk about equality issues, we have to show enormous respect for other

people's views. I have yet to find a single parliamentarian with whom I work who holds their views because of some prejudice that is not born out of their experience and their own truly held personal beliefs. If we show disrespect for people's views and beliefs, we will make no progress. I hope that, as a cross-party Select Committee that looks at the evidence, we can, when we come to the particular issue of abortion in Northern Ireland, set out plainly what people in the communities think. The views will be very wide and divergent, and they will not necessarily accord with my own personal views, but I hope that, by allowing people to have a more transparent debate, we can find a way forward.

I know that I risk incurring the wrath of my colleague Mr Rosindell by going on, but I am thinking in particular of my recent visit to Northern Ireland, where I spoke to a woman who was in an appalling situation. The baby that she was carrying had been given a terminal diagnosis and would not be born alive. Having had three children myself, I cannot imagine what that would feel like, but that lady was not able to secure an abortion in circumstances in which most people, I think, would have thought it the only option open to her. If a woman finds herself in such a situation, the system is not working. That is what I am interested in—I am not interested in trying to determine or dictate local policy on the ground. I am interested in looking at those equality and human rights issues, which the Supreme Court has also pointedly remarked on.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank the Rt Hon Maria Miller on your behalf for a very thoughtful and interesting discussion. It has been, for many of us here, a very thought-provoking discussion, and I thank Maria Miller for her time. I apologise for the fact that we started the session a bit late, but I very much hope that she can remain and join us for lunch immediately afterwards. *[Applause.]*

I inform members that, immediately after we finish, there will be the usual British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly family photograph, in which all members are expected to take part. I am told that we are going to meet on the stairs for it. Personally, I think that it would be nice to have it taken outside if there is somewhere appropriate, but if the photographer suggests the stairs, so be it. As soon as the photograph is taken, we will have lunch in the Quadrato restaurant in the hotel. Everyone is expected back in this room to reconvene the assembly at 2.30 pm, when Seán Crowe TD will take the chair for the next session.

Without further ado, I suspend this morning's session. I look forward to seeing members on the stairs for the photograph.

The sitting was suspended at 1 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.37 pm.

**WHAT HAPPENED AT WESTMINSTER? MEN, WOMEN AND THE
REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT 1918**

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Welcome back, Members. I am pleased to invite our next speaker to mark the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918. Dr Mari Takayanagi is the joint project manager and co-curator of the Westminster Parliament's Vote 100 project. We are very fortunate to have her here to address us today. I call on Dr Takayanagi to give her address—I hope that I am pronouncing her name properly—and then, following the usual format, we will have questions.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

I am delighted to be here. I was supposed to give this talk at your plenary in Sligo in March, which, sadly, was snowed off—I got all the way to Gatwick airport before my plane was cancelled. I was sorry not to make it to Sligo, because I would have loved to have visited Lissadell House, the home of Constance Markievicz and her family. I still hope to get to Sligo one day but, alas, it was not possible this year. Instead, I am delighted to be able to talk to you here in London.

The title of my talk today is “What happened at Westminster? Men, women and the Representation of the People Act 1918”.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave the parliamentary franchise to virtually all men and to the first women to get the vote, who were women over the age of 30 who met minimum property qualifications. As such, 2018 is one of the most important anniversaries in the democratic history of the UK and Ireland.

Taking the long view, the 1918 Act forms part of a long series of electoral reform Acts from 1832 onwards that enfranchised men first, then women. The great reform Act—the Representation of the People Act 1832—enfranchised some men, but disenfranchised women by defining a voter as a “male person” for the first time. John Stuart Mill attempted to amend the second reform Bill to redefine a voter as a “person” in 1867 and, from that point on, Bills that aimed to enfranchise women were introduced to Parliament virtually every session. Some 60 Bills that aimed to give women the vote were introduced between 1867 and 1918, with much pressure in particular around the third reform Act, the Representation of the People Act 1884. However, even when such Bills obtained a majority in the House of Commons, as they sometimes did, no Government was prepared to give them time to pass and become law.

What actually happened at Westminster 100 years ago? What had changed in Parliament that enabled a Bill to pass in 1918? Why did women not get the vote on the same terms as men? Why was it from the age of 30, what were the property qualifications and what difference did the war make? My paper discusses how the Representation of the People Bill originated from the political need to give votes not to women, but to men. It explains the role of the Speaker's conference on electoral reform in 1916-17, how the conference recommendations came to be incorporated into the Bill and the continuing importance of the women's suffrage campaign throughout the war.

It is often forgotten today that approximately 40 per cent of men could not vote before 1918. The third reform Act of 1884 gave the vote to men who paid an annual rent or held land to the value of £10. As well as men who were poorer than that, other men

who were excluded from voting included men who moved around a lot and did not meet the 12-month residence requirement, such as soldiers, sailors and students, and men who lived in other people's houses, including some domestic servants and adult sons living at home with parents or other family members.

The adult suffrage movement is often overlooked but there were organisations, as well as the Labour Party and labour movement more generally, that campaigned before the First World War for all adults over the age of 21 to have the vote. The historian Karen Hunt has recently drawn attention to those "adultists", who differed from most women's suffrage groups that campaigned for women to have

"the Vote on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men."

For example, there was the Adult Suffrage Society, which was chaired in 1906 by Margaret Bondfield, who became one of the first Labour women MPs. There was the People's Suffrage Federation, which was formed in 1909 by Margaret Llewelyn Davies of the Women's Co-operative Guild. Another long-standing supporter of adult suffrage, or "human suffrage" as it was also known, was Sylvia Pankhurst, whose East London Federation of Suffragettes opposed the war on pacifist and socialist grounds, and which became the Workers' Suffrage Federation in 1916. Although none of that was as high profile and attention grabbing as the pre-war mass marches and militant activity of the suffragists and suffragettes, there was undoubtedly a constant level of interest in and agitation for votes for excluded men, as well as for women. However, it took the war to bring those arguments to the fore.

By 1916, it was clear that the next general election could not take place based on the pre-war electoral register. Men were going off in their millions to fight and die without any choice in the matter after the introduction of conscription in 1916. As the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, said:

"if anyone is entitled to a voice in the government of the country, the men who have been willing to risk life and limb in its defence are surely entitled to a share."

Furthermore, there were men who were working in munitions and other industries that were essential to the war, and, as Samuel went on to say:

"Great numbers of these men have moved from one part of the country to another and have consequently lost their ordinary qualifications".

Given the importance of women's contribution to the war effort, it became necessary to at least consider whether some women should also be included. Approximately 1 million additional women joined the workforce during the First World War, in areas such as transport, munitions and farm work. Women workers and others such as the Women Police Service volunteers were suddenly visible in public space and valued for their work; they gained confidence and new skills.

Suffrage campaigners used existing networks and campaigning experience to organise members in war work and other initiatives, in particular relieving families' economic distress that was caused by the war and conscription; running workrooms, toy factories, cost-price canteens and nurseries; and fundraising to help injured service personnel. Other women went directly to the western and eastern fronts to work as doctors, nurses and drivers, despite discouragement from the War Office; and more than 100,000 women served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Women's Royal Naval Service and Women's Royal Air Force. As Millicent Fawcett later said:

"No nation is sustained, either in peace or in war, by the work of one sex only; it is sustained by the work of

both sexes combined. And this, which we have always perceived, has come to many as a revelation, made clear by the great search-lights of war.”

However, it should be particularly remembered that the consideration of votes for women in 1916 followed the very long campaign for votes for women, which originated in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in the late 18th century. The first petition asking for the vote from an individual woman—Mary Smith—was presented to Parliament by Henry Hunt in 1832. The first national mass suffrage petition was organised in 1866, followed by decades of peaceful lobbying, petitioning and marching led by Millicent Fawcett and others, and then the militant campaign of the early 20th century led by Emmeline Pankhurst and others. Without all that, women would not have been considered for inclusion.

2.45 pm

It should also be realised that, although the Women’s Social and Political Union—the Pankhurst organisation—suspended militancy on the outbreak of war and all suffragette prisoners were released, suffrage campaigning did not cease but instead took different forms, influenced by support either for the war or for pacifism. Campaigns took place less in public and more behind the scenes. Millicent Fawcett wrote at length to Asquith, the Prime Minister, on 4 May 1916 to press the case most strongly for women to be included in any Bill expanding the franchise, a point that was widely discussed at that time. Although there was not much appetite in the House of Commons for a general election, the matter was urgent as the life of the Parliament had been extended more than once and the wartime coalition Government was fragile. However, the House of Commons could not agree a solution, so another way forward had to be found.

The Speaker’s conference on electoral reform was the brainchild of Walter Long, then president of the Local Government Board and previously leader of the Irish Unionists in the House of Commons. Long suggested that there should be a cross-party, cross-House body to make recommendations on electoral reform.

The Speaker of the House of Commons, James William Lowther, was asked to chair the conference, which he agreed to do with some reluctance. Speaker Lowther was generally acknowledged to be a dignified and tactful presence in his role presiding over the Commons. However, he also had to deal with militant suffragette activity in Parliament: he closed the Ladies’ Gallery for a while after the grille protest of 1908, when suffragettes chained themselves to the windows, and banned Emily Wilding Davison from the building in 1910. In 1913, he made a controversial ruling on women’s suffrage by declaring that it could not be added to a men’s suffrage Bill. That effectively scuppered the whole Bill, to the great anger of Asquith, some MPs, and suffrage campaigners, who consequently felt that they had little reason to trust the Speaker. However, he confounded their expectations, and Millicent Fawcett concluded he was justly famed for his

“courtesy, humour, and power of balancing contending factions”.

The conference met successfully over 26 sittings between October 1916 and January 1917, including throughout Parliament’s recess and through a change of Government and Prime Minister in December 1916. It was made up of 32 MPs and Peers, chosen by the Speaker to ensure party balance and a balance of opinion on controversial

issues, such as women's suffrage and proportional representation. Its initial membership included approximately 17 women's suffrage supporters and 10 anti-suffragists, with others undecided or unclear, even to the Speaker, who reported:

“On the question of Woman Suffrage I endeavoured to obtain an equal division of opinion ... but many obvious difficulties presented themselves in discovering the views of gentlemen upon that important topic.”

As well as franchise reform, the conference was asked to make recommendations on redistribution of seats, electoral registration, and method and cost of elections.

Suffrage campaigners, including Millicent Fawcett, leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, lobbied the conference members throughout, to ensure that women's suffrage was given proper consideration. The NUWSS asked to address the conference, and when this was refused, wrote to every member individually instead. The suffragettes of the WSPU, a breakaway group from the Pankhurst organisation, picketed conference members outside the House of Commons.

There was no formal record made of conference proceedings, but a number of accounts by its members survive. The Speaker explained in his memoirs that he took less controversial issues first, on which it was easier to get consensus, and then moved to more controversial ones, including women's suffrage. It is also noticeable that when certain conference members resigned who were known to be anti-suffrage, he appointed pro-suffragists in their place. Alexander MacCallum Scott, a pro-suffrage MP, gave much credit to the Speaker, writing:

“He told the Conference plainly that it was not a Parliamentary Debating Society ... the Government had asked us to find a way, and we had got to find a way ... When the two sides sat and stared blankly at each other he took the initiative and put proposals for their discussions ... He created the atmosphere of conciliation.”

One of the most dedicated women's suffrage supporters at the conference was Willoughby Dickinson MP. Willoughby Hyett Dickinson believed in women's suffrage as a matter of steadfast principle. His great-granddaughter, Baroness Jenkin, relates that that was because his sister was a doctor, and he could not accept that he should be any more entitled to vote than she was.

Unlike most MPs, Dickinson did not criticise suffragettes for militancy, writing on the actions of Emily Wilding Davison at the Derby in 1913, which resulted in her death:

“I cannot help admiring the pluck of the woman.”

Of all the members of the conference, he was the only one with a perfect record of both attending and voting in favour of every women's suffrage Bill between 1906 and 1914. That included his own private members' Bill in 1907. Appropriately, his daughter Joan would later become Viscountess Davidson and one of the first women MPs in 1937.

Dickinson recorded that, on 10 and 11 January 1917, the conference agreed to consider the question of women's suffrage by 18 votes to four and agreed that there should be some measure of women's suffrage by 15 votes to six, but a motion that that should be on the same terms as those for men was lost by 10 votes to 12. That is how close it was. From Dickinson's scribbled notes, it also appears that they voted on motions that women should have the franchise at age 25—no figures are given for that vote—at age 30, for which there were 11 votes for and eight against, and at age 35, for which there were 12 votes for and three against.

In Dickinson's own account, he stated:

“I made my proposition that the vote should go to occupiers or wives of occupiers, and this carried 9 to 8. Thus by a majority of one, the suffrage clause went forward!”

The Speaker duly reported that the conference decided by a majority to recommend that the franchise be conferred on all women who were on the local government register or whose husbands were, provided that they had reached a specified age,

“of which 30 and 35 received most favour”.

Later, the Speaker explained in the House of Commons:

“It was thought desirable that women and men should be somewhere about on a parity, and we took the age of thirty, which was the nearest we could get to make the number of women voters equal to the number of men.”

That was partly due to the loss of men in the war.

How did the conference recommendations come to be embodied in the Representation of the People Bill? On 28 March 1917, Asquith, the former Prime Minister but now the leader of the Opposition, moved the motion in the House of Commons:

“That this House records its thanks to Mr. Speaker for his services in presiding over the Electoral Reform Conference, and is of opinion that legislation should promptly be introduced on the lines of the Resolutions reported from the Conference.”

That passed with a huge majority despite the efforts of Arnold Ward MP, son of the anti-suffragist leader Mrs Humphry Ward, to amend it.

The following day, a large deputation of women war workers, presided over by Millicent Fawcett and including Charlotte Despard and Emmeline Pankhurst, met the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, at 10 Downing Street to lobby for the inclusion of women’s suffrage. Although the women would have preferred the vote to be on the same terms as those for men and for the Government whips to be put on rather than there be a free vote, Lloyd George warned the women that that would risk antagonising anti-suffrage MPs and losing everything. The attitude of the deputation was summed up by Millicent Fawcett, who said:

“We would greatly prefer an imperfect scheme that can pass to the most perfect scheme in the world that could not pass.”

Emmeline Pankhurst said in wartime that she wanted to see the vote given

“with as little disputes and as little difference as possible.”

Not all women’s suffrage campaigners agreed with that. The adultists, including Sylvia Pankhurst, opposed it to the end. The Australian socialist and suffragette Dora Montefiore wrote that it was

“carrying out the spirit and aspiration of the Conservative women in the movement”,

and that, because of

“these ladies who are so eager to betray the interests of working women, we shall have Woman Suffrage measure in its very worst form placed on the Statute Book, and what should have been a broadening out of liberties will become a reactionary and treacherous betrayal.”

She was in a minority, however.

So women’s suffrage was included in the Bill, but on a free vote. The Speaker’s conference member William Bull MP credited the fact that the age given was 30 rather than 35 to the actions of Walter Long during drafting. A few years later, he related:

“I attended the meeting of the Drafting Committee. Lord Long took the Chair, and there were also present the Home Secretary and the draftsman. When we came to the question of the age, Lord Long said, ‘This is rubbish,’ and he

struck out 35, and put in 30.”

The requirement for women to meet the local government franchise eligibility was advocated by Willoughby Dickinson as follows:

“I believe you will get a very fair system of representation of women. It practically comes to this, that under this scheme you do not give the vote to servant maids, daughters and other people in that position in a family, but you give the vote to the head of the household. You practically give to women what the men were first of all given in former years; you give them a household franchise. The head of the house, the mother of the family in every family, rich and poor, would have the vote.”

Despite the age and property restrictions that capped the number of women voters, there was still opposition in the House of Commons. As the long-standing suffrage opponent Frederick Banbury MP declared:

“We have been told that the War has made a very considerable alteration in the situation. I should be the last person to deny that women have done well, and have been of very great assistance to us during the years of trial, but I fail to see any reason in that for giving them the vote.”

He was in the minority. Banbury had been a member of the Speaker’s conference; he resigned in December 1916 before women’s suffrage was considered.

The crucial clause in the Bill passed in the House of Commons by 385 votes to 55. Including tellers, the Liberals voted for the clause 184 to 12, and the Conservatives voted for it 140 to 45. All the Irish Nationalists and Labour MPs backed it.

Comparisons with pre-war divisions are complex because bills were different in nature then, but it is clear that there was a large reversal among Liberals and Conservatives, with high-profile conversions such as Asquith and Long. Conservatives and Unionists had much less reason to fear limited women’s suffrage once universal male suffrage had been granted. Millicent Fawcett wrote to thank supportive MPs and added that she hoped that the big majority would

“provide deep waters enough to float over the rocks of the House of Lords”.

The Lord Chancellor, Robert Finlay, was responsible for piloting the Representation of the People Bill through the House of Lords. He had been a member of the Speaker’s conference before he was made Lord Chancellor in December 1916. However, as it was a free vote, he was not bound to support the women’s suffrage clause. Instead, he voted and spoke against it, arguing that there was no evidence that women wanted the vote and that it would be a “leap in the dark”. Despite that, the clause passed in the Lords by 134 votes to 71. Lord Curzon, the president of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, abstained on the ground that he did not want to bring the Lords into conflict with the Commons on an issue that affected their own constitution. Millicent Fawcett was present, sitting with a small group of women in a “small pewlike enclosure” near the bar of the House. She called it:

“the greatest moment of my life”.

The Act received Royal Assent on 6 February 1918.

What did the Act actually do? It tripled the electorate from 7.7 million in 1910 to 21.4 million in 1918 and gave the vote to 13 million men—virtually all men aged 21 years or older. A man got the vote if he had occupied a residence for six months, regardless of the value of the premises or the rates paid, and he got a possible second vote if he had business premises in a different constituency or through the university franchise. Those who were away on war service received an absentee ballot for the constituency in which they normally lived. Men who were on military or naval service in

connection with the current war were allowed to vote from the age of 19, and conscientious objectors who had not performed other war services or alternative work of national importance were disqualified from voting for five years.

Women got the vote if they were aged 30 or older and if they or their husband qualified for the local government franchise. That meant occupying a dwelling house, which might be a house or a discrete part of a house of any value, or land or premises with a yearly value of not less than £5. Those provisos excluded approximately one third of the adult female population. Approximately one third of the women who were excluded were over 30, including women who lived at home with parents or other family members, who were resident servants in someone else's household or who lived in furnished rooms or hostels.

The exclusion of resident servants, in particular, was significant. Although the numbers of those employed in domestic service had declined since Victorian times, the 1931 England and Wales census shows that there were 1.3 million female servants, of whom about 60 per cent still lived in someone else's household. Such women would have been unable to vote before 1928, even if they were over the age of 30, and many women who worked in factories, shops and offices during the war would have been living at home with parents or in furnished rooms, so, similarly, they would have been voteless at any age.

Women were also given the university franchise, provided that they were over 30 years old and would be entitled to be registered if they were male, even if their university did not admit women for degrees. By 1918, only the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge did not admit women for degrees. The University of Oxford did so in 1920; the University of Cambridge did not do so until 1948.

Unlike men, women were not eligible for the business premises franchise, and no woman under 30 could vote, even if they were a university graduate or on military or naval service. Therefore, gender equality and rewarding war service were not as important principles of reform as retaining traditional considerations of electoral eligibility, such as age, respectability, class, property and education.

During the debate, it was thought that the vote would be given to about 6 million women, but the eventual figure was approximately 8.4 million. As the historian Nicoletta Gullace has said, it was "incongruous but not unacceptable" to give votes to women ostensibly for their patriotic war service while excluding young female munitions workers. Although there was a compromise, pro-suffrage MPs were clear that that was the best possible result. David Lloyd George told the deputation of women that the age limit was illogical and unjustifiable, unpalatable and undesirable, but necessary for consensus. Willoughby Dickinson recognised that young war workers would not get the vote, but at least

"their mothers, their sisters and the women who know what they have been doing and who are quite as well capable of exercising it in their behalf as themselves"

would.

The accounts of the Speaker's conference and the debates on the Bill make it clear that it was not possible for Parliament to agree to equal franchise in 1918. That had to wait until 1922 in Ireland, when equal franchise was included in the constitution of

the Irish Free State, and until 1928 in the UK, when the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 was passed. Despite the age and property restrictions on women, the 1918 Act was a huge concession of principle: gender alone was no longer a barrier to voting.

As we celebrate the 1918 Act this year, we should remember the crucial role of the Speaker's conference, which is not well remembered today. However, the Act could never have happened without it. In particular, credit is due to little-known conference members such as Willoughby Dickinson MP and Speaker Lowther, as well as to Millicent Fawcett, Emmeline Pankhurst and all the other women's suffrage campaigners who never stopped campaigning during the war.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

So there was no evidence that women wanted the vote.

I will open the meeting to questions from the floor. May I have questions, please?

3.00 pm

Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

In 1881, women on the Isle of Man were not voting, but Emmeline Pankhurst's mother was born there and was able to vote from that date, although she never saw the franchise extended in the UK. What reason—logical or illogical—was given at the time for the age limit of 30? That was not a step that was taken in my jurisdiction, so I am just wondering what the logic was.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

There are some odd examples of places with very early franchises in some parts of the world, of which the Isle of Man is one. I would love to know more about that situation.

On the age limit of 30, the Speaker and the MPs were quite open about saying in Parliament that it was to restrict the number of women voters. Because of the war, if women had been given the vote on the same terms as men, they would have outnumbered male voters, which, in 1918, was thought not to be acceptable. It might sound ridiculous to us today, but people had no idea how women would vote. All sorts of things were said in Parliament and outside it, such as that women would vote only for other women or for odd or non-party candidates, or on the basis of ridiculous policies such as bedtime hours for children. Such arguments went on and on. Of course, what happened was that, after the 1918 Act, it was found that women voted for pretty much the same reasons as men do. However, that was not known beforehand, so there you go.

Ms Helen Jones MP:

It was interesting to hear Maria Miller say earlier that she would not have been here 100 years ago. I certainly would not, because none of my forebears got the vote in 1918. There was huge disillusionment among working-class women—certainly

among those in the mills of Lancashire and Cheshire, who had campaigned very hard for the vote.

We have focused very much on the anniversary, and there has been too much focus on the suffragettes rather than on the suffragists, who actually did more for the campaign. I wonder whether the archives contain just as much information about what led to the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928. I hope that we will do something to commemorate that Act, after which most working-class women got the vote. We hear constantly that women got the vote in 1918 but, in the area that I come from, a lot of women did not.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

Yes—absolutely. In the Houses of Parliament this year, during Vote 100, as we have called it, we have been at pains to stress that the anniversary of the establishment of the universal male franchise is very important, too, that the 1918 Act applied to only some women, and what the restrictions were. Over the summer, I was the co-curator of a big exhibition in Parliament, at which I hope that all those messages got through. We particularly tried to avoid some of the things that we see very much in public life, such as the purple, white and green branding that was used by only the militant suffragettes; we went for colours that were not especially associated with any part of the suffrage movement. I know a lot of curators of other exhibitions and people who work in libraries, museums and archives, many of whom have tried to bring those messages across, but it is very hard to interest the media in particular and funding bodies in going beyond the militant suffragette angle. I could not agree with you more.

I am sorry that I did not hear Maria Miller speak earlier, as I arrived at lunchtime. However, on the idea that you could not have been an MP 100 years ago, I point out that people did not have to be able to vote in order to become an MP. That is perhaps not widely known, but I hope that it will become better known. We are now approaching the anniversary, on 21 November, of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918, which allowed women to stand to become MPs. I could have given you a whole different talk on that. I regard it as a much more radical piece of legislation than the Representation of the People Act 1918, because it contained no age or property qualifications. That eventually led to Jennie Lee being elected when she was too young to vote for herself and to there being a number of women parliamentary candidates for all parties over the next 10 years who were too young to vote for themselves or who did not meet the property qualification. Ellen Wilkinson, who was one of the early Labour women MPs, was over the age of 30 when she was elected, but she did not meet the property qualification, so she was unable to vote for herself. There is a whole different story about that, and I hope that the anniversary on 21 November will bring out some of that.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am going to take a group of questions from Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Linda Fabiani and Viscount Bridgeman.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

That was very interesting. I had to give a lecture recently in Dublin Castle about the 1918 elections. I can send it to you. It is in Irish, but I could translate it for you if you are interested. Going back over some of the statistics from years ago, I found it very interesting to see just how radical a change there was. In Ireland, there were an extra 1.2 million voters, 36 per cent of whom were women. That is fantastic, even by today's standards, and it was not just women who were added to the electoral roll.

You alluded to the perception that the radicalised women who were demanding the vote would vote for radical parties, and there was some comment about who the women who had been active as suffragettes voted for afterwards and that one might not have been able to presume that the two would be the same—from a distance, at least, although it might have been well known at the time. For instance, in Ireland, Anna Haslam of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association voted for Sir Maurice Dockrell, who was a Unionist not known to be the most open in terms of women's votes.

There were other clashes. You mentioned that the vote on Willoughby Dickinson's private member's Bill was very narrow. It was lost by 47 votes, but 54 of the Irish Parliamentary Party voted against it, and there was a campaign against John Redmond and others, although they were not the only ones who voted against it, by those who had presumed that they would vote with other people in England and the rest of Britain at the time.

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

My thoughts are the same as Helen Jones's. There seems to have been a general frustration about the difference between the suffragists and the suffragettes, especially those who were campaigning far away from London and were therefore unable to be down there for all sorts of reasons. Rather than repeat what Helen Jones said, I would like to take it a wee bit further, and I would like Mari Takayanagi's opinion on this. I have often wondered whether what happened in 1918 would have happened if the suffragist movement had not ended up with the suffragette movement working alongside it, being militant and being able to be at Westminster to lobby people.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

I am sure that many people in this room are a lot more expert on Irish suffrage than I am, but I find it very interesting that Irish MPs voted against suffrage immediately before the First World War. I have always understood that that was because they did not want to risk losing home rule and that home rule was considered to be much more important than suffrage at the end of the day, however much individuals may have believed in suffrage. I have managed to forget the name of one particular MP whose history I looked into, but his wife was a suffragette in the Women's Freedom League, which was one of the militant organisations, and he voted against those bills in 1913, just as Aengus Ó Snodaigh said. I wonder what the situation at home must have been like for him.

There were many other issues. It is easy to assume that women's suffrage was the most important issue at the time but, before the first world war, it appeared very low

on many politicians' agendas. The House of Commons could vote in favour of women's suffrage as much as it wanted to, but the Government were very reluctant to give time for any voting reform Bill, let alone one that included women's suffrage.

Aengus Ó Snodaigh said that radical campaigns do not necessarily lead to people voting in radical ways. That relates to what I said previously. Women end up voting for similar reasons as men do. There could have been all sorts of considerations, including the war, the peace settlement, the empire, budgets and the Irish political situation. It is not necessarily the case that people simply supported votes for women by any means.

Does that cover your points?

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Yes.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

With regard to suffragists and suffragettes, the question of whether the suffragettes' militant movement helped or hindered women's suffrage is still actively debated by historians today. Some historians are prepared to argue quite strongly that, if it was not for the war, women would have got the vote in 1914 because of the difference that the suffragettes had made, and others are prepared to argue, just as strongly, the complete opposite and say that, by 1914, women's suffrage was a dead issue and the war changed everything for various reasons.

A lot of historians fail to look at the situation in Parliament—perhaps I am helped a little bit by working in the parliamentary archives and by understanding parliamentary processes and procedures a little more than most people do. When looking at how women's suffrage happened, what comes through very strongly is how difficult it was to pass the legislation even as late as 1917 and 1918. It was hard fought for, because some MPs were still willing to die in that last ditch, and it was difficult to cobble together a consensus, even with the age restriction and the property qualification.

I am not convinced that we were particularly close to votes for women in 1914—the war changed a lot. We have been talking about what the media makes of votes for women, this year, and the caveat to what I have said is that there is a very lazy narrative that votes for women was a reward for their war work. As I have explained—I hope—nothing could be further from the case, because the women who got the vote were not the women who had done the war work. The war changed a lot of things: it changed many people's perceptions, it changed the political and parliamentary situation, it gave MPs such as Asquith the reason to change their minds and climb down off their high horses, and it gave women's suffrage campaigners the chance to show what they could do. However, the vote was not given to women as a reward for their war work. Does that answer the question?

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

I would like to probe that a wee bit more. Had it not been for the actions of the suffragettes and their closeness to Parliament, would women's suffrage have taken

longer?

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

By “closeness”, do you mean in terms of lobbying and influencing?

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

Yes. I also mean the positions in society that some of the women held. I do not necessarily mean the direct action, but that action was given publicity, so the issues were reported on and in the public eye.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

There is no doubt that a lot more was going on behind the scenes than ever made the news. That was certainly true when the First World War started, but it was also true before that. There is correspondence between Emmeline Pankhurst and David Lloyd George in the Lloyd George papers, for example. We also know that Millicent Fawcett wrote to Asquith and Lloyd George. Much of that correspondence survives, and we can see that those women, at least in some situations, could get meetings, put forward their opinions and get letters to the right people. However, there were too many other political factors, particularly before the First World War, for that to make a huge difference.

Once the war started, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst supported, and mobilised young women for, the war effort. Again, there is a lazy narrative that Emmeline and Christabel abandoned suffrage when the war started. That is not true either, because they believed that the way to get the vote was to support the war, the state and Lloyd George, when he became Prime Minister, in his efforts to get women to join the war effort. They thought that there were other more important things, such as winning the war, but they never lost sight of women’s suffrage, so it is hard to believe that they were not mentioning it behind the scenes while they were busy mobilising women war workers.

The suffragists—the peaceful campaigners—were split. Many of them were pacifists and completely opposed to the war. Indeed, Sylvia Pankhurst said that the suffragettes were also split. Part of the reason that Millicent Fawcett supported the war was that she, too, was patriotic, as she would, I think, have described it at the time, but her support also helped her to keep that closeness to Government during the war.

3.15 pm

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I will take three questions, starting with Viscount Bridgeman.

The Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you, Co-Chair.

You can correct me, but I think that Speaker Lowther was created Lord Ullswater—

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

Yes.

The Viscount Bridgeman:

—and his eventual successor Nicholas Ullswater is a colleague in the House of Lords today.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

Oh! Lovely. Thank you.

The Baroness Suttie:

Thank you very much. I found your talk really interesting. I had not known about the Speaker's conference.

What key lessons are to be learned from the process of building consensus? If this not an inappropriately political question for you, are there any lessons to be learned for the current situation in which we find ourselves?

Mr Vernon Coaker MP:

What interest have you had from young people about your studies of what happened in 1918, the whole thing about the 100th anniversary of votes for women and Helen Jones' point about 1928? That is a loaded question. I ask that because you—or someone else—sent around a lot of packs on the topic. We then did a lot of work with young trade unionists and young people in schools. The response was amazing, which is quite something, given the frustration that we all sometimes have about young people's knowledge of and involvement in politics. I picked up the pack and thought that we should do something with it. What is your experience and that of others in Britain and Ireland? For example, we discussed Constance Markievicz. Many of the young people had never heard of her. Whatever one's views of the rights and wrongs of all these matters, her story brings history alive. It was the first time that many of those young people had thought about the issues.

I thought that whomever produced and made available the resource did an amazing piece of work. Has there been an evaluation of its impact on learning about history and about the importance of struggle in achieving things in politics not only for women, including young women, but men, including young men, whose attitudes also need to change in all sorts of other ways? Has there been any reflection on that? Is it worth doing?

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

You are absolutely right about Lord Ullswater. The conference is sometimes known as the Ullswater conference, even though he was not Lord Ullswater at the time,

which I remember confused me no end in the past.

On building consensus, I have tried to describe the conference as best as I could, based on what I could glean about it. As politicians, you are all much better equipped than me to know how you might apply the lessons learned. The Speaker clearly had to deploy tactics, which a number of participants described as taking the easy things first and getting agreement on those before moving on to the more difficult things.

I talked a lot about women's suffrage, but proportional representation occupied vast amounts of discussion. That was all for nothing, because there was a free vote on that part of the Bill and, unlike on women's suffrage, the House of Commons could not agree on the matter and it was voted out of the Bill. They spent a lot of energy and time on the issue. The Speaker passionately believed in proportional representation and really wanted to see that through. Alas, it was all for nothing.

Membership was also very important to the conference. The Speaker started with a balance, but when a couple of members who happened to be anti-suffragists left for personal or other reasons, he replaced them with pro-suffragists. It is quite difficult to see that, and I do not think that it could have been that obvious at the time, because getting hold of the voting records of all the MPs would not necessarily be that easy. As time progressed, and it became more important to reach a consensus quickly, he saw the need to stack the membership a little. Whether you can take any lessons from that for politics today, I do not know.

The Speaker saw himself as a man on a mission and with a job to do. The Commons could not agree, but the matter had to be agreed—there was no choice in the matter. He did not want to do the job. His first reaction was that he could not imagine anything more terrible than chairing the conference but, once he got the job, he clearly regarded it as his job to find a consensus, get an agreement and get recommendations out there, and that is what he did.

I cannot take any credit for parliamentary education resources myself, but the parliamentary education service has wonderful resources online and for delivery in schools. Away from Parliament, the Government itself has done an awful lot. The Government Equalities Office has done an awful lot of work on education resources. The main thing that I have been working on this year is the exhibition in Parliament. The aim was always to attract a younger audience and therefore to make it as interactive and immersive as possible, which I think we succeeded in doing. The ultimate aim that we always had was that people would leave the exhibition more likely to vote than they were when they came in. To that end, we had a peg board at the end where people could put in a coloured peg to say what they were going to do, with statements such as, "I pledge to get involved in my UK Parliament by" and options such as "voting or registering to vote", "signing or starting a petition", "giving evidence to a select committee", and all the other ways in which people—even people too young to vote—can still interact with Parliament. That was enormously popular and the feedback forms, of which we received many thousands, contained a number of comments from people who said that they would write to their MP about fracking or some other cause that they felt strongly about and from teachers saying that they would teach their class about it.

I firmly believe that it is by knowing their history that people understand how hard

won their rights are and how recently they were won, and it makes them more likely to exercise those rights in future. That is why I am an advocate for getting the story out there. I am sure that there is much more that could be done, but we have made inroads this year in celebrating the events of 1918 and the centenary.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Constance Gore-Booth, or Constance Markievicz, had a younger sister called Eva Gore-Booth, who was really influential when she came to live in England, ultimately in the London area, because she was instrumental in the trade union movement in England at the time, particularly among the Lancashire cotton mill workers. In fact, she moved motions at the turn of the century in favour of women's suffrage, which were changed at the Labour party conference to motions on universal suffrage, although I do not know what the internal debate was. She lived most of her life in England and was very well known. She was also a poet and writer. She died in the 1920s and was buried in Hampstead with her lifelong companion, a woman called Esther Roper, who was also a significant trade unionist and a suffragette. It is an interesting story and Michael D Higgins, the President of Ireland, has written quite an amount about Eva Gore-Booth. She is quite famous in Ireland but has perhaps been forgotten about in the UK.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

That is true, just as Constance Markievicz, or Gore-Booth, is not as well known as she should be. I went to see a play called "Constance and Eva" earlier this year, and I hope that that sort of thing means that her name is getting out there.

As we are nearing the end of the meeting, perhaps I could leave members with one last observation, since we are talking about the Gore-Booth family. My favourite theory about Constance Markievicz is that, although she was elected as an MP, she was not actually eligible because she lost her British nationality when she married a Pole. That is not something that people are generally aware of, but British women lost their nationality on marriage to foreigners at that time, so she would have lost eligibility to become an MP. Of course, the question never arose because she never came to Westminster to take her seat, but that is my personal favourite fact about her.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you very much for your presentation. We all found it very interesting.

Dr Mari Takayanagi:

Thank you for having me. *[Applause.]*

DEBATE ON THE PROGRESS OF BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will now commence our political debate on a motion approved by our Steering Committee. I call on Mr Declan Breathnach TD to move on behalf of the Steering

Committee.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

I move:

That this Assembly takes note of the outcome of the European Council of 17-18 October and discussions on the Brexit negotiations; and reaffirms its resolution of 16 October 2017 which stated that the absence of a hard border in Ireland is necessary, recognises that there are different opinions on how to safeguard this achievement, and calls for every effort to be made in the Brexit negotiations to achieve a positive, solution-focussed outcome on this issue.

It has been a very difficult few weeks of negotiations and it was almost as difficult to find a compromise motion that satisfied everybody in the course of our Edinburgh discussion and that of yesterday evening. It has been designed to give the opportunity for everybody in the room to discuss Brexit, not just in terms of Northern Ireland but in terms of both Governments, the Parliaments and the devolved Administrations. It will give everybody an opportunity to have their say and I hope we can move ahead on that basis.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I call on Members to use this opportunity to make contributions on the motion put forward by Declan Breathnach. I ask members to keep their contributions as succinct as possible so that we can ensure all those who wish to speak have the opportunity to do so. On such a significant issue, it is vital we hear a wide range of views.

The Lord Dubs:

I am a bit taken aback at being the first person to speak but I thank the Co-Chairperson for giving me the opportunity. I will be blunt. I was one of the 670,000 people who marched in London on the demonstration and I am glad that other colleagues were also there. If the demonstration were to achieve what it wanted it would be “problem solved” because we would have a second vote and would vote either to remain or to reaffirm the decision of the first referendum. Those who supported the first referendum have nothing to lose by giving the people another chance to comment on it.

All through the Brexit campaign I felt, as did other people, that if there was one reason to vote to remain, even if every other argument pointed to the case for leaving - which I do not believe was the case - it was Ireland and the border. That seems to be a more important issue than all the others on either side of the Brexit debate. In the middle of the referendum campaign, I was due to speak at a meeting of the Irish community in Birmingham with John Bruton and Shirley Williams. It was rather a tragic day because on the train up to Birmingham I heard that Jo Cox had been murdered and the meeting was cancelled. Nevertheless, the meeting was one of many attempts to influence the result of the referendum vote and to argue the case for Ireland. If we cannot have a second vote it would, at the very least, be a good thing to be part of the customs union. If Britain decided to stay in the customs union it would deal with a large part of the issue to do with the border, if not the totality of it. It has to be considered.

We do not know what will happen at Westminster and people always ask me what I think. I do not know and I have yet to meet anybody else who believes he or she can predict what will happen. It is a very sad day that we have to discuss this at all and I feel very much for our colleagues from Ireland as they see what the Brits have done to make a mess of the whole situation. I know the Co-Chairperson does not agree with me on this but that is democracy; we can differ on this.

I feel very strongly about it. At a minimum, Britain should stay in the customs union and that may be achievable through parliamentary votes. The best thing, however, would be a second referendum and a second chance for the people of Britain to have a say, now they can see the details of what it all means.

3.30 pm

The Lord Bew:

The motion specifically mentions a hard border and BIPA has been 100% opposed to this from the day and hour of the Brexit referendum. Everybody across the spectrum of political tendencies agrees there should not be a hard border. I am happy to say I think it very unlikely there will be one but there is one possible route, which is if the current negotiations between the EU and the British Government do not reach a benign compromise. Those who are particularly strong on what the EU should get out of this deal may be the very people who, by pushing the EU side of the argument, end up giving us a hard border by accident.

My next point is more of a question than anything else. I understand the Irish Government is bringing in thousands of new customs officers but I understand the Taoiseach is saying they will never be employed on the border. I also read in the European press of reports that Pascal Lamy, the great trade guru, said Ireland will have to have officials on its border, though this is not the view of the European Union. The only route to a hard border is a failure to compromise now and in the next few weeks. Is the Taoiseach right or are those people in the European Union right when they say Ireland will have to have customs officials on its border? I do not know the answer but I hope somebody in the room does.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

As with most members, I find this situation quite challenging. The end of the motion, as drafted, refers to finding a positive, solution-focused outcome on this issue, which we can all agree is a desirable outcome. I do not, however, believe there is any positive solution to the Brexit situation as a whole. We have spent the past two years talking about damage limitation - limiting the damage of a bad decision. The Co-Chairperson asked for a broad spectrum of views and mine is that global-trading Britain is a fantasy, a nonsense that has been sold to people and whose damaging consequences we are now trying to limit.

One of my biggest concerns at the moment is that we have a UK Government which is seriously contemplating no deal as an option. I ask members to forgive me but I cannot remember the side of the red bus, which was used during the campaign, carrying the message that we will probably not have adequate food. The Government,

however, is producing position papers on how we deal with the potential of a no-deal outcome in terms of securing food supplies and medicines - a farcical situation and an embarrassing one for the UK to be in. It is of even greater concern that, in the context of how the debate is shaping in the UK, the idea of no deal is on the table, which makes even a very bad deal look palatable in comparison. Those of us who know a bad deal is a bad deal, and the millions of people across the UK, in Ireland and the rest of Europe who will lose out as a result, should not allow the prevailing media narratives to turn a bad deal into what looks like a good deal by virtue of the fact that something even worse is on the table.

We need to be realistic about this. I am not particularly enthusiastic about a people's vote but I recognise that it is something towards which public opinion is shifting and is entirely legitimate to ask for, given that what will be on the table at the end of this process is far from what was offered by the campaigners who won in 2016.

Senator Frank Feighan:

It is good to have a robust debate on this very important issue. I agree with Mr Greer that there are no upsides from Brexit and it is all damage limitation. I helped launch an SDLP Irish for Europe campaign in Westminster before the 2016 referendum. We were trying to encourage Irish citizens living in the UK to vote to remain on the grounds that it would be in our interest. The anecdotal evidence is that they voted not to remain but to leave. We are used to referendums and we have one in two weeks' time on whether to take blasphemy out of the constitution. We have effectively had 27 referendums in 27 years and people never answer the question they are asked. If they do not like the Government on a matter they vote against the Government. It was on the issue of turf cutting in one case and, in this case, it was probably to do with immigration.

We are in a very difficult situation. The Irish Government tried to articulate the impact on the Good Friday Agreement and the effect on the Irish border but this was not taken into account. If the border was on the UK mainland, it would probably still not have been taken into account because people never look at the technical issues. I hope it works out because a good deal for the UK is a good deal for Ireland and *vice versa*, and we should work together to get a good deal.

For the past 100 or 200 years, the Irish question and the Irish border have dogged British politics. I hope that, on this occasion and perhaps in a roundabout way, the Irish border and the Irish question will help British politics.

Ms Pauline McNeill MSP:

I would go further than Ross Greer and say that, far from being damage limitation, this is the worst time in British politics in my lifetime. I have had four sessions in the Scottish Parliament and have never seen such divisive years in British and Scottish politics. We are divided on the question of independence as well as on the Brexit question. I was a reluctant remainer but I have complete disrespect for the leadership of those who took us out of Europe without a plan. There is no governance for Brexit. In yesterday's *The Sunday Times* Tim Shipman, who is regarded as the closest person to what is going on and has a good understanding of it, says even sensible voices in

the Tory party are now saying there is no sensible leadership or governance at a time when we are trying to manage our way out of the European Union. This is an absolute disaster. It is a disaster for Ireland, for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales. We do not have time to analyse the damage it will do to the whole of the UK but Scotland is concerned about an immigration policy that does not recognise that we will lose staff we need from the NHS, as we already have done because they did not understand their rights in respect of remaining in Scotland because it took the Prime Minister so long to guarantee rights for European nationals. Even though I say I respect the outcome, we are in a complete shambles at the moment.

I will come to the motion. This is only my second plenary session and I am not familiar with how business is done but every single speaker around the table has expressed the highest level of concern about the prospect of a border of any kind between the North and the South of Ireland and I would have thought the motion needed to reflect that in language somewhat harder than what we have. It states that the absence of a hard border in Ireland is necessary but I would have liked stronger language on this. There seems to be a consensus in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly that believes a border is completely unacceptable.

Like Lord Dubs, I believe the only way forward in any deal is to be part of a customs union, which resolves the border question as it does the issues of Scotland and the rest of the UK, which needs to be able to trade with no tariffs. If we are not in a customs union in the long run, logic states there is no other way than to have some kind of border controls. I am sure there are lots of political reasons behind the scenes for the wording of the motion and I was not party to that, but I would like stronger language from this Assembly to the effect that any compromise on a hard border is not acceptable.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

We heard from the ambassador today that bilateral trade between the UK and Ireland is €70 billion per year and Ireland is our fifth biggest trading partner. Not enough attention has been given to the Irish perspective and the question of the border and that is disgraceful. We are taking our Irish neighbours for granted, on the issue of trade but also on the issue of security. A 900-year old problem was solved after a 30-year war in the North of Ireland and it is very precious.

The level of ignorance on the part of some Brexiteers is unbelievable, and I speak as a Welsh MP. I am north Walian and Holyhead is the second busiest port by footfall in the United Kingdom. Holyhead is part of the trans-European network, taking most of its trade from Ireland down to London and into Europe. It is a precious route that needs to be preserved. Many people today have stressed the east-west bonds and have suggested an extra session for the BIPA. My home town of Rhyl is twinned with Athy and we should do more on the twinning front so that the bonds are strengthened on a people-to-people basis. My daughter is looking to spend her gap year in another university around the world and there should be more student exchanges between our two countries. We do not want to pull away from each other but need to embed our relationship with the Republic of Ireland.

I think Ross Greer is right to have said he did not think there would be a solution for

the border and that what was being proposed will certainly not suffice. There is talk of stockpiling medicine and food, a promise of the police and the army on the streets and suggestions of 17-mile queues at Dover with food rotting at our ports. None of this was promised before the Brexit vote. The closer we get to the precipice and the more we look over it, the more it confirms that it will be a terrible situation. There has to be a dose of realism on the part of Brexiteers on these issues, especially the issue of the border.

Mr Nigel Evans MP:

Let us look at three issues. One is the second referendum. David Cameron's Conservative Government issued a pamphlet about a month before the referendum, which said we would deliver what the British people voted for. There is enough video footage of politicians, from John Major down, who said that whatever the people decide, that is it, and that there would not be another chance as it was a once-in-a-generation event. When one starts to question the result, which was 52%-48% in favour of leaving on the largest turnout in a democratic exercise in the United Kingdom, one has to look at the integrity of democracy. Democracy is at stake here and we have to be very careful before we start to change the ground rules on which the referendum was held, simply because a number of people do not like the result. I can understand why people do not like the result but the result was what it was.

People have mentioned the customs union but it was made explicit during the campaign, by both David Cameron and George Osborne, that we would leave the customs union and the Single Market. To remain part of the customs union and Single Market was not what people voted for so we have to leave both, as we leave the European Union to take control of our borders and levels of immigration into the United Kingdom. As I understand it, to remain part of the customs union would cost billions of pounds and we would have to have free movement of labour. That is not what people voted for.

3.45 pm

The Northern Ireland-Ireland border is the biggest sticking point as far as the European Union and we are concerned. Iain Duncan Smith has made some suggestions and we all know what happens in St Pancras, where there is a French immigration official on British soil while we have a British immigration official at Gare du Nord, where passports are checked on account of the fact that we are not part of the Schengen relationship. That seems to work and there is a suggestion that customs officials could monitor at points of entry into the United Kingdom. I have no problem with that. Only 1% of non-EU goods are now looked at in Southampton. There has been talk of lorry parks on the motorways at Dover or in Calais but we have an £80 billion deficit with the European Union and we love buying their Mercedes, Audi and BMW cars and their Prosecco and Champagne. We want to continue to do that, hopefully on a tariff-free basis, as it is common sense to want to carry on the trading relationship we have at the moment.

When we joined the European Union in 1973, a lot of technology was not available that is available now. I was elected in 1992 and have been an MP for 26 years. Computers were relatively new when I was first elected and mobile phones were the

size of bricks. One could hardly phone anybody because the reception was rubbish. We have advanced a long way from that. I have been on the United States-Canada border and I have seen the new technology which operates there, with trusted trader provisions and where computer itineraries have to be forwarded before vehicles turn up.

I spoke to a former Secretary of State who used to be involved in such meetings and she told me they always let it go down to the wire to get an agreement. If we want to get a deal with the European Union and the European Union wants to get a deal with us, the issue of the Ireland-Northern Ireland border can be resolved. We do not want to build a border and the Irish do not want a border. Who will build this border? I would love to know. We need to respect the democratic vote of the people. We will be able to get a solution to the border issue if there is political will on all sides.

Mr David Morris MP:

I was astounded to learn today from Lord Murphy that nobody from the Irish Government has been appointed by the European Commission to look into the border issue. Surely that should be questioned. The Governments on either side of the border should have some input into this question.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Like Alf Dubs, I have been slightly worried throughout the Brexit negotiations about the fact that Ireland was not being properly considered. It should have been considered at the beginning as a matter of good faith. There were plenty of people, myself included, who felt the British-Irish relationship was unique and so successful that the only people who could deal with it in the context of Brexit were the United Kingdom and the Irish Governments, respectively. That did not turn out to be the case. To his credit, Mr Barnier has produced a coalition of 27 countries, of which Ireland is one, to deal with the issue.

The United Kingdom cannot accept a backstop with unlimited time because it would mean we would have to ask permission to leave the union. It is also not acceptable to the European Union. The English language is flexible though it may be rather arrogant of me to say so. Is there not any way in which there can be a form of words in which both options can be considered, with various qualifications on either side?

Has Mr Karlsson's findings on the Norway-Sweden arrangements, in particular the technological details thereof, been revealed? He came back with an answer which was clearly unacceptable to the European Parliament and the issue now seems to have been lost but it was a very sensible solution on the technical side.

Mr Dai Lloyd MP:

Prynhawn da, serch hynny, Cyd-Gadeirydd. Ychydig bach o Gymraeg yn fan yna.

I agree with what Alf Dubs, Ross Greer and Pauline McNeill said so I will keep my contribution short. I regard the looming Brexit as an unmitigated disaster and there are no positives. This is a "take note" motion and in that context I am happy to take note

of it but I find very little to be positive about. The National Assembly for Wales has found that the Welsh Government is often sidelined in discussions involving the Westminster Government on European issues and we fear a roll-back of some of the powers we have had since devolution, on the grounds that it is too complicated to sort out Wales's unique problems as well as those of everybody else.

People were lied to in 2016. There were red buses but nobody said anything about stockpiling drugs and food. We need a people's vote now.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

As people know, I voted remain and I am not happy about us leaving but we are leaving. I do not wish this to turn into a debate among British politicians but the issue is not just about the border as most people on the island of Ireland will understand it. It is about what the border represents in terms of history and our conflictual relationship. This morning, people have shown bravery to emphasise what we have in common over what divides us but I have to bear in mind that two of my neighbouring constituencies are represented by Jacob Rees-Mogg and Liam Fox, respectively, who are both well-known Brexiteers. I listened to Jacob Rees-Mogg make a speech recently and he often says interesting things. He said that if remainers were quite as passionate about the European Union before the referendum we would be in a different place, as we would if Brexiteers were as passionate about what was to be achieved by leaving. We have become somewhat stuck, politically, and I fear we are going to be stuck for another few months.

The challenge for us in this body is to move to the question of "what next?" As an English politician, I can say it is not acceptable to go to the electorate saying life was rosy on 23 June 2016 and that we must return to that point. The European Union is also changing and everything is moving. The advantage this body, the BIPA, has in being peopled by politicians of all political flavours and jurisdictions within the European Union is that it still has the possibility of shaping what comes next. People can go on marches and otherwise contemplate where we are but the real challenge is to think about how to move forward now, recognising that the relationship across these islands is unique. It is something on which we have made progress and we want to keep making that progress but that requires Brexiteers to answer the question of how we develop those relationships. I do not mean just on the border - it requires the rest of us who think we should not be in this position to offer thoughts on what being in Europe will mean in the future. We need to ask how we can use our influence, inside and outside the institutions of the European Union, to make this relationship work for the future.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

As the proposer of the motion, and as the person who lives closest to the border of all the members present, I feel it is important to put it in context. I was born in 1958, prior to the re-emergence of the Troubles in 1969. My experience of the period from when I was born to 1969 was of customs and the British Army. We lived through that period with difficulty but after joining the EU in 1974 things changed greatly, particularly from the perspective of those on the southern side of the border. There was huge investment in infrastructure, such as in roads and other grant-aided projects. I was 40 in 1998 when a lot of us in the North and the South who had stopped

engaging, whether through visiting on holidays or in respect of trade, began to see prosperity. It is 20 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and it is strange that we are now attempting to repeat the difficulties of earlier years.

It would be wrong of me not to say in this room today that one has to live near the border to understand it. To make a simplistic point, we did away with roaming charges for mobile phones, as was mentioned by another delegate earlier, but in reality one cannot live on the border without a single system for mobile phones. We will revert to having to disengage our phones even if we do not have to deal with customs.

The European peace funding that has been granted on both sides and the investment in communities has been enormous. We are now on the PEACE V programme. This is not to mention the investment in education, huge infrastructure projects and medical cooperation so that people can move freely between both jurisdictions to get things such as the E111, which will no longer exist.

We need to listen to the groups who have been before us in the past number of years, or who contributed to the discussion on the Good Friday Agreement. The youth of these two islands will stress, in no uncertain terms, the need for us to work collectively. If anybody in this room is under any illusion that we are not going to return to the difficulties of paramilitary-style operations they are kidding themselves. They are already engaging and rubbing their hands hoping for a hard border. We need to work collaboratively to ensure the two islands do not regress from the economic and other achievements we made following 40 or 50 years of stagnation.

Mr Willie Coffey MSP:

I wish to make a brief comment on the point made by Declan Breathnach relating to roaming charges. The European Union operates a digital single market but, sadly, the UK Prime Minister has declared that we are coming out of that. It is utterly and ridiculously stupid to think that it is ever going to be possible to pull ourselves out of a digital single market into which we have so embedded ourselves. Are we really looking forward to the return of roaming charges when we go to Europe for a holiday? What about sharing digital content? It is utterly ridiculous and it is like saying one wants to be off the bus and on the bus at the same time. Brexiteers have said many preposterous and silly things over the last period of time.

I remind colleagues that Scotland supported staying in the European Union by a huge majority and every local authority in Scotland voted to remain. The UK is not a unitary state but a collection of nations, supposedly equal in status, yet we see the powers that Scotland fought hard for in 1999 being corralled back by this UK Government, possibly to be returned at some future unknown point. Is it any wonder the people of Scotland are increasingly looking towards a future in which we will decide for ourselves?

4.00 pm

Surely it is about respecting, not ignoring, the views of all the nations in the UK. When asked this morning who ultimately is going to decide what was good for

Scotland, the Secretary of State said it would be the UK Parliament. I do not agree with that and I believe an increasing number of people in Scotland do not agree with it. We did not trade away our sovereignty in 1707 - sovereignty rests with the Scottish people and it always will do. I, for one, hope that once this crazy Brexit deal is made known to the Scottish people, they will decide to take the future into their own hands once again.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

The one thing on which we are all agreed, whatever about our differing views on individual things, is that a good deal is essential for us both and no deal is unthinkable. Some sort of customs arrangement is vital. How could Britain countenance giving up a market of over 500 million people in Europe that it had nurtured and established over the years for possible unilateral deals under the World Trade Organization? We do not know how long such deals would take. Britain might, as Senator Frank Feighan put it, have shot themselves in our foot but it also shot itself in the foot to the same extent. As Nigel Evans reminded us, Brussels is known for 11th-hour deals and I believe that will happen at the end of the day. If the gap is only 5%, as is reported, I believe it will be bridged. The wordsmiths will have a very important role in this. We have to think positively and keep our fingers crossed for the best outcome.

The Lord Kilclooney:

As one who actually lives near the border, I find this all very interesting. In 1973 I was very actively involved in the campaign for the United Kingdom to join the Common Market and I welcomed the fact that we made the decision to join, after which I became a member of the European Parliament for ten years. I learned a lot about the European Union then and that is why I decided to vote to leave the European Union in 2016.

I listened to all the talk about the border but in practice it is great. At the moment the cities of Newry and Armagh are booming - not with bombs but with thousands of Irish shoppers coming in every day because of Brexit. One cannot park one's car in Newry any more because of the County Louth cars, or in Armagh city because of the County Monaghan cars. They are pouring in. They love Northern Ireland and love shopping there because Brexit has made Northern Ireland cheaper than the Republic. These shoppers prove one thing in respect of the border. We have a common travel area, which will continue in the event of Brexit or no Brexit as it has already been agreed by Dublin, London and Brussels. There will be free movement of people across the border so we should not misrepresent what is going to happen in practice.

In the context of trade, the United Kingdom has said we do not want a hard border. Some 80% of the hauliers, which are small and medium-sized firms, will not be subjected to customs and duties by the United Kingdom. The other 20% will be "trusted hauliers" who will have to be checked but who will do this? I well remember when Jean-Claude Juncker visited Leinster House to speak to Members a year ago and said, in very diplomatic terms which I do not think they picked up, that it would not be Irish Deputies or Irish law which would control the border but Europe and European law. It is the European Union that will impose the hard border on the 20%

of hauliers which the United Kingdom states will not have free movement, if this happens, though I hope it does not happen.

It is time the Irish told the European Union they do not want a hard border but an ordinary border but the message has not got home to Brussels yet. If we have a breakdown in the talks there will be a hard border, not imposed by the United Kingdom but by the European Union because the Irish will have failed to influence the latter.

Mr. Paul Givan MLA:

I am struck by the number of politicians in Great Britain who are now experts on the border in Ireland and have concern for the peace process. I do not take anything away from those people who have a very real interest and have shown dedication to this area in their careers, such as former secretaries of state who bring genuine concerns to the table. For most people looking on from Northern Ireland it is remarkable to see how many politicians there are from Westminster who now seem to care what happens in Northern Ireland.

Brexit has had a destabilising effect right across the United Kingdom in terms of the different arguments people have been putting forward. There is always turbulence at times of change and one has to try to work through that so that, when one gets to the other side, things can settle down. The destabilising impact in Northern Ireland is more pronounced given the constitutional sensitivities that exist and we have to take cognisance of those. However, a decision was taken to leave. If the Nationalist parties in Northern Ireland had even registered to campaign, and the turnout in places like west Belfast and Foyle had replicated the higher turnouts in Unionist constituencies, there may have been an impact on the broader referendum. It might not have changed it but it may well have given greater validity to the process of attrition that has been taking place subsequent to the event but which did not take place at the time of the referendum.

The commentary around Brexit in Northern Ireland has fed into a very real concern in the Unionist community that Brexit is being used to advance the cause of Irish Republicans and Nationalists, North and South, for the reunification of Ireland. We have proper reason to express this view when the Taoiseach, such as when talking about the backstop agreed last year, says Nationalists will never again be left behind in Northern Ireland, or when the Tánaiste says he wants the reunification of Ireland within the timeline of his political career. People should recognise that comments such as these by Nationalists have an impact on how Unionists feel about the underlying agenda of some on the island of Ireland and we need to be careful about this.

When southern politicians evoke what went on in the past related to the Troubles as a reason for the position they are taking, it also stirs up old animosities. We could list the grievances Unionism has, including the succour the Provisional IRA got from the Irish Government in the form of a safe haven in the south for IRA terrorists, and the significant decrease in the Protestant population as a result of partition, my family being among those who had to leave the Irish Republic, but we have been able to make huge progress in the past 20 years and Bertie Ahern, Enda Kenny and Unionist leaders played a very important role in moving us beyond all of that. The language

being used now in respect of Brexit needs to be tempered because there needs to be relationships on the other side of Brexit and we should not say things that could damage those relationships. We need to respect the democratic process and calls for a second vote undermine integrity of democracy. I appeal to my southern counterparts on the island of Ireland to use their influence within the European Union to assist the United Kingdom Government in getting a sensible deal, which we all want. As I see it, the Irish Government is being used by the EU to send a message to other European countries that they should not dare to leave. They are saying they need to treat the UK badly to show what will happen to other countries which want to leave. The Irish Government has to be careful not to be used in a bigger game of power politics advanced by those involved in the process in Brussels.

The United Kingdom stood with the Irish people, when the financial crisis hit, in a way the rest of Europe did not. The EU says it stands in solidarity with the Irish but I will let the Irish members be the judge of what exactly the real motivation is for Brussels.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We are running out of time but a few speakers are left. We will run through them fairly quickly. We have had contributions from Ireland and all parts of the UK but nobody from the Crown Dependencies. If anybody from the Crown Dependencies would like to speak, he or she would be more than welcome.

Mr. Vernon Coaker MP:

I represent a constituency that voted to leave but I voted to remain. It is important to recognise the context. The problem the UK Government has at the moment stems from the fact that it is trying to find a way of implementing the agreement it made with the EU in December last year, which included the backstop. This has not come out of the blue. The agreement talks about what happens if there is no deal and states that there has to be a backstop and all the things about the continued movement of goods and people. Everybody I speak to says there is a problem and one cannot just assume it will happen. There has to be an agreement and some sort of signed documentation to make it happen. We cannot leave the EU and just carry on as though nothing has happened. It is the practical realities that are the problem. I do not agree with the Government on this but it has a problem because as soon as it tries to put into practice the international agreement it cannot deliver it, either in its own party or Parliament.

We have an international agreement and I suggest it is not a good idea to rip it up. Our motion cannot be amended, as Pauline McNeill said, but it could be changed to read that it is essential not to have a hard border.

I am sorry to be boring about this but I will return to what I said this morning. In the end, the only way to get anywhere is for people to sit around a table and negotiate through it. That includes the British and Irish Governments, the various parties in Northern Ireland, including the DUP, and the devolved Administrations. It is important that there be a summit of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly but there is no alternative to people sitting around a table to thrash the issues out.

4.15 pm

Mr. Martin Vickers MP:

More than anything, we have to recognise that the British people have never been more than, at most, semi-detached members of the European project. They never signed up to the federal structure or the ideals of the founding fathers. I am old enough to remember, and indeed campaigned in, the 1975 referendum when I was a rebel as a young conservative in Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Party. She campaigned to stay in and she must have regretted it but I was a rebel who campaigned to vote "No" to the question. I did that because, as a political anorak, I had read the treaty of Rome and had studied it. I saw the long-term ideals of the European project, which were perfectly honourable, but the British people have been always somewhat semi-detached, both physically and in terms of these European ideals. Governments have to recognise that.

People say this is not what we voted for in 1975, and that we had only voted for a trade deal. It is interesting because some people are now saying the opposite. They make the argument that the people were not told all the facts in the 2016 referendum campaign but this is the same argument as the one that was being made on the doorsteps in connection with the original 1975 vote. My constituency in Lincolnshire voted 70% for Brexit and Lincolnshire was the Brexit capital of the country. It includes Boston and Skegness, which was the No. 1 constituency in this list with a 76% vote to leave.

There are those who think a second referendum might be a way of overturning the result but I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that, in my part of the world, a vote tomorrow would give an even stronger result. People are shaped by their experiences. I do not pretend that economic decline is in any way comparable to the Troubles which people in Northern Ireland experienced but my area suffered because of the decline of the deep sea fishing industry. The industry suffered originally because of the cod wars with Iceland but the industry was never able to adapt after that because of the Common Fisheries Policy. If one walks the streets of the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area, one would convince no one that Europe did not kill off the fishing industry and that is why there is such strong Euroscepticism in that area.

We have to respect the original vote. Nigel Evans referred to the leaflet the Government sent out a few days before the spending controls came in, which I remember amounting to £9 million. The leaflet argued for a vote to remain but stated, quite clearly, that the Government would implement the decision. It did not say it would implement a watered-down version of what the people voted for but would implement the decision whether it was to leave or to stay. Our entire democratic process will be undermined if we do not accept the result.

We will have to make some concessions here and there and I believe, as do my constituents, that the British Government has already made far too many concessions. It is vital we come to some agreement over the border. We can, of course, accept the motion and nobody could disagree with what is in it. I assume it will be carried this afternoon.

Mr. Gavin Newlands MP:

I do not recognise the comments made by Mr Vickers on British people being semi-detached from the EU project. In Scotland, a clear majority is in favour of the EU project. Many of the contributions from Irish and Northern Irish members highlighted the sensitivities and difficulties they have. The motion itself is somewhat woolly but, given the nature of this forum, it is probably necessarily so. It would have been better if it had stressed the difficulties in achieving a positive solution.

I could not agree more with Ross Greer and Willie Coffey. The latest polls regarding Brexit in Scotland show a ratio of 2:1 in favour of remaining so this has increased, in contrast to the constituencies south of the border referred to by the previous speaker. In Scotland, we were told that we voted as one UK and will leave as one UK. Provided there is a deal, which is highly questionable as things stand, come 29 March England and Wales will leave the EU, which is what they voted for. Northern Ireland, which voted to remain, will get some sort of a differentiated deal, which is obviously necessary and is something we support. Gibraltar, which voted overwhelmingly to remain, will also get a special deal but Scotland, which decisively voted to remain, is the only nation in this so-called partnership of equals which is not getting either what it voted for or special treatment. I could not let the session go without this being noted.

Mr John Scott MSP:

As a politician from Scotland, I did not expect to have anything to say on this debate. It is important to remind ourselves here in London that the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU. I voted to remain but we are where we are and this is not all about negatives. If, as Theresa May suggests today in *The Sun*, 95% of the deal is in place and only the Irish border remains, it will require bravery and thinking outside the box on the part of our heads of Government to resolve the outstanding matter.

Where difficulties occur between parties my experience shows me that principals need to take the big decisions when solutions have to be found. All the politicians involved in the Downing Street declaration were completely outside their comfort zone at that time. Our leaders in the UK and Ireland will have to move outside their comfort zones again and explore previously unthinkable thoughts about how to create a solution if the channels explored thus far are not working.

The fact remains that we will still be able to work collaboratively with Europe and with Ireland after Brexit. It will just be a different type of collaboration. Britain and Ireland have overcome problems greater than this and all of us in this room know our history. I suggest we do not talk ourselves into despair but, instead, deal with the problem and move on. We have done so in the past and we must do so again.

Mr. Brendan Smith TD:

At the outset I wish to reject, very strongly, the comments of Paul Givan about our state being a haven for terrorists. That is not correct and I utterly reject the comment.

Senator Coghlan expressed satisfaction with the fact that only 5% of the deal remained to be sorted out at the 11th hour. That is what I am worried about as the 11th hour is when the difficult issues are dealt with, having been left until last. It was said that the European Union tended to do this but I am worried about it in the context of how it might affect my country.

I do not want to continue on a negative rant but John Taylor spoke about booming Armagh, Portadown and other towns. That is a transient economic phenomenon and is not always sustainable. In my constituency of Cavan-Monaghan the trade sometimes comes south, depending on currency fluctuations, but I would rather a stable economy, North and South. Lord Kilclooney also referred to the common travel area and said there would not be restrictions. There has been a common travel area since 1921 but there were restrictions on the movement of goods until the Single European Act came into force in 1993. Understandably, there were restrictions in the movement of people due to terrorism from paramilitary organisations, from both traditions, until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998, which was endorsed overwhelmingly by the people throughout the island in referenda North and South in May 1998.

Nigel Evans spoke about his period in Parliament since 1992. I have been a Member of Dáil Éireann for the same period. Thankfully, as our ambassador said today, we have witnessed a transformative era with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. I am privileged to have been on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly since its early days of 1992 and 1993 and, as was said earlier this morning, the relationships between us as politicians have been transformed. The relationships on our islands, north, south, east and west, were likewise transformed because of the Good Friday Agreement. As my colleague, John Scott, said this was because of the good work of John Major and Albert Reynolds, who stepped outside their comfort zone to make decisions on which later political leaders were able to build and which led to the Good Friday Agreement. I worry, however, about the fact that we are back to talking about borders again at this Assembly.

I agree with what Pauline McNeill said but I am realistic enough to know that the Steering Committee recommends getting agreement on the wording of motions. A number of legislatures are present and a number of traditions are represented so the motion will not have the wording I would have put forward if I had been at liberty to do so.

I never thought that, after May 1998, we would be back talking about borders in this Assembly but unfortunately we are. There have been dramatic improvements on our island and between east and west, arising from the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and the new political environment which emerged from it. It was not a case of people talking about political ideology or waving flags. Businesses got on and enterprise worked together on an all-island basis, as did statutory agencies, but the stuffing has been knocked out of the border communities and they dread going back to what we grew up with. I lived through being checked on the border going to the next parish. Yesterday, I went to a part of my own constituency a short journey. I travelled through County Fermanagh on six different occasions on the journey and in the past I could not have taken that route to the other part of my constituency. I do it

automatically now, as does everybody else in Fermanagh, Cavan and Monaghan as they go about their daily business, whether it is to go to school or to work or to access public services. We have to ensure that this issue is in the agreement. We want the British to get a good agreement with the European Union because it is in our best interests and we hope we can continue to function as a society in the way we do today.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

I live in Dundalk, which touches the borders of Armagh and Down. I am a former member of the Irish Defence Forces and was based in Dundalk barracks during the Troubles. I remember leaving the barracks at night-time on many occasions and taking the road from Cullaville to Omeath, which was not a very nice experience. People on either side of the border were afraid to speak to each other and it was a bad time for people who had to travel over the border to see family or for any other reason. I have seen a massive difference in the past 20 years since the peace process. I am heavily involved in sport and have managed football teams on both sides of the border, in Armagh, Louth and Monaghan. The past 20 years have been absolutely fantastic from that point of view.

People talk about a united Ireland but the most important thing is that nobody, whether that is Theresa May, Leo Varadkar or the EU, wants to go back to the bad old days. It was a cold place in which to live but it is fantastic to see all the different parties engaged in trying to find a solution. It is important to send the message that we do not want a border dividing the island of Ireland.

4.30 pm

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

To end the discussion, we will let the Crown Dependencies have the final word. Deputy David Johnson will make his maiden speech. He is very welcome.

Deputy David Johnson:

I thank the Co-Chairperson. I hesitated to come in earlier because Jersey did not have the right to vote in the referendum and it seemed discourteous for this dependency to give its views on how the Government should proceed. That is not to say we are not interested in what is going on. Our Government has an ongoing relationship with the UK Government and we are well informed. We have a Brexit review panel, of which I am vice chairman, and last week we had a briefing from our legal officer as to where we are. Our view is that we make a substantial financial contribution to the UK economy and we hope that continues. All we can do is keep our good relationship with the UK and hope it arrives at a good conclusion. It is not the role of Jersey to seek to influence in a situation where we do not have the right to vote.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank everybody who contributed to the debate. We have heard a wide variety of views from every corner of the United Kingdom, from Ireland and from the Crown

Dependencies. Whatever our views and however we feel about this issue, when we next meet - and certainly in a year's time - we will all know what the situation is and where we are. We can review the whole situation at that point.

Question put and agreed to.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will change the schedule slightly because Tony Lloyd has joined us.

ADDRESS BY THE SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am pleased to invite Tony Lloyd MP, shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to address the Assembly, and then there will be some time for questions. Tony, you are very welcome. *[Applause.]*

Mr Tony Lloyd MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland):

Thanks, Chair. It is always a matter of great politeness, but, I think, a matter of great foolishness to clap before the speaker begins; it only encourages them. I am very pleased to be here, partly because, obviously, there are a good number of people in this room that I know—some over many years and some I have got to know over more recent years—but I strongly welcome the fact that this parliamentary body exists to bring together parliamentarians from across these islands.

What I think is important, though—I will be quite, I suppose, narrow in my focus—is the recognition that we are probably living in very different circumstances to what we hoped for not so very long ago. I want to pick up a comment—unfortunately, they were sat at the back, and I could not see who was speaking—by the speaker before last, who made the point that we cannot go back to the days that we all remember, when violence was the arbiter of the relationship between, certainly, the United Kingdom and Ireland and north of the border when things were desperate.

I am old enough to remember the beginning of the civil rights demonstrations and the movement through to violence, and we cannot take it for granted that we do not go back in that direction. Nobody ought to be alarmist and predict a return to the kind of troubles that we saw, but I want to make the obvious point that, when we have the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland, George Hamilton, talking about the capacity for a hard border to deliver the kind of targets that would give succour to those who would do us ill, we have to take his message seriously. He is a professional law enforcement officer—a professional police officer—who is speaking as an independent in this conversation and not with any particular bias. What that says to me is that what we have got to deliver over these very few months between now and March of next year is the capacity to have the kind of Brexit that means that we are able to deliver that lack of a hard border, the lack of a border that would take us back those 20 years and more. I can remember going through the armoured checkpoints

that separated the two sides of the island of Ireland. We have got to have that soft border commensurate with the kind of relationship that has been built over the years.

Now, there is a challenge in that, and there is a political challenge. It is a challenge to every politician in this room—probably particularly to the British parliamentarians. It is a challenge, in a way, to strip away individual prejudices. Let me say from this platform that I voted to remain in the referendum, but I accept that the reality of the referendum is that we were asked to do something different. So my task is to work with others and say, “How do we deliver that Brexit that is compatible with the will of the British people but also is compatible with delivering to the island of Ireland a situation that makes sure that we are not putting people’s futures and lives at risk?”.

It is, I have got to say, a future that recognises where we have come from in the past but recognises where we are now. When I stood, not so many months ago, on the bridge between Strabane and Lifford, I saw the constant flow of traffic crossing from one side to the other. Sometimes, it was people just going down to do a little bit of shopping on the other side of the effectively non-existent border. When we recognise the number of people who travel as part of their daily activities—to go to work, to see family members or whatever it might be—when we look at the different parts, we recognise now the planning that has gone on over the last 20 years to build common facilities. There are common health facilities, where it is accepted that the border has become almost non-existent in terms of the way people want to live their life. That is what we have got to protect, and that is why the issue is so potentially dramatic for us all.

It is dramatic in this way—I have got to say this: I am a politician, so forgive me for being political—at the moment, the negotiating position of the British Government simply is incompatible with delivering that non-hard border. We have got to get to a situation where we are talking the languages of a customs union. We have got to get to the position where we are talking a language of convergence around the single market standards, which are good for the protection of employees and good for the protection of consumers. That kind of language can begin to deliver for us all the kind of border that is consistent with recognising the distance we have travelled because of the Good Friday Agreement and since the Good Friday Agreement.

That, Chair, if I may, is probably enough this side of questions for the conversation about Brexit, but I want to move on, because I am bound to touch on the other issue that is dramatic in the situation in Northern Ireland, and that is the lack of a functioning Executive. I am bound to say that an Executive that, over the years since the Good Friday Agreement, has spent something like seven years where direct rule has been the order of the day is not something that is working properly for the people of Northern Ireland, people from all different backgrounds.

Let us strip away the things that separate the major parties. Let us look at the kinds of issues that ought to unite the political parties and the political traditions on different sides. Let us look at an issue such as healthcare. We know that, some years ago, the Bengoa report into the health service in Northern Ireland was very clear that there is waste in that system. Waste in a health service, in the end, is about the quality of people’s health and the quality of the life they lead and, ultimately, it is about the quantity of their lives. It is about life and death and the choices that we make in a

health system that does not work as well as it should do. The figures for the Northern Irish health service are dramatically worse than those—I will use the reference point here—in the rest of the United Kingdom. This is what it is costing because of the lack of a functioning Executive in Northern Ireland at the moment.

I can talk about many other different issues. It is about the lack of capacity to make decisions around the education spend. It is about the fact that, at the moment, Northern Ireland has protections for people on welfare spending that do not apply to my constituents in Rochdale, who are equally dependent in many ways. Nevertheless, the Executive were able to give protection against and mitigation of the impact of the cuts in welfare spending in the rest of the United Kingdom. Those are already beginning to run out and will finish by March of next year. This, again, is a price that people in east Belfast, for example, or in Derry city—amongst the poorest communities in these two islands—will suffer because of the lack of an Executive to make those practical decisions. So, I am bound to say to the political parties in Northern Ireland that I expect more of those who stand for election and I expect more of those who want to put forward the interests of all the people that they represent. In the end, seeing the Executive back and working has got to be the priority for us all.

I will say as well that I do not spare our Government here in London—Whitehall and Westminster—from criticism in this. The lack of action in bringing the different parties together over recent months and years now is quite unacceptable. There has got to be urgency now put into the multiparty talks. There has got to be proper consideration of making the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference work once again. That really does matter. It is a body that mirrors your own. It is part of the legacy from the Good Friday Agreement, and it is important for all that that that dialogue between London and Dublin is there to bring legitimate pressure on all the political parties in Northern Ireland but also to make sure that there is a proper voice heard from those who are the custodians—the two Governments in London and Dublin—of the Good Friday Agreement. Again, it is about putting some more urgency into getting the parties around the table. That is absolutely fundamental in giving a voice to the kind of politics and political debate that we ought to be having in Northern Ireland and across these islands and is what an association such as yours ought to be about.

Chair, I know that you have probably had a long day and there are many other things I could talk about today, but, because you have had such a long day and because, in any case, while monologues from the platform are interesting, conversations are normally more productive, I will close my speech at this point and look to questions from the floor, to which I am more than happy to try to respond.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Brilliant. OK. That is great, so I am opening it up for questions. I have Steve Aiken MLA here on my left, first off. Anyone else? Steve, please.

Mr Steve Aiken MLA:

Tony, thank you very much indeed. I will definitely not be the only person asking questions, so you need not worry about that as we go through.

Just for clarification, what is the Labour Party's position on the Tánaiste's idea of having a legally operative backstop for Northern Ireland? Does the Labour Party's position mirror that of the trade union movement that does not want to see any form of regulatory barrier or border down the Irish Sea?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Let me start off with the Irish Sea. The Irish Sea issue is very simple: we've been very clear that we don't want to see any constitutional or new border placed down the Irish Sea. But, actually, on the question of the backstop, I think we go beyond, because what we've been very clear about is that the backstop would come into operation only if we fail to deliver the kind of non-hard border that I've already tried to talk about. If we do move on to the terrain of customs agreements—a customs union—into the long run, if we are serious about looking at where single market convergence is in the interests of both our two countries but also, in actual fact, between the United Kingdom and the European Union, then we can go beyond the whole question of the backstop, and that ought to be the negotiating position we start from. It certainly avoids hard borders across the island of Ireland; it avoids hard borders down the Irish Sea.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Anyone else? Juan.

Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Thank you, Chair. In terms of the point about the sea border, my understanding is that the Government's position at the moment is that they will allow the devolved Assemblies to have autonomy over their fishing grounds out to 12 miles. Again, I would appreciate the view of the Opposition on that one, because that will fundamentally change the nature of the fisheries management agreement that is in place between Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland and the Republic and, not least of all, the Isle of Man, which is in [*Inaudible*] of that and where I represent today, so I would appreciate your views on that.

4.45 pm

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Well, what, clearly, post Brexit, we would want is a properly negotiated settlement. I am not an expert on voisinage and all that goes with it. I am glad you are not also—that makes two of us—but, look, what we do need to make sure is that, from this, there is the rational kind of agreement that neighbouring coastal states—neighbouring maritime states, in this sense—need to make fisheries work. I am very well aware. I was in Ardglass, probably two months ago, looking over to your island—they are not, of course, so very far away—recognising that, at the moment, vessels pull into a port like that, having fished in all manner of different waters and we need to make sure of the viability not simply of the fishing industry but of those that depend, upstream or downstream, whichever way that is, on that fishing industry and those in ports like Kilkeel, Ardglass, your ports on the Isle of Man and, obviously, those in different

parts of these islands of ours.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. Thank you, Tony, for your contribution. Tony will be all too familiar with the, I suppose, very unique and bespoke citizenship arrangements and protections afforded to those of us on the island of Ireland as a result of the Good Friday Agreement. Obviously, I suppose, in the context of Brexit, it magnifies the potential jeopardisation of those protections and rights for those of us who identify solely as Irish and therefore retain our EU citizenship but are resident in the North in a potential post-Brexit scenario that we voted to oppose. So, within the context of the Good Friday Agreement and the context of protecting people's citizenship rights, what is the Labour Party's position on voting for any deal that would compromise or jeopardise, subvert or, indeed, minimise those rights and protections that are afforded to us by dint of the majority of people, North and South, as a result of the Good Friday Agreement, and also clearly opposed to any change in that, given our opposition to Brexit?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Well, as you will know, the Good Friday Agreement enshrined the comparability of rights on both sides of the Irish border, and that is an important underpinning both of what the Good Friday Agreement was designed to achieve and, actually, what it brought into practice. Of course, that was helped, at the time, by the fact that it was done within the framework of the European Union. That does pose some challenges now because the capacity for those who identify as Irish nationals in the North and those who prefer, in Northern Ireland, to identify as British nationals ought normally to be [*Inaudible*] but we will face some kind of challenge as a result of Brexit to make sure that there is no change in those rights, either with respect to Irish nationals on either side of the border or between British nationals in Northern Ireland and Irish nationals. That's actually received not enough attention, quite frankly, in the whole Brexit conversation. It is something that, over these months, we have to make sure figures there. Some of that, I think, can be achieved by looking, in the context of Northern Ireland, at whether we now need to bring in the bill of rights that was discussed some 20 years ago but was never achieved, and it may well be that, to enshrine the rights that do exist, we now have to look at what legal underpinning would give the necessary capacity to deliver the maintenance of those rights.

The Lord Lexden:

You have made it clear that a Labour Government would seek to resuscitate the inter-party talks in Northern Ireland. Has the Labour Party got any specific proposals which would, in their view, enhance the chances of gaining success in those inter-party talks, and do you think that Mr Corbyn's well-known strong sympathy for republicanism might stand in the way of a successful conclusion of those inter-party talks?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Let me say this, if I may: I'm not talking about a Labour Government, which we've not yet got. I would love, quite honestly, to have a general election; I would love to

see a change of Government. If I am brutally honest, we've now got a worn-out Government. I have seen Governments wear out many times. It is time for change and refreshment in the polity of the United Kingdom, so that general election I would welcome, but I am not talking about that now; I am talking about the need for the present Secretary of State, the present Government, to show real urgency in the context of getting the all-party talks in the Northern Ireland Assembly back up and running. That should be happening now. It does not need to wait for a general election.

I am talking about the need to give real meaning to the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. That can happen now. In fact, the first meeting did take place in London a few weeks ago, and the second meeting should take place in Dublin, but it should be being scheduled to take place now. That is for this Government. If we come into government, we will do those things. There is something else we can do. We can begin to look at the possibility of bringing in an independent chair to look at those talks. We know that, in the past, that was materially very helpful.

Let me touch on your second question. Of course, many people have history and have taken positions during the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. What I would say, though, is this: the guiding star for the Labour Party—Labour believes that the Good Friday Agreement is something precious to us because it was a Labour Government that brought that in. We don't claim ownership of it. Many people played enormous parts—obviously, back in those days, John Hume and David Trimble and, later on, Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley, and I should mention people like David Ervine as well as politicians of different backgrounds—but the Good Friday Agreement is the guiding constitutional drive for us, and we will not drift away from that which was so hard fought to deliver. Neither Jeremy Corbyn nor me nor anybody else should take us away from that. It is so important that we stick with that as the way in which we will handle these matters.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I do not see anyone else—sorry, Reg.

The Lord Empey:

I apologise to the shadow Secretary of State for not being in at the beginning of his speech. I have mentioned to him before the issue of health in Northern Ireland. He will be aware of the enormous waiting lists: 280,000 waiting for their first consultant-led appointment—over 90,000 waiting for over a year; 18,500 people waiting for cancer treatment, compared with 3,500 in England. If sufficient consensus could be reached and in the event of talks not progressing to the restoration of the Executive, would the Labour Party be prepared to look at the short-term restoration of health powers to Westminster on humanitarian grounds as we approach a winter where many people will be left in severe difficulties? As I said, it is not a political issue. We did it with social security, and I am just wondering if the Labour Party would be prepared to look at that?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Thanks, Lord Empey. I referred to health in my opening remarks; indeed, it is such an important issue. To bring in the Bengoa reforms or to look any way at updating Bengoa ought to be something that seizes every politician in Northern Ireland. Every Assembly Member ought to be looking at the interests of their own constituencies and asking themselves what really does matter in that light.

I am, if you will forgive me, going to avoid answering directly your question at this point, because what I would say is this: that is exactly why the Secretary of State has got now to bring together the politicians from the Assembly. We have got to see a functioning Executive up and running precisely to begin to deliver on issues like health, but I can mention social security, social services, education and many more areas where, we know, the drift and the lack of decisions is costing people's futures, costing people's lives.

Health matters enormously, so I am well aware of the dramatic impetus that Lord Empey raises with us, and we have got to take that seriously. Most of us are probably very reluctant to use the words "direct rule", and that has got to be right and got to be understood, which is why, for today, we have got to say it is precisely because we do not want to see the wrong constitutional solution that ought to be the driver to say, "Let us now push for the right kind of constitutional settlement that can begin to guarantee that we see both the investment in health and the decision-making in health that can avoid the type of unfairness". I said earlier that one of the tragic things about the failure to reform health in Northern Ireland is that you can measure it in ill health. Actually, in the end, you can measure it in shortened lives, and that is actually what we are fighting for. This is not some nice constitutional principle; it is about real people, about real people's lives, and that is why it matters.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I have two more questioners, and then I am going to bring this session to a close, so Brendan Smith and Baroness Suttie.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, and I welcome Mr Lloyd's presence as shadow Secretary of State. It is very important to get the perspective of the main opposition party as well.

Could you tell us, Tony, do you think or believe that the two Governments are attaching the urgency to the talks that is needed? We are heading for two years now without a functioning Assembly or Executive. Ambassador O'Neill here this morning spoke about the Good Friday Agreement and its achievement and that there were powerful protections in that agreement for the people. Surely one of the most powerful protections that any society needs is to have a Government, is to have an Assembly that represents the views of the people, the myriad different political views and then an Executive drawn democratically from the Assembly to govern on behalf of the people. We do not have that, as we all know here. Is the urgency being attached to the talks that the two Governments should apply?

Similarly, in your engagement with Sinn Féin and the DUP, how serious are they

about getting back in to govern, back around an Executive table? What meaningful role have the smaller parties—the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and the Alliance Party—been given in the talks, or are they being sidelined? If they are, I think it is regrettable; I sincerely hope not.

Could you tell us what engagement you have with civic society? One thing that amazes me in regard to Northern Ireland is how quiet civic society is. I know in our jurisdiction, if there was an absence of leadership on a particular issue, by God the people would be legitimately out voicing their concerns, be it in street protests or whatever, and that is understandable, but in Northern Ireland, civic society seems to be extremely quiet. They write letters to the Taoiseach or to the Government—and I am an opposition party spokesperson—but they would need some civic society and, actually, both Governments have a role. They are co-guarantors—we all appreciate that—but civic society would want to be directing their anxiety to the leaders of the two main parties in Northern Ireland and, obviously, to the two Governments as well. Do you have meaningful dialogue with civic society, and what feedback are you getting from those groups?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Thanks for the question. One of the real dangers at the moment in terms of public opinion in Northern Ireland is almost consequential on your question, Brendan, in that, if the public believe and have begun to believe that there is no particular dynamism in the Assembly and the Executive structures, if they believe that they are not there to make the kind of decisions that Lord Empey has referred to about health or whatever it might be, of course it brings politics into disrepute. It devalues people's capacity and people's belief that there are democratic solutions for their issues. Actually, frankly, as well, an Executive that has spent nearly a third of its time not working over the years since the Good Friday Agreement is one where the public may be looking to Westminster/Whitehall intervention to pull the irons out of the fire, but that is a very unhealthy situation. I believe profoundly in the need to make the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement work, and primary in that is the democratically elected Assembly. So we have got to have genuine urgency in making that work.

Now, I do not want to make this party political either in the context of any forthcoming election that may be about to take place in Ireland or any general election that may or may not be going to take place in the United Kingdom, so I'll try to avoid party politics, but I am bound to say that I have not seen the urgency. The primary obligation is on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I do not want to politicise it around her as an individual, but we simply have not seen the urgency that says that we need to see the parties round the table. We need to test whether Sinn Féin and the DUP and, actually, the other parties are committed to making the Assembly and the Executive work. You can only do that by getting people round that table, and they have not been round that table. So, yes, there is a lack of urgency. We have got to see more from the Government here in London so that we can begin to deliver on that.

5.00 pm

In terms of the smaller parties—the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP, Alliance—we cannot

see them sidelined either. They are part of that democratic mix, and, in any elected body, however this is structured—it is not up to me to dictate whether it is done by being part of the system of governance, whether it is by being part of a constructive opposition; actually, those are legitimate roles for politicians of different backgrounds, different parties and even different traditions—making the thing work has really got to be the objective and putting urgency into seeing the work has got to be there. I would welcome any contribution that politicians in the Dáil could make and the Government in Dublin to help that, but, ultimately, it is for the Secretary of State to make sure that we get those five parties round the table with an independent Chair, if that is going to make a material difference and put in real urgency. Lock them in the room, as they say, and throw away the key until we see a result.

Baroness Suttie:

Can I just clarify something that you said earlier? You talked twice about Labour Party policy being a customs union in the context of avoiding a hard border. Is it the Labour Party's policy now to be in “the customs union” or “a customs union”, and do you think, in the context of the negotiations for our future relations with the EU, that the EU side would accept “a customs union” rather than “the customs union”?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

There are actually legal issues as to why it is “a customs union” and not “the customs union”, so it is not that—we, as I understand it, could not be part of “the customs union” and out of the European Union. So, within that context, “a customs union” is where we must be performe. But, yes, I believe that the European Union would be able to negotiate on that basis because what I am talking about is removing the red lines that, quite frankly, have made it so difficult for Theresa May to negotiate with Brussels and the European Union but also to negotiate with her own Back-Benchers. We are not encumbered by those red lines. We want to see a solution to this. We want to see the kind of Brexit that delivers the jobs, the capacity for cross-border trade across boundaries that we have become used to in recent years, not simply for employment and trade but for social activity to access healthcare and to access all the other things that people do, and the only way [*Inaudible*] to achieve those things is with that kind of arrangement around a customs union and the recognition of single market standards.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. Do you want to sum up, Tony? Are you happy?

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

Well, do you want another 15-minute speech?

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

No. We would love to, but I do not think that we have the time.

Mr Tony Lloyd MP:

All I would say is that I am bound to welcome the continued interest and involvement of people like yourselves; it really is important. The dialogue—I hope that those from the other territories will forgive me when I say this—between politicians in Ireland and politicians in the United Kingdom did not always have the same amicableness or mutual knowledge that we have built over the past 20 years. These are things that are precious, because cultures change as a result of mutual understanding, and we cannot throw away the benefits that the Good Friday Agreement gave to us all. I know that nobody in this room wants to do that.

We cannot go back. I deliberately did not want to go back into the period before the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement is still central to the way we operate. I think your association is a Good Friday consequence, and we should all be very proud of that. The relationship between these two islands of ours is massively different in this era—even now, with all the pressures of Brexit—from what it was 20, 30-plus years ago, and I am bound to celebrate that. So thank you for welcoming me here today.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Again, on behalf of Members, I thank you for your time and insight into our deliberations. *Go raibh maith agat.*

[Applause.]

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We are straight into the Committee reports. We will now have updates from the Committee Chairs on the work of the various Committees.

Committee A (Sovereign Matters)

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

As Chairman of Committee A—sovereign matters—I would like to outline our future programme.

Our Committee agreed that it would undertake work in relation to two proposed inquiries: BIPA and cross-border co-ordination after Brexit; and the illicit trade on the UK/Irish border and the implementation of Brexit.

On the BIPA and cross-border cooperation after Brexit, Members discussed the importance of inter-parliamentary dialogue after the UK leaves the EU in March 2019 and the particular value of the work undertaken by and the relationships built within BIPA. Members agreed that BIPA should be strengthened. Consequently, in my role as Chair, I recommended to the Steering Committee that the joint Chairs of BIPA write to the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach to call on them to strengthen the role of BIPA. In turn, the Steering Committee asked Committee A to report to it at the next

plenary with specific recommendations for strengthening BIPA. What we are going to do is report to the BIPA Steering Committee in March 2019 with recommendations for the strengthening of BIPA after Brexit. This will lead to the joint Chairs of BIPA writing to the Dáil and to Parliament, calling on them to strengthen the role of BIPA.

With the recommendation to the Steering Committee in mind, we will ask the Committee and also appointed Members to meet the following organisations: the joint Chairs of BIPA; the Chairs of Committees B, C and D; individual BIPA Members to *[Inaudible]*; the British-Irish Council; the Northern Ireland Office; the director-general of the Ireland, United Kingdom and Americas division, Department of Foreign Affairs.

The second proposal has to do with illicit trade on the UK/Irish border and the implementation of Brexit. Members also agreed to undertake an inquiry into illicit trade on the UK/Irish border, noting in particular concerns about tobacco and fuel smuggling and the potential effects of further tax and regulatory divergence after the UK leaves the EU. Our proposed outcome is that the report be agreed at the October 2019 plenary. We will also appoint a rapporteur to oversee the gathering of evidence, as we think that that will be a major job and it is important to get one person looking after it.

It is also proposed that the Committee—individually appointed members—meet up with other organisations. We broke this into four groups. The first is Irish officials, such as the Garda commissioner, the Criminal Assets Bureau, the Revenue Commissioners, the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency. The second is UK officials: HMRC; the PSNI Chief Constable and the National Crime Agency; HM Treasury; the Northern Ireland Office; and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. The third group is business and other experts: for example, InterTradeIreland; Japan Tobacco International and other tobacco companies; Calor Gas Northern Ireland and other fuel companies; the Centre for Cross Border Studies and other academies; and the Irish Business and Employers Confederation. The last group is specific areas of interest, such as fuel laundering, tobacco, digital privacy, intellectual property crime, pharmaceutical and other cross-border crime.

The Committee will meet again tonight at half past five, after this meeting, at which we will appoint committees, individual Members and a rapporteur. As you see, we have a lot of work to get through over the next six months, and I hope that all Members of the Committee will participate. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Peter.

Committee B (European Affairs)

Mr Darren Millar AM:

I want to give a brief update, Co-Chair, on the work of Committee B. We have had a change in our clerking arrangements: Marie-Claire Hughes, who served the Committee faithfully over a number of years, has moved on to the Irish embassy in Malawi. As a result, we have taken in Eoin Egan, who has been a very welcome

addition to the team, to work alongside Harriet Deane, the British clerk.

We are undertaking an inquiry into European security cooperation, post Brexit, and we are publishing, as the next item on our agenda, an interim report into that topic. We issued a call for written evidence over the summer, and, earlier this month, the Committee visited Dublin and Belfast to undertake oral evidence sessions with a range of witnesses.

We have some further visits to Brussels and to Holyhead and Dublin ports in the process of being organised in order to take further evidence on the security cooperation and opportunities post Brexit. I hope to be able to report to the next plenary session of BIPA early next year with a completed report.

In the meantime, given the very fast-moving nature of events, obviously we wanted to publish a report, and that is why we published an interim report today with some key conclusions and issues that we have considered to date, along with some short recommendations. I look forward to sharing that with Members on the next item on our agenda.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thanks very much, Darren.

Committee C (Economic Affairs)

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Committee C has welcomed two new Members: Deputy David Johnson and John Blair MLA. We thank David Ford MLA and Deputy John Le Fondré, who have stood down from the Committee, for all their work and contribution.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the detailed and considered responses that it has received from the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, the Irish Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to its recent report on the impact of Brexit on the agri-food sector.

The Committee has launched its new inquiry into the revitalisation of the high street and local businesses. We will look at the role of local authorities and national Governments, tax strategies, business rates and, in particular, the effect of online trading on the long-term future of high streets. As part of our inquiry, we are planning visits to Newcastle, Belfast, Tipperary town, and Dublin in the next six months to learn, we hope, from best practice projects. The journey to Newcastle upon Tyne, which will include Darlington, will be on the 18 and 19 of November next. We expect that we will travel to Belfast and Newcastle in County Down, Tipperary town and Dublin most likely on the 17 and 18 of January. Thank you.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Joan.

Committee D (Environment and Social Affairs)

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I now call on the ever-popular Lord Alf Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

May I just say one thing about Seymour Crawford? May I join in the tributes to him? I first met him through BIPA. I remember his handshake; it made my hand feel very small. He was a big man but a gentle man. He became a great colleague and friend, and I am very sad to hear the news that we heard earlier today.

As regards Committee D, we have relaunched our inquiry into the cross-jurisdictional implications of abortion policy in the various jurisdictions. We had to stop for a while because of the Irish referendum, and, three weeks ago, we had a long evidence session in Belfast where we took evidence from the pro-life people, the pro-choice people, academics, the Northern Ireland Attorney General, the Chief Medical Officer, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. We propose to go to Dublin, which would be the last evidence session, about the middle of January so that we will be able to give a full report to the plenary, which, I understand, will be in May. We have had very good help and cooperation throughout our work. We also understand there has been a live debate on the issue in different jurisdictions, including the Isle of Man, and we have asked for written evidence to supplement the oral evidence that we have taken in the various places we have been.

My thanks to all the Members of the Committee, including some changes, for their work and for putting in a very hard day in Belfast, where we took evidence in six sessions from first thing in the morning till about 6.00 pm. So my thanks for that, and we will deliver our report to the next plenary.

The Co-Chair (Seán Crowe):

Thank you, Alf, and, again, I commend the Chairs and Members of all the Committees for the valuable work they do on behalf of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I hand over to Andrew now.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Seán. I now call on the Chair of Committee B, Darren Millar AM, to present his report on European security cooperation after —.

Mr Vernon Coaker MP:

I would like to ask a question. Is that not in order, sorry? After the report?

The Co-Chair (Seán Crowe):

We don't normally, but —.

Mr Vernon Coaker MP:

I see. That is fine.

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

I am sure that Lord Dubs can speak to you afterwards if you have a question.

Mr Vernon Coaker MP:

No, that is okay, thanks.

The Co-Chair (Seán Crowe):

No, it was the first —.

5.15 pm

**COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS): “EUROPEAN SECURITY
COOPERATION AFTER BREXIT”**

The Co-Chair (Andrew Rosindell MP):

Now, if I may continue, because we have moved onto the next item. So, Darren Millar is going to present the “European Security Cooperation after Brexit” interim report to the Assembly.

Mr Darren Millar AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am very pleased to be able to present this report on behalf of Committee B. I want to thank all the Committee Members who helped to bring this report together and, indeed, the clerks of the committee for their work in putting it together too.

As I indicated earlier in the last item of business, we’ve been undertaking an inquiry into European security cooperation after Brexit, as we felt very strongly that this was not an issue that had received a great deal of attention in the public domain, certainly, and, indeed, in our various parliamentary discussions also. So, we felt that we wanted to add value to the discussions that are going on around Brexit by undertaking this work.

The inquiry is considering the potential impact of Brexit on cooperation between the United Kingdom and the European Union on security matters, including cross-border policing cooperation, the fight against organised crime, counterterrorism and cybersecurity. We are also looking at security cooperation between the UK and Ireland in the context of Brexit and the future direction of EU security policy, including the implementation of the European Agenda on Security and the implications of these [*Inaudible*] for the future of security cooperation between the UK and the EU.

As I said earlier, we took some evidence in both Dublin and Belfast earlier this month, and, in those oral evidence sessions we heard from Her Excellency Marie Cross, chair of the Future for Europe group, co-chair of the security group at the Institute of International and European Affairs and also she is a former Irish ambassador to the Czech Republic, Ukraine and to the Political and Security Committee of the EU. We heard also from Richard Browne, principal security officer for internet policy at the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, and Dr Cormac Doherty, head of cybersecurity programmes and director of the Centre for Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Investigation at University College Dublin. In addition, we took evidence in Dublin from the assistant commissioner of an Garda Síochána, John O'Driscoll, who of course is responsible for serious crime operations. I have to say that, on that opening day in Dublin, we were very warm in terms of the opportunities. It was a very positive and constructive day, and we felt quite uplifted that there is such a great deal of cooperation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and an Garda Síochána in the Republic and, indeed, the wonderful work that is going on between the UK Government and the Irish Government in terms of cooperation on security matters.

In Belfast, we took evidence from John Boylan and Philip Grant—sorry, from Brian Gormally and Daniel Holder, director and deputy director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice, and we also heard and received oral evidence from the Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Stephen Martin, and the Assistant Chief Constable, Tim Mairs. In addition, we took evidence from Eilís McGrath, who is the assistant director of the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland.

As I said, we are going to publish a full report as a result of this inquiry in due course that outlines all the evidence that we have received from our witnesses and our conclusions on a whole range of issues, but we did feel that it was essential, given the nature of some of the evidence that we received, that we should publish an interim report as soon as possible, because there were some pressing matters that I will return to as I continue with this address.

So, as I said, we heard some very vivid impressions of the deep level of security cooperation between the UK and Ireland. We heard about many of the working groups and mechanisms that sit within the EU arrangements, but also those that sit outside the EU arrangements, including the joint agency task force between an Garda Síochána, the PSNI and other relevant bodies, and the joint investigation task force, which also exists. We were very impressed at those levels of cooperation, and we were given a high level of reassurance from all the witnesses that that cooperation would be able to continue post Brexit, regardless of any Brexit deal—or no deal—that may be done between the UK Government and the EU 27, but there were three primary concerns that were brought to the attention of the Committee.

The first was the future of the European arrest warrant, including the possibility that the UK might have to fall back on the 1957 European Convention on Extradition after Brexit. The second was the multitude of Ireland to UK extraditions that are currently on hold as a result of Brexit, because we are awaiting a ruling of the European Court of Justice regarding the extradition of Irish citizens to a country that will no longer be

an EU country by the end of their sentence of imprisonment. And data sharing on criminal matters, including the possibility that the UK may lose access to EU databases as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

So the first recommendation we wanted to make was to urge the UK and EU negotiators to prioritise the safety and security of all UK and EU citizens and do all they can to ensure that close cooperation will continue in the future, including speedy and effective extradition arrangements post Brexit.

Irish experts emphasised the valuable and mutually beneficial contribution that the UK makes to European security and defence cooperation through the common security and defence policy, and they highlighted the role the UK plays—the leading role that the UK plays—in a number of different initiatives, including combating piracy through Operation Atalanta. Therefore, we also urge the UK and EU negotiators to ensure that the security and defence relationship is given a central focus in the negotiations so as to ensure that close cooperation on matters of common interest can continue and that capacity and expertise can be effectively shared.

With regard to cybersecurity, we had a wide-ranging discussion with businesses about the challenges of recruiting and retaining staff due to competition from the private sector, so we recommend that the UK and Irish Governments should scope the possibility of launching a programme that would enable both Governments to use cybersecurity reservists to bolster forces and deepen cooperation between the public and private sectors, given the mutual interest between both in order to tackle cybercrime. That would, of course, enable people to be seconded into government use, should they be required, from the private sector at some point in the future, to combat the wide range of threats that are out there.

The Committee on the Administration of Justice highlighted many outstanding issues regarding the rights of UK and Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland. As Members will be aware, citizens in Northern Ireland have the right to choose their nationality or their nationalities, but this currently entails no divergence in human rights or service provision, as has been referred to in other discussion this afternoon.

The committee was telling us—the Committee on the Administration of Justice was telling us—that, after Brexit, there is a concern that those individuals who choose to exercise their right to Irish citizenship and to not exercise their right to British citizenship may have additional rights as EU citizens and, therefore, this equality in terms of access to rights may not be available. So, we urge the UK and the EU to resolve those issues as a matter of urgency.

Finally, the Police Service of Northern Ireland were referring to significant funding and workforce pressures that they have to deal with at present. They were telling us that they have fewer officers than is regarded as being an appropriate level for even a benign environment and that, as a result of that, they do not feel as though they have sufficient human resources to be able to meet the potential needs that may present themselves post Brexit, particularly in the event of border infrastructure being established along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. They also highlighted to us, of course, the difficulties that the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive have placed upon them in terms of their forward planning and their budget

arrangements. So, our final recommendation in the report is to urge the UK Government to take immediate action to ensure that the Police Service of Northern Ireland has the resources that it needs so that it can prepare properly for the implications of Brexit.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Darren, for that comprehensive report. That concludes the reports, unless anyone wants to make a contribution.

Mr Steve Aiken MLA:

Yes.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

You do. OK, sorry. Steve.

Mr Steve Aiken MLA:

Co-Chairs and Members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I would like to commend the work from Committee B. Bearing in mind there is over 39 million tons' worth of trade that goes back and forth across the Irish Sea and over 20 million people travel back and forth, we were very struck by the amount of cooperation that was being demonstrated both by Irish and British policing and other agencies to develop and look at the security issues going forward. Indeed, we thought that, probably, that basis for security cooperation should be mirrored across the rest of the areas, particularly as we move into a period of uncertainty over Brexit. We commend very clearly the work of all the members of the police—an Garda Síochána and the PSNI—and other agencies for their hard work and their hard work ongoing and their ability to keep the business on track. Thank you very much, Co-Chairs.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK, thank you, Steve. Any other contributions to this discussion? If not, we can move on. OK. Darren, thank you again.

OK, ladies and gentlemen, we are now coming to the climax of today's business. I have a few announcements to make before we formally adjourn.

First of all, I thank all of our guest speakers today and Members for their stimulating contributions to the plenary session. It has been an excellent day, and I thank all of you for your participation.

We will now obviously have a period—not very long; we have got one and a quarter hours—to have a break, freshen up and get ready for what I hope will be a spectacular evening at the Mansion House, where we are to be hosted by the Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of London. This is the first time that BIPA has visited the Mansion House, and

I look forward to what, I hope, will be a wonderful evening for us all. The coach will depart at 6.45 pm precisely, so please be on time. We do not want to lose anybody and miss the opportunity to go to the Mansion House. If, however, someone is late, you can make your own way there by public transport. The Jubilee line and the Docklands Light Railway are not far away, but, clearly, it is far better that you are all on the coach ready to leave at 6.45 pm. The coach will return approximately at 10.30 pm back here to the hotel. Any questions from anybody? OK. So, after that, of course, the evening is free, so enjoy the evening in London or back at the hotel.

Tomorrow, the plenary session will be held in the Attlee Suite, which is in Portcullis House. That is the new building across the road from the Palace of Westminster, but, as you all know, there is a tunnel underneath. So, we are in the Attlee Suite, and that commences at 10.00 am. Now, because we are dealing with London traffic and rush hour etc and we must start at 10.00 am because Mr Speaker will be arriving to open the session, it is vital that we leave in the coaches on time, which, I am afraid to say, is 8.45 tomorrow morning. So, a little bit early, but we do need to make sure we are all in Portcullis House ready for the start of the session at 10.00 am. The reason why it is a bit early is because there is security to go through and your luggage to get sorted out if you are taking it in etc, so please be on time. Again, if anyone misses the coach at 8.45 am, the Jubilee line from Canary Wharf goes straight the way round to Westminster, so you could do that, but then it is a problem because we are getting you in as a group. So, it would be a difficulty if that happened. So, please, if you can, it is much simpler if everyone can be ready and leave in good time so that we are all ready to begin the session with Mr Speaker tomorrow at 10.00 am.

Please also remember that you must check out your luggage and pay any extras before you leave. I advise everyone to take their luggage with them because Westminster is a way from here, and you do not want to have to come back to the hotel later. You can, if you wish, but it is better if you take it with you.

After our plenary session tomorrow morning, we have speakers, as has already been mentioned. There will be the wreath laying in Westminster Hall, and then the plenary begins again. And then, at 12:30 pm, we wrap up completely—I think at 12:15 pm we wrap up our plenary session. Again, we must do this on time, because we then have to make our way over to Number 10 Downing Street for a reception for BIPA in the Prime Minister's office. Just to say that, again, there is very tight security. So, even though you have been through the Commons security, you have to go through the Number 10 security, and that can take a long time, so I really want everyone to leave Portcullis House as quickly as possible, preferably even a little bit before 12:15 pm, if we can.

We are having the reception in Number 10 in honour of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. It has been agreed personally by the Prime Minister that we can have this at Number 10. I am also pleased to inform you that Karen Bradley, the Secretary of State, will join us again for the reception, together with, I am pleased to tell you, the Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP.

I cannot at this stage confirm whether or not the Prime Minister will be able to come along herself. Clearly, there is a lot happening at the moment, and we also have the state visit of the King and Queen of the Netherlands, which she is having to deal with

tomorrow as well. There is a chance that Mrs May will call in to see us, but I cannot promise that. But let us keep our fingers crossed that she will find the time in her diary to pop in and visit us tomorrow lunchtime.

Are there any questions about the arrangements for the remainder of the plenary and the programme for tonight or tomorrow? OK.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Maybe just say something about photo ID.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Yes, that is a very good point, Seán. Please make sure you bring photo IDs to assist with security at the Commons but also at Number 10 Downing Street. So, parliamentarians should have photo ID cards. Anyone who does not, please bring your passport, if you have it, or something else that can demonstrate who you are for security purposes.

OK. I think I have covered everything, so I wish you an hour's rest, and I will see you in just over an hour's time for our visit to the Mansion House. So, I formally adjourn the plenary session for today. Thank you very much.

Adjourned at 5.31 pm

Tuesday 23 October 2018

The Assembly met at 10.04 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Good morning, Lords, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome you to the Palace of Westminster and to the final session of our British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly meeting in London. It is a great privilege to welcome you here to the Parliament of the United Kingdom. I hope that you have enjoyed the proceedings so far, particularly our visit to the Mansion House yesterday evening as guests of the Lord Mayor.

WELCOME FROM THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I am delighted to welcome the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Right Honourable John Bercow MP. John has been our Speaker for nearly 10 years. He has been a reforming Speaker of the House of Commons and has been a champion of the back benchers in the House of Commons. [MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That is music to everyone's ears. I have known Mr Speaker for around 30 years, so it is a great

pleasure to welcome him. John, thank you for coming to open our Assembly proceedings here in Portcullis House this morning.

Mr John Bercow MP:

Andrew, Seán, parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, friends, thank you for allowing to be among your number and, very specifically, thank you to you, Andrew. I see a panoply of parliamentary colleagues from the UK spread around the room and parliamentarians from both Houses, including the illustrious and never-to-be-forgotten Paul Murphy, who served with great distinction in the House of Commons. He was a rather rare being in that he was both a man of government and a committed parliamentarian. The two do not always go together, as you will understand. Sometimes people are great in government but have no great interest in the legislature, and others are very good in the legislature but have no great interest in government. Well, Paul fused the two extremely effectively, as many others do.

Andrew, I hope you will not mind if I say that I have in fact known you for 37 years, since 1981. I know it seems hard to believe that such a young fellow could possibly have known anybody 37 years ago. *[Interruption.]* We did not quite go to school together, but we were in youth politics together. As such, I think I should be permitted, very briefly, to tease Andrew on the matter of voice projection, because there is no danger of not hearing Andrew any more than there is any real danger of people not hearing me.

I do not know whether you will emphasise with this, parliamentarians, but most people tend in public speaking to speak too softly. They speak conversationally and tend not to put themselves in the headspace of the people in the audience, not always fully realising that you do have to speak up. On one occasion, I said to people, “Can you hear me at the back?” and the response was a very positive, “Yes.” On another occasion I called out, “Can you hear me at the back?” to which some unhelpful wag replied, “Yes, but I’ll happily change places with someone who can’t.” *[Laughter.]* That is a fate not to be envied, and I do not wish to repeat it. However, Andrew can always be heard.

I know that this is a British-Irish body, but I hope that I can be forgiven for just mentioning on that matter—this is the last thing that I shall say on it—one of the most famous anecdotes that I recall in relation to the late Reverend Ian Paisley. Ian was orating—orating is the word—in the European Parliament under the presidency of Simone Veil, and he spoke and spoke and spoke and spoke. Eventually, Simone Veil said to him, “Dr Paisley, will you please now bring your remarks to a close?” Ian, in his characteristic fashion, either affected not to hear or had not the slightest interest in hearing and proceeded, uninterrupted, with his oration and with no reference to or acknowledgement of what Simone Veil had said to him. Eventually, becoming somewhat exasperated, she said to him, “For the last time, Dr Paisley, I must appeal to you. Conclude your speech at once. If you do not, I will switch off your microphone.” Unfortunately, Simone Veil did not realise that Ian Paisley without a microphone was very little different from Ian Paisley with a microphone.

Thank you for coming, 70 Members from the UK and Irish Parliaments. I am advised that you meet twice a year—once in Ireland, where it rotates a bit from one venue to

another, and once in the UK. The current Co-Chairs, Andrew and Seán, are extremely committed to the group and to the nurture and extension of the cooperation that should exist between parliamentarians in the two polities. I think I am right in saying that, after my welcome, your session will focus on post-Brexit cooperation in specific policy areas, which is extremely important. In the most Speakerly and inscrutable fashion, I simply say, “Good luck with that.” It is incredibly important, and I do not seek to treat the subject with levity, but when times are tough one must not altogether lose one’s sense of humour. These are important issues.

I think it is fantastic that this group exists, and I hope that I carry you with me to a degree, colleagues, when I say that the bad things about our Parliaments are all too well known to and commented on by the media, members of the public, civil society activists and so on, and that is as it is—there is no point in complaining about that. However, there are lots of good things in our Parliaments that tend to operate beneath the radar. Huge numbers of people are probably not aware that this body exists and that it deliberately and calculatedly brings together people from different political parties, from different Houses within their legislatures and from, in some cases, radically different viewpoints, using the age-old, tried-and-tested, never-to-be-skipped at principle that, as Churchill apparently used to say, “Jaw jaw is better than war war.” In any case, whatever may have happened in the past—whatever the centuries-long history of conflict, tension and struggle between Britain and Ireland—our relationship today is radically different from what it was, and it is extraordinarily important. It is not just important in the name of what I will call “niceness” and people trying to be polite to each other as parliamentarians, which in any case is the grown-up thing to do, and it is important not for us, because it is not about us in the end, but in terms of our countries.

Knowing that some people here will be strong supporters of Brexit, others who are strong opponents and others who are somewhere in the middle, I think I can be forgiven for saying that whatever position people take on Brexit, and whatever happens in relation to Brexit, the relations between our countries and the readiness and capacity effectively to co-operate in the interests of our citizens cannot possibly be either denied or overstated. That is extraordinarily important. I think I am right in saying that there is a real, not totemic, but symbolic and powerful symbolism and significance to the fact that the Co-Chairs will lay wreaths in Westminster Hall to mark the centenary of the ending of the first world war. How right that is, colleagues, and I hope you all identify with it.

If there has not already been, I think there is to be a lunchtime reception at 10 Downing Street. This Prime Minister and her team take such responsibilities and the discharge of such duties and the proffer of hospitality as seriously as any of her predecessors did. I hope that you will all identify with that and want to be involved. I assume that that also applies to the Vice-Chairs, such as Karin Smyth and Nigel Evans. Since Karin was elected in 2015, the House of Commons has witnessed her knowledge of British-Irish affairs and her passion for the subject. Nigel Evans has knowledge on all sorts of matters that extend beyond the United Kingdom, and he is sometimes given, in the name of furthering and deepening his knowledge of such matters, to travelling to the appropriate location to add to his knowledge. I say that non-pejoratively; it is right that he is willing to travel and to broaden the mind in the process.

10.15 am

The same is true of my good friend—I hope I can be forgiven for referring to him as such—one of the great parliamentarians of recent times and someone who spends so much of his time thinking about people who are vulnerable and need help, protection and sanctuary, and who sees his duty, as he did when he was in the Commons so he sees it as his duty in the Lords, to be, if you will, a voice for the voiceless. That person is my good friend Alf Dubs. [*Applause.*] Alf Dubs is a model of parliamentarianism, and we all know that.

In wishing you well, I just want to conclude with one other observation. I do not think that he is here yet, so I cannot tease him in his presence, which would be altogether more fun than to tease him in his absence, but I believe that you are at some point going to hear from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Secretary Gove. Is the fellow here? No. He will be toddling along later. Colleagues, I hope that you enjoy the experience. Michael and I have known each other a long time. I will not say that we have always been bosom pals, and we have had our clashes, but we have two things in common. One is that our kids go to the same comprehensive school in Holland Park, so we often bump into each other at school events. I reckon that Michael and I compete in our enthusiasm for the quality of leadership at that school. He and I are inclined to say to each other, “When you have state schools as good as this, why the hell would you go private and cost yourself a fortune?” It is a fantastic school, and his kids are benefiting from it and so are ours.

The second thing we have in common is that we have always rather enjoyed public speaking, and I am afraid that that is all too obvious to you. My late father used to say, “The thing about John is that John, generally speaking, is generally speaking,” and some people will say the same of Michael. Michael was on display—on parade—in the House of Commons for DEFRA questions last Thursday. If you have an idle moment—because you are all so underworked and do not have enough to do—and you want to study the official report or Hansard record of the exchanges at DEFRA questions, believe me that the spectacle does not fully come out in the written form. You need really to have witnessed it, but it was an oratorical feast—a cross between Demosthenes and Cicero. You will be hearing from young Gove soon, and I do hope that the young pup will come along before very long as it would be very good to see him. He will have some serious things to say, but I rather imagine that he will say them both with eloquence and with humour.

Good luck to you all. Thank you for the important work that you do. Thank you for putting up with me. Notwithstanding the extraordinary stoicism, forbearance and courtesy that you have displayed to me over the past 10 minutes or so, the truth of the matter is that you will be now relieved beyond words to know that my words of welcome are definitively at an end. [*Applause.*]

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will now hand over to Seán to chair the next session.

BRITISH-IRISH RELATIONS

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Well, that woke us all up, didn't it? I am pleased to invite Tom Tugendhat MBE, MP and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons, to address the Assembly. I believe that this will be a very interesting and stimulating topic.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

How do I follow that? One often finds oneself in this Parliament trying to follow John and deciding that Mr Speaker's words speak for themselves, so perhaps it is best not to try. Today, however, one must give it a go, because I am, if you like, sat between John Bercow and Michael Gove, and I understand that in many ways, as John put it, I am between Demosthenes and Cicero, and yet sadly my words are somewhat lacking in Greek style.

It is a huge pleasure and a great privilege to be here with you. As Seán and Andrew have rightly been praised already, I shall not lavish on them too much more other than to say that they really have brought together an Assembly of friends, both of the United Kingdom and of Ireland, including many of our regions and countries. It is tremendous privilege to have you here today.

I stand here, as many British MPs do, conscious of the legacy of Ireland in our House of Commons. For many of us, it is not just an academic question of remembering that it was the Irish MPs who carried the vote for the abolition of slavery, and it is not just the academic remembrance of the Irish MPs who emancipated Catholicism in this country and of the freedom of faith that followed. It is the reality for me personally, as a grandson of Limerick and as a Catholic in this House, that those liberties—so hard won over so many years, not just to us in this House but to all these islands—have carried across an amazing record of liberty that has since spread around the world. It is unquestionably true that Ireland and Britain together have set a tone that has been carried forward by many others, and it is absolutely true that we work so much better together.

As Andrew Rosindell will tell you, the first visit of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to which he contributes enormously, was to the Republic of Ireland. Many people were wondering why we were not going to the Caribbean or somewhere perhaps with weather that would appeal a little more than Cavan—forgive me, Brendan, but it is true. However, many of us realised that the reason why we decided to do that was because, of all the relationships that the United Kingdom has around the world, the only one that is completely non-discretionary and the only one for which we have no choice but to make it work is our relationship with Ireland. We are in so many ways two nations divided by a sea, but one nation united by a soul, because our past has built us together and has intertwined us. Like trees growing in the soil, our roots are so deep and so entwined that there is no way to separate us. That is why this gathering matters so much to me and, as you saw, to John Bercow and, indeed, to many others in this House. It is only when we realise that depth, that single humanity, that enormous proximity that we remember that we simply have no choice but to continue our conversations, even when they are sometimes fraught or—dare I say it?—tetchy or worse, not for ourselves, but for everyone we represent and for the future of these islands.

It is therefore a huge privilege to welcome you and to say thank you for your efforts, not just on occasions like today, but in the periods before and after. Although you are 70 around this room, the truth is that you speak for and represent the whole of our House and—I am sure, Seán—the whole of yours as well. Thank you very much indeed for your enormous efforts and for taking the time out of your extraordinarily busy diaries to be here. Thank you for your efforts and for the kindness that you show us all. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Shall we start off with the easy questions and then give him the difficult ones? Who wants to open up? No one? It looks like you are going to have a handy morning, Tom.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

There we go. More time for coffee.

Mr Jo Carey TD:

Did you go to the All-Ireland hurling final? Limerick won.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

Jo, next time you invite me, I will be there.

Deputy Simon Crowcroft:

Tom, thank you for your words of welcome. Jersey has a strong Irish community that goes back to the navvies who came to build our harbours of refuge in the early 19th century. We have streets with Irish names, and we have a community that gathers together, particularly around St Patrick's day. I wondered what your feeling was about the Irish diaspora and what they can contribute to the current discussions about Brexit and the impact on Ireland.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

That is an extremely important question. If I may say so, the single greatest achievement of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, so ably represented here by Adrian O'Neill, is the creation of St Patrick's day around the world. Fifty years ago, it was a small affair celebrated by a few. Today, I think I am right in saying that Ireland is probably the only country in the world that has guaranteed access to the White House for 24 hours once a year—absolutely no questions asked. Around the world, you see the extraordinary soft power of the Irish people when celebrating St Patrick's Day. It is fantastic. It is hugely important—I say that as a British parliamentarian—because it speaks of the softer European values that I think we all share and identify with, whichever Brexit camp we are in. It is fantastic that Ireland has that ability.

It is interesting that you mentioned the navvies, Simon. I live right next door to a

tunnel built by navvies in the 1800s that saw the event of the Markbeech riots, in which several navvies were killed by local farmers. Such incidents were sadly not uncommon. The transformation from that period, when we saw each other very differently, to today, when we see that St Patrick's day represents an amazing moment of joy for an awful lot of people, no matter how loose their Irish connection. I celebrated St Patrick's day in Cameroon, and there were several people who did not look particularly Irish to me, but they were none the less enjoying the event enormously, which is one of the wonderful things about Irish soft power.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

They like what they are hearing, Tom, because a load of hands are going up now. I call first Brendan Smith TD, who is the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence in Dublin.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I welcome Tom's comments and his visits to our Committee in Dublin and to the Cavan-Monaghan area and County Fermanagh. Your Speaker spoke earlier about Karin's work in the House of Commons on raising the profile of Irish issues, and Karin's roots are in County Cavan, which is very important. Our ambassador Adrian referred in his presentation yesterday to the work of your Foreign Affairs Committee in relation to certain proposals that you are asking the Government to consider for intensifying bilateral relations post-Brexit. Might you be able to give us an outline of some of your Committee's thoughts about that?

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

I think that is extremely important. I should say that Brendan and I are old friends and speak often as we discuss many issues, bilaterally and privately, which I hope sets a tone that allows us to bring our Committees together. One of the areas that we have been looking at is how to ensure that the relationship that we have seen grow up over the past 30 or 40 years is not in any way damaged or diluted over the coming 20 or 30 years. That, of course, is a challenge. All our Governments are busy and have enormous pressures on their time, and it is unquestionable that it is often too easy to find other things to do than talk to each other. That is why among the thoughts that we have been having is how our Governments should work together. Should we have joint Cabinet sessions, for example? We think that that would be helpful.

10.30 am

In fact, we took from the example of the joint Cabinet sessions that the French and the Germans have. As you know, they meet once a year not quite as a joint Government, but as two Governments working together to discuss major issues. That would be an excellent demonstration not just of the proximity of the relationship, but it would force both our Administrations to focus on what they were going to say to each other once a year. You do not want two days to be filled with chit-chat; you want substantive business. That would create a mechanism to support such events. Looking around for more ideas for how to force our countries to work together at every level is exactly the sort of format that we are looking for to ensure that the proximity does not

change.

I should say that I do work exceptionally closely with the Irish Government, and not just because Brendan is a dear friend. I should admit that almost all my staff were either trained by Lord Bew or are a descendant of Lord Bew. I am completely dominated by Northern Irish support and help.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

I was pleased to hear navvies mentioned by Deputy Simon Crowcroft, because it is an important issue for us. There are 12 MPs who are sons or daughters of navvies, and we had a navy event in the House in March. We celebrate their contribution to this country: the rebuilding of the country after the second world war and the building of our canals in the 1700s and 1800s. The history of the navy has not really been written. There are two books, and there is one artist, Bernard Canavan, who has commemorated the role of the navy in his work. Are you aware of any Government funding, either through the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport or wherever, that we could lay our hands on to celebrate and commemorate the work of the Irish navy in building and rebuilding this nation?

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

I find myself talking about history with slight trepidation, not just because we have the great Marxist historian here in Lord Bew, but because we also have the great constitutional and Conservative historian in Lord Lexden. I am therefore massively outranked by historical talent, so forgive me if I slightly duck away. I am not sure what money is available, but I am sure that Sir Peter Luff, who is now running the Heritage Lottery Fund, would be interested in hearing any ideas. Although the navvies are an important part of our common history, I am going to be entirely selfish here and say that the number of men from what is now the Republic—Limerick in my case—who served in the British forces are also often overlooked. My own great-grandfather was killed in Ypres fighting with the Royal Field Artillery. Like all men who came out of Limerick to serve in that conflict, he was a volunteer, and we sometimes overlook that as well. There is a lot of our common history that is important for us to remember, because it reminds us of the honesty of the future and that the depth of our roots is significantly greater than sometimes the more strident would have us believe.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you. Tom, we are tight on time, so would you mind if I took a few questions together?

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

Of course.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I call Declan Breathnach, Paul Coghlan and Frank Feighan.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

I am a border TD, equidistant between Belfast and Dublin, so how do you square the border on the island of Ireland—soft or hard—without some form of customs union?

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Given your Limerick connections, forgive my curiosity but I do not think that the name Tugendhat comes from around there. *[Laughter.]* I do not recognise it, and I am from the neighbouring county, you see. Do I recall that someone of the same name or a similar name was one time a British European commissioner?

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

You do, yes. That is my uncle.

Senator Frank Feighan:

As somebody whose grandfather was a navy in Glasgow and whose father was a navy in London, it is great to see the Irish diaspora doing so well. One thing that I have noticed over the past 10 years is that there is a huge Irish caucus for good here in Westminster, and that is something that we should mobilise.

Regarding 1914 to 1918, we did forget about the sacrifices of thousands of Irish men from the 26 counties, but we have come of age over the past 10 years. In my own town, 126 young men went away to war and never came home. We are talking about up to maybe 30,000 men from the 26 counties and up to 50,000 from the island of Ireland. You mentioned that you are from Limerick, and we had a difficulty with the poppy in Ireland, but the Limerick branch of the Royal British Legion has designed a shamrock poppy pin. I have given 1,500 to every MP and Lord over the past two days, and we will get 1,500 to every TD, Senator and councillor in the 26 counties. I just want to say that we have worked extremely hard, and those sacrifices will be appropriately commemorated over the coming years. Thank you for your presentation.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

The last question in this group will come from Fergus O'Dowd.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

Tom, I was very impressed with your introduction. I come from a Nationalist family in Ireland, and I have two uncles who fought in the Irish war of independence and one uncle who died in the second world war fighting with the RAF. You are quite right about our common history and backgrounds and about how we must continue to work together. Your commentary is enlightened and informative, and you hold a high position, so your influence, knowledge and expertise in understanding and appreciating the British and Irish backgrounds and how historically entwined we are is hugely important. In the context of Brexit, we want to be as close as possible to Britain, whatever happens, because we always found that Britain was our best friend

in Europe. We hope that that will continue, notwithstanding that you are leaving the European Union, and the links that this body has should hopefully be strengthened, not weakened, as a result.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

I will try to take those questions in order. I am not going to get into an exposition of which of the various Brexit options are available, but I spent yesterday evening with a bunch of tech firms, talking about frictionless trade and how to identify vehicles and goods moving through ports and at various different points. The key for me is that I grew up, as most of us did, with the events of Northern Ireland playing out very much in my mind. My uncle, who served on the European Commission, was targeted by gunmen, and many of us here in this room share deep sadness for mistakes and crimes committed on all sides. We must not look at this next stage in our common life as a way of going backwards, but as a way of going forwards. This must not be Northern Irish politics for slow learners. We cannot think that the examples that we tried in the '70s and '80s are examples to copy. They are not. It is the talks and the achievements of FitzGerald and Thatcher, and later Ahern and Blair, that we should be celebrating. Those, not the old ways, are the great moments of success. I will not pretend that I can come up with a simple answer, because I cannot, but the truth is that if we remember who we are—our common bonds and our joint brotherhood and sisterhood—we will find ways to make it work. We must remember that we will sometimes have to be gentler on the symbolism each way in order to find practical solutions that work for our people and do not just reinforce our egos. That is an important element to keep in the forefront of our minds.

I mentioned my uncle, and I am sorry that you did not know of the Tugendhats of Limerick. We were admittedly a very small family, but we normally went by the surname Ryan, so perhaps you did not know how it was pronounced. *[Laughter.]* A lot of people find Tugendhat difficult to pronounce, so we just pronounced it “Ryan”.

My family is in many ways fully European. My grandfather Tugendhat came from Austria and fought on the Italian front in the first world war. In fact, he and Hugh Dalton spent a couple of years shelling each other, so thank God that they both missed. He then left Austria as the empire was collapsing and travelled across Europe, as people did in those days, settling for a bit in each town as he went, until he ended up in the UK. He studied at the London School of Economics, which is where he met my Irish grandmother. When we talk about the pain of our conflicts, you can imagine the pain of my great-grandmother—my grandmother's mother—when this Austrian man who had spent the best part of four years trying to kill people like her husband, who was now dead and lying cold in Ypres, asked to marry her daughter. It was a moment of extreme pain and great grief. Indeed, we have the letters from the time, and she was convinced to allow the marriage only by a young American priest, who said, “Put it behind you,” and helped her to move on. If people could do it then, those examples that live on are the ones that we must be setting again. We know what the past looks like. We know what the period of 70 years before the past 70 years looks like. We know what it can look like, and it is essential that we do not repeat it.

Senator Feighan, thank you for your contribution, because it touches me greatly and I know that it will touch many in these Houses and many in these islands. You are right

that the Irish diaspora community, whether navvies or ex-servicemen or whomever they happen to be, is very real. I remember very vividly the military funeral—I think it was just north of Dublin—after a man from the Irish Guards had been killed in Iraq. He was buried with military honours in a cemetery near Dublin. I believe I am right in saying that it was the first British military funeral at all the in the Republic and the first one in Dublin for 80-odd years.

That reminds us that there are thousands of men from the 26 counties serving in Her Majesty's armed forces today as volunteers. They can do that not just because they have the permission, the laws and the passports that allow it, but because they know that we are part of one brotherhood. They know that we are connected deeply by many values. Now, that does not mean that we agree on everything—of course not. The 26 counties do not agree on everything, and these four nations do not agree on everything. That would be a simplistic expectation, but it true that that depth of understanding and brotherhood that we see reflected in the Irish men and women who served in our armed forces is hugely enriching.

Fergus, thank you for your comments. We come from different traditions, but neither tradition is invalidated by the other. In fact, I would argue that both are enriched by the other. One of the greatest achievements of politics in recent years—certainly one of the moments that really struck me—was the genius of those who drafted the agreements in Belfast and the Anglo-Irish Agreement before them. They ensured that identity could be divorced from paperwork, allowing people to define themselves as Nationalist, Unionist, Republican—however they chose—and not be forced into an identity simply by geography. I think that that comes back to the first question: we must ensure that that freedom and that multiplicity of identities is respected and that it can continue.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I call Vicky Ford.

10.45 am

Ms Vicky Ford MP:

Sorting out Brexit and the relationship between Britain and Ireland is obviously key, but we are also living at a time of huge geopolitical change. Tom, it would be interesting to get a view on some of the other work on which your Committee focusing and on the areas that unite us across the world.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

We are living through an extraordinary moment in our world, and the reason why I am so impressed by the work of this Assembly is because the changes that we see around the world are deeply concerning. We are seeing ourselves going from a multipolar, multinational world that we built up over 70 years with the writing of various documents and the creation of various institutions, from the United Nations to NATO and so on, towards a more bilateral world. We are seeing that in the United States, and that is not just about Trump because Obama did it, too. There is a pull

towards bilateralism and isolationism. That isolationism—not too strong, but heading towards it—is something that we have seen in the United States for many years. We are now seeing the strengthening of China and its push towards bilateralism as well.

For countries such as ours and for countries that, let us be honest, have grown rich on our ability to interact with the whole world and to shape events through our diasporas, our commercial links and our diplomats and armies, this is a really challenging moment. It is challenging because if we back away and pretend that it is okay to go towards bilateralism, we will rapidly find that the institutions that have allowed us the freedoms that we now enjoy are collapsing. It is a real threat. We see that most extraordinarily with Russia, which is actually trying to pull down those institutions, but we see it creeping in with others, too. That is why the work that we are doing—this is related to the Foreign Affairs Committee going to Cavan and Dublin—is based on the fact that we share a common outlook.

We may not be members of all the same institutions, but we do rely on the same infrastructure of multinationalism. When one looks at NATO, an organisation of which only one of us is a member, the truth is that we all know that NATO underpins the security of western Europe. Ireland has heroically sent many men for to the UN for its defence forces over many years, not least in Lebanon, and it is important to remember that that commitment was not simply an act of charitable generosity; it was a commitment on the behalf of the Irish people and the British people to a multinational order that has kept us safe and strong.

As that is being challenged by changes around the world, we are asking ourselves questions in the Committee. I know that Brendan Smith is looking at this differently, but in the same way—if you will forgive the ambiguity. We are beginning to see that there are areas where we really can have an influence—where we, the United Kingdom, can shape things—but the truth is that we cannot shape them alone. The truth is that we can only shape things if we remember that we can offer leverage with partners and friends. That is where talking to partners around the world is of course important, but there is none more important to us than Ireland. If we work together in many of these forums, we find time and again that we are each other's best friends and best partners. I very much hope that the work we are doing will find echo with Brendan—I know it will—but also with the wider Irish political community, because the multinationalism that we see is under threat is fundamental to all our freedoms.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We have about five minutes left. Does anyone else want to ask a question? No. Thank you very much, Tom.

Mr Tom Tugendhat MP:

It was a great pleasure. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you to Tom. I am proud to serve with Tom on the Foreign Affairs Committee. In fact, we are meeting later today. Thank you not only for attending and contributing,

but also for your commitment to the British-Irish friendship, which we appreciate enormously.

This being the 100th anniversary of the great war, we are now going to take part in a wreath-laying ceremony to commemorate those who died in the first world war. I am delighted to invite my Co-Chair Seán and all of you to join me in a short ceremony below the south window of Westminster Hall. Once that has concluded, we will make our way back here to continue our deliberations.

The sitting was suspended at 10.52 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.41 am.

BREXIT AND THE AGRICULTURE AND FISHING INDUSTRIES

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We are told that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove, is still in Cabinet at No. 10, so that is why there is a delay. We still hope that he will be able to get over here in time before we must leave for No. 10 ourselves. We therefore have a short gap and need to fill up a little time. It is a great pleasure that we have the Chief Minister of Jersey with us, so this is an ideal time to invite him to say a few words to us and talk about the British-Irish Council. John Le Fondré is no longer a Member of this Assembly, but it is still great to have him here. As he is now a member of the British-Irish Council, he can say a few words about that and about anything else he would like to fill the time with. *[Laughter.]* Can we have a big hand for the Chief Minister of Jersey? *[Applause.]*

Senator John Le Fondré:

There is nothing like zero notice. Thank you for that, Andrew. On the behalf of myself and Deputy Kevin Lewis, who is also our Infrastructure Minister and was previously an associate Member, I welcome the invitation for us to be here as observers today. I was first with the British-Irish Parliamentary Association in 2013 in London, and I am now finishing with BIPA in London, even though I am an observer. It is nice to see some old friends and friendly faces.

As everybody knows, we face some challenging times. I went to the British-Irish Council for the first time immediately after Sligo—about 10 days afterwards, although there are some overlaps—and it is interesting how the dynamics work. There were some queries, and I am happy to see whether we can get a better connection between the two organisations. That could take the form of the Co-Chairs attending as observers or something—I do not know—but the impression I get is that BIPA would like better communication between the two, so let us see what we can do.

Looking around, I see Juan Watterson, who is the Speaker of the House of Keys on the Isle of Man, Al Brouard of Guernsey, David Johnson, who is the leader Member for Jersey after taking over from me, and Simon Crowcroft, who is an associate Member and also the Connétable of St Helier. Some people may have been through the unfortunate experience of me doing a presentation in Cheltenham on the constitutional relationship of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Broadly

speaking, after about 1,000 years of history, the United Kingdom is responsible for our defence and certain international affairs, but other than that we are broadly independent, including on budget-setting and law-making. Speaking for Jersey alone, we are worth about £5 billion to the UK economy, supporting about 250,000 jobs, and we upstream about half a trillion pounds' worth of investment into the UK, so we rather think that that is a good tale to tell.

11.45 am

As for Brexit, we are already a third country in certain areas. For fund placement, for example, we have a private placement regime. For GDPR, we are a third country or have third-country equivalence. There are obvious challenges, however. I believe that the UK has something like 800 pieces of Brexit-related legislation potentially coming down the line, and we have about 200. For example, we are looking to extend the Vienna convention so that we do not have transport problems. There were obviously different views on Brexit around the table in terms of the Jersey Government of the day, which was obviously not the Government that I led. Brexit is obviously a key risk to Jersey, and we had a position paper ready on day one after the vote that I was able to give to the House of Lords Committee and say that we had been preparing for the past two years.

That is a quick snapshot. We have some challenges ahead at a parliamentary level, where there are views around beneficial ownership and public registers. Speaking for Jersey alone, we have had a register of beneficial ownership for decades. It is private so, unfortunately for them, the media does not have access, but the UK authorities do. Normally, access is granted within 24 hours, but it can be done within one hour if the matter is urgent. The Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information recently evaluated our register as compliant and the UK register as largely compliant, but we all have the same objective: combatting financial crime. Basically, all the Crown dependencies hit the regulatory level in financial services at the top end at organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. I shall pause at this point in case anyone has any questions.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you for your address. It is very good of you to speak to us. It may be of interest to Members to learn that the King and Queen of the Netherlands are arriving for a state visit later today. I am not asking them to come and speak. *[Laughter.]* But they will be here later. If you look at Parliament Square today, you will see that it is incredibly colourful, because the flag of Jersey is flying, together with the flags of Guernsey and the Isle of Man and the 16 British Overseas Territories. We have the five Crown dependencies—Alderney and Sark are treated separately—and the 16 overseas territories, so all 21 flags are on display in Parliament Square today. It is an incredible display in which Jersey's flag is prominent, so it is an appropriate day for you to speak in Parliament.

We still need to a kill a little time, but we hope that the Secretary of State will still join us. Kevin, would you like to add to the Chief Minister's comments?

Deputy Kevin Lewis:

Thank you, Co-Chair. If you recall—I do not think that everyone has heard this story—we were having a cup of tea in Dublin, and you grabbed me by the arm and said, “Kevin, it would be really great to come down to Jersey with BIPA at some point.” All I said was, “That will be nice,” which was taken as an invitation, and you promptly turned up with the Steering Committee. However, I believe that there is a vacancy in 2020. I am not authorised to invite everybody, but all that I will say is, “That will be nice.” *[Laughter.]* I join John le Fondré in thanking everyone for the past four years of being on BIPA. Thank you for your counsel and your friendship; it will be sorely missed.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. Would anyone else like to contribute? I think Lord Dubs has indicated that he would like to contribute.

The Lord Dubs:

I would like to ask a question of our friends from Jersey. The Steering Committee had a great time when we went to Jersey a year ago. Thank you for your hospitality and for showing us around the island. We were made to feel very welcome indeed. What effect will the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union have on Jersey?

Senator John Le Fondré:

We did not vote in the referendum. Essentially, the Crown dependencies are part of the UK treaty of accession through what we refer to as protocol 3. At present, we are in Europe for goods, but otherwise not in Europe. When the treaty of accession is revoked, that protocol will disappear, so we will no longer be in Europe for goods for VAT purposes unless that forms part of the UK’s negotiations. I suppose that that is the situation in a nutshell but, as I was alluding to earlier, because we are already outside of the EU in a variety of matters as a third country the limit of the impact in certain areas will be minimal. However, there is obviously a lot of discussion happening around the relationship with the UK, which is where most of our goods go. For example, there will be a minor impact—although not minor for the individuals affected—on things such as shellfish, oddly enough. In terms of exports, our production is probably one of the highest proportionally for the UK. We export quite a lot of shellfish 40 miles across the water to Cancale in France. A lot of that is mussel seed, which then grows up to become French mussels, so we are quite important regionally for that little area of France.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

This is about not just the free movement of goods, but also the free movement of people, which could also be affected.

Senator John Le Fondré:

We are putting in place an EU citizen settlement scheme. About 25% of the workforce

in Jersey alone are EU citizens—as in non-UK citizens—but we are basically using the same system that the UK is putting in place, and it will be in place fairly soon.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Would anyone else like to contribute or raise any points?

The Lord Kilclooney:

I heard something over coffee that surprised me. France has an equivalent of the Commonwealth in the Francophone group of nations, and I was told about an hour ago that Ireland has now applied to join the Francophone group. Is that correct?

Senator Frank Feighan:

Oui, c'est vrai.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Are they becoming French rather than British?

Senator Frank Feighan:

We have been granted observer status.

The Lord Kilclooney:

You are French now?

Senator Frank Feighan:

We are taking a worldly view, and I hope that we might apply for Commonwealth status down the road, but that is only my opinion.

Senator John Le Fondré:

I will just add that Jersey has long been a full-voting member of the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie. In fact, when I leave here today, I am briefly visiting the APF European plenary, which is in session down in Andorra this year. I shall be interested to see whether any representatives from Ireland join us in due course.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Would anyone else like to contribute anything? Karin, I wonder whether you would like to say a few words at this point. Sadly, we did try to get Jeremy Corbyn, but he was unable to come, which we are very sorry about. You can speak for Jeremy, can't you?

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Nothing can go wrong. *[Laughter.]* I think it has been a fantastic couple of days. The ceremony that we just did was very moving. I find Westminster Hall one of the most amazing parts of this building and—we have some great historians with us—I am pleased that we were able to show some of the involvement of people from across these islands.

If we are looking for things to talk about, we were going to talk about environment, food and agriculture and there is a great deal of expertise in the room. It might be worthwhile to take contributions from colleagues here who are involved in or speak on behalf of agriculture, food or rural affairs in their areas, so that they can share some of their current thinking. I know that some people may be willing to kick off a bit of discussion while we are sitting here. I will give a peroration on Jeremy another time.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I regret to say that I think the Secretary of State is stuck in Cabinet. It is a great pity, but it is likely that he is not going to arrive. I apologise on Mr Gove's behalf, but we may bump into him as we go over to No. 10. I call John Scott.

Mr John Scott MSP:

Thank you, Andrew. We were talking over coffee about how moving that ceremony at the south window was. Some time ago, this body was given a lecture by an eminent Irish historian about how many Irish people fought on the British side at the start of the first world war and also during the second world war. I think that that is not that well-enough known or recognised in Ireland or, indeed, in the United Kingdom. While we were given that lecture a few years ago, I do not think that everyone here, because of the renewal of members within this body, will be aware of that situation. It is quite important in this decade of reconciliation that we constantly remind ourselves of those links. There are others in this room much better-qualified than me—by 100 miles—to talk about that and who could do so and add to the spirit of the day if they were so inclined.

On Scotland's behalf and because time is short—others can make their own remarks—I also want to thank Seán Crowe and Andrew Rosindell for what has been a memorable plenary. However, I think we have an opportunity now to talk about the history of 100 years ago if anyone better qualified than me might wish to do so.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, John, for your kinds words.

The Lord Bew:

I just want to follow up on John Scott's remarks by saying a few things about the ceremony that we have just had. The blur of names was such that it would be hard for many people to clock the significance of the individual names, which include Irish parliamentarians who died in the first world war. The first UK MP to die was an

Antrim MP, but the first MP to die was Arthur Bruce O'Neill, who was Captain Terence O'Neill's father. His family had a service for him here on the 100th anniversary of his death, and they have documents showing that he was pretty much casually executed by a German officer while lying on the ground. The entire family was at the service, including Baroness O'Neill, who is a Member of my House of Lords.

The death was not insignificant, because it meant that Terence O'Neill never knew his father. His mother was the daughter of the Earl of Crewe, who was a strong home ruler, and she fell out with her father for various reasons. One of her acts of defiance was to marry an Orange Unionist MP from Antrim, which did not go down extraordinarily well in Liberal London at the time. However, upon the death of her husband, she gravitated back to Liberal London, which is where Terence was raised. That is part of the reason why many people said when he became Prime Minister of Northern Ireland that, although the family is the most rooted family in County Antrim, he had never really grown up among these people and did not have the kind of intuition that was necessary to guide people through the crisis that began with the civil rights movement. So, the very first name that you saw had major historical implications.

12.00 pm

My other point is about the Redmondite MPs on the memorial. It is often said that they urged young Irish lads in the Dublin slums to go and die for Britain while they sat around here drinking wine. However, they are as represented on the memorial as any of the mainstream British parties. They may have made the wrong decision politically, but they were sincere and sacrificed themselves. If you look at the sons, you will also see that many sons of Irish Nationalist party MPs died in the first world war and that compares with the sons of British Conservative, Labour or Liberal MPs. That is one of the most striking things about the memorial we have just seen. If you make a count of the Irish names, you will see what I mean. Whatever they were, they may have been wrong, but they were not hypocrites.

Senator Frank Feighan:

You learn something new every day. It was only when I went to Flanders 15 years ago that I realised that 126 young men from my own town lost their lives, including the four Wynne brothers, who lived within 50 yards of my house. I never knew that they had died in world war one. Lord Bew kindly informed me that a Captain Fitzgibbon is also on the memorial, and that he was the son of an MP and also had a brother, a priest, who fell in world war one. I only realised that today, so we have an awful lot to learn about world war one, especially about the history of the 26 counties.

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

It may interest colleagues to know that several of us have been campaigning in Parliament, with the support of the *Daily Mirror*, for recognition for those on the home front, such as munitions workers, particularly the women. My own great-grandmother, Hannah Marsh, was originally from an Irish family—the Cassidys—and worked alongside many Irish people in the secret munitions factory in Gretna and

Eastriggs on the English-Scottish border. They were known as “canary girls” because they mixed the nitroglycerin and cotton to make cordite for bombs and shells. Tens of thousands of Irish people, including my great-grandmother worked in those factories, but we only discovered the story relatively recently by looking at old photographs. Many of us are now campaigning to recognise the extraordinary stories of all the people, whether they served on the western front or elsewhere.

The Viscount Bridgeman:

The visit to the battlefields about three years ago was a moving event, and I remember showing one of our Irish colleagues a gravestone which just said “An Irish Soldier of the Great War”—nothing more. However, a lot of the named Irish graves would not have had a visit from a compatriot or a member of their family for a century. It was a significant occasion altogether.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Again, reflecting on the sacrifices, I want to talk about the 8,000 men who volunteered from the Isle of Man, 1,100 of whom did not come back. We are proud of our contribution in that it was the greatest proportion of service-age men to sign up from anywhere in the British Isles. There was also a recent piece about internees. In world war one, many Germans were imprisoned on the Isle of Man, and there are records of a women and families camp hosting Italian, German and Austrian internees in world war two. It is a rare example of women and children being interned in their own camp anywhere in the world. That story about the Isle of Man’s history is only starting to be told.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA:

Before I entered the constructive world of Northern Ireland politics, I was in youth work. There was an opportunity to bring a group of young people from the South and the North, from both different traditions, over to the Flanders area to see the story of the soldiers who travelled over. It was a tremendous opportunity to have a process of reconciliation, to allow young people to explore their history and to see that there was a shared journey among people across the island of Ireland and that, ultimately, it was a great leveller when people went and faced death, because there was none of the baggage that people had grown up with and were surrounded with back home. Unfortunately, funding for that programme was cut. It was not the biggest amount of money to allow a number of groups to travel each year, so if anyone has any influence in any committees that could allow that funding to be reinstated, that would provide an excellent opportunity for hundreds of young people to go on that journey, which is worthwhile. People here have mentioned how they got quite an experience from it, so if we can pass that on to the next generation and if that could help with community relations back at home, that would be valuable.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

To follow on from Lord Bew’s story, one of the MPs on the memorial is Tom Kettle, who would have been a great friend of one of the leaders of the Rising: Thomas MacDonagh. He was one of the Irish volunteers. He did not necessarily agree with

Redmond's reasons for going over, but he was in Belgium trying to source weapons for the Irish volunteers that would eventually be used in 1916. He was there during the German invasion and saw some of the atrocities that were going on. That was the influence for him. He then went back and argued within the volunteers. Redmond had his own position that it was important that Irish people get involved, coming from a small nation, and that we would get our own independence. There was then a split between the volunteers at that time. Tom Kettle was on the battlefields and then heard about the 1916 revolution in Ireland, and many of his friends and comrades were involved. You can imagine the difficulties that he was going through while fighting in the war when events were happening back in Ireland. That is just a little snippet of information that people may not know about.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. I apologise again for the fact that the Secretary of State was unable to join us, but he is still in Cabinet, which is a great pity. Let us hope that we may bump into him when we go over to No. 10, or perhaps he could drop by. We may hopefully see some other Cabinet Ministers, because they are clearly in quite an intense meeting—I wonder what they are discussing. [*Laughter.*] Thank you everybody. I will now hand over to Seán to chair the Adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Our business is now concluded. On the behalf of all of you, I thank our speakers, our Secretariat, the staff of the Riverside hotel and here in Westminster, and all those who have helped to make this 57th plenary session such a successful event. I know that we said it last night, but I want to thank the Co-Chair Andrew for pulling out all the stops with the trip to Romford. The fact that the Irish tricolour was flying there for the first time has a special significance to many of us from Irish backgrounds, but it is also significant for people from Romford with Irish backgrounds. I really appreciated the meal last night—it was a pleasure to meet Andrew's mother. What struck me about the plenary was Members' engagement. Normally you see people drifting off and so on, but I think everyone stayed in the room and most people took part in the debates. That shows the relevance not only of the debates themselves, but of the times that we are living in and the challenges that we are facing.

The Co-Chair (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank all of you for the past three days. It has been a real pleasure to welcome you here to London and to Romford in Essex. I know that I has been an intense few days, but we have had a very successful plenary, and the camaraderie and cooperation that we have shared has been tremendous. I also thank the Clerks from both the UK Parliament and our friends from Ireland, who have worked together to make all this possible and to ensure that we leave, I hope, with happy memories of the past few days. [*Applause.*] I cannot wait to see what happens at the plenary in Ireland next year.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I call on Steve Aiken to move the Adjournment.

Dr Steve Aiken OBE, MLA:

I beg to move

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

On the behalf of the Members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I thank the Co-Chairs, the Vice-Chairs and the staff for this, the 57th plenary conference. We are all looking forward to going to Tallaght.

The Co-Chair (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I now declare the 57th plenary session of the Assembly closed, and we will next meet in plenary session in Ireland sometime next year—hopefully around May. We will now head to 10 Downing Street for the reception. I wish you all a safe and pleasant journey home. The plenary session now stands adjourned.

Adjourned at 12.12 pm