BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

SIXTY-SECOND PLENARY SESSION

Monday 24 October 2022

The Assembly met at 9.30 am

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate Karen Bradley MP on her appointment as the British Co-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA). *[Applause.]* I wish her well in her new role. You all join with me in wishing Karen well in her new role, and I know that we will continue to work in the spirit of openness and friendship.

I take a moment to note the deep regret that the Assembly felt at the recent passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. On behalf of Members of the Assembly, I extend our condolences to the royal family. The Queen's historic visit to our country in 2011 marked a significant step in the normalisation of relations between the UK and Ireland. Her positive contribution in that work will always be warmly remembered on this island.

I also mark the passing last week of Baroness Blood, a Member of this body for many years, a passionate advocate of labour rights and a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. May Blood, as some of us will recall, addressed the Assembly's Sligo plenary in 2018 on the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. I am sure that Members will like to remember her and, indeed, all other former Members of the Assembly who have passed since we last met in London in February.

Members, I welcome you all here today to the Farnham Estate in County Cavan. As you will have all seen on your travels, Cavan is a beautiful county, full of rolling drumlins and scenic lakes. We are delighted to be hosting this sixty-second plenary session of BIPA in the surroundings of the stunning Farnham Estate.

You have all been circulated with an up-to-date list of BIPA membership in your briefing packs. I have to inform the Assembly 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: John Griffiths and Cathal Boylan. We have received apologies for the plenary session from Senator Vincent P Martin, Senator Frances Black, Sorca Clarke TD, Brendan Howlin TD, Mark Menzies MP, Sir Peter Bottomley MP, Alistair Carmichael MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Lord Donoughue, Conor McGinn MP, Mark Logan MP, Craig Williams MP, Bridget Phillipson MP and Steve Aiken MLA.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Brendan, and thank you for your warm welcome and for already making me feel very much part of the team.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I hope that we can work together in a spirit of cooperation and partnership to make BIPA even more relevant and topical in the years ahead. I am delighted

to welcome all Members here to the sixty-second plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Members will have received a copy of the programme of business. During this plenary, we will focus some of our discussions on the challenges facing us as parliamentarians, particularly in relation to trade. *[Inaudible due to technical difficulties.]* We will then hear from Dr Linda Doyle, provost and president of Trinity College, Dublin.

We are delighted that three Committees have reports to present to the Assembly during this plenary session. The first Committee report will be presented this afternoon. We will hear from the vice-chair of Committee C, Stephen Doughty MP, who will present Committee C's report on the effects of the post-Brexit trading environment on UK-Irish trade. A panel of trade experts will then discuss the challenges and opportunities on trade between our islands. The panel comprises Marina Donohoe, regional director of UK, Nordics and global procurement at Enterprise Ireland; John McGrane, director-general of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce; and, from InterTradeIreland, Margaret Hearty, chief executive officer, Martin Robinson, director of strategy and policy, and Deirdre Maguire, manager of their Brexit advisory service.

Monday will conclude with a debate among Members on recent political developments, and who knows what they will be by that time? We expect Monday's session to conclude around 5.30 pm.

On Tuesday morning, we will hear from the chair of Committee A, Senator Emer Currie, who will present Committee A's report on consolidating the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland. Darren Millar MS, chair of Committee B, will then present Committee B's report on vaccine roll-outs in BIPA jurisdictions to the Assembly. We will then hear updates from Committees C and D. The Assembly will then hear from Professor Alvin Jackson from the University of Edinburgh, who will speak on Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Union from 1800 to 1925. He will then take questions.

Tuesday's session will conclude with an address by John FitzGerald, an adjunct professor at Trinity College, Dublin and member of Ireland's statutory climate change advisory committee. The Assembly will adjourn at 12.15 pm on Tuesday.

It is indeed very fitting to have a plenary in the beautiful and scenic county of Cavan — thank you for inviting us, Brendan — as we discuss the future challenges impacting not only on politics but on all our citizens' lives.

I now ask Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile to formally move that the adoption of the proposed programme of business be agreed to.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile*:*

Go raibh maith agaibh, a Chomh-Chathaoirleacha. Ba mhaith liom moladh go nglactar leis an chlár gnó den dara suí iomlánach is seasca de Thionól Parlaiminteach na Breataine agus na hÉireann. Thank you, Co-Chairs. I formally propose the adoption of the programme of business for the sixty-second plenary of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

Programme of Business agreed.

ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF STATE AT THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I call on Steve Baker MP, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, to address the Assembly. Minister Baker, you are very welcome. *[Applause.]*

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you very much indeed for doing me the honour of being with you for this, the first time that I have attended this great Assembly, and let me just say at this time that I hope that it is not the last. You will understand what I mean. I particularly thank our Co-Chairs for their generous welcome this morning. Karen, in particular, made it very clear indeed that this was not an option for the British Government, and I am delighted to be here. Brendan, thank you for making me so very welcome here in Cavan. It is obviously a very beautiful place indeed, and I look forward to getting out there and seeing the lakes in due course.

Since 1990, this Assembly has played a really key role in ensuring a strong link between the Houses of Parliament and the Oireachtas. It continues to play a key role in promoting good relations and a forum for discussion and debate for all of us from across the representative Assemblies of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. You have brought people closer together, which is the basis of all that we want to achieve.

Much has been written and discussed about the UK-Irish relationship, particularly under the lens of the Northern Ireland protocol agreed between the UK and the EU. Some of us have put considerable effort into improving those relations, and I hope that it has been beneficial. This, of course, is not the moment for commentary on talks that are under way, but it is clear that both sides remain committed to getting an agreement that works for everyone.

I restate our conviction that the protocol can and should be improved so that it better reflects the delicate but crucial balances at the heart of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Since some of my comments have been perhaps misrepresented, let me be absolutely clear: I want us, together, to celebrate the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. It is a wonderful agreement. We are all resolutely committed to it, but the point that I want everyone to understand is that it will be difficult to see how President Biden and figures from across the European Union will come to the island of Ireland to rejoice over that agreement if we fail to sort out the protocol. We need to respect everyone's legitimate interests and move forward together as friends.

For unionists, the direct application of EU laws and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the EU show that, while Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the UK, it is treated differently. I have to say, in the context of the leadership election and the need for the Conservative Party to come together, that it is very important to remember that that is crucial for Conservative Eurosceptics too. As somebody who wants stable and good government in the UK, I say to you all that we need to respect everyone's legitimate interests, including those of unionists.

The Foreign Secretary and his team, working closely with Northern Ireland Office Ministers and others, will pursue their discussions respectfully but robustly with the aim of reaching an agreed outcome with the EU that works for everyone. Like most friends and neighbours, we

will not always agree on everything, and frank and honest discussions will sometimes be needed. However, we firmly believe that what unites us is stronger and more important than those things that divide us.

I am conscious that the British and Irish Governments work closely across a range of areas. We work jointly to uphold the common travel area and tackle cross-border criminality. We have extensive trade North/South and east-west. In 2021 and 2022, we have cooperated at the UN Security Council, and, of course, we have worked jointly with the rest of the Western world against Russia. It is clear that, collectively, we want to deliver for all citizens across our various jurisdictions. This organisation — this organisation — has been at the heart of uniting us in this common goal.

It is in that ethos of delivering common objectives that each of us must take an active role and personal responsibly in building and maintaining strong relations across these islands. I am, as perhaps you know, personally committed to playing my role in rebuilding those relations. It is only through deep bonds of trust and close working that we are going to make progress on key issues, wider devolution and areas of mutual interest. That is what we all want to see continue, and it will. The work of BIPA is central to that. Whether through your biannual plenary meetings and Committee work or your events and debates, you help to build the bonds of trust that lay the foundation of the strong working relationships of the UK and Ireland.

As I have said, next year will, of course, mark the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and we absolutely want to celebrate it. The agreement is recognised across the globe as the framework for peace and stability, and we in the UK Government remain steadfastly committed to its success. The agreement enshrined the principle of consent, setting Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom for as long as its people wish to be part of the Union. It established crucial political institutions to give expression to all communities in Northern Ireland, and we want those institutions up and running. It created new bodies to foster greater North/South and east-west cooperation. It reaffirmed the birthright of the people of Northern Ireland to their identity and citizenship and ensured that their rights are protected by law. In so doing, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement created the conditions for a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland.

This key milestone, the 25th anniversary, provides an opportunity for all of us to not only reflect on all that has been achieved but to look to the future with optimism and purpose. A growing economy with a thriving private sector that creates skilled, well-paid jobs for people in Northern Ireland is the surest route to achieving the vision set out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of long-term prosperity and stability and of a dynamic Northern Ireland whose people are a success. I say this from my script with some heartfelt feeling: it is only with stable institutions in place that that can be achieved. It is therefore incumbent on all the parties to form an Executive as soon as possible to deliver on that vision and fully unlock Northern Ireland's potential.

Everyone in this room understands that Northern Ireland has enormous unfulfilled economic potential, growing strength in key growth sectors and a young, well-educated population, and that it is an attractive place to invest and do business. My personal goal is to do everything in my power to advance the interests of Northern Ireland and unleash that potential. However, change does not happen overnight. We recognise that the global economy faces very substantial headwinds and uncertainty, not least skyrocketing energy costs. Those have, of course, had a terribly damaging effect on household and business finances, which is why the Government acted so strongly.

9.45 am

The Northern Ireland economy in particular faces its own challenges, particularly long-standing issues of low productivity and economic inactivity, and it needs its leaders in Government and civil society to work together to address them. We will continue, in the short term, to press all parties to reform the Northern Ireland Executive. We want to see the DUP in particular accept that the Government, and whichever Prime Minister the UK returns, will continue their policy of reaching an agreement that is acceptable to all sides. We would like the DUP to accept that and to reform the Executive in order to avoid an election. We are very clear that, otherwise, we will call an election and get it done as soon as is feasible.

In many areas, the Government are already taking action to invest for growth and a strong society in Northern Ireland, with £617 million for the city and growth deal programme in Northern Ireland and £400 million of New Deal for Northern Ireland funding. We have targeted funding for key growth sectors. There is £730 million of funding going into the PEACE PLUS programme to support economic stability, peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Through the Department for Levelling Up-led Community Ownership, Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity funds, the UK Government are investing in communities across Northern Ireland, with the objective of improving the lives of people and places most in need.

I want to see us be, absolutely, as ambitious as possible in developing the investment zone policy in Northern Ireland. Working with a restored Northern Ireland Executive and local partners to explore that game-changing idea, investment zones will create jobs and turbocharge growth by offering tax cuts for local businesses and will allow for a more open planning system to drive forward residential and commercial development. Today, a €74 million — £64 million — joint investment over six years has been announced to create new research centres in collaboration between the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI), the NI Executive's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). The new co-centre programme is an exciting example of the UK and Ireland working together on high-quality science and innovation on climate and on sustainable and resilient food systems. It will further deepen the relationships between the research sectors in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Ireland, encouraging valuable cross-border collaboration between our nations as friends.

We recognise that boosting Northern Ireland's economy will have positive outcomes across the UK. Closing the productivity gap and the public-service outcomes gaps would drive up Northern Ireland's prosperity and create a more resilient Northern Ireland economy. If the productivity gap between Northern Ireland and the UK average were closed entirely overnight, it would add an extra £11 billion to Northern Ireland's economy annually: around £6,000 for every individual in Northern Ireland. That is a prize worth chasing. The Government plan to continue to drive forward growth and economic prosperity to ensure that Northern Ireland's full economic potential is fulfilled.

The genius of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and one of its many critical balances, was to recognise the fundamental right of people in Northern Ireland to decide whether or not to remain in the UK but also to recognise that the Government of Ireland have a crucial role to play, not least because the agreement allows people in Northern Ireland to identify as Irish. My Government's view, it will not surprise you to know, is that Northern Ireland's future is best secured in the UK, but I entirely accept, of course, that this is a debate that continues and that the people of Northern Ireland hold the keys to resolving it, as they should and as they see fit. I want to stress that we welcome the Taoiseach's Shared Island initiative and its commitment

to an east-west dimension, ensuring that the UK Government can be involved in supporting and helping to shape aspects of North/South cooperation, which in itself is such an important part of the agreement. The three strands were intended to be, and must be, mutually reinforcing.

Northern Ireland can, however, be built only on the foundations of sustainable and good local governance and within the context of a safer, more integrated and reconciled society. The Government and I stand ready to help to build that Northern Ireland, but there is also a challenge for parties across the political spectrum to demonstrate that they can achieve better outcomes for Northern Ireland citizens than those achieved to date in the previous 25 years of interrupted devolved government.

There is a vision that must be the guiding light for the Government and, I suggest, all of us, and every policy that we choose to follow. We know that, in the next few days, we will face a choice between a restored Executive and an election. We know that we face a new Government in the United Kingdom. I hope that none of you will mind my saying that every last one of you here has a crucial role to play as we seek to author our own future — a better future — between the UK and Ireland, and a better future for Northern Ireland. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Minister. Your clear message that you want to see the political institutions in Northern Ireland restored and fully working and functioning in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland is one that all of us in this Assembly share. We sincerely hope that progress can be made on that very important issue without delay.

We thank our media friends who have been live-streaming the Minister's address to the Assembly. I ask that the live streaming end now.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

We are just getting to the best bit, where I go off-script.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

The Minister is, kindly, taking questions. We have limited time. I ask Members who wish to contribute to so indicate, and I ask for brief questions, please.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

Steve, it is really great that you have come. I have said many times in the House of Commons that we need more Conservatives in particular to understand and know what is happening here in Ireland and in Northern Ireland, so thank you for coming.

My question is really quite simple. I think that most of us here are quite sceptical about a changed outcome of elections that will happen in the next few weeks. What is plan B? If the DUP and Sinn Féin, as the major parties, put something very stark in their manifestoes, which is quite likely, and they receive a mandate to take a particular course of action, what is the British Government's plan B?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you very much indeed, Karin. I hope that you will not mind my saying that, particularly reflecting on my own experience over the past 12 years, it is very important that parliamentarians from all parties get involved more with Northern Ireland and relations with Ireland and the Government of Ireland.

It is vital that everybody understands what you have just said: this election is likely to return very little difference in the make-up of the Assembly. Unionists, in particular, should reflect on there being perhaps quite a good outcome for Sinn Féin. I approach that possibility with considerable trepidation and humility. The answer to it, I am afraid, is for the DUP to choose to accept that the Government and, indeed, the next Prime Minister will maintain the UK's policy on the protocol, and to get back into the institutions. The DUP should count on us to negotiate, as I said, with humility and resolve, recognising everyone's legitimate interests and trying to get a deal that works for us all in a new spirit of friendship. If the DUP would accept that, choke down the position that it has taken and just get into the Executive, and do it this week, we can avoid an election, which would waste time and money that would be better spent elsewhere. We call on the DUP to take that in hand and do the right thing.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee:

Thank you very much, Minister, for your opening address. You are very welcome to County Cavan. Identity and language legislation is due to be passed in Westminster this week. Can we be guaranteed that the implementation of the legislation will not be delayed or blocked regularly, as most measures need to be ratified by the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland?

I understand that the Secretary of State will have the power to intervene if any measures are being blocked, but there is no time frame on that, Minister. Without that time frame, there is a real risk that language issues will be caught up in the political issues of the day, and we will not see any real progress on the ground. Minister, are you willing to take an amendment this week that would give a three-month time frame for the Secretary of State to intervene in order to ratify the measures under the legislation?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Lorraine, I am extremely grateful to you for raising this issue. As I engaged with people about the Bill, that was an issue that Conradh na Gaeilge — I do not think that it will mind my saying this — raised with great passion and force. One of the things that I observed is that when people talk, for example, in the Gaeltacht, you can see their genuine passion and love for the Irish language and culture. You can see that people feel genuinely wounded that, over the years, progress has not been made in perfectly reasonable directions on their desire to be Irish, and I very much regret that.

There were two areas where people made representations for changing the Bill and where I really felt moved that we should look extremely closely at what they had said. One was the point that you raised: timing. On the other hand, I listened to what unionists said, including the DUP, and look at the passion with which they implored to have parity of esteem reflected in the need to have due regard to what the commissioner for Ulster Scots and the Ulster-British tradition had to say. In particular, they made the case that in some Sinn Féin-controlled councils, things were being stripped out of those buildings, which undermined their identity. It has been put to me that in those councils, what Sinn Féin has done is, rather, to rebalance the extent of identity.

The reason why I, as a relatively impartial observer, am putting both sides of that coin to you is that there is not merely decade upon decade but possibly centuries of hurt going on here that we need to peel away and deal with. That will take all of us listening to one another extremely carefully and choosing to behave differently in the future from, perhaps, how we have in the past. It is in that spirit that, again — because we know that we are talking about DUP Ministers — I implore my friends in the DUP, when they get back in the Executive, to get on and implement that strategy for the Irish language. As we have seen in Wales, implementing such a strategy could depoliticise the Irish language. I say to unionism: please see the advantages of just getting on with it.

On your point about accepting an amendment, we are still discussing it. The very practical problem, which I hope that you will understand, is that, if we were to put a timeline on intervention on this point, we could not foresee what the political context would be. We could end up being forced to intervene when we really do not want to be intervening in those matters. We want devolved government to work. We could end up being forced to intervene in circumstances unknown, and that is not where we want to be.

Forgive me: I will not give my final answer today; I will give it in the House of Commons on Wednesday. I hope that by my giving you an extended answer, you can see the sincerity with which I take people's concerns about their identity on both sides of the argument. It is very clear that we need to look after people here.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee:

Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister.

Mr Neale Richmond TD:

Thank you very much for being here this morning, Minister. We all acknowledge that, over the past couple of weeks, there has been a gradual re-warming of relations, particularly on an Anglo-Irish basis. Every single person in this room welcomes that development, and we very much hope that it continues and goes further. Although I appreciate that there has been a change of Prime Ministers and electoral contests for some people to consider, the issues do not change. My first question is this: when will this warming of relations change into genuine proposals from the British Government in relation to resolving the problems that are being caused by the implementation of the post-Brexit protocol?

Whilst I appreciate that you said that you did not want to get into the negotiation field here, and I respect that, you have quite clearly laid out what you do not think is acceptable to Eurosceptics and, indeed, certain unionists in Northern Ireland. I am sure, nevertheless, that you do so cognisant of what is not acceptable to the European Union and nationalists in the North.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Yes.

Mr Neale Richmond TD:

How exactly will you resolve that stand-off in a way that we all hope for, which is an agreed solution and not unilateral action?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

First, thank you for what you have said, Neale. The warming in relations is genuine. I have put some effort into that, and, indeed, I have taken some hits on my own side for doing so. The point that I was trying to make here is that we have enough troubles in this world without taking chunks out of each other by failing to listen to one another's legitimate interests.

I keep using that term "legitimate interests", because we should always strive to see the other person's point of view. The integrity of the single market and the other interests of Ireland are vital, and we recognise that they are vital, but we have to remember that the Union interest is also vital. The constitutional status of Northern Ireland can only be changed by consent. Whatever the legal details, which, of course, matter very much, unionists feel that the status of Northern Ireland has been changed through the protocol. If that is the case, then, of course, their complaint is legitimate and we are right to take it seriously.

10.00 am

The answer to your question about when we are going to get serious about proposals is that we are serious. We have written down what we would like to achieve, and we have put that in the Bill, but everyone will know that I cannot conduct the negotiations standing here in a plenary Q&A. All I can really do is appeal for all of us to go off to our negotiating proxies — it is a Foreign Office responsibility in the UK — and say, "Look, get in a room. Do not conduct the negotiation in public. Let's not talk about our big red lines and our concessions in public. Let's just have a private conversation, in formal terms, with tabled text, and resolve this in a way that can work for us all", because we do need to move on and deal with other issues.

My sense is that everyone is getting to a point where they want to be talking about other issues and other problems, and to resolve this, but, if I may say so, it is all going to turn on trust. If we are going to get to a point where we are respecting your legitimate interests and you are respecting ours, we are going to need to get to a point where everything is based on your trust in us to use our law to defend your interests. We all have to think about what it will mean if we do not achieve that, and where that will take us. In the end, we are all the authors of our fate. That is why we are here. Those of us who are elected get elected because we would like to make a difference, so my appeal to you all is this: if you need to take a hit to improve relations and get to a deal, do it. However, equally, please let no one misunderstand my level of resolve. As someone in the Irish Government said to me after my first intervention, "We do not think you have gone soft, Mr Baker." Let me assure you that I have not gone soft. I just want us to be friends and respect one another's legitimate interests and do a deal.

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA:

Thank you, Co-Chairs. It is great to be back in County Cavan. *[Inaudible]* Armagh. Minister, I appreciate the sensitivities and the challenges, but on behalf of Sinn Féin —I am here as a representative of Sinn Féin and the Assembly — I can tell you that we want to get back into government. The people who I am listening to day and daily are the people on the ground, and we are the ones who are best placed to serve our constituents. What I want to say is not so much a question but rather a commentary. We want to get back into government, so I suggest, in whatever time is left this week, going back and negotiating seriously on behalf of the people

of the North of Ireland who want us to get back into government. I am mindful of my good colleague here from the DUP who is sitting beside me. We want to do business and we want to represent the people; that is what is at the heart of it. I want you to take back the message that we want to get back into government.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

I really appreciate the sentiment, and I also appreciate, if I may say so, the manner in which you have expressed it. We agree with you: we would like the institutions to be up and functioning and working properly to serve the people of Northern Ireland. Equally, I do not want the DUP to be smouldering with rage. I want to make it very clear that I understand and accept the legitimate interests that they have, which are preventing them from going into the institutions. My appeal to the DUP is to hear what I am saying on the "resolve" side of the argument and to understand that whoever is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom by the end of the week will maintain the same policy. If I may say so, I think that it is highly significant that Simon Hoare and I were able to unite on that point. The Government are going to maintain the same policy, so let us move forward together, recognising that we are going to need to resolve the issues of the protocol in the way that I have elaborated and that the Government have set out.

My appeal to the DUP — I am not going to use the "t" word — is, please, not to trust us but to rely on us to deliver against the set of incentives that we face. As Conservatives, we want a stable UK Government. A stable UK Government is only going to be achieved with progress on the protocol. As a unionist, I say to the DUP: you can rely on us to strive to resolve these issues in a way that also works for you, so please return to the Executive this week and avoid an election that will likely harm unionism.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Minister. I ask Members, when they are contributing, to wait until they have the microphone, because our Official Reporters need people to use the microphones.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

May I just say how glad I am that I cut my speech slightly short? It is far more fun doing questions.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you, Minister Baker, and thanks for your efforts to reset the relationship and for your clarification of the remarks that you made yesterday. You set out your stall with resolve.

Minister, I think that the Good Friday Agreement is, and has always been, as much about hope and values like partnership as it is about institutions and structures. That is why the majority of people still champion it and believe in it 25 years later despite all the ups and downs. You diminish the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement, and the sweat and the tears that went into negotiating it, when it is reduced to one party's or one Government's single-mindedness at a single moment in time. Peace and reconciliation on our islands are bigger than the DUP, bigger than the Conservative Party, bigger than Biden, bigger than all of us, and bigger than the people who negotiated it at the time, as they would say themselves. It is that humility and resolve that will bring a resolution, which means that an election would be ill-

judged. That humility and resolve will challenge the legacy proposals to the end, which means that we have to celebrate the Good Friday Agreement.

Minister, I ask you, given that you have commented on other aspects of where we are, to comment on legacy specifically.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Yes, sure. First, I overwhelmingly agree with almost everything that you said — I do. When you give interviews, as all of you who give interviews know, you choose your words very carefully but you also have to flow naturally. I encourage anyone to watch the video clip of what I said. If people watch what I actually said, in the order in which I said it, it should become clear to them what I was getting at. I want to celebrate the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. I agree with you that it is bigger than the Conservative Party or unionism. Of course it is. It is an exemplar to the whole world, and I want us to be rejoicing over it with the whole world. I want President Biden to be able to fly in and rejoice, and I want big figures from the EU to be able to come in and rejoice: I want it to be an example to the whole world.

The point that I am making, and the reason why I am making it in this way and am willing to take the hits of being misunderstood, is that I recognise, to make a counterpoint to what you said, the mechanical realities of who has what votes and who has what power. When we think about who has power where and the extent to which parties have vetoes over what happens, and we think about the scale of what we are asking people to do in this negotiation in order to reconcile our slightly tense legitimate interests, we are asking people to do something very, very, very big. We will get there only if we talk to one another openly, honestly and earnestly. That is why I am willing, if I need to, to stand here and take the hit of saying that you are right: if I created the impression that I didn't want to celebrate the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, I am sorry. However, I encourage anyone to read what I said and understand that I am taking these risks because there is a very narrow path forward to success, and it involves all of us adjusting ourselves to not only hear everybody else's legitimate interests but to accommodate them. My goodness, I hope that people will not mind my saying that there have been decades and centuries of people not doing that on this island. I want all of us to come together, really listen to each other, really respect one another and try to move forward as friends. As I said, I overwhelmingly agree with you.

Legacy is one of those other issues that is obviously extremely sensitive and will involve that process of listening. I just want to say, in the interests of brevity, that the Secretary of State and I and, indeed, Lord Caine are absolutely committed to listening to people. We would far rather proceed with measures that enjoy widespread consent. I cannot know what it is like to have lost someone in the Troubles because I have not. However, the prospect of prosecutions is now so small, on all sides, and we have to go forward in a spirit that can work to bring reconciliation. We are absolutely open to listening to everyone's voice on that issue.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Minister Baker, thank you for your presentation. You are welcome to Ulster this morning.

Minister, I do not want you just to celebrate the Good Friday Agreement; I want you to implement it. I do not think that, 25 years later, that is or should be too much of an ask. My question this morning crosses the Good Friday Agreement, given that one of our cross-border bodies, Tourism Ireland, promotes the island internationally as one effectively and

successfully. Coming out of the COVID restrictions and in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, tourism is an important sector for us all, North and South.

Given that your Government walked with eyes wide open through the Bill that became the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, how will you, in your position in the NIO, work with the Irish Government and any future institution in the North to reverse the practical damage that the Act can do to our economy? It does not just impact tourism: 30,000 cross-border journeys are made every day. That involves communities such as that here in Cavan, people who are going to work or for education, all of whom, if they are not British or Irish citizens, will be impacted by the Act because they will need to apply — unbelievably, in 2022 — for an electronic travel authorisation waiver. That will, I presume, include President Biden, if, on his visit, he goes to Dublin first before he heads up the road to Belfast. I wonder how you will convey to people such as him and Richie Neal who travelled here through the worst days of conflict and played a central role in the peace process that the huge American market, the growing markets around the world and people who are nurses in Derry but live in Donegal or students who travel to Queen's University from parts of the South and are non-British or non-Irish citizens will now have to apply for an electronic travel waiver. Do you not agree that that is not just absolutely foolish and deeply offensive but runs completely contrary to the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement?

Mr Steve Baker MP:

You know that I am not going to agree with some of what you have just said, and I cannot commit to a reversal of policy. Of course, you make your point with great clarity and force, as did Mr Coveney at the recent British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. At that conference, we committed that our immigration Minister would visit Dublin to discuss those matters. If it is indeed Tom Pursglove, I am looking forward to Tom's visit.

Obviously, we want tourism to flourish. Obviously, we are completely committed to the common travel area. I am happy to say that we will want to make progress on the issue to a satisfactory resolution, but I am not committing to any reversals of policy or otherwise. Obviously, as friends, we need to make sure that the issue is resolved satisfactorily.

Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:

You are very welcome here today. I would like to address the language issue. I think that the Good Friday Agreement has two references: one to the Irish language and a less substantial one to Ulster Scots. Do you agree that language and culture should never threaten anybody? The world is multicultural, and we should embrace all cultures and not see them as a threat.

Secondly, nobody is proposing to take rights away from English speakers, but it is proposed to give rights to Irish speakers and to Ulster Scots speakers, and that is vital. In other words, nobody is going to force an English speaker to have to change in any way to Irish or Ulster Scots or any other language.

Do you agree that what is actually involved in language legislation is the giving of rights, in this case, to the Irish language and Ulster Scots? I have dealt with the issue for a long time and have always had the view that that relates to the demands from each community. In other words, the Bill has to deal separately with the demands of the Irish-speaking community and the demands of the Ulster Scots-speaking and cultural community. It is a question of giving them the services and rights that they require so that both cultures and languages flourish.

10.15 am

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Éamon, thank you very much for your question, and I agree with you. I represent Wycombe, which is a very diverse community in its own way. One of my schools has 47 languages spoken by pupils there as their first language. I thoroughly agree that somebody's identity, language and culture should never threaten anyone. That is as true in Wycombe as it is in Belfast, if I may say so. People need to just be comfortable that others choose to speak another language first. That is up to them, and that is great, and they are welcome. Yes, I agree: it should never threaten anyone.

You are right: no one is proposing to take rights away. This is about giving rights to Irish speakers and, indeed, about parity of esteem for Ulster Scots and the Ulster-British tradition.

If I may, in agreeing with you, I will just conclude with a point that I picked up earlier. One of the contributions from a Welsh MP at Second Reading was to point out that, in Wales, the act of moving forward on the Welsh language has depoliticised the Welsh language. I think that depoliticising language, identity and culture would be a very good thing, and I hope that it is achieved in Northern Ireland.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Again, on behalf of the Assembly, I thank Minister Baker for his address this morning and for taking questions. We wish you well in your work. As I said, all of us want to see the institutions restored, fully functioning and working in the best interests of all constituents and people in Northern Ireland and working alongside the Irish Government and the British Government at what is a very challenging time for all legislatures and all people. Minister, your contribution is very welcome, and thank you very much.

Mr Steve Baker MP:

Thank you. *[Applause.]*

PROMOTING BRITISH-IRISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much to the Minister. We move on to the next item on the agenda, which is "Promoting British-Irish diplomatic relations". I am absolutely delighted that His Excellency Ambassador Paul Johnston is here. I know that we are all looking forward to hearing his views on UK-Ireland relations.

Ambassador Paul Johnston:

Thank you very much. I am delighted to be with you in this beautiful place. I give particular welcome to you, Karen, and congratulate you on your appointment. Thank you to everyone for being here. I am particularly grateful to colleagues from Westminster, including the Minister, for being here, when they had a good excuse not to be here today.

As the Minister said, in these turbulent times, dialogue and debate are more important than ever. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly plays such a vital function in bringing together

members from across the common travel area. It has representation from the same jurisdictions as the British-Irish Council, and, as with the British-Irish Council, it is an important expression of what the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement calls the "totality of relationships" across these islands. That is a doubly appropriate phrase, as the totality of relationships has to embrace legislatures, not just Governments and Executives.

I add my thanks to the BIPA Co-Chair Brendan Smith for hosting us in this beautiful constituency and superb venue, and, as I said, I offer a special welcome to the new head of the Westminster delegation and BIPA Co-Chair Karen Bradley.

Much as I love Dublin, it is great to meet outside Dublin. County Cavan is a fitting venue for the conference. It epitomises the close links between the UK and Ireland. As Senator Niall's comment implied, it is, of course, one of the nine counties of the historic province of Ulster, as well as being one of the 26 counties, and it shares, I think, 43 miles of border with County Fermanagh. We have all seen from the books in our hotel rooms that Cavan is the "Lakeland County", with 365 lakes; one for every day of the year. I hope to get round some of those lakes in the remainder of my time in Ireland.

I also very much look forward to visiting the Cavan County Museum tomorrow, where the exhibits include, I understand, a recreation of a World War I trench used by the Royal Irish Fusiliers at the battle of the Somme. The museum explores the events of the Great War through the stories of several Cavan men who served in the conflict. Poignantly, in reflecting our complex shared history, another part of the same museum marks the momentous events of the 1916 Easter Rising, during which young men from Cavan, some of whom had perhaps just fought with the British on the continent, rose up against British rule in Ireland. As the Queen's celebrated visits to the Garden of Remembrance and Islandbridge symbolise so well, it is important to recognise and remember all facets of our multifaceted and closely intertwined history.

It is equally important, however, to look at the challenges of the present and, indeed, to the opportunities of the future. There is a lot for us to do together. "Doing together" implies discussing together, and parliamentary relations are an essential part of that network of connections. Earlier this month, at the embassy, we were privileged to host a visit that reflected the unique value of inter-parliamentary relations. The Lord Speaker — the Speaker of the House of Lords — Lord McFall, a former Northern Ireland Office Minister, visited Ireland and addressed the Senate on 5 October. In his address, the Lord Speaker stressed the importance of relationships. He talked about how links between Members of the then British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body laid the foundation for cooperation between participants in the Northern Ireland peace process, culminating in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the 25th anniversary of which we will mark and, as the Minister said, all want to celebrate next April.

Another dimension of the parliamentary linkages is within the Oireachtas itself. As I recall, it was at the virtual BIPA plenary sitting in early 2021 in Dublin that the Taoiseach announced the creation of an Ireland-UK Parliamentary Friendship Group. I have to confess that there have been times in the intervening period when I wondered whether the friendship group could have met in a phone box, such was the low temperature of UK-Ireland relations, but I am glad that that group is up and running. The temperature is rising in a good sense. I have certainly enjoyed my engagement with the members of that group, and I am grateful to them, some of whom are here today, for their time and commitment. My team at the embassy and I stand ready to help them with planning their first visit to Westminster. The tender mercies of

Ambassador Fraser and his team await them. I am sure that it will be an interesting time to visit Westminster, as it always seems to be.

Talking of the Oireachtas, I would also like to say how much I appreciated and we all appreciated the many touching gestures of sympathy made in both Chambers following the passing of Her late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. Thank you, Brendan, for what you said this morning. The courtesies and condolences paid to the Queen included statements in both Houses on the Queen's legacy, the opening of a condolence book and minutes of silence in both Chambers. I was honoured to be able to attend both of those events. I was also greatly touched by the many people who came to the embassy to sign our books of condolence, including the president, the Taoiseach and many Ministers. In many ways, just as moving were the many of what the media call "ordinary people" who came — some of them in tears — to talk about the distinctive personal impact that the Queen's visit had on them, their lives and their families. That was striking. Ireland had the unique distinction of having both its head of state and head of government invited to attend the Queen's funeral, a reflection of the uniquely close relationship that our two countries enjoy. Our new King and Queen Consort are, of course, very familiar with Ireland from their many visits over the years. I had the honour of accompanying them on their visit to Ireland in March of this year, visiting counties Waterford and Tipperary. Throughout the three days of the visit, I was struck by the warmth of the reception and by the multiple connections that every part of this great country has with my country. I hope that Their Majesties will be able to visit Ireland again soon, and I know that that is their wish as well.

To put it in a typically British understated way, there have been significant changes in the global as well as domestic scene in the course of this calendar year. Our last BIPA plenary occurred just three days after the launch of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. That war is now in its ninth month. The solidarity of the West with Ukraine has been impressive, and both Governments agree that it is vital to sustain it. I would like to highlight the extraordinary and powerful role that Ireland has played, working with us in the United Nations Security Council but, just as important and, in some ways, more important, through its leadership role — morally, practically and politically — in the European Council on issues relating to standing up to Russia's aggression.

The UK-Ireland relationship is unique in that we share a land border and a common travel area, but we also work together at the global level. In the UN, including, until December of this year, in the UN Security Council, we cooperate daily. As open and democratic societies, we share so many values in an era in which those values are, perhaps, more challenged than they have been at any time since the Cold War or, indeed, the Second World War. We have adopted similarly robust positions on the invasion of Ukraine, but we have worked together on other issues on the Security Council as well, including food insecurity, especially in the Horn of Africa. Ireland has done an outstanding job by bringing the issue of climate security, which we first brought to the Security Council in 2007, back onto the agenda and getting close to getting what would have been a landmark Security Council resolution had the Russians not cynically vetoed it, as they have cynically vetoed so much else on the council. We share many similarities in our global outlook, whether that is through supporting climate action, promoting gender equality, strengthening governance or working at the root cause of conflicts to reduce humanitarian suffering.

There are, of course, many policy challenges closer to home in the UK-Ireland relationship. Minister Baker just spoke about the need for the Stormont institutions to be restored as soon as possible and about our aim for a joint UK-EU sustainable solution to the challenges posed by

the operation of the Northern Ireland protocol. Last week, I had the pleasure of hosting Minister Baker's ministerial colleague in the Northern Ireland Office, Lord Caine, for discussions with Irish counterparts in Dublin. That was only the latest of an intense series of ministerial contacts in recent weeks, including between Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers, Deputy Prime Ministers, Finance Ministers, Energy Ministers, Europe Ministers, Northern Ireland Ministers and many others.

Those discussions have touched not only on the challenges for today but on the opportunities of the future. One of those opportunities is economic cooperation. The population of Cavan has, I understand, risen by almost 7% since the 2016 census. It is a similar picture in the UK, with the populations of Birmingham and Liverpool growing. It is fantastic that the Irish Government have invested in a consulate general in the north-west of England. We in the embassy have a policy — or campaign — called "Joining the Dots", which we have had over the last four years, for strengthening the British-Irish trading, commercial and cultural relationships outside the capitals and those regions, spreading the linkages across the country. In pursuit of that, I have been happy to go to Limerick, Galway and Cork. I am keen to pursue that relationship, including by going to Donegal and other parts of this great country. We think that it is really important to bring civic leaders and businesses together to share best practice in creating well-paid jobs, upskilling and investment, particularly in relation to those growing regions. Earlier this year, I was delighted to host the metropolitan mayors of Liverpool and Greater Manchester to meet their counterparts from across the island of Ireland and to explore how to boost economic links. I also had the great pleasure of meeting Denis Irwin, the former Manchester United defender.

Another area on which we are working together is climate action. The Taoiseach and our new Prime Minister will join other world leaders at the Conference of the Parties (COP) 27 summit in Sharm El-Sheikh next month. The UK will hand over our presidency of COP, which started with the Glasgow summit last November, to Egypt. Ireland and the UK agree that the war in Ukraine and the resulting impact on global energy and food security have brought into sharp focus the need to accelerate the implementation of the Glasgow climate pact. Across our islands, there are many opportunities to collaborate on clean, green growth that will increase our resilience and our mutual prosperity.

In the county of Cavan, moving towards sustainable agriculture is an important element of our climate action agenda. Cavan is a major centre for dairy farming. The UK and Ireland are committed to achieving sustainable and profitable modern agriculture. Last year, our embassy teamed up with the Irish research agency BiOrbic to identify opportunities for future UK-Ireland collaboration. On energy, there is significant opportunity to collaborate on infrastructure and on realising the full potential for offshore energy generation. That is something that I have discussed with Eamon Ryan and that he has discussed with his British counterparts, and we are keen to take that forward. Ireland's climate action plan contains a target of at least 5 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind energy by 2030. The UK has an ambitious target as well: 40 GW of offshore wind.

Talking of wind, the great George Orwell once famously wrote that political language is intended to:

"give an appearance of solidity to pure wind."

Diplomatic language is, of course, much more polite and straightforward, although not without its decorative touches. For one thing, ambassadors almost always write in their diplomatic

telegrams that ministerial visits are “timely” and “important”, and, of course, they almost always are.

10.30 am

A former ambassador once famously wrote that diplomats are honest men, sent abroad to tell lies for the good of their country. I am glad to say that I have never had to do that in my 30-year diplomatic career and, in any event, it is no word of a lie to say that this Assembly's meeting is both timely and important. It has been a pleasure to address you. I will do my best to take any comments or questions you might have.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Ambassador. When you talked about the Somme in particular, you reminded me that I had the honour of representing the UK Government at the Somme commemorations one year, and that shared history is so deep and important to all of us. With our shared interests and values, it is absolutely clear that progress is made in these islands when Dublin and London get on and work together. That is how we make progress. We do not make progress when we battle each other. We will certainly not be doing that in BIPA. That is for sure.

Does anyone want to make any comments? Stephen Doughty is the first person I have spotted.

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

Thanks very much, Ambassador. I totally agree with the comments that you made about the role that Ireland has played, particularly in relation to the Ukraine crisis, diplomatically and otherwise. I also commend the extraordinarily warm welcome given to so many Ukrainian refugees across Ireland. Can you say a little more about our cooperation? Ireland is outside NATO as the UK is outside the EU, but we face a common threat in what Russia is doing in Europe and with regard to the risks to shared infrastructure, information and cyber issues. Can you say a little more about our cooperation in all those areas to ensure that we are as resilient as possible to the threats that we face?

Ambassador Paul Johnston:

Certainly. There are a couple of dimensions that I did not touch on. In the purely bilateral sphere, last year, in the British Government’s so-called ‘Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’, Ireland was identified as a key partner, up there with France, Germany and the United States, which may have surprised some people who do not understand the depth of the UK/Ireland relationship. Because of our geographical proximity, the huge trade and investment relationship and the common travel area, the resilience issues cross the two jurisdictions. We are keen to see what we can do, and we will see this in the refresh of the integrated review, which will be out in a few weeks’ time. It will detail what we can do in information security, cybersecurity and energy security. Weaning ourselves off Russian hydrocarbons is a massive shared interest. The outgoing Prime Minister, the previous Prime Minister and the Taoiseach have been discussing those broader issues. It is fair to say that the bandwidth has largely been taken up over the last period by Brexit, COVID, Ukraine and ongoing issues such as the protocol. However, I am hopeful and indeed confident that we can now move on to looking at those wider shared interests.

There are also European-wide dimensions. You are right: Ireland is not in NATO and we are not in the European Union, but it was significant that the Prime Minister went to the European Political Community summit in Prague a few weeks ago. The Taoiseach publicly welcomed that. We see that gathering of non-EU member states, aspirant countries, countries with particular relationships with the European Union, such as ourselves, Turkey and Norway, to look at a broad range of issues, perhaps upstream of them being debated in the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe or the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe). The Prime Minister valued the engagement that she had there, and I am sure that the new Prime Minister will want to continue it. Indeed, we have committed to hosting the fourth of these biannual summits in the UK in 2024. That is the Europe-wide context to our cooperation on security broadly defined, and there is an important bilateral agenda to pursue as well.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

Thank you very much indeed for a very useful contribution, Ambassador. A quarter of a century ago, Liz O'Donnell and I chaired the strand three negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement, which set up the relationships between these two islands, as you know. However, we did that when both countries were members of the European Union. Things have changed. Relations have worsened considerably, certainly over the past few years. How do you see those specific strand three arrangements, such as the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC), between Governments improving? Frankly, over the past number of years, they have not really worked properly at all.

Ambassador Paul Johnston:

Clearly, Britain's leaving the European Union has been a big structural change in relationships. I was British Ambassador to the EU for political and security affairs and foreign and defence policy in my last job before coming here, and I worked very closely with my Irish counterparts. The two delegation rooms in the European Council building were next door to each other. The Ministers, the Prime Ministers and the officials were able to see each other regularly in the course of their monthly or quarterly visits to Brussels for Council meetings. Clearly, that does not happen now, and it is one of the virtues of the European political community. That means that more emphasis has to be placed on bilateral relationships.

I sometimes think that people have made the mistake of looking at the BIIGC in isolation and that, because it has not, perhaps, met frequently or because the meetings have not been very productive in some eyes, they have tended to have taken a rather reductive view and say that the relationship is not really functioning. I mentioned in my speech the enormous range of ministerial contacts that there have been just in the past few weeks. At the risk of not sparing his blushes, Minister Baker, plus the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Foreign Secretary, the Europe Minister in the Foreign Office, from whom we will be hearing soon, and lots of other Ministers in the Government have made a real effort to reach out and to engage with their Irish counterparts. I think that that has been both reciprocated and welcomed. I am a natural optimist, and I think that there will be a period, moving ahead, where we will have broader, more intense and more successful active engagement between the two Governments, and I think that everyone in this room would welcome that.

10.45 am

Mr Neale Richmond TD:

Ambassador, thank you very much for your kind intervention. You touched very briefly on the European Political Community. As was referred to, Ireland is not in NATO and, sadly, the UK is not in the EU anymore. So, that narrows the opportunities for inter-parliamentary engagement like this, which is so important. Do you foresee any areas where that level of inter-parliamentary engagement could be improved and could be more formalised and where every opportunity could be taken advantage of, be it the Council of Europe or any other body where we can bring British and Irish parliamentarians together and, indeed, British and Irish Ministers together to try to bring us back up to that level of commonality and working together?

Ambassador Paul Johnston:

I do think that these inter-parliamentary Assemblies are really important, not just when they meet in beautiful venues like this. In my Brussels jobs, both as our acting ambassador to NATO and when I was doing the job in our EU delegation, we had parliamentary Assembly visits, often in Select Committee visits. I often think that parliamentarians can have debates that, sort of, push the limits of each country's respective policy parameters and inform, therefore, the executive's consideration of policy issues in a way that, maybe, Ministers and officials are not always equipped to have in quite such a free-flowing way. So, I think that there is a good question there about whether an inter-parliamentary strand to the European community of some kind might want to be considered as that particular forum gathers momentum.

I think that bilateral exchanges and the work that the Committee that you are taking part in, Deputy Richmond, on the European security nexus of issues are really important. That is an opportunity to have dialogue and discussion. One of the challenges of the past few years is not just the fact of not having the day-to-day contacts in Brussels but, because of COVID, not being able to talk to each other directly. That has been an important hindrance to the development of relationships and to the development of policy. Therefore, I hope that we can find ways in various forums to strengthen the inter-parliamentary dimension to the bilateral relationship.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Does anyone else want to come in?

Ambassador Paul Johnston:

I am impressed by the fact that there are about 40 microphones but only one of them seems to work. I imagine that this is a sort of message control that the Co-Chairs are exercising, inspired by the Chinese Communist Party conference. *[Laughter.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

It is working exceptionally well.

In that case, thank you so much, Ambassador. It was a fascinating contribution, and I know that we will all take much away from your comments. We will now have a very short break. We are not going to leave the room but will wait for our next speaker, who is preparing himself. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The sitting was suspended at 10.47 am

The sitting was resumed at 11.02 am.

ADDRESS BY AN TAOISEACH

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

A Thaoisigh, you are very welcome. We are absolutely delighted to see you again, this time in person, at our plenary meeting. We are very conscious of your ongoing commitment to east-west cooperation, and we are very appreciative of the time and commitment that you give to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA). So, a Thaoisigh, you are very welcome, and we look forward to your address this morning. *[Applause.]*

An Taoiseach (Mr Micheál Martin TD):

Good morning to you all, and I give sincere thanks to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Co-Chairs, Mr Brendan Smith TD and Ms Karen Bradley MP, for inviting me to speak here today. I am particularly delighted to be back in person, after the past few years, for the sixty-second British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly plenary meeting, here in Cavan. I compliment the Committee Chairs and the wider membership of BIPA for the excellent programme that they put together for their plenary meeting. We have representatives here from the Oireachtas, the United Kingdom Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Parliament, the High Court of Tynwald, the States of Guernsey and the States Assembly of Jersey, so there can be no better place for taking stock of the British-Irish relationship.

The deep nature of our ties is clear to see in Cavan and across the border region. Our shared history, interconnected economies and our cultural family and community connections make this a unique space. The dividends that the Good Friday Agreement has delivered over almost 25 years in terms of peace, reconciliation and collaboration are also well understood in this region. Those dividends were powerfully demonstrated very recently in the outpouring of practical support and empathy following the terrible accident in Creeslough, County Donegal. In the midst of such tragedy, we saw communities, citizens and emergency responders on both sides of the border rally to help. The very best of human nature and the best of human decency and courage were evident in the huge response, which was characterised by friendship, genuine concern and support across borders and communities. Given the proximity of our islands, our shared past and present and our rich community and family ties, the British-Irish relationship is of fundamental importance.

The recent passing of Queen Elizabeth II provided a touchstone for reflecting on that relationship. As I said at the time, the Queen's reign was one of historic duration and immense consequence and a focus of respect and admiration around the world. The Queen's steadfast commitment to reconciliation and partnership on these islands was always deeply appreciated by the people of Ireland. Her state visit in 2011 marked a crucial step in good relations between our two countries. Her words and dignified gestures paved a pathway towards true friendship, which we must continue to build on. Given the Queen's legacy, the president and I valued the opportunity to pay our respects at the service for reflection in Belfast and at the state funeral in London.

Ladies and gentlemen, I speak at a time of political change and some uncertainty in the United Kingdom as we look at the prospect of having a third British Prime Minister this year. I wish the British Government well in the challenging times that are ahead. This has undeniably been a difficult period in British-Irish relations. While recognising that Brexit has fundamentally changed the relationship, I am very clear that the United Kingdom remains a key and important partner for us, given our trade and intertwined economies, our ties of family and of history and

culture and given our shared commitment to democratic values and norms. It is in that context that your gathering here today and the work of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly are so important. The engagements that you have, as parliamentarians, help to build understanding, develop common objectives and, crucially, build relationships that will endure into the future, supporting renewed and positive British-Irish relations.

I was also delighted to see Lord Speaker, John McFall, address the Seanad in early October. I met Lord McFall during his visit, and I fully support his call for intensified efforts to build enduring relationships between our two parliaments. Learning from the generation of leaders who gave us the Good Friday Agreement and building relationships between our next generation of leaders is our collective task. A stable and prosperous Britain is in all our interests.

To the incoming British Prime Minister, I stress the importance of the two Governments working in partnership to support the gains of the Good Friday Agreement. Our joint responsibilities of stewardship of the agreement are more critical than ever now, in the absence of a properly functioning Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

This year and next, we are marking the milestones of 50 years of membership of the European Union. Our European Union membership has played a key role in our transformation into an open, globalised and progressive country. Our membership is grounded in shared values, and, through the European Union, we can better influence and advance our goals on the world stage.

As we celebrate that milestone, we must also reflect on the significant and profound change that Brexit has brought across these islands. Managing that change has undoubtedly been challenging, but I believe that it is in all our interests to see a close and stable European Union-United Kingdom relationship into the future; one that is founded on our shared values, common global interests and our important trade and economic links. In an increasingly troubled and troubling world, close neighbours strengthen our resilience.

There is a real opportunity to find jointly agreed solutions around the implementation of the protocol, but substance is what is now required to sustain good intentions and catalyse durable solutions. I urge the new British Prime Minister to move quickly to genuine and substantive engagement with the European Union on that basis. Our focus must be on finding solutions that address the real problems that affect people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

Partnership, vision and compromise delivered the Good Friday Agreement. We need to see a return to that partnership approach in order to resolve the genuine concerns of people and businesses in Northern Ireland.

I want to take this opportunity to reflect on a particularly important milestone next year: the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. That agreement is a series of interlocking and reinforcing commitments that gives all of us — that means the two Governments, political parties and civil society — specific tools and responsibilities to make peace a lasting reality. It is also one of the best examples in our collective histories of what we can achieve when we work together. The 30 years of violence that it effectively brought to an end claimed over 3,500 lives. There are people alive today because Hume, Trimble, Ahern and Blair, their predecessors and successors, came together for peace. They sold difficult compromises, then and in the years that followed, to their own supporters on decommissioning, the release of paramilitary prisoners and changes to our Irish constitution. In doing so, they put the needs of everyone in Northern Ireland ahead of their own ideologies and agendas.

The agreement was a determination, endorsed by citizens on both sides of the border, that politics, not violence, is the only way forward. That was based on a belief that politics had the potential to make Northern Ireland a better, more peaceful and more prosperous place to live. I am sure that, as democrats, that is a belief that all of us in this room continue to hold.

However, the decision of one political party not to participate in the Northern Ireland Executive runs counter to democracy and risks undermining the faith of people in the potential of politics. There is a genuine risk that people in Northern Ireland will become disengaged from a political process that they do not feel is working for them. Politics has to respond to the legitimate, everyday needs of voters. As John Hume often reminded us:

"'You can't eat a flag'… real politics is about the living standards, about social and economic development."

Ultimately, voters in Northern Ireland expect their politicians to deliver for them on those issues. We are entering into a winter where communities and families will face enormous challenges. The cost of putting a decent meal on the table, heating our homes, getting to work or school or visiting family and friends is rising. It is incumbent upon us, as elected representatives, to lessen those burdens where we can.

In Northern Ireland, the absence of a functioning Executive and Assembly makes a challenging situation all the more difficult. This is a moment for politicians to embrace their responsibilities to the voters of Northern Ireland. It is time for the Assembly to function and for a new Executive to be established before the 28 October deadline. Failure to do that is a denial of the mandate that voters in Northern Ireland gave to their political representatives.

As we work through those vital concerns, we in the Irish Government are also fostering a positive agenda for the future through our Shared Island initiative. As I said when I launched the initiative, and as I set out to this Assembly last year, that is an open and inclusive approach to the future of this island that all communities and traditions can engage with in confidence. It has been established to unlock the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement for deeper cooperation and connections across our borders and communities so that together, whatever your identity, we work for a shared, reconciled future.

Through that initiative, we are significantly raising the level of ambition for North/South and east-west partnerships; delivering tangible benefits for the whole island through our €1 billion Shared Island Fund; and enabling people across the island to interact and work in new ways on their common interests and concerns, today and in the years ahead. Over the past two years, we have allocated more than €120 million from our Shared Island Fund in order to move ahead with cross-border investments that have been talked about for decades, like the Ulster canal restoration and the Narrow Water bridge. Those are landmark projects that will connect communities and foster sustainable tourism in the central and east-border regions.

11.15 am

We are also delivering a new generation of all-island investments, including a €40 million North/South research programme and a new scheme of support for collaboration between local authorities on the island. We want to deploy the fund and work in more strategic ways with a new Executive in Northern Ireland and through the North/South Ministerial Council. Importantly, we are also developing a strong east-west dimension to the Shared Island initiative, because stronger and sincere partnership between the Irish and British Governments is the fundamental dynamic that is required to move from peacebuilding to prosperity and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Citizens and civil society are central to our Shared Island

initiative. We have to nourish and develop our civic and political relationships in meaningful and inclusive ways. That is why I am fully supportive of invigorated British-Irish and North/South parliamentary institutions and connections that are focused on the issues that matter most to the people whom we represent.

Through our Shared Island Dialogues series, we have engaged directly with almost 2,500 citizens and civic representatives and have received contributions from across all communities, political traditions and regions on how, together, we can shape a shared future on this island. Those contributions have included practical concerns on issues like community development and growing sustainable tourism and on deeper societal questions around how to accommodate and celebrate our diverse identities and cultural traditions and how to achieve a more inclusive and equal island. The dialogues have been genuinely inspiring for me and the 12 Ministers who have participated so far, and they have reminded us just how strong the will and energy is in communities up and down this island to live up to the core commitment of the Good Friday Agreement to:

"strive in every practical way towards reconciliation".

In that way, we are fostering conversations on the future that do not constantly reduce our interests and interactions to a false dichotomy of green or orange, unionist or nationalist or Irish or British. That never adequately described us in the past and certainly does not today on this diverse and diversifying island that we share.

When we reflect on the 25 years since the Good Friday Agreement, it is worth remembering that this is not the first obstacle that we have encountered. Each time, we have challenged ourselves to ensure that the full potential of the agreement — for peace — is achieved. Those who negotiated our peace had the foresight to recognise that it would require constant work. They also knew that the agreement was not the end of the peace process but rather:

"a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning."

As we look forward to the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we must grasp this historic opportunity to ensure that the institutions of the agreement flourish and, together, build a better future for our children.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir, agus go mbaine sibh taitneamh as an chúpla lá le chéile. I wish you all well and a most enjoyable few days together. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

A Thaoisigh, thank you very much for your comprehensive address. We are very glad that you reiterated your determination that we build not just stronger government bilateral relationships but parliamentary links. As Karen outlined, the work of our Assembly is particularly important in that respect. We intend to intensify that work. As you quite rightly said, it was disrupted due to COVID, with no in-person meetings etc, but we have a very progressive and positive work programme ahead of us. We look forward to continuing that work and helping to strengthen those bilateral relations. You echoed the words of Minister Baker when you outlined the necessity of getting the political institutions in Northern Ireland restored and fully functioning. That is the very strong view of all of us here, and we sincerely hope that those institutions can be back up and running and working in the best interests of all their citizens very shortly.

We are running slightly behind time. We will have a short break for tea and coffee now, and I emphasise that it will be short. Again, a Thaoisigh, sincere thanks for your attendance and address. *[Applause.]*

The sitting was suspended at 11.19 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.50 am.

ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF STATE, COLM BROPHY TD

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We are running a little bit behind time, so we will kick off the next session. I am sure that our colleagues will be delighted to join us once they have realised that we have restarted. Well done to those of you who are back, and the others will appear shortly.

I am absolutely delighted to welcome our next speaker, Colm Brophy TD, Minister of State for the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora, who will give us an address. He will take a few questions afterwards, but I urge colleagues to keep those questions short in the interests of our being able to finish on time and the Minister not having to spend too long at the lectern.

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

Thank you for the introduction, Karen. Co-Chairs, Ambassador, elected representatives, ladies and gentlemen and my parliamentary colleagues from right across the islands, I am delighted to be here in lovely Cavan — Brendan Smith is not here to hear me say that, but Cavan is lovely — to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Association. I feel that my visits to London and Liverpool last week were an ideal warm-up for today's engagement. Those visits reinforced for me yet again the importance that we all attach to that British-Irish relationship. My focus today will be primarily on my role as Minister of State for Diaspora and the importance of people-to-people links between our two countries.

The British-Irish relationship is supported by a number of central pillars, including, obviously, our joint stewardship of the Good Friday Agreement, our trading connections, our interconnected energy and common travel area (CTA) interests and the depth of our community, cultural and family ties. In particular, the UK remains an important trade, investment and tourism partner for Ireland, despite the obvious Brexit challenges.

I know that you will hear much more on this later today from the trade panel and, indeed, from work undertaken by the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly subcommittees. We maintain close collaboration with the UK on a host of areas, such as emigration, policing and public health matters. We are fully committed to strengthening the British-Irish relationship in the post-Brexit era. In recent years, we have demonstrated that commitment by expanding our embassy in London, through the Global Ireland initiative. We also opened consulates in Cardiff and Manchester.

When I was in Liverpool last week, I saw the real political, economic, cultural and community impacts that the opening of the consulate has had on our relationship with the north of England. The visit to Ireland earlier this year by the mayors of Liverpool and Manchester together, accompanied by a business delegation of 100 companies, shows the potential for that relationship. I met the Liverpool Metro mayor, Steve Rotheram, on Friday. He was at pains to

point out to me that tangible benefits from his recent visit to Ireland are already beginning to bear fruit. Clearly, therefore, the future of our relationship with the north of England is bright. Such regional relationships will be an important part of Ireland's relationship with Britain right into the future. We have also agreed and published bilateral frameworks with Scotland and Wales, and, again, there is great potential for expanding those relationships.

Given the close links, and notwithstanding the challenges of recent times, we can work with the incoming British Prime Minister towards a new era in British-Irish relations. I look forward to early progress by the new Prime Minister and to the reset of the UK's relationship with the EU, which, in turn, will impact positively on relations between our islands. It is also clear that, in that better context of real partnership underpinned by EU-UK and British-Irish relations, even more can be done to develop the east-west collaboration to our mutual benefit.

At the heart of the wider British-Irish relationship lies the relationship between the people of these islands. The common travel area continues to allow Irish and British citizens to move freely to live, work and study in both our jurisdictions. They can do that while benefiting from access to healthcare, education, social protection, social housing and certain voting rights. Britain has also attracted Irish emigrants in large numbers and is home to the largest Irish-born community outside of Ireland.

Of course, Britain has always been the most accessible destination, given the close proximity of the two countries, our shared language, the cultural familiarity, the common travel area and the strong familial ties. In the year to April 2021, over 18,000 people left Ireland to live in the UK. The UK Office for National Statistics estimates that, on average, in the year to June 2021, 412,000 people living in the UK were born in Ireland. Millions of people in Britain have some degree of Irish heritage, possibly as many as one in four. Data from the recent census in England, Wales and Scotland will be an important tool in understanding exactly who our community in Britain is today. Our presence in Britain has undoubtedly brought our two nations closer together. For me, one particular quote captures the essence of that relationship:

"These ties of family, friendship and affection are our most precious resource. They are the lifeblood of the partnership across these islands, a golden thread that runs through all our joint successes so far, and all we will go on to achieve."

Those words were spoken by Queen Elizabeth in Dublin Castle on her visit to Ireland back in 2011. Queen Elizabeth's visit, and the outpouring of emotion and goodwill towards it, was a landmark moment for British-Irish relationships. She radiated with genuine happiness about finally being in Ireland, and she genuinely charmed the Irish people. King Charles III and Camilla, the Queen Consort, have displayed a similar affection for Ireland and its people during their many visits in recent years. Indeed, King Charles has said that it is his ambition to visit every county in Ireland. Obviously, therefore, we look forward to welcoming them back to our shores many times, this time as king and queen.

The Irish diaspora in Britain is somewhat unique in terms of size, diversity and impact. Our community encompasses all the demographics and is represented in every walk of life. The Irish community, both Irish-born and those of Irish descent, has made distinctive, creative contributions to virtually every aspect of British society, including business, healthcare, education, infrastructure, politics, public service, the arts, media, community and sport. There is virtually no aspect of British civic or political life that has not been enriched by contributions from the Irish community. Over the years, notwithstanding some challenging periods, the hand of friendship has been extended to thousands of young Irish immigrants all across Britain. For much of the 20th century, Irish immigrants built the canals and railways of Britain. They were

part of the post-war reconstruction programme. They helped to build the earliest tunnels for the London Underground and, in more recent times, worked on the construction of the Channel Tunnel and the skyscrapers of London. Today, we have reached successful and prominent positions in all walks of life.

I want to say a special word about one particular cohort of Irish in Britain: those working in the NHS. Some 14,000 Irish citizens work in the NHS; that is the fourth-largest nationality to work in the service. President Michael D Higgins paid special tribute to their service during his 2014 state visit to Britain. They made particularly enormous contributions during the recent pandemic. I am delighted that we are supporting an oral history project about the contribution of Irish nurses to the NHS. It is a project that is very close to my heart: my mother, who celebrated her 85th birthday just the other day, was an NHS nurse for a period of years when she was younger. It is so important that we record the story of the millions of Irish people who, like my mother, spent some or all of their adult lives living and working in Britain.

Our social lives in Britain have also evolved. Emigrants in the 1950s to the 1980s often relied on Irish centres and clubs as their primary social outlet. Nowadays, we tend to integrate more easily, often through less formal business, cultural and other networks. As it has matured, the Irish community has also become more diverse and multicultural. I am very proud that, in my time as Minister, we have funded organisations in Britain such as IAmIrish, which is a non-profit movement that connects, supports, advocates and empowers Irish people of multi heritage and multi ethnicity. Emigrant communities face very particular challenges. The Irish emigrant community worldwide is no different. There are some in our diaspora communities, including in Britain, who continue to experience economic and social challenges. Those people include elderly Irish, vulnerable young Irish emigrants, and, in particular, survivors of institutional abuse.

12.00 noon

We support organisations that work with those people through our emigrant support programme, for which I have ministerial responsibility. Since its establishment in 2004, the programme has assisted over 530 organisations in over 40 countries with grants totalling just over €210 million. In Britain alone this year, the emigrant support programme has distributed grants of almost €6 million to 100 Irish community organisations right across England, Scotland and Wales. I was very pleased to announce those grants at a reception in the Irish embassy in London last week and to meet some of those who do such fantastic work with the Irish community in Britain. They are a credit both to their own Irish community and, obviously, to their adopted home.

The grants that we give range from small amounts for grassroots groups to major allocations that are awarded to voluntary and community organisations that operate on a large scale. The emphasis of the programme is on supporting culturally sensitive front-line welfare services. It also supports cultural, heritage, business and other infrastructure projects. It is a very important statement of Ireland's connection with, and support for, its global diaspora and, in particular, our community in Britain, which is the single largest recipient of the funding each year. That connection with the global Irish family runs very deep. Bunreacht na hÉireann, the constitution of Ireland, states:

"the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad".

That reflects our long history of emigration. As many as 70 million people around the world claim Irish ancestry and heritage. In Britain and all over the world, our diaspora opens the doors for us and amplifies our reach. It is a rich pool of goodwill and connection into which we often dip. It is a relationship, though, that we do not take for granted, and which I, in particular, as Minister for Diaspora, work extremely hard to maintain and further enrich.

Our ambitions for the relationship were set out in the 2020 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy', which covers the years 2020 to 2025. The diaspora policy has been developed over many years, and the strategy commits us to engaging with and sharing our experiences with other countries. With that in mind, last April, we hosted the diaspora summit at Dublin Castle. As Minister, I welcomed Ministers and ambassadors from 12 countries directly to Dublin Castle, and a further hundred delegations contributed remotely. The summit concluded with the adoption by the Ministers of the Dublin declaration, a future agenda of action for global diaspora engagement. That declaration commits the international community, working with partners from across society, to create conditions for migrants and diasporas to further contribute to sustainable development.

It is incredibly fulfilling for me to serve as Ireland's Minister for Diaspora in this year of unprecedented change for Ireland: for our people, our relationships, our place in the world and, of course, our diaspora. I do so in the knowledge that Irish communities all over the world, including in Britain, have built up an incredible resource of goodwill, support and faith in what we can achieve together. It is heartening to know that, despite the challenges that will arise in the future, Ireland remains so connected to its global family.

Thank you. Go raibh míle maith agat. *[Applause.]* I am happy to take some questions, if there are any.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Minister. What you said resonates so much. There is nobody in this room who does not have friends and family with connections to both Britain and Ireland. You talked about nurses in the NHS; my first son was delivered by an Irish midwife. The links and relationships are so deep, and, working together, we can all help to better support those.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thank you very much indeed, Minister. You will probably be aware that, some years ago, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Committee of which I am now Chair looked at the Irish community in Britain. It was a very interesting study, and we discovered a lot of things about the enormous contribution that the Irish community at all levels is making, and has made, to life in Britain.

Thank you for the support that your Department is giving to Irish centres. I live in Hammersmith in London, and there is an Irish centre there that gets a lot of support both from you and from the local council. It is an absolutely great place. I am sure that you have been there, and I am sure that you will be invited again.

On British-Irish relationships, I believe that it is a positive asset to have an Irish accent in Britain. That used not to be the case, but it is always a pleasure to hear an Irish voice, whether it is a doctor or nurse in the local hospital or whatever. It is such a pleasure, and it is a sign of how far we have come. It was not always like that.

I will say one other word of thanks. Although it is not your direct departmental responsibility, thank you for what Ireland is doing for refugees. You are doing a great job, looking at it at a slight distance from London. Thank you for what you are doing; it is a good example to other countries.

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

Thank you very much. Your opening remarks were about the depth and strength of the relationship with the Irish diaspora in the UK, and that is important. We are all familiar with the main stories of people who went over and maybe worked in construction or other areas, such as the NHS etc, but when you start interacting with the community, you realise, as I said in the speech, that there is not a single area that was not touched by that Irish involvement. It is a two-way street, because there was huge openness and a willingness to allow Irish people to be involved and to work in so many areas of, for example, broadcasting. People such as Terry Wogan had a huge influence through the way that they were able to communicate, and that continues right through to the present day.

There is a mutual respect and a mutual involvement. There is a tremendous openness and willingness among Irish people to travel to work in other countries and to get the experience of being there. In the past, Irish people went over, lived and established their lives there, and they established their children's lives. Last week, I was at an event where Irish dancing was taking place, and, basically, 90-odd per cent of the people taking part were born in Britain to either Irish parents or Irish grandparents, but their love of and affection for Ireland and their willingness to be part of the Irish diaspora has them immersed in the Irish community. In certain areas — Irish studies areas — there are pioneering new classes in the Irish language, and there is a huge uptake and a huge willingness. It is not just native Irish people but people right across the UK who want to have the opportunity to involve themselves with the Irish diaspora.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Thank you, Minister, for your very interesting remarks. As a Scot, obviously I have a great interest in the potential of the Scottish diaspora. I am not sure what the numbers are and whether they equate to the Irish figure that the Minister referred to, but we certainly recognise that there is an increasing potential and role there that we need to work at. I was very pleased to hear that a bilateral arrangement was signed with Scotland recently. Can the Minister briefly state in what form that is proceeding? More generally, as far as the Irish diaspora policy is concerned, to what extent does the Minister feel that the fact that there are Irish embassies and consulates across the world is an important element in ensuring the success of the diaspora policy?

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

The diaspora policy is delivered across a number of main areas, and, yes, there is a definite benefit. One of the reasons why we have enhanced and increased our footprint of consulates and embassies is to reach out to the diaspora. Also, the work of Irish community groups is one of the single biggest drivers of the diaspora, because, in a number of areas and situations where we do not have that immediate presence on the ground, we still have very vibrant diaspora networks. As a Government, we want to support that. That is part of what the emigrant support programme does; it looks at how you can target resources. To go back to the point about the Hammersmith situation, we very much work on the basis that, if we can put in some support, most community groups are very innovative and very dynamic and will reach out and use that as the anchor for their funding, but they will then multiply it by multiple factors.

The key thing about diaspora, which is part of that confidence that I mentioned in my speech, is that we need to move more and more away from the idea and the historical notion that the diaspora was people who had left, and that what we got back may have been remittances, to the recognition of the mutual benefit that can be achieved by building a relationship that allows the diaspora — it does not matter how small or large that diaspora is — to feed back into the home country and the home country to reach out to it. When the relationship has that feeling of involvement and greater inclusivity, you begin to see a lot of the benefits that we certainly have seen.

For example, the main interconnection for most people in the world and for their countries and leaderships will probably be with Irish diaspora people. It will be with people who identify as Irish, who will have that link back to Ireland and for whom there will constantly be that reinforcement. It gives a relatively small country, which is what we are, a far greater presence. The figure we work off is about 70 million, although I sometimes wonder about that, because I think that it could be well north of 100 million. There are so many people. One of the most incredible things, when you travel as the Diaspora Minister, is that people are quite willing to open up. Once, I sat in a meeting during which four of the five people representing the Government on the other side spent most of the meeting trying to tell me about their Irish relatives and how they were nearly more Irish than I was. That connection is wonderful and really strong. We will obviously continue to build on that.

Senator Victor Boyhan:

I want to follow on from what Annabelle Ewing said about our relationships, embassies and consulates. First, I welcome you, Minister, and thank you for coming to join us.

I will touch on what you said about our east-west relationships and on what the Taoiseach said earlier. It is important, and, clearly, the Irish Government have demonstrated their commitment to east-west ties through our expanding embassy in London, our new consulates in Cardiff and Manchester and our bilateral frameworks in Scotland and Wales. We have a broader audience here; we tend to talk about Ireland and England, but Scotland and Wales are here too. Somehow, that has got lost in a lot of our BIPA debates in recent times. You might, perhaps, touch on the framework in relation to Scotland and Wales. It is really important, and we would be interested in hearing about it.

We talked about interparliamentary relationships. All politics, business and commerce — everything — is down to personal relationships and friendships and to what goes on in forming trust. That is important. There is a greater role, maybe not now but at some point, for the Co-Chairs. We need to look at how we can expand the potential of BIPA. That is for another day, but I want to flag it to you; you might have a thought or two on it.

I will close with one comment of thanks. I speak for many people here when I say that the working relationships of the embassies in London and Dublin are unique and special. The relationships that the ambassadors and their staff build with us through interparliamentary activities are really important and cannot be overstated. I acknowledge that and extend our thanks to them. It is really crucial and ever-improving.

Really, I just ask you to talk about the Scotland-Wales bilateral framework. That would be very interesting for our audience.

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

I will pick up on your closing remark as well. There is an incredible strength in the embassies and consulates and the work that they do. The most incredible part of the work, certainly of our own team, is in reaching out daily to the Irish community but also in working to ensure that we build this new, enhanced relationship. Take the Welsh-Irish relationship; we had some recent visits in Dublin and Cork from the Welsh side, and we will build further on that. On the Scottish side, programmes have been looked at and devised. It is, though, at the heart of it, about building around the relationships between people. It is a matter of making sure that, whether it is in the north of England or between the mayors of big cities, wherever we are, we are building on a solid relationship between peoples, so that we can not only continue to have the more formal structure, the more formal relationship — the relationship that is there as a result of agreements or as a result of government or assembly ties — but also ensure that we have a continuing relationship between the peoples of these islands and between the regions. I think that if we do that, and if we continue to build on it, that will be the real strength.

12.15 pm

A lot of different issues arise in the different parts of the United Kingdom; a lot of different issues arise in respect of different aspects of where we can most work closely together. However, in some key areas, particularly around economic activity and, I believe, around ties on the cultural side, there is tremendous opportunity right across the devolved Administrations and right across the administrative regions and cities in the north of England for us to strengthen and deepen those relationships. A key part of that, though, is building people-to-people relations.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

It is nice to see you again, Minister. You may be aware that the Scottish Government have begun to publish the prospectus papers on what the arrangements for an independent Scotland would be, should that be the outcome of next year's referendum. Obviously, and quite appropriately, the Irish Government do not take a position on that; it is an internal issue for us. However, part of those proposals is that an independent Scotland would remain in the common travel area. Do the Irish Government have any objection to that proposal or, in terms of future Scotland/Ireland relationships, do you acknowledge that that is the most appropriate and smoothest arrangement that there could be in terms of common travel and the border?

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

The relationship that is there at the moment, which is the common travel area between the islands, North/South and east-west — it does not matter which way you cut it — has served us all incredibly well for a very long time. One would hope that, because of the amount of movement that there is and, to come back to the central theme that I keep referring to, the relationship that is built primarily on people, you would not look for obstacles or obstructions that would come about. However, that is a long way down a road that has not yet been travelled, so I will leave it at that.

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

Minister, thanks very much. I want to ask you about the other part of your portfolio: overseas aid and development. Obviously, there is huge need at the moment in Ukraine but also in the Horn of Africa. I know that the Irish Government have played a significant role; I think that you visited there recently. What do you think about the future of the cooperation between the

UK and Ireland on those matters? Obviously, we have seen huge cuts in the UK's development budget and a kind of a stepping back from some of the key bodies and institutions, whereas, previously, we were working very closely on a lot of those matters. Where do you see that relationship going forward?

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

It is known, and fair to say, that the British Government have brought in some changes in the way in which they handle their development aid side. As the development aid Minister, I think that it is very important to acknowledge that Britain's development aid programme is still one of the largest in the world and is one that we work very closely with. One of the amazing things about the ethos of development aid that we use as a guiding principle for us is reaching the furthest behind the first and making sure that you target your resources in the most ethical way. Those are the type of programme ideals that really were built by the British aid programme in recent years. We have an ongoing strong relationship and a lot of projects, which I have had the chance to see at first hand in different parts of Africa, on which we still work together. Obviously, depending on how things are in the future, there will be tremendous scope for us to continue to work on projects.

Just on the point about the Horn of Africa, I never, ever miss an opportunity to make this point. I saw at first hand, less than a month ago, what is happening in the Horn of Africa. We are looking at a situation where, if the international community does not act very quickly, we will have the greatest famine that we have seen in, maybe, 50 years. We will have a famine in which people will die in their thousands and tens of thousands daily. The great thing is that it does not have to happen. We can stop it. We can intervene now, but we need other countries to take a similar role and view to that of Ireland, where we have maximised our resources to the Horn of Africa and have increased, this year, our end-of-year spend by €30 million direct in.

I acknowledge the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). There are, however, a large number of countries right across the developed world space that are not matching that. The tragedy of it is that the world television cameras that are beginning to cover it a little will turn up in their droves when it is too late. However, if we move and move now — I have asked this to be an item on the agenda of my EU meeting with development Ministers when we meet in a couple of weeks' time — we have the potential to try to stop this catastrophe happening. The amazing thing about it is that this is a wake-up call for the world. This is the first totally climate-made famine. The climate change that has already taken place — not will take place but has taken place — has wiped out the land and the ability of a community to live. There will be no going back to a situation. It is not a case of, "The rains will come, and we can go back". That is not going to happen.

We have to do two things through our development aid in the developed world. First, we have to deal with the emergency, so we have to stop children and adults dying. Then, we have to put in place the development work that either enables people in those communities to continue to live by making a living from a new form of agriculture or provides a new form of help and support that enables them to stay in their communities, which is where they want to stay. One of the great failings of development aid work in previous decades was that we marched people back from the cliff, but only by about 5 millimetres, and then walked away. Then we wonder why we end up back there again. We want to see the silos that exist between humanitarian and development aid broken down. We want to ensure that, when you help a community, you stop the immediate crisis and then enable that community to rebuild its life and remain where it is. I will continue to campaign for that.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. Those are very wise words. There is a final question from Niall Ó Donnghaile.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Thanks, Co-Chair, and thank you, Minister Brophy. Minister, you will have seen the recent jubilant scenes in Dublin of Brazilian citizens going to cast their vote for their president at home. You will know that we are currently an outlier in the EU in not granting emigrant voting rights. Can you update us on the Programme for Government commitment to hold a referendum on extending the right to vote in presidential elections to Irish citizens who live outside the state, including those of us who are resident in the North of Ireland? Thanks, Co-Chair.

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

Thank you very much. As you know, that is a Programme for Government commitment. That still stands. COVID obviously intervened in a lot of things and slowed that down. It is my intention to convene on that again. I have already been in contact with some of the main groups that have been involved. Hopefully, in the first half of next year, we will come together to look at how we can advance the situation. We want to see the extension of the franchise. We are very conscious, as everybody is, of making sure that we get it right and how we do that. We believe that a consultation, which everyone is asking for, will come together relatively quickly early next year and that proposals will come out of that. Hopefully, we will see progress next year.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Minister. Those are fascinating comments, and there is a lot of food for thought. There is, I think, a real, renewed commitment from everyone in this room to make sure that we foster better relationships across the board, particularly with those diaspora communities. Thank you for all that you do.

Mr Colm Brophy TD:

Thank you very much. *[Applause].*

UNIVERSITIES: CATALYSTS FOR COOPERATION AND FORCES FOR GOOD

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Our next presentation is from Dr Linda Doyle, provost and president, Trinity College Dublin.

Dr Linda Doyle (Trinity College):

Thank you, everybody. It is a real honour to be here. Éamon Ó Cuív said to me earlier that I should tell a lot of jokes. I do not have a load of jokes with me, but I did bring some pictures. I am going to be using some slides, so I am sorry that it will be slightly awkward for people on one side of the room to see. I am an engineer, so I have to use technology.

I am really delighted to be here. I want to give you a little flavour of how universities in Ireland and the UK interact with each other, because that is a really brilliant and deep interaction, and also talk a little bit about the future of universities.

In case people do not know, we have about 13 universities in the Republic of Ireland. Some of those are new: we have about five new technical universities. There are roughly 134 universities in the United Kingdom, so there are a lot of institutions for us to interact with.

I have put the official title of my university on the slide. I bet that if I went round the room and asked how many words were in our title, people would be surprised to know that there are more words in it —25 — than there are universities in Ireland. There are 25 words. The reason that I put that up was to welcome colleagues from across the water. Obviously, our university was founded by Queen Elizabeth I, and that is very much part of the tradition of where Trinity came from. It is a very beautiful university. The slide shows a picture of the front square. Trinity has a very complex history, and I am sure that most of you will be well aware of that. For the first 200 years, Protestants did not allow Catholics in; then, in the 20th century, Catholics did not allow Catholics in. However, we are now a really strong, secular university that has really inclusive principles.

We remain completely connected in many ways with the UK. A little test for you could be to see whether you recognise all the people in the picture on the slide. Here are some of the visitors that we have had over the years that came to meet us, some more recently than others. In the middle is Daisy Edgar-Jones, who starred in 'Normal People'. Sally Rooney is a very proud alum of Trinity and wrote the book, 'Normal People'. If any of you saw that, you got some glimpse of Trinity. I put that picture in to symbolise the really strong interaction that we continue to have on the personal relationship level that a lot of people have been speaking about today.

12.30 pm

I will say a little bit about my own role before I go on to the wider picture. I, too, got elected. I am sure that all the people here who are elected appreciate the challenge of an election campaign. I was in campaign mode and had to write a manifesto, and that campaign lasted for about a year. I was professor of engineering and the arts before I took over the role. I am the forty-fifth provost of Trinity, and it took us 429 years to have a woman provost, so, for me, it was a really special day when I got elected to the role. I emphasise the fact that we use the word provost to mean vice chancellor of the university; different words are used across the UK and the continent in general.

The university is very large. We have 21,000 students. About 25% of those students come through non-traditional routes, and that is the reason for the image that I have used here. On the left-hand side of the slide, you will see Samuel Beckett, an alum of Trinity, and, on the right, you will see Leah Kenny, one of our students who came through one of the access projects. Her research was about Samuel Beckett. For me, that image — we had a large-scale, gigantic version of it in Front Square for a while under our Inspiring Generations slogan — captures where we have come from and where we are going as a university.

There are 120 nationalities there, which is really important, and you will find that in all the universities in Ireland. It is not just about serving Ireland; it is about looking outwards and serving the world more broadly. Trinity, we are very proud to say, is one of the top 100 universities in the world.

I will talk briefly about our history of great collaboration. I know that we have a history of many things between our two nations, but we have one here that is founded in a huge amount of collaboration. I will start with the steamboat ladies. I do not know whether anyone here has heard of them. In 1904, Trinity first admitted women. In Britain, women had been in Oxford and Cambridge for a number of years, but they did not actually give the women degrees, so they had to travel to Ireland to get their degree from an Irish university. We share that interesting history. The lovely picture that you can see is of the steamboat ladies, so-called because of their mode of transport. They hugely influenced an awful lot of things for women in Trinity, because it was owing to the existence of the steamboat ladies that we set up our first accommodation for women. At that time, they were not allowed on campus, because they were considered to be a danger to the men, so they went off-campus somewhere.

I will switch to the whole of Ireland now and emphasise the huge amount of collaboration and cooperation between Ireland and the UK. You heard some of it this morning from various different people, with Steve Baker talking about various things that are happening and are yet to come. There is an enormous amount of collaboration, and, on the next few slides, I have put a little bit of an alphabet soup of acronyms that all relate to the various funding bodies in the country.

There is a hugely strong relationship between the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and our Science Foundation Ireland. We have large-scale centres for what is known as doctoral training, where we train the next generation of people in the STEM area, with a significant investment to date. They are right across Ireland and the UK. We have very distinguished scholarships, which are really focused on brilliant individuals. For example, we have the Royal Society - Science Foundation Ireland University Research Fellowship. We currently have 24 such fellows, with €20 million invested to date on the Irish side.

There is a great relationship between the Science Foundation Ireland, our Health Research Board and the Wellcome Research Partnership, with a huge amount invested there to push forward areas of health. In the biological sciences, we have a great partnership between the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and our own Science Foundation Ireland. Likewise, there is partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council in supporting arts and humanities. There is an incredible wealth of relationships between the two countries. The really important thing is that that is just the tip of the iceberg: I am talking to you just about the formal ones. In every week of every year, academics and students go back and forwards to the UK, accessing archives and working on projects together.

Very importantly in the current context of how we discuss things, when it comes to Horizon and European Framework funding, if I look back at the previous framework — Horizon 2020 — I see that Ireland drew down about €142 million from the EU but that 62% of our collaborative projects involved a partner from the UK, which is pretty spectacular. That is how much we are in partnership and how much we want to work together, particularly because there are such amazing and fantastic institutions right across Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The UK received more than €7 billion from Horizon 2020. That is really important, and we would love to continue those strong relationships, directly, bilaterally and through wider institutions.

You might also be interested to know the number of papers that have been written jointly over the past five years. There have been 2,185 papers co-authored with Northern Ireland and 20,000 co-authored with Great Britain. There are probably people in the room who will be surprised to realise that that is the density with which we interact. It has doubled in the past 10 years. Trinity collaborated with 476 UK institutions and co-authored 4,922 academic publications in

the past year. We also worked with 89 UK companies. That is a really important thing about research. Very central to it is that it is not just about academics working with academics but about the larger collaborations that also involve innovation and working with industry. That is such an important part of what we do in Ireland and with our neighbours across the water.

There are also projects that go further, and some of you may be familiar with them. There is a programme called the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership. For that, you typically need institutions in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the US. It has been a fantastic programme, and €126 million has been invested already. The areas that it focuses on include sensors and sensor networks, new materials, telecoms, cybersecurity, agriculture and health — a rich range of topics. It has been an incredibly important programme. I will give you an example from Trinity. One of the most recent funding awards that we got through the partnership was for something that is known as the quantum internet. Essentially, we are working with the University of Arizona and Queen's University Belfast. Furthermore, we are drawing in funding through the EU for the quantum internet. I do not know whether you discuss such things as quantum computing and the quantum internet at events like this, but those are technologies of the future. If you are interested in secure communications of the future, you will be doing it on the quantum internet. If you are interested in really tackling climate change, you will be modelling things in quantum computing. The message here is that those are big, challenging problems and that, together, we make better work of approaching them. There are more examples.

Research is not always about research projects. It is also about inclusivity, for example. One of the programmes in Trinity that I am hugely proud of is our Trinity Access Programmes. We have been working on that for over 30 years. It is partly why we have a richer, wider range of people coming to Trinity now. We exported it to the University of Oxford and helped Lady Margaret Hall college to develop its own access programme. That research has also fed into policy in Ireland in that we influence routes for people to go to college that are an alternative to what, in Ireland, we call the "CAO route" (Central Applications Office) or the traditional leaving certificate route.

When I talk about research and collaboration, it is on multiple levels and in multiple ways. When we look to the UK, we see such incredible institutions with incredible excellence and really great practices. That is a huge influence for us in how we thrive and strive to do better.

For the last few minutes, I want to talk about the fact that we can do more. I hear you all talk about the fact that it is so important to be in this room and to have these relationships. I cannot stress enough that the research relationships allow that to happen in spades. I want to touch on a few examples where that really matters.

The research relationships really matter, for example, in understanding the past. I have included a project that you might find interesting. At the start of our civil war, our Public Record Office was destroyed. At the time, the Record Treasury contained records from seven centuries, and those were gone in one go. When I talked to Lord Murphy earlier, he said that he could not find things about his family in Ballincollig. Some of the genealogy and documents that would have been in there are gone. We are involved in a project that is about recreating that virtually. It is called Beyond 2022. It is an all-island and international collaborative project in which we have reconstructed that office virtually. Not only can you go into it virtually on a website but we have recollected documents from the diaspora in Ireland, the UK and around the world. Luckily, especially in the past, the British were really good at doing duplicate documents and having multiple copies of things. Because of those civil service practices, we have been able to

gather together information that was lost, and people have access to it for the first time. On top of that, because it is digitally available, they are able to see other links that they would not be able to see otherwise. I hope that you will be able to find records on Ballincollig there.

It is important to say that this is also relevant because something like civil war is incredibly difficult to commemorate. I am very proud of how Ireland has worked through various decades of commemorations. However, a project like Beyond 2022 allows you to think beyond the civil war and about things that happened and how we move forward in new ways. That research is not about finding out things about the past — it is about helping to negotiate the future. That is what I hear about this Assembly. We are all about recognising the differences in the past but also deeply interested in how we negotiate the future.

Research is of vital importance to our health and well-being. I have a picture here of when, recently, we gave Adrian Hill, from the team that produced the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, an honorary doctorate in Trinity. He went to Trinity, and we are very proud of him. He came over for a major conference on lessons that we have learnt from the pandemic. When you look at the well-being of the world and the potential for the next pandemic, it is completely clear that that will only be dealt with and tackled through continued collaboration and the pushing of science. We also know that it is about not just the technology and the science but the sociology and experience. Here is a gorgeous picture, which was drawn by one of the kids who engaged with our Trinity Access Programmes, showing her experience with COVID and the feeling of isolation. A lot of our research is driven by the social science, such as the understanding of how children lost out in school and online learning and how we can improve that. That is really important in pushing our health and well-being. Research really matters, and we can do much more.

Our future also really matters from a research perspective. The Minister for Diaspora put it so articulately when he spoke about famine in the Horn of Africa and the fact that that is evidenced through climate change. We know that the planet is burning and that we are in really difficult times. This is a picture of our rewilding at the front of Trinity. I am regularly offered a mixture of, "Oh, this is magnificent", and, "I will give you the loan of a lawnmower to cut that and get rid of it. I liked it the way it was". Nonetheless, that is a symbol of what we need to do in the future and that we need to improve everything that we do.

In Trinity, we have about 130 different research projects about climate and biodiversity. Right across Ireland, all of the universities are equally engaged. It is something that everyone is passionate about. The UK is the same. The All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network — it does not have a catchy acronym, but it is AIC+BRN — is really interesting. I was really pleased this morning when Steve Baker talked about the continued funding, which was announced today, for the co-centres in Ireland, the UK and Northern Ireland, where we begin to tackle, together with critical mass, climate diversity, cancer and other things that the critical mass of the island really matters in. That is really interesting.

I will end with a slightly busy slide where I say that we, the university sector, can do much more on leadership. The onus is on us to not just talk a good talk and say, "Look at this great research we have done", and, "These are the things that you should be doing". The onus is on us to be better leaders. This is an interesting picture, which some of you may recognise, of a protest in the university a couple of weeks ago. It was the biggest protest that I have seen in the university in decades. Our students are very unhappy about the cost-of-living crisis, the challenges that they face, the housing crisis in Ireland and the fact that they find it really difficult to find somewhere to live and to fully engage in their education. When I look at this,

I really worry that we are robbing their future on multiple fronts. The planet is burning, and now we are making it harder and harder to engage in education. There is a bigger onus on us, as a university, and on society as a whole to make sure that we tackle that.

12.45 pm

Very recently — I thought that it was appropriate for this audience — I had the pleasure of being invited to the MacGill Summer School to give the John Hume Lecture. That caused me to contemplate Hume's words a bit more and helped me to find a guiding light to describe the leadership that a university needs to show. On the next slide, I have taken some of Hume's words. They might be a little bit hard to read but it is worth calling out some of his very famous quotes, starting with:

"Difference is of the essence of humanity. Difference is an accident of birth and it should therefore never be the source of hatred or conflict. The answer to difference is to respect it. Therein lies a most fundamental principle of peace — respect for diversity."

In another, he talks about education:

"In my opinion, what changed the situation eventually — and, of course, it took a lot of time to change it, things like that don't change in a week or a fortnight — was the new educational system."

This is another of his very famous quotes:

"I want to see Ireland as an example to men and women everywhere of what can be achieved by living for ideals, rather than fighting for them, and by viewing each and every person as worthy of respect and honour. I want to see an Ireland of partnership where we wage war on want and poverty, where we reach out to the marginalised and dispossessed, where we build together a future that can be as great as our dreams allow."

Those words are powerful and wonderful. When I looked at them, I asked myself, "What do I want for my university? What do I want for the university system?". I put these words together: universities should be places of great diversity that celebrate difference, places that live for ideals — that means that we have to walk the walk as well as talk the talk — and places that educate for a future that will be as great as our dreams will allow. I found Hume's words to be an extraordinary guiding light. If I manage to move Trinity more and more in that direction in my tenure as provost, I will feel that I have achieved a lot. We, collectively, can use universities to move society in that direction. We, in Trinity and across the educational sector in Ireland, are only too delighted to be more and more involved, to help in any way that we can to push the boundaries of research and tackle the problems that really matter to us, and to use the coming together of the friendships, mixes of culture and difference of ideals to push all the ideals that this group strives for.

Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you for an incredibly inspirational lecture. To anyone who had never seen it before or who was in any doubt about the value of collaboration and academics working together, I say that we would not be meeting here physically if it had not been for the development of vaccines. That was only possible because of institutions working together. Thank you so much for that. We have a few minutes for questions.

Ms Mairéad Farrell TD:

Thank you so much for that really inspiring presentation. One thing that piqued my interest, as somebody who is in Galway and the west, was your mention of the new universities: for example, ATU, which is based in Galway but, of course, reaches across the west. I am interested in hearing how cooperation has changed as a result of the move to those universities, such as ATU, and, specifically, whether they are included in that US-Ireland research now or already were.

Dr Linda Doyle:

Until recently, we did not have a thing called a technical university. We now have five new technical universities, which are what Mairéad is referring to. In creating the technical universities, other institutes of technology have come together to create something of a critical mass.

Mairead, you will be glad to know that they have always been part of those programmes. For example, the research centre at the heart of the quantum internet one that I mentioned is headquartered in Trinity but also has a presence in Waterford at the Waterford Institute of Technology and the South East Technological University. Likewise, Atlantic Technological University and others are very involved. All that it means is that they are as involved as ever; they just have new branding. That is a good sign. What is also really important is that the technological universities and the comprehensive universities have slightly different things to bring to the table, which makes for even greater collaboration.

Ms Heledd Fychan MS:

Thank you very much. It is wonderful to see a female provost — that is a huge achievement — and to hear your vision for the university. As a former student of Trinity, I was particularly interested in your emphasis on the cost-of-living crisis and on Trinity's Access programme. Are you seeing any impact of Brexit in hindering collaboration and, specifically, in the demographic of students from the United Kingdom, especially their socio-economic background?

Dr Linda Doyle:

It is a mixed picture. We have problems. It was always really easy for people from any institutions here to travel to Northern Ireland, for example, or to England, Scotland and Wales. Now, it is easy for them to travel there if they happen to be Irish or British, but it is not easy, for example, for the 18% of international students at Trinity who cannot travel around as easily as before. There are impacts such as that.

Another huge impact is the British universities that are missing from the European Union framework. You have some of the best universities in the world, without a doubt, and excellence raises all boats. That is a huge impact. That has also caused a lack of stability if you are trying to plan for the future. Some institutions in the UK were not sure what was going to happen. Around Europe, you are finding that people do not necessarily want to include those universities in case it is not going to be a good thing. You see some of that instability. When it comes to one-to-one relationships, writing papers together and working together, we have not seen any negative effects, but that is because the strength of the relationship with our close neighbours continues. It is a mixed bag.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Thank you for your inspirational words on cooperation and the accessibility of higher education. Part of that success story between Britain and Ireland has been the treatment of each other's students as home students so that they are treated as domestic students for the purposes of fees. Sadly, the Irish institutions treat students from the Crown dependencies as international students for the purposes of fees. We are very much the exception to that carve-out, and, given that we do not have a university between us, that is a bit of a barrier to educational opportunity in Ireland. There is a missing opportunity there. Can more be done to make higher education a bit more accessible to people from the Crown dependencies?

Dr Linda Doyle:

I absolutely think so. It is not in my gift to make those rules. To a certain extent, the fact that you are sitting in this room with these other people means that I have always seen you as one community. The fact that there is that distinction is, without a doubt, worth looking into.

Senator Diarmuid Wilson:

If you will permit me, I will join my colleague and Co-Chairperson Brendan Smith TD in welcoming everybody to County Cavan and to my home parish. You are all very welcome. I speak not only on my behalf or Brendan's but on behalf of some of the diaspora from Cavan, such as Karin Smyth MP, whom Brendan mentioned last night. There are two other colleagues of mine here: Neale Richmond TD, whose mother comes from Cavan, and Victor Boyhan, whose grandmother hailed from Cavan. Actually, you would know that they are from Cavan when you see how they operate at the bar. *[Laughter.]*

Dr Linda Doyle:

You will be glad to know that we allow people from Cavan into Trinity as well. *[Laughter.]*

Senator Diarmuid Wilson:

Dr Doyle, thank you very much for your comprehensive and interesting presentation.

Trinity is way ahead of its time in bringing in the Access programme. What numbers have gone through that programme since its inception?

Trinity is unique in the sense that it has the constitutional right to elect three senators. Of our Senate of 60 senators, three are elected by your graduates. In a way, that is a Thirty-two Counties electorate. For many decades, that was the only way in which the unionist community, in particular, had a voice in our political system. How important is it to your university to have those senators? Could we improve their ability to represent, in particular, the unionist community in the Six Counties or the North of Ireland?

Finally, some people, particularly in your university, suggest that Trinity's autonomy has been affected by the recent Higher Education Authority Act. Would you like to comment on that?

Dr Linda Doyle:

There were a good few questions there. First, on the Access programme, as I mentioned in the slides, about 25% of people who come to Trinity now come through non-traditional routes, although not all of those come through the Access programme. You might be interested to know that the Access programme also serves universities more generally. We engage with tons

of schools across Dublin, especially delivering equality of opportunity (DEIS) schools. We also initiated College Awareness Week. We are driving awareness of university more generally. A proportion will come to us obviously, but we are also interested in how people access universities elsewhere and further education where appropriate: the appropriate thing needs to happen.

Your second question about the senators is interesting. I really believe in equality, inclusivity and diversity. On that basis, I cannot say that it is fair that Trinity has three senators and the rest of the system has three. We are definitely interested in how that might be addressed. However, I take your point that, traditionally, that system has allowed other voices to come through. The university is, as I mentioned, very secular now. To a certain extent, I do not think that that is thought about now. A certain sense of social justice often comes up through the candidates who get elected through Trinity, and that is one of the driving forces. However, ultimately, in the interests of fairness, we would be happy to evolve the system. I do not know whether everybody in the university would be happy that I should say that, but that is really important.

Your final question was on the new Higher Education Authority Act in the Republic of Ireland. A lot of that Act is about putting more things on a statutory footing. There are many other things, including things that address the governance of the universities. To my mind, there is some erosion of autonomy. If you look across the world, you will see a general trend towards the erosion of the autonomy of independent institutions. You see it in many countries. You see it more drastically in places like Hungary and Poland, but you see parts of it everywhere. What makes a really strong democracy is having really strong, independent institutions. Those institutions should be there not to agree with society but to challenge society. I have worries about, for example, the powers of the CEO of the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The devil will be in the detail of how it is implemented, and we will certainly keep a close eye on it.

Rt Hon The Lord Bruce:

Thank you very much for a great address. Trinity is a university that does what it says on the tin in reaching out across communities, disciplines and the world. You mentioned Horizon 2020 and its success. From the UK's point of view, Horizon is obviously in suspense while we are in dispute. How are you getting around that, or are you getting around it? We know that UK institutions are effectively being excluded. Are you finding ways of continuing to collaborate that will, hopefully, eventually lead us back into proper engagement with Horizon and with ERASMUS? I have never quite understood why we left ERASMUS altogether; well, I do understand why, but I do not approve of it. Is that an opportunity for UK-based students to come to Irish universities where they would get access to ERASMUS? For an awful lot of students, that was a very attractive part of a degree. It involves a year abroad as well as three years, potentially, in Ireland, which seems to me like a good mix. Do you have a sales opportunity there?

Dr Linda Doyle:

Yes, you are right. I hope that we will be able to address that. Having an international experience is important to most of the universities in Ireland. It goes to what we talk about time and time again: the understanding of cultural difference. In fact, a lot of statistics show that, in the UK, people who went on ERASMUS may have voted in a particular way on Brexit versus others who did not. It is really interesting and important.

On your wider points about the European framework, the examples that I gave are, in the main, collaborations that are created between our two countries, so those go on and will thrive. We have an eye to what is happening. We are beefing them up. The co-centres that were announced today will further beef them up. There are some ways around it. We are open to joint appointments. If somebody has an appointment in the UK and an appointment here, they are able to take advantage of both sides. There have been a few successful examples of joint appointments, but we could do much more. Things like that are ways around it, but, ultimately, the best way around it is to sort out the situation so that we can move to deeper and continued collaboration.

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you very much. My question is short because I do not want to be the person who comes between delegates and their lunch. *[Laughter.]*

Like Heledd, I went to Trinity. When I was there 20 years ago, one of the best things about it was the strong presence of people from Northern Ireland and, in particular, from the unionist community. It was genuine diversity in Dublin. For many people from Ireland who did not have family or whatever in Northern Ireland, it was one of their first opportunities to really get to know people better. One of the things that appear to have changed over time is that that number has gone down considerably. My understanding is that that is because you have to do four A levels to get into Trinity, whereas, to go to a top university in the United Kingdom, you need only do three. Why would you do four to go to Trinity when you can do three to go to Oxford, Durham or wherever else? Is that correct?

Dr Linda Doyle:

Yes, Jennifer. This is not specific to Trinity, but, essentially, the way that it happens is that an algorithm converts A-level results into the points system in Ireland. Because people in Ireland do six subjects and different things, the algorithm is not great. It ends up that, if you want to go to universities that require very high points, you nearly need four A* grades. It is not even that you just need four A levels; you need a huge achievement in them. That definitely has an impact. We could do something to improve that, without a doubt.

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

When did that change?

Dr Linda Doyle:

It is not that it has changed. There has always been that translational system. If you are in Romania, for example, there is a translational system. What has happened is that, over COVID, we have all experienced higher and higher points. That is why people are noticing it more now. It has become harder and harder to get the equivalent number of points. A lot of our courses are maxed out on points and are random selection only because of the demand for them. There are those two things coupled together. However, you make a good point about Northern Ireland. We could do more to reignite relationships and encourage people into Trinity. I have some plans afoot on that front as well. Practical things like that can be done.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

In concluding this session, I echo the words of my Co-Chair, Karen, and thank Linda for her fascinating and comprehensive address and her responses to the questions. It is worth noting that Trinity is one of the seven ancient universities on these islands. It has been at the crossroads of our shared history for over 400 years, offering a unique perspective on relationships North/South and east/west, as referred to by our colleagues Diarmuid and Jennifer. Trinity is the alma mater of the writers Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett; thinkers such as Edmund Burke; political leaders like Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmet and Edward Carson; and three Irish presidents: Douglas Hyde, Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese. Éamon de Valera also studied there for a time.

Linda, who has joined us today, was elected Trinity's 45th provost last year, making history as the first woman to hold that office since the university's foundation in 1592. Before her election as provost, Linda held the positions of dean of research and professor of engineering and the arts in Trinity.

We are delighted that Linda accepted our invitation to join us. Hopefully, in the years to come, we will have more contact with Linda and her colleagues in Trinity. On behalf of all the Assembly, I offer a sincere thanks to Linda for her participation.

Dr Linda Doyle:

Thank you. It is fascinating to be here. It is brilliant to hear all of your conversations. We feel privileged to be allowed in to hear those. It is great. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The sitting was suspended at 1.06 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.37 pm.

VIDEO ADDRESS BY THE UK MINISTER OF STATE AT THE FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much to those who have returned from lunch. You may have been watching interesting developments on the TV and elsewhere. Yes, we have a new leader and a new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, although he is not Prime Minister yet.

The next session is a video recording from Leo Docherty MP. He was unable to join us in person. I made representations to the Foreign Secretary, James Cleverly, that we needed to be properly represented. Unfortunately, Mr Docherty was unable to attend in person but it is very good that we have a message from him in his capacity as Minister for Europe at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Let us play the video.

Mr Leo Docherty MP:

Co-Chairs and Members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, it is an immense honour to be able to address you all today. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person, especially at a time when these exchanges between fellow parliamentarians are hugely valuable, but I hope to have the opportunity to meet many of you during my upcoming visit.

Ireland is our closest geographical partner, as demonstrated by the extent of recent high-level engagement between our two countries. I am very pleased that the Lord Speaker had the

opportunity to address the Seanad and that our Deputy Prime Minister, Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary have all been able to meet with the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Foreign Minister Coveney in past weeks.

Geopolitical challenges such as the war in Ukraine and the growing problem of climate change have brought us all closer together. As open democracies and fellow UN Security Council members, our two countries were appalled by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. I thank those of you present for Ireland's strong position and unwavering support for Ukraine. I am sure that everyone here will agree that we must use our position to encourage the international community to remain engaged. Together, we are determined to ensure that Putin loses and cannot further undermine European stability.

As we look forward to COP27 in Egypt, we recall the success of COP26 last year in Glasgow. Ireland's support for the UK's COP presidency priorities was and still is really appreciated. We know that we can count on your continued collaboration to build on the progress made thus far and maintain momentum.

Our relationship has a huge amount of further potential, and it is unfortunate that some barriers still stand in the way of this. We have two separate but closely related priorities in the next few weeks on which the two Governments are working closely together. Of course, the first is to seek to get the Stormont institutions up and running, without preconditions and without further delay. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach and their respective ministerial teams have delivered very clear messages on this. The people of Northern Ireland deserve nothing less than a functioning Executive. Both Governments also understand, albeit, perhaps, to differing degrees, the concerns that unionists in particular have about the Northern Ireland protocol. The United Kingdom Government are in talks with the European Commission and are endeavouring to make progress on those matters. A sustainable, long-term solution, agreed by the UK and the EU that delivers the objectives of the protocol — respect for the UK and the EU single market — and which thus fully reflects the crucial and delicate balances of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is what we want. That has to be our shared goal.

To conclude, Ireland is and will always remain a key partner in navigating the challenges that lie before us, and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly plays a hugely important role in supporting that ambition. I really look forward to building even closer connections between us in person in the months to come. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I am sure that we are all very grateful for that contribution from the Minister for Europe. I do want to assure you that there were genuine and insurmountable barriers to his getting here and being here in person, but I will pass back to the Minister our best wishes and our thanks to him for recording that message. It is now time for my Co-Chair.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much. I join with you in thanks to the Minister for his contribution.

COMMITTEE C REPORT: THE EFFECTS OF THE POST-BREXIT TRADING ENVIRONMENT ON UK-IRISH TRADE

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I call the Vice-Chair of Committee C, Stephen Doughty MP, to present the report of Committee C to our Assembly.

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

Thank you very much, Co-Chairs. It is a pleasure to be here to present the report from Committee C. Apologies, again, to all of you on behalf of Brendan, who, unfortunately, has COVID, otherwise he would be here to present the report. He very ably chaired the Committee during its deliberations and visits. First, I thank the Clerks from both the Houses and to all of the stakeholders who inputted into the inquiry. One of the excellent things about it was that we were able to take physical visits to Dublin, Belfast, Holyhead and Liverpool, where we were able to meet and engage with a huge range of stakeholders, not only from the Governments but, crucially, from traders, from businesses, from trade bodies and federations, from trade unions, from civil society groups and from others. We also had written submissions, so we were able to take a substantial amount of evidence and see for ourselves some of the practical infrastructure or, in some cases, the non-existent infrastructure. We saw the very real challenges that there have been in the post-Brexit trading environment for people across our islands.

2.45 pm

We looked at three issues, essentially, that are in the report. First, we looked at how Brexit has altered the trading environment in which UK and Irish businesses trade within our islands. Secondly, we considered some of the economic and social impacts of those changes and how traders, business and consumers have responded. We also looked at how Governments and government agencies have implemented changes relating to Brexit and, of course, the Northern Ireland protocol to date. Obviously, as will be clear to everyone in this room, this has been a continually moving feast, not only throughout our inquiry but even through these days. We tried to make the report as up to date as we could as of today, but there are aspects of it that are under active negotiation and discussion.

The first real conclusion that we reached is that there has been friction in the relationship. Decisions have been taken that have resulted in significant changes, and that has resulted in greater friction for trade between Ireland and the United Kingdom and within our islands. It has also meant that delays in some of the decision-making processes at the political level have made it more challenging for businesses to prepare for the future and to adapt to the post-Brexit trading environment. We were very clear that the UK and Irish Governments and the EU should work together to ensure that trade friction between the UK and Ireland is as low as it possibly can be in the post-Brexit context. I will go into some of the specific recommendations, but our clear view was that that work has to happen through a process of negotiation and that that is the way forward. That was certainly the bulk of the evidence that we heard from businesses, traders and others who are involved.

The second major point was that it is very clear that there have been significant impacts but that it has been very difficult to measure and assess some of those impacts in detail and to have a consistent position. That is for one reason, and this should be obvious to all of us, which is the impact of COVID during the period of our inquiry and since Brexit came about. This reason is more significant for all of us to consider going forward, and it is the inconsistencies in the ways that trade statistics are measured across the different jurisdictions. One of our key recommendations is that the UK and Irish Governments produce a common methodology for measuring trade and business flows so that the situation can be better understood.

To illustrate that for the Assembly, I will say that when we compare data from Ireland with data from the UK, we see that the Central Statistics Office's (CSO) data from Ireland show that from 2019 to 2021, Irish goods exports to Northern Ireland rose by 67·4% and that, in the opposite direction, Northern Ireland's exports to Ireland increased by 130·9%. However, the HM Revenue and Customs data show an increase in imports from Ireland to Northern Ireland of just 18% and show that exports from Northern Ireland to Ireland fell by 3·2%.

I just wanted to give you an idea of some of the complexities that we were looking at and, similarly, of some of the confusion about the data between Northern Ireland and GB. An inability to get a clear position on that has affected what we are able to say definitively about the patterns. However, it is clear that there are significant shifts and changes. I represent a Welsh constituency, and when you look at the shifts in trading patterns in the routes from the Irish to the Welsh ports, you will see increases on the GB-NI port routes. Changes in those have been significant, and there have been changes in, for example, the relationships for traders that previously used the land bridge across GB, particularly through, again, my part of Wales. That has often been replaced by ferry traffic going directly to continental Europe and an increase in services that are being operated from Rosslare.

Again, on some of the issues that related to the GB-NI corridor, we were given a mixed picture. I am not going to go through all the examples, but I will give you a couple just to give you an idea. The Food and Drink Federation told us that agri-food trade on the GB-NI corridor had remained largely stable through the period, but it said that that was largely due to the grace periods that were still in place, so that could change. In other sectors, such as textiles and vehicle trade, there had been significant negative impacts that saw a fall by more than 50% during the early months of 2021. That is according to the UK Trade Policy Observatory (UKTPO).

Again, we have seen changes as people have adapted to initial difficulties. At some point in 2021, 289 British retailers suspended delivery to Northern Ireland, but many have now resumed their services. We have seen differential impacts across different sectors and in different circumstances, but what is clear — we can say this definitively — is that there have been significant impacts on different sectors and shifts in trading patterns.

Where do we go from here? We came up with a series of recommendations. Apart from those broader points about data, negotiations and trying to find solutions that work for us all, we wanted to come up with practical solutions that were very much informed by what traders, businesses, consumers and others had told us.

First, we think that the UK Government should clarify their policy on charging for the use of inland inspection facilities for goods arriving from Ireland, and ensure that their policy does not create market distortions that favour or penalise the use of some trade routes over others and increase the costs for hauliers, their clients and consumers. There is still a great deal of confusion over what will happen in that respect.

Secondly, traders who move goods from GB to the island of Ireland face higher costs because they need to comply with EU rules. The UK Government's free Trader Support Service and movement assistance scheme have mitigated some of the impact of that, but the contracts and long-term future of those services are still uncertain. We think that the UK Government should clarify the future of the Trader Support Service and movement assistance scheme and consider what long-term support they will make beyond that to support traders with the costs and

administrative burdens of moving goods. Consideration should be given to making those assistance schemes permanent.

Thirdly, it is clear that there may be further changes to the trading environment for businesses. We have already seen the impact of some of them. While we recognise that support is already in place through Enterprise Ireland and other state agencies, the Irish Government should consider how they will support traders to meet any new requirements on trade with GB once full controls are imposed. The experiences of GB-based traders, HMRC and the Trader Support Service could be instructive in that.

At the beginning, I made the point that stakeholders told us that they needed certainty about the trading environment in order to plan for the future. We heard that uncertainty — for example, around the UK's plans for introducing full import controls on goods entering GB from Ireland — was unhelpful, and that the UK Government need to prioritise the needs of businesses and traders when setting and communicating their plans for implementing any post-Brexit trading arrangements. Traders should be given a lead-in time of at least six months to be able to prepare for new arrangements, whatever they finally end up being.

We also felt that the current definition of goods not at risk and the need to protect the single market is fairly narrow. We understand the EU's understandable caution about protecting the single market. However, we also hope that, over time, it might be possible to broaden that definition to reduce trade frictions and costs to businesses and consumers. In order to be able to do that and to build the trust, understanding and data to do it, we believe that the UK and EU should cooperate and share data to develop a sophisticated understanding of any real risks that are posed to the single market by goods entering from the UK. Data sharing and cooperation on that front are important and could help to build trust and enable things to function better going forward.

Lastly — this is, obviously, critical and has been part of many debates that many of us will have taken part in — the EU and UK should seek to reach a sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement to reduce the administrative and cost burdens, particularly of animal health checks, for products crossing the Irish Sea. We very much welcome the fact that negotiations are ongoing and want to see those negotiations continue and, hopefully, come to agreements that, again, will make things better for all parts of our islands.

Sadly, as I said, we were unable to come to absolutely definitive conclusions on some issues at this stage. However, through engaging with all those different stakeholders, seeing some of the physical aspects of changes at ports and elsewhere, meeting hauliers and gaining an understanding of the challenges that they face and the mixed picture and impacts that it has had for different sectors, businesses, consumers and, indeed, parts of our islands, with some benefiting, some seeing negative impacts, and, for some, the picture not being clear at this stage, the inquiry has been extremely instructive.

We hope that some of the practical solutions that we have put forward will be taken on board by all the Governments and agencies involved. We very much hope that negotiations continue and are successful in finding conclusions. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much for your detailed report, Stephen. I thank you and your colleagues for preparing the Committee report. I echo Stephen's words: our colleague Brendan Howlin TD

was very disappointed that he was unable to join us today. Are there any comments or questions from Members?

Rt Hon the Lord Bruce:

Thanks very much, Stephen. That was very thorough and very interesting. I am looking at Darren Millar, the Chair of Committee B, because we did a similar inquiry before the pandemic and before Brexit had happened. It is interesting that pretty much what you described is what we saw was going to happen, so it is not as if it is a surprise. I wonder whether you were able to give any sort of comment on what might be called the only constructive bits that seem to be in the protocol Bill — the development of the ideas of trusted traders and the green channel as ways of reducing the friction — and, possibly, because there was an issue, fairly early on, when the EU wanted to have an office in Northern Ireland as a symptom of mutual trust and exchange of information, whether you had a take on whether that would be helpful or unhelpful. I think that most of us are of the view that you cannot have no borders, given the trade agreement that we have, but you can hope for the minimum amount of bureaucracy and friction. What you have identified is that it exists, but do you feel that you have recommendations that would help the negotiations to deliver workable results that are compatible with the agreement?

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

We did not get into the very technical specifics. I know that there are some wording issues around what different channels might be called and how those would operate. I do not want to stray into that, particularly because of some of the live conversations that are going on, but I very much agree with what you said about data and information being critical to building that underlying trust in order to minimise and reduce frictions to the lowest level possible. For everybody involved, we want to reduce the impact as much as possible to allow trade to flow as freely as it can, but within the context of decisions that have been made. Of those decisions that have been made, the fundamental ones will not change. Therefore, we all have to find ways to work round that. That was certainly the message that we heard in the views of the non-political, pragmatic businesses, traders and others whom we spoke to. They just want to make things as easy as possible for consumers and businesses, and they hope and expect that the Governments will put in place the measures for that to happen. However, that requires trust, and that is why it is about not only data sharing but the building of political trust between Governments and institutions, because there are genuine concerns, and those have to be allayed on all sides.

The Lord Bew:

Thank you very much for your elegant presentation, Stephen. I just want to go back on the HMRC figures to make sure that I heard them correctly. What you are actually saying, and I have the language of article 16 in my mind, is that there is not much trade displacement in the HMRC figures. There are other figures, and you are quite right: one day, you are told that there is a huge boom in Northern Ireland. Part of the reason is that the figure for the original level of trade — prior to Brexit and even up to 2019 — is tiny: £160 million, but that is just going from 2% to 6%, if you see what I mean. The HMRC figures, on your account, do not constitute a case for arguing that there is trade displacement. There may be economic and social dislocation — indeed, there probably is — as a result of Brexit, but as for actual trade displacement, going on the UK's own figures, it does not sound like all that much has happened. Am I right?

3.00 pm

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

I suggest that you pick up a copy of the report. We have laid out all the figures as dispassionately as possible, and there are differences. It is clear that there are trade displacement effects: things going through different routes or different ports and impacts in different sectors. That is very clear. However, what the aggregate impact of all that is differs depending on which set of figures you look at. I did not go into those. That also goes for the figures of external sales from NI to GB and GB to NI. There is disagreement about what those figures are, but have a look; we have put it right at the front of the report. It is really important to emphasise that we need to find some common methodology on this issue. We all want to understand what is really going on. The reality, of course, is that COVID overlaid a lot of that and we are still, probably, seeing an impact of COVID, so we are not going to get as clear a picture as we would like right now. Have a look at it. It is there. I do not want to say which one I believe more than the other or what the aggregate effect is, for the very reason that I do not feel qualified to delve into the way in which those statistics are compiled.

Mr Darren Millar MS:

Thank you for presenting the report today. One of the challenges that we have in all jurisdictions at the moment is the rising cost-of-living pressures, with inflation having increased significantly. We were warned during the inquiry that we undertook about the additional costs that businesses would incur as a result of some of the changes that needed to be introduced post Brexit. To what extent did the Committee consider the impact of those and the contribution that that might be making to inflation rates across the UK and Ireland at the moment?

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

It is difficult to get very specific, but we had a number of conversations with businesses and traders about that. They were very frank to us at the session that we held in Dublin: more bureaucracy and complication increases costs, and, inevitably, those get passed on to consumers. There are direct impacts as a result of the decisions that have been taken. The question is about how much that is, and whether that is increasing or decreasing. One of the reasons why we made the recommendations about the different support schemes and others was to try to reduce some of that bureaucracy and enable businesses to adapt. Of course, the lead-in times and the clarity and timeliness of the information that is provided is critical to that. If businesses get hit with stuff in a very short space of time, that will increase disruption and costs for consumers. It is even more important that we look at that in the current context. Nobody wants to see a premium added on to goods for consumers in any part of our islands. Obviously, it is different from sector to sector. As I said, some sectors have seen far more straightforward arrangements, and others have seen far more complex arrangements, particularly when you look at those goods.

There are also impacts in terms of the tariffs that now exist. I will give an example to do with quotas that exist. I have a huge steel plant in my constituency that produces rebar for the construction industry. Obviously, with construction doing well in Ireland, there is a desire for that, but, on a number of occasions since Brexit happened, we have hit the quota limit for how much of that steel can come in. Where is that steel then brought from? Is there an additional transport cost for that, and what does that mean for the construction industry here? Those are very real issues.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you, Stephen. Any other comments or questions? Grand.

I ask the plenary to formally adopt the report of Committee C. Is that agreed?

Report agreed.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I commend the members of Committee C again for their work, and I thank Stephen for his contributions this afternoon. I compliment the Committee on completing its report. The joint Clerks will now arrange to send the report to the British and Irish Governments.

PANEL DISCUSSION: TRADE

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Nobody in the room would disagree that trade and the trading around these islands is so incredibly important and is just vital to the prosperity of the communities that we represent. Committee C's report makes some very timely observations and recommendations in that respect. We are going to have a session now to explore the challenges facing trade across the BIPA jurisdictions.

We welcome to the discussion Marina Donohoe, who is the regional director of UK, Nordics and global procurement in Enterprise Ireland, and John McGrane, who is director general of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. I also welcome Margaret Hearty, who is chief executive officer of InterTradeIreland, and she is joined by her colleagues Martin Robinson, director of strategy and policy, and Deirdre Maguire, the manager of InterTradeIreland's Brexit advisory service. I will let you get settled down.

We will start. Martin may not be able to make it. We will hear from each speaker, and then we will have time for comments and questions.

Ms Marina Donohoe (Enterprise Ireland):

Good afternoon. I will start with a very quick video, if I may, to give a sense of our ambition. You will see it up above. You might be seeing a picture but no sound. Is that correct?

Some Members:

Yes.

Ms Marina Donohoe:

Not to worry. If we cannot get the sound going, I can kick off. In the interests of time, we might skip ahead.

I am delighted to be here. Many thanks for the opportunity. I am regional director for the UK, Nordics and global procurement in Enterprise Ireland. Unfortunately, our CEO, Leo Clancy, is unable to attend, so he asked me to represent him.

It is a great opportunity for Enterprise Ireland to be here, and, for those who are unfamiliar with the agency, I would like to talk about our organisation. As you may know, we are an Irish Government agency that works with indigenous Irish enterprises, supporting them to grow and to scale in international markets. It is really about economic prosperity and the growth of jobs in regions throughout Ireland based on the growth that they are achieving in international markets.

I came in from London this morning, and, as I was driving from Dublin to Cavan, I was reminded of many a trip I took as a youth. My father came from the Cavan/Leitrim border, so I spent plenty of summers playing on the fields and learning about farming, which, as a city girl, was great fun. However, I was reminiscing about the economic situation back then, and I thought about the opportunities that children, teenagers and those leaving school and universities these days have based on the great growth of companies across the country. From an Enterprise Ireland perspective, we are working hard with Irish industry to ensure that we can continue to provide job creation and sustain employment throughout the jurisdiction that we work with.

We work with 5,000 clients across all sectors. They are all sizes, from start-ups all the way through to plcs. PitchBook considers us the largest venture capital company in Europe based on the number of deals that we do, so we take equity positions in them. I am telling you all this because it is critical for the work that we are trying to do to ensure that the companies that we are working with are well placed to continue to grow globally, particularly in near markets.

In the context of near markets, the UK is a critical market for our client companies. We had record figures in 2021. Our clients exported — these are Enterprise Ireland client companies, not the total trade stats that you might have heard earlier — €8·4 billion to the UK. That was a growth of 15% on 2020 figures. The non-food figure rose by 20%. Despite market uncertainty and the challenges that Brexit and COVID presented, our clients have remained remarkably agile and resilient in the context of all those market issues. It is a big positive story for the companies that we are working with.

Our strategy absolutely sees us continuing to focus on the UK market. It takes about 30% of the total exports globally. That will continue. It is the first market for many client companies, and it is a critical market for our clients as they embed in the system, partner and deliver their innovation. The experience that they then gain serves them in international markets, so it is hugely important.

I would like to share with you the economic impact of Enterprise Ireland clients in the UK. You may be familiar with some of these statistics, but the most notable is the employment of 117,000 people by Enterprise Ireland clients in the UK. That figure is rising. So not only are clients delivering innovation, important solutions and products but they are putting a footprint in the market, employing people and delivering economic impact to local communities just as much as they are delivering in Cork, Galway, Cavan, Monaghan and so on.

Our strategy is very much based around supporting companies to continue to trade and to have that economic benefit in the UK. Today is an opportunity to speak about the areas where we are most interested in continuing that collaboration and where we have looked at bringing companies together from a cluster perspective. Last week, we got a delegation together so that clients from Northern Ireland and the Republic could meet Irish Water. We are working to identify areas where there is a common agenda or interest for which there could be partnership. We do that alongside education. We got a delegation together at the Farnborough air show. I

could continue, but our interest as an agency is very much in where we can find opportunities for companies across the jurisdictions to work together for mutual benefit. There is absolutely an openness to see and to continue to do that, and the work with InterTradeIreland is a key part of that.

The other dimension is around the areas whose future we focus on. Those might include offshore wind, and that is certainly an area we can work together on as the UK is the global leader in the provision and exploitation of wind offshore. What more can we do together on those particular agendas?

Without taking up too much time, I will talk about one area that is close to my heart given that I will return to Ireland after eight years in London. I will return to Ireland at the end of this year, and I am taking up a new role with Enterprise Ireland, which is heading out a research and innovation team. Earlier today, you may have seen the announcement by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) on its commitment of €40 million to research centres. I think that the total commitment across the three Governments is €76 million. That is a really key aspect of our continuing to work together and collaborate, because ensuring that our research centres and the research ecosystems are working together followed by the journey that the research takes from basic to applied into industry, as well as the longer-term impact that it will have on societies, communities and individuals, is really important.

Enterprise Ireland is very keen to continue with a shared dialogue that is based on how we can work together to ensure that trade continues to be strong between all our areas of interest, whether it is cross-border, from the Republic into Northern Ireland or from the Republic into the UK directly. We have seen the great resilience and agility of our Enterprise Ireland clients. We have every confidence that that will continue, not least with all the uncertainty in the market and with the geopolitical situation. We have great ambition and confidence that our clients will continue to trade strongly in the region. Thank you for the time.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Marina.

3.15 pm

Mr John McGrane (British Irish Chamber of Commerce):

Go raith maith agat. Thank you very much Co-Chairs, and go raibh maith agaibh go léir as ucht bhur gcuireadh bheith anseo.

Thanks to all of you for inviting representation from the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. I have the privilege of leading the chamber, which is a unique organisation on the trade side for trade representation. It represents with equanimity businesses across these two islands, north, south, east and west, employing more than a million people directly and many more in the supply chains. It is less about business and more about communities. As Marina said, it is the role of business to create jobs, take risk, invest and, ultimately, deliver the jobs that are the best — indeed, they are the only — assurance of long-term durable peace and prosperity everywhere, not just in this town or county but right across these islands for whatever constituency you have the right to represent.

I will give full disclosure. I am a cross-border trader. I was born in 1957, and my father taught me from an early age. Until 1969 when the so-called Troubles started, we drove to Northern

Ireland every Wednesday on the commercial half-day when the shops shut in Drogheda — do you remember those days? — and my father would do business in Newry, Belfast, Newcastle and all the towns of Northern Ireland. As a kid, I knew that those towns had highly enterprising, entrepreneurial businesses, going back many decades. Northern Ireland has a great and proud tradition in many leading industries.

Not a lot of people know this; it is a pub quiz fact. What modern industry was born out of weaving linen in Northern Ireland? Linen is still woven, but I will help you to the shortcut. The wings of one of the planes that you will be flying back on are made by Short Brothers using the same weaving skill, though in this case it uses not flax but carbon fibre. There are many such examples of traditional industries on all parts of these islands, not least in Northern Ireland, that show that the competence of individuals, the latent skills they used, long after they produced yarn several decades ago, are used in world-class industries. There is every opportunity for every part of these two islands. We represent businesses across all parts to ask what we can do, not what we cannot do.

We are not a political organisation, and we are proud to work with Governments, Administrations, public representatives, departmental officials and policymakers and agencies, not least Enterprise Ireland and its UK counterpart, the Department for International Trade, and, of course, InterTradeIreland, which you will hear from in a few moments. This is about joining hands and working together to solve problems that get to be solved only if we work together and are of like mind.

We are in the heart of an enterprise community right here in Cavan. Lakeland Dairies is just down the road. My friend and colleague Denise Walsh, the communications director, will tell you that we are absolutely connected and that the story of business in these parts, the story of politics-less business, is essentially one of connectedness. Everything around here is connected. The cows in Northern Ireland give forth their milk every day, and one third of it is processed just down the road from here. It happens to be inside the jurisdiction, so to speak, of the Republic of Ireland simply because there is not a market case to build yet a further dairy processing plant in Northern Ireland. The cow gives her milk, and it is processed in Killeshandra, which is a stone's throw from here. It goes back over the border to produce world-class butter and infant food of the highest quality for children and families all around the world. The milk that is produced in Northern Ireland aggregates to 27% of the United Kingdom's global exports, so it is no small thing.

When we talk with Administrations, we think of how we must, like the doctor, do no harm. We are proud to work with so many of the good people who make policy, and we are concerned about making sure that people like us can help you to answer the questions that you may not have even thought of yet, and, certainly, you should ask us the questions that you have thought of. For example, how would we deal with the farmers of mid-Ulster who produce that quality milk every day if their cows' milk has no market for processing? Without being dramatic, the stats on that, just to cut to the chase, tell you that one third of the herd of dairy cows in Northern Ireland would need to be culled. You cannot hang about on that, you are looking at a massive human health and animal welfare catastrophe, not to be dramatic. I will leave it at that because you know what that begins to look like, and we can avoid that by talking. The current talks process is in good shape.

We have no politics, but we certainly wish well people such as Steve Baker, who spoke to you this morning, Chris Heaton-Harris, Simon Coveney and the team from the relevant Departments on both sides of the border and in all parts to work out arrangements. Talk to

business; tell us what you want to know about business; tell us what you know about how we can help you and how you want to help us to protect the jobs and investment that are the best way to peace and prosperity across these islands. Go raibh maith agat, and I look forward to the discussion.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I had the pleasure of visiting the Lakeland areas in Newtownards, so I am well aware of the cross-border nature of the dairy industry on the island of Ireland. I also have to declare that one of the largest employers in my constituency is Ornua. If you buy your Kerrygold butter in the United Kingdom, it will almost certainly have been processed and packaged in my constituency, so I am very keen to make sure that we have plenty of frictionless trade between the two jurisdictions and the two customs unions.

Ms Margaret Hearty (InterTradeIreland):

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to address the plenary. I am the chief executive of InterTradeIreland. I am delighted to be joined by my colleague Deirdre Maguire, who manages our Brexit advisory service for small businesses that trade North to South and South to North, which is transitioning to a new trade information service. For those of you who may not be familiar with InterTradeIreland, it is a cross-border implementation body that was born out of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and is mandated by both Governments to promote cross-border trade and business development initiatives on the island.

InterTradeIreland provides a comprehensive range of supports for businesses focused on growing trade on a cross-border basis; that is, selling from business to business, from business to consumer and into the public procurement market in both jurisdictions. Cross-border exporting is a crucial first export market for small businesses on the island. We know that over 73% of businesses that export off the island take their first step in the cross-border market, so it is a crucial first-time export market for those businesses. The most recent results from our quarterly business monitor, through which we survey 750 businesses quarterly, North and South, show us that cross-border traders are twice as likely to experience moderate to rapid growth as non-exporters. While we are a small organisation based in Newry, with 42 staff, we have an all-island remit. In 2021, we supported over 4,000 businesses directly and a further 2,000 indirectly. Although InterTradeIreland's remit is focused on trade on the island, I will focus primarily on North/South and South/North trade today.

We pride ourselves on being an agile organisation that is business-led and constantly takes the pulse of businesses. As I said, through our research, we survey over 750 businesses quarterly. That informs our work and, indeed, the policymakers whom we lobby in both jurisdictions and inform of key trends. Our agility was certainly put to the test following the referendum vote in 2016. We moved quickly to establish a Brexit advisory service to support businesses to continue to trade and to avail themselves of new trade opportunities. We have supported over 17,000 businesses directly and 60,000 businesses through our online information portal.

I suppose that the UK's formal departure from the EU at the beginning of 2021 has resulted in businesses across the island operating in a very different market environment, and the dynamics of trade on the island have changed on the back of that. Businesses have had to rethink their supply chains, understand their trade routes and develop an understanding of the trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) between the EU and the UK and of the Northern Ireland

protocol. Many cross-border traders have supply chains that extend beyond the island, and they therefore need to understand the implications of all that.

Reflecting on some cross-border trade statistics, it is difficult to look at 2021 in isolation. Those are the most recent full-year stats that we have to go on. Over the past 20 years, cross-border trade had been growing by about 4% on average per annum. It was after the referendum result in 2016, coupled with four years of uncertainty and a risk of no deal, that the dynamics of cross-border trade on the island very much changed, and it has very much been on a growth trajectory since 2016.

Cross-border trade in goods and services in 2020 was valued at €7·7 billion. Whilst that represented a slight decline on the 2019 figures, which were significantly increased, that was in a post-COVID period. For the full 2021 year, cross-border trade in goods alone between Ireland and Northern Ireland increased by €2·8 billion. Imports to Northern Ireland were up by 65% to €3·9 billion, a rise of €1·5 billion compared with 2020. Irish exports to Northern Ireland increased by 54% in 2021 to €3·7 billion, an increase of €1·3 billion compared with 2020.

Reference was made earlier to the difficulties in streamlining the trade stats. In order to get a total trade value for 2021 for goods and services, we rely on merging Central Statistics Office (CSO) data with Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) data and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) data for goods and services trade, and there is a two-year lag. We hope to have the trade figures for 2021, but we estimate trade to be close to €10 billion in total, which would be a doubling of cross-border trade figures over the past 10 years.

That trend very much continues into 2022. Exports from Ireland to Northern Ireland are valued at €3·2 billion – an increase of 35% compared with the same period in 2021 – and imports from Northern Ireland into Ireland are valued at €3·4 billion, up 30%, so the figures show a continued trend.

That having been said, businesses need certainty. Uncertainty does not allow businesses to thrive. Uncertainty on the future picture of North/South trade includes a number of factors. Obviously, rising energy and overhead costs threaten the viability of some businesses, and they impact on trade. Inflation, which was mentioned earlier, is hampering consumer confidence, which, in turn, is affecting overall economic activity.

The one ask that we have, if it is possible, is to give certainty to those businesses that will create the employment and growth for both our economies.

Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. Some really interesting contributions. We now open the debate.

Ms Mairéad Farrell TD:

That was extremely interesting, Margaret, so thank you very much. I was really interested in what you were saying in relation to North/South trade, and one of the final points that you made was in relation to the cost of living and, indeed, inflation, and all through these working relations the cooperation regarding how we all deal with businesses. Specifically, in relation to the cost of living – or the cost of doing business, I suppose – has there been any work done on

a cooperative basis between England, the North and here on how to deal with that cost of inflation?

3.30 pm

Ms Margaret Hearty:

Are you referring to the impact of the cost of inflation on doing business?

Ms Mairéad Farrell TD:

Yes, the cost of doing business at this point. I speak to a lot of the businesses in my local area, and a lot of the themes, no matter what the business is, are the same. The same things affect and impact them; it is just the scale that is different, depending on what they do. I imagine that, as a result of the war in Ukraine, all businesses, no matter where they are at this time, face those same challenges. It is about how that then impacts North/South trade. Businesses are dealing with the exact same issues, but there is not a common approach. Have there been any discussions about having a more common approach to help businesses?

Ms Margaret Hearty:

Initially, we worked closely with colleagues in Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland, which is the economic development agency in Northern Ireland. There is a raft of supports in place for businesses on general overhead costs and the cost of doing business. I know that, through our Brexit advisory service, for example, we refer businesses in Northern Ireland to the Trader Support Service, which is a really good service. It is very important that we work closely together. One of the things that kills businesses is that they do not have time. If we signpost, it is very important that we signpost appropriately. Marina referred to some of the cluster activity. All that focused on linking businesses into industry groups, networks and clusters where they could learn from and exchange information with peers. That is really crucial.

Ms Marina Donohue:

I will also come in on that. Competitiveness is of great importance to us all and to our client companies. We have been working on it. We provide advisory supports and assistance to companies. One aspect that we did a lot on in recent years — I know that companies across the island joined with us on this — was strategic pricing and the capability of particularly smaller SMEs to command higher prices. We have been working closely on that, and we have had participation from both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

A big opportunity for us all is how we can encourage our companies to look closer to home for their supply chain — John referenced that as well — because they can become even more competitive by taking additional cost out of that area.

Mr John McGrane:

Thanks for your question. I will add to that that business gets on with getting on. It appreciates support from the state across both islands, North/South and east-west. It does not expect handouts. The COVID experience economically, if not on a much more serious level for communities and families, has shown us that links between business and the state are more

important than ever, and there are plenty of businesses on both islands that have received very much appreciated support.

Marina is right. Take a company like Combilift, which is a seven-iron out the road from here. It makes world-class engineered products that are used in countries where people cannot not pronounce the island of “Ireland” or, indeed, the “United Kingdom”. There are businesses around these parts that are world class, and they inherently employ local, buy local, support local and even vote local, because they are rooted in community. If you traced the web of connectedness that we talked about that Combilift has with its community, North and South and into Britain and beyond, you would find a web of people who are committed to a single cause, which is to make a great product that delivers great livelihoods and great livings for people in every part of the country, not least around here.

Nigel Mills MP:

I thank those on the panel for their very interesting presentations. May I ask a couple of questions? The first one is about the thorny issue of the protocol, which we have danced around a little bit. Politically, at least, it seems that something has to change. It strikes me that the only real solution, if we want Northern Ireland to be in two single markets and two customs areas, is that we will have to accept that the border is a bit porous and that we cannot stop everything moving. Do you sense that there is enough information, data and traceability through all the systems that you see to find a trusted system whereby we can spot the dangerous stuff that we really are concerned about and we do not get too worried about sausages or something that, perhaps, we should not be too concerned about? Is there a way to have a trusted system that can work?

The second question is this: are your members and the people whom you deal with happy with how east-west trade works now, or are they asking for changes to make it simpler, or are we just focusing on how we get the Northern Ireland situation sorted out?

Mr John McGrane:

I will start off. Thank you for your question. As has been said before, the enemy of business and jobs is uncertainty, and we are in an uncertain space, but there is always an ambient level of uncertainty that spawns innovation, creativity, enterprise and all those good things. We are at a slightly more elevated level of uncertainty at this time, but it will pass, and it can pass because, to answer your question directly, a landing zone that can solve this is available.

We are not a political organisation, but we know what our businesses tell us about what can be done. For instance, they make a distinction between goods and business delivery that touches consumers. You make the point about sausages; in reality, people are entitled to their preferences, and most people are minded to say that a system that enables the great Northern Ireland households that buy their goods and services in the local supermarkets or service establishments are entitled to their preferences. There is a distinction to be drawn in policy between consumer-related purchases and supply chains on the one hand, versus industrial goods and industrial product production on the other hand. That means that a retailer-based paradigm is definitely within scope, and most people think that, in this day and age, there is plenty of data to guard against any threat of material levels of abuse of that system.

However, take our friends in Lakeland Dairies and the idea that Lakeland, going right back to farm-gate level, would have to differentiate between regulations specifying farm inputs —

think veterinary medicines, feed and fertiliser — that are manufactured to British standards and those that are manufactured to EU standards. I am afraid that Daisy the cow would not know what way to point. In reality, we need, on a rational basis, a different world for industrial production and processing. There is ample data at that level of business enterprise to say, "Yes, beyond doubt, we can power that up". However, we need time because technology is a piece of that, and the complications and global standards protection are very important. We could do consumer care very quickly, but we will need a bit more time and a working group to establish all interests, representing everybody involved in the industrial side. We should then look positively and say, "Once you have done all that, what can you do with it to enable wider prosperity for the island — not least Northern Ireland — in global markets, with the best opportunity to have the best of both worlds: the UK market of 60 million consumers, and the other 450 million people in the EU market and beyond?"

That is the opportunity for us to take. Based on our experience at this stage, a couple of years into it, and bearing in mind that full Brexit inbound into GB has not yet happened, I think that you would find that businesses in England, Scotland and Wales would also be minded to say, "Can we have a look at the way we govern for consumption on the one hand and for industrial production on the other?" Hopefully, we can get there sooner rather than later.

Ms Deirdre Maguire (InterTradeIreland):

I can add to that. Managing the Brexit advisory service at InterTradeIreland, I get to speak to and deal with a lot of businesses in the practical space of this. Earlier today, we heard some recommendations on digital solutions for SPS checks that would be very valuable to businesses in the agri-food sector. Also mentioned was the Trader Support Service, to which businesses in Southern Ireland do not have access but businesses in Northern Ireland do. That has been extended for another year, but only a year as far as we know, so we would welcome any further support for businesses in that space. A lot of our businesses are learning how to understand and declare what goods are at risk, so, if there is uncertainty or there are changes to that, we need to reposition our supports to make sure that we can help them to manage through any changes in how they might do that.

Thirdly — John also mentioned this — changes in regulations, so CE marking, UKNI and whatever changes are possible or coming down the track. We would like to look at those and find out, in practical terms, how the businesses will be able to manage them, either through the TSS or through customs without the TSS.

Ms Marina Donohoe:

To add to the comments just made, yes, uncertainty is a massive issue for companies, so anything we can do to prepare them for it in terms of insight, and I think that, together, we should be having this joined-up conversation, as we are, in terms of what might be ahead and how we can help companies to future-proof what they are doing because of the critical importance of trade that we have all spoken about.

One other point I would make is on the relevance and continued importance of the common travel area for the facilitation of trade and the movement of people over and back, and we certainly do not want to see that threatened in any way or compromised at all. It is a huge asset for our companies as they do business across these islands.

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

I just want to pick up on something that Mr McGrane said. I took from what he said a plea to policymakers. I don't want to traduce you in any way, Mr McGrane, but I took it as a plea to policymakers to better engage with business. Therefore, in the crucial weeks and months ahead, in trying to resolve the outstanding post-Brexit trade issues, what specific mechanism would Mr McGrane like to see? If he feels that the current engagement with policymakers is not working, what does he think would work?

Mr John McGrane:

Thank you very much. I would not overstate my pleading as much as the offer of engagement. Look, we could never engage enough; that is really the point. The very busy work that policymakers, politicians and public representatives have to do every day and every week is certainly well appreciated by business. I would argue equally in favour of your point that, actually, business has much to be responsible for in making its information and its insights available. We are all in this together.

As Deirdre touched on, there are some practical things: for instance, the co-development between policy and commerce, if you take it in those terms, and, indeed, community, on something like an SPS agreement, a safety agreement for human and animal health and such public goods as they are clearly seen to be, recognising sensitivities etc. The birds do not know where the border is. The fish, the electrons, the environment and the wind are all public goods in common, and it would not take much for the well-minded people here and like us elsewhere to get our heads together over a reasonable period and say, "What's stopping us signing the agreements that don't offend anybody's ideology" — people are entitled to that — "but that strengthen the public good?" Business will respond to that and will say, "If you make it easier for us to take care of public well-being and avoid the division that costs jobs and does not increase jobs, we will make those jobs, we will make those investments and we will improve the well-being of communities on both islands and beyond".

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

This is just a quick question. As we all know, the food industry has to constantly reinvest; technology is emerging all the time, so processing plants need to be upgraded etc. To be fair to the food industry, they are like the farmers on the farms, the primary food producers, who are constantly investing in the quality of the animals and their holdings as well, and the food industry does that for its processing side. Is there any evidence emerging of decisions being deferred, delayed or maybe changed due to the uncertainty, particularly, maybe, on the dairy side or sheep meat, pig meat or beef?

Mr John McGrane:

Co-Chair, thanks. Go raibh maith agat. You can take it that, for as long as people are unsure about where the ball might land, in terms of policy and procedures and changes of rules, people are holding back. It affects investment at farm-gate level; it affects investment in the supply chain; it affects industrial processing investment decisions. There is a fairly corresponding relationship: the greater the uncertainty for a longer time, the less investment there will be for a longer time. The opposite also applies.

3.45 pm

The island of Ireland's economy in overall terms is in very good shape, and a lot of people have done a lot of hard work to make it so, so it should not, and will not, be taken for granted. I have absolute certainty, from the point of view of the businesses that I represent across these islands, actually, that the sooner we have less uncertainty — there is always going to be some — and know the direction of travel of the joined-up policymaking of these islands, you will see the investment that follows that. A very good case in point is industrial investment in Northern Ireland, which should represent one of the best investment cases in the world, actually. The reality is that investors will say, "Well, what is the risk that something might change or not be settled?" The sooner we can help people to take those unknowns off the page, the sooner the new jobs will follow.

Ms Marina Donohoe:

Just very quickly, it is a hugely important sector for Ireland, and uncertainty, geopolitical or local, is certainly impacting on the decisions that they might be taking and investments that they might be making as it serves to address major themes around sustainability and digitisation. Positively, we had a very close engagement with some of these companies at the National Ploughing Championships, and we brought in a couple — well, many — early-stage innovative start-ups who can offer an immediate response to this to help companies. I think that there are opportunities for start-ups to get closer to these companies.

Ms Margaret Hearty:

That is a very relevant point in general, because we are aware of a lot of smaller businesses — not necessarily large agri-food businesses, but a lot of small businesses — that, when you add up all the employment, are the biggest employers on both parts of the island. They are suspending investment decisions because of the uncertainty, and, again, that is not good. We need those businesses innovating and investing. They certainly are, we know anecdotally and from our research, suspending those decisions until they have more clarity.

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA:

Seeing as John mentioned Combilift and Margaret mentioned Newry, I feel that I have to ask the question. There is just one thing. The word "uncertainty" — I know that, at the start of the process, some of the businesses in Newry were looking at moving over to Dundalk, or vice versa — Armagh and Monaghan. I just want you to comment on whether that has materialised in terms of how we have moved forward.

The other point that John might be able to answer is — we heard a lovely report earlier from Stephen Doughty, but the issue was about trade figures. We are not getting — they did a good report, but the issue is still over trading figures. That is going to create uncertainty in its own right. Stephen also mentioned displacement in the movement of goods through using different ports or whatever the case might be. Maybe you would like to comment on how that is impacting. I ask those questions in the context of uncertainty itself.

Mr John McGrane:

Others will have comments on this too, but I might just say that there are 30,000 people — workers and income providers for households, so that is probably around 100,000 mouths — being fed every day by people who cross the border every day to work, North to South and South to North. My own nieces in County Louth cross the border to work in Newry. A great

company like First Derivatives — we do not often talk about the services sector quite as much as goods, because the TCA and the protocol very much focus on goods and trade, but First Derivatives is a world-class employer and a world-class value generator and well-being generator for families in Newry and Dundalk and beyond. There are lots of those examples. We mentioned Lakeland and Combilift. I could mention Abcon in Cavan and many more that naturally just employ people literally in the commuting area around them.

On the trade stats, my personal opinion, informed by my own relationship with businesses North/South and east-west, is that it is too early to get absolute transparency in the official statistics, by whatever source. You are talking about an environment that was very heavily disrupted by a democratic process that changed things. How many of the trucks were actually unloading in one jurisdiction or another, or just passing through? How much of the pre-Brexit trade between these islands and beyond was actually trans-shipment? I think we can see a lot of that coming to light now in GB-Ireland trade, because some of that stuff was coming to the island of Ireland, North and South, through the corridor of GB, which is perfectly fine, and vice versa.

I am not among those who say that the trade has been massively skewed anyway. I think normal trade continues to be normal trade. People do business with people whom they already do business with. If it becomes more difficult, they do not suddenly say, "I will go away and do it with somebody else". They start by working out, in a relationship, how they can adapt to the new arrangements. In our view, there would be relatively little distortion of traditional trade.

The reality is that businesspeople follow business opportunities. Consumers usually tell the supplier, manufacturer or distributor what they want, not the other way around. The consumer has probably chosen the products that they prefer, and they are well entitled to do that. As long as those products can be supplied at a competitive price, in a world where households and businesses are under a lot of economic pressure, the natural economics will prevail. It is not a distortion; it is simply normal market behaviours playing out over time.

Ms Margaret Hearty:

I might ask Deirdre to come in because, as she mentioned, she was very much at the coalface with those companies at the beginning. Our objective was to give businesses impartial advice to mitigate the risks. For some of those businesses, that was imperative. Some co-located. I am not aware of any businesses that uprooted and moved into the other jurisdiction, but, certainly, businesses put mitigations in place, planning for a no deal. It was crucial to give businesses that impartial information. I will hand over to Deirdre to give more detail.

Ms Deirdre Maguire:

Since 2017, over 4,000 businesses have asked and applied for support through the Brexit advisory service. They have received support for many different things. Some of it was during no deal, some was pre the TCA transition period, and some was when the TCA and Northern Ireland protocol came in. A common thing that a lot of businesses did, to help mitigate the risk and adapt to the new trading relationship, was to open up companies in the opposite jurisdiction. That made natural sense as it helps with currency, customs and all of that.

You mentioned something else that is relevant. One of the issues presented to us quite recently was the transit procedure. For example, businesses that traditionally would have taken their lorries from GB into Monaghan without any customs now have to follow procedures. If they

are coming through the port in Warrenpoint, for example, they have to follow a transit procedure, which causes complications if there is nowhere to close it or they do not understand the customs. For businesses in GB, that is an additional complexity. I do not have the stats, but some of those businesses are perhaps rerouting through Dublin because it is easier. That is what we are being told. Our support will help the businesses to assess what options are available to them on those things. In doing that, a lot of them open up two companies.

Ms Marina Donohoe:

I have a few points. First, our clients who are exporting into Europe do not see the land bridge as an option any more. That probably goes without saying, but I just want to mention it. We hear from our smaller businesses that have small shipments about the challenge of consolidating those shipments. We hear from companies about the challenges in the lack of and cost of warehousing space. That is what we hear from our exporters.

On the movement of investment cross-border, I agree with Margaret that we have not seen that massively. We are seeing more acquisitions of companies, but that is not at a cost to jobs. They are not moving what they are doing in one jurisdiction to another. It is about growth and scale, which is encouraging and should be supported.

My final point is about ports, which you referred to. A genuine concern and a constant plea from clients who are looking at the offshore wind opportunity is about the infrastructure at the ports on this island and whether the ports are best placed to serve and future-proof that opportunity.

The Lord Bew:

I will pick up on something that John McGrane said two or three comments back. He talked very sharply about animal health and food safety, and he was on the button. One of the real successes of the Good Friday Agreement is that North/South cooperation, which was highly controversial across the two communities in the North, is not controversial any more. Indeed, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson has said that, if we get pumped up again, things can be expanded. That is if we are being optimistic about solving the bigger problem.

There is provision in the initial agreement for North/South bodies to deal with food safety and animal health. Do they have a role in implementing any compromise that is agreed in those areas? I have always been surprised that they have played no role so far. We talk about the issues as though we do not have those cross-border bodies. We talk about how sensitive they are. Do they have a role in, at least, implementation or, indeed, creating solutions? Those bodies are not controversial between the two communities, and they have been running for some years.

Mr John McGrane:

Thanks, Lord Bew. The other agencies might speak to that point in a moment. Certainly, InterTradeIreland is one of those organisations. Speaking through an apolitical and purely business lens, people would like the entities that have been commissioned to be the natural cross-border apparatus of these things on their behalf to be given the chance to be that. Equally, we are not naive; we understand the sensitivities around that.

However, let us look at something that works extraordinarily well: Tourism Ireland. My son returned home from Australia for a holiday a couple of months back, and I took him to see

Northern Ireland. I took him to the seven townlands that are namechecked in Van Morrison's 'Coney Island'. We took the new ferry across from Greenore near Carlingford to the east Down coast at St John's Point. First, he did not know Van Morrison, which should be an indictable offence. Secondly, he was blown away. When we came back, after two days, he was sending Van Morrison things on Spotify to people back in Australia. That is a flippant story, but you know the point that I am making. The tourism infrastructure on this island is utterly joined at the hip. I was saying earlier that the Cuilcagh walkway, which is a cross-border boardwalk trail across some of the most beautiful landscapes anywhere on these islands, is another testament to the natural connectedness and natural collaborations that happen between agencies and communities on all sides. We know how to do this when we let the agencies do what we ask them to do. Hopefully, we will let even more of them do even more of that over the next while.

Ms Margaret Hearty:

InterTradeIreland is one of the cross-border bodies that was born out of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement. As a practitioner, I would say that the simple answer to your question is yes, but it is a political question in that the cross-border bodies are governed by the North/South Ministerial Council and the Northern Ireland Executive needs to be operating to allow the Council to meet. Unfortunately, that is where it sits. Is it possible? Yes, absolutely.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

At least one member of the UK delegation has walked the boardwalk — Karin.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

I recommended it to the Ambassador last night.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

She has been a great advocate for it all day. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

I thank our witnesses. It has been a very interesting debate. I got most of the figures from the business sentiments surveys and the research that you have completed, but figures that would be quite important for the discussion about market behaviour are those for investment and, potentially, investment forgone as a result of the uncertainties. Do you have any evidence of that from the client companies and/or research that you have completed over the past few years? That would be investment forgone in the likes of plant and machinery, which you would expect to see when cross-border trade, east-west and North/South, is increasing as it is.

4.00 pm

Ms Margaret Hearty:

We survey our 750 companies quarterly and track the level of investment across 10 years' worth of figures. I am not sure that it goes down to the granular detail, but it does track, I suppose, the sentiment towards investment, more so in R&D and innovation activity. That is impacted when you have greater levels of uncertainty, and we can see the trends. We will be happy to pull out that information and share it with you.

Mr John McGrane:

Thanks for your question, Alan. I do not mean to be in any way irritating, inappropriate or, indeed, offensive on this. However, decision-makers in the boardrooms of overseas investors, with money to spend abroad in everything from major industrial investments to investments in major services, such as financial services, are bound to consider lots of factors, among which are risks. Among those risks are political risks. It would be inappropriate for me not to mention that concerns are expressed when people say that they might sign a trade agreement and not honour that.

I do not want to be inappropriate in this company or anywhere, but it is a non-trivial matter. It should concern us all. When people's word is their bond, that should be the case. Hopefully, that will prove to be the case. However, it is a non-trivial new risk that boardrooms in the US and elsewhere will take into consideration when they look at Manchester versus Munich, Belfast versus Brussels or whatever. It would be irresponsible of boards not to take that into account.

Mr Martin Vickers MP:

We have heard much about uncertainties, and John has just spoken about foreign investors and so on. However, it is not just Brexit that has caused uncertainty; there is COVID and the situation in Ukraine. Companies, particularly international companies, are reviewing their supply chains. We hear talk about onshoring, nearshoring, friend-shoring and so on. Do you see opportunities for Ireland, North and South, to take advantage of businesses that are looking to relocate and review their supply chains?

Mr John McGrane:

Marina will give you her comment in a moment. In our work, we say to nobody, "Close somewhere"; we say, "Open in an additional place". Northern Ireland is in a phenomenally attractive position to be that additional place for businesses in Great Britain and, indeed, for businesses in Ireland and beyond. Northern Ireland has core competencies that are almost unique. I mentioned carbon-fibre weaving, which is a non-trivial example. I could mention the work that is being done in cyber, in which there is an amazingly strong competence in Northern Ireland. There are other examples in the life sciences area.

Once people feel that they know what the rules will be and that those rules will sustain for a reasonable period of investment, they will follow the opportunity. There is the skills pool in Northern Ireland. We have talked about the food and agriculture sector. In the higher education research sector, Northern Ireland's universities are in a phenomenally strong position to collaborate with other universities; and they do that in areas of very advanced research, as Marina talked about. There is no question. Investment is a dull science: the money simply follows the opportunity, and the jobs follow the investment of that money into the opportunity.

Ms Marina Donohoe:

Just to add to that, we hold an event — typically every year, but it has not happened for about three years, for obvious reasons — called International Markets Week. Over 600 of our client companies were in Dublin for that two weeks ago. There was massive interest in the executives within the team that are dealing with the multinationals in Ireland. There is a real opportunity across both jurisdictions here to work on FDI, particularly US FDI in Ireland. You speak about

the trend towards nearshoring and towards sourcing more locally, and many of them are unfamiliar with the supply capability in Ireland, particularly on the SME side. It is an agenda and an area of focus for Enterprise Ireland and one that I am leading on within my team. We are seeing very strong interest in that, so, yes, I think that it is an area that is worth exploring further.

Ms Margaret Hearty:

I endorse what my two colleagues said. We see evidence of that in import substitution opportunities for businesses. As you rightly reference, the pandemic has had an impact on supply chains, as, indeed, has the Ukraine war, but when you look at the whole supply base, both North and South, and at FDI and wider supply chain opportunities, you see that there are massive opportunities for small businesses.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I agree that money is not political; money will go where there is an opportunity, and it will flee where there is too much risk. If anyone wants to see a case study on that, they can look at the UK economy over the last few weeks.

I am a chartered accountant and chartered tax adviser by training, and I have always had a view, when speaking to business, that business wants government to provide the support where it is needed and open the doors that no one else can open. It is absolutely vital to give simplicity and certainty to business, and that means that we in the UK need to make sure that there is certainty around our political system. We need the institutions back and working in Stormont, because that is vital for Northern Ireland, which I agree wholeheartedly has so much potential and has so many cutting-edge industries that are the best in the world. However, you need to have certainty for money to go there. Of course, we need certainty around the protocol so that we can make that east-west trade work.

I found that absolutely fascinating and very interesting. I hope that we will all take away from that things that we can take back to our constituencies, Parliaments and legislatures and express the view that we need to get these things right.

The sitting was suspended at 4.06 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 4.32 pm.

THAT THIS ASSEMBLY HAS CONSIDERED RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

The motion is:

"that this Assembly has considered recent political developments."

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

I move the motion.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

We will commence our debate.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

I did not realise that it would be that quick, Co-Chair. As you can see, my machine is working, so there must be something in that, which is more than where we are with the political progress at the moment.

The Taoiseach was extremely good this morning. His references to the coming anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement were very pertinent. He made them in a very statesmanlike way and, in some ways, a very moving way. It put me in mind of 25 years ago, when I was the Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office who was responsible for talks; I had to chair quite a lot of the talks. I came to a meeting of this body within weeks of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Dublin. What a wonderful time it was: the process had, at least, begun. It took another 20 years or 25 years for the process to develop, and yet, unhappily, of course, we are now in a position where we have gone backwards again.

Everybody involved in the current impasse in Northern Ireland seems to quote the Good Friday Agreement, praying in aid for their own particular argument. In a sense, I think, they are all right. It is a question of how you resolve it. Unionists will quite rightly argue that the sea border has not got the consent of their community and, therefore, goes against, at least, the tenor — the spirit — of the Good Friday Agreement in not getting consensus on it. To that extent, I absolutely agree with them. On the other side, and indeed on the unionist side, the argument is that a land border is certainly not the answer, because that would reimpose a division, which the Good Friday Agreement wanted to eradicate in the first place.

All of them should understand — we do too — that the fact that we do not have an Assembly, an Executive or North/South bodies is, in itself, a huge violation of the Good Friday Agreement. You cannot pick bits that you agree with. When people, North and South, voted on the agreement, they voted on all of it. Even though some of them might dislike parts, they voted on all of it.

The issue now is this: what do we do? Within the past six hours, we have a new Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. He is the third in seven weeks, and, hopefully, we can have a little bit of stability in the months to come. Personally, I wish him well in trying to resolve the issues. This is one that he has to resolve very quickly. The European Research Group (ERG) wing of the Conservative Party, in the past hour, put out a statement that said that if the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which, tomorrow, goes through its stage in the House of Lords, does not get through quickly, the Parliament Act 1949 should be invoked. It has been invoked only twice, I think; once on fox hunting. In this case, if the Parliament Act is invoked, we will be heading towards some sort of constitutional crisis. That is not the answer. The only answer — I hope that people who take part in this debate agree with me — is to go back to some form of deep, structured, proper negotiations — negotiations between the British and Irish Governments, for which we are, in a sense, responsible, and between them and all the political parties in Northern Ireland. If that happens, as well of course as the overriding negotiation between the EU and the United Kingdom, we can come to an agreement.

It has to be a proper negotiation. In the past couple of weeks, there has been a sign that that is happening. If there is not proper negotiation, we will not be coming back here, this time next year, which will be the proper anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, in a very good mood,

because, if, by then, there is direct rule, and if we are still negotiating or negotiations have broken down, that quarter of a century of progress will be violated.

I do not believe that we will get to that stage, because I believe, basically, that, as we agreed, in 1997-98, on a whole host of things that were immeasurably more difficult than what we have now, we can agree on this. I think that all of us — me, you, everybody here — can play our part in persuading our Governments to get to the proper negotiating table. Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Lord Murphy for, as always, a most interesting and constructive contribution.

The Lord Bew:

I will respond briefly to Paul's wise words. We have been in these holes before and have always somehow managed to get out of them. As Paul will remember, on the Sunday before the referendum, we were looking at polling figures that were nothing like as good as what eventuated. If there had been what some of the polling figures that we were looking at were concerned about, it would not have had the support of both communities, which it did have.

To build on Paul's point: the unionist community does have a case for saying that the equality and esteem provisions in article 1 of the international agreement mean that, for example, it is right to do what the British Government have just done with the Irish language to prevent alienation in the nationalist community. It is perfectly correct to do that and to do it at Westminster. Paul and I both took part in that debate, and I certainly support the legislation.

This does not apply to every detail of this Bill and certainly does not apply to the Parliament Act, but, equally, in principle, a Bill that says to the unionist community, "You are alienated on this score" is reasonable and something that the British Government, under their international obligations, have no alternative but to try. That is not the same thing as saying that every detail of the Bill is right, but, if they are to keep to their international obligations, they have to do for unionists what they did on the Irish language. I am talking not about the detail but the principle of the Bill. That is why I regret the regret motion for tomorrow night. As always in the Lords, I am certain that there will be amendments to this Bill. I will put it kindly: bits of it will need some work.

The great victory of the past 25 years has been unionist acceptance of North/South cooperation and a willingness to invest in that. It is just not controversial any more. If you are to capitalise on that and the unionist acceptance of power-sharing, you have to help the current unionist leadership to get out of the difficult position that it is in. The most important route to that is the negotiation between the UK and the EU.

The House of Lords meets tomorrow night on this point, but let me say that the Irish Government have been extremely calm. They have not said that this Bill is the end of the world and that we cannot have negotiations. The EU has also been calm. Therefore, it is very important to say that the British Parliament should follow the attitude of the Irish Government in saying that this Bill may be necessary as part of a process of confidence building, which we used to do a lot of, Paul, back in the day. It may be necessary in that respect, but the Irish Government are not saying that we cannot negotiate now or be part of an EU negotiation to reach a landing zone. I find it quite difficult to understand why British parliamentarians cannot

take the Irish Government's word for it. This is not a fundamental obstacle to progress. It may become so later, but, right now, it is not a fundamental obstacle to progress and negotiation.

I am inspired by Paul's remarks and memories of how we have been in holes before and have always somehow got out of them. I do not know how we get out of this one, but we have done it before.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Paul. It is great to have the wisdom of people who held ministerial office and acted as advisers in the talks leading up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Those contributions are very informative and very beneficial for all of us in this Assembly.

Senator Emer Currie:

I thank my colleagues for their remarks, and I think that the Irish Government have been very clear that we very much want to see thorough negotiation and to arrive at a solution that works for everyone. The Good Friday Agreement has shown us again and again that it is so relationship-based that when one of our stakeholders is going through a period of instability or flux, it has an impact on the overall agreement. We really need to find a way whereby our institutions become more resilient to that instability. We have to get to a point where the cycle of crisis and collapse, particularly for the Assembly, is not allowed to continue and where the institutions on all three strands are upheld with a permanency and a commitment that we just have not experienced. What we have therefore lacked is the evolution of the three strands, which would have helped us through this situation.

4.45 pm

So we have to reflect on how we contribute to the permanency of the institutions of the three strands. Our report, which I will present tomorrow, reflects on how much more important that has become since the UK left the EU as we do not have the same access to informal and formal interaction at ministerial level. Institutions like BIPA are really important, but we need to address the lack of permanency. Thank you.

The Lord Dubs:

I am a little surprised by the dearth of comments. I was going to comment on what Paul, Lord Bew and Emer said, so I do not have that much new to add. I feel quite emotional about this because I was a junior Minister when Paul Murphy was involved in a lot of the negotiations. I remember the way in which we discussed the negotiations at ministerial meetings, and I remember the long Maundy Thursday and Good Friday in Castle Buildings, with the snow, and with Ian Paisley outside demanding to go in and saying that the talks should not be happening. It was emotional. I also remember a wonderful party in Dublin at which the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and a lot of the then senior Irish Government Ministers were celebrating the passing of the referendum and the fact that we were on our way to something positive. I do not apologise for feeling emotional about this. When we talk about the 25th anniversary, it means something: so many hopes and dreams rest on it. I still have one or two copies of the Good Friday Agreement, which I shall auction for charity, because it is such a significant document.

I take some comfort in the wise words from the Irish Government and the calming influence that they are having on some of the discussions. If the ERG were to use the Parliament Act, it would be an outrageous escalation that would cause a constitutional crisis. That is the last thing

that should happen. We should take encouragement from the calm words. I always value the way in which Simon Coveney says that, given the situation, he wants as many ways as possible for conversations to take place between Ireland and Britain — between Irish and British parliamentarians — because that is the way forward and the way to keep going. I am concerned that the absence of a Government at Stormont means that a lot of key decisions are not being made and that the people of Northern Ireland are suffering as a result. There are vulnerable people who deserve better of the system in terms of healthcare and in all the other areas where decisions should be made. Northern Ireland is being stifled because decisions that could probably be agreed are not being made. The victims, as usual, are ordinary people, so I think that we have to encourage more negotiation.

I regret very much that a former Prime Minister, when asked whether France was a friend or enemy, said, "The jury's out." That is not the way to talk to or deal with the French. We, in Britain, have to talk as much as possible to the Irish Government, and we have to talk much more to our other European friends. Of course, France has to be a friend and be regarded as such. We have to have a different mood in the way that we approach these discussions: we have to be calm, measured and considered. I cannot make any further contribution because it is not in our hands. The mood of the approach is absolutely crucial, and we just have to calm down a bit. So much is at stake, and we can get a resolution only through calm and sensible negotiation.

Mr Alan Farrell TD:

I thank the three Members of the Lords for their contributions and for bringing us back to the origins of this Assembly. Lord Dubs — Alf — and I had the pleasure of working together on the OSCE for seven years. It, of course, is the product of another crisis, a global crisis, and it shows the importance of interparliamentary dialogue. One of the things that I remember from the discussions that we were having in 2017 or 2018, following the vote to leave, was the fact that, on the sidelines of European meetings, for decades, Irish and British diplomats and parliamentarians had met and had discussions; that, following Brexit and the departure from the Union, those conversations no longer took place; and the importance that those conversations can have.

My point today, for colleagues from Westminster and, indeed, Jersey, Guernsey, Scotland and Wales — do not worry; I will not forget anyone, or at least I will try not to — is to have those conversations, visit Dublin, reach out to the European or Northern Ireland spokespersons, or whoever it might be, and come and meet us. It is absolutely imperative for all of us to continue the discussions with one another and to learn from the past. I do not believe that there is a member of the unionist representation present, if I am not mistaken, Chairman, which is a bit disappointing. I noted it before we started this conversation, because the title of the motion is:

"That this Assembly has considered recent political developments".

While there have, of course, been very significant developments in Westminster, equally if not more important ones are occurring in Northern Ireland. On Friday, decisions will be removed by law from the Province, and that is very unfortunate because the people of Northern Ireland voted in significant numbers — a huge majority — to have those decisions made at a local level. That is regrettable, particularly given the conversations that have been had in this room by the three Members of the Lords, at least two of whom — in fact, I am certain, all three — were integrally involved in the peace process.

It is imperative that we continue the interparliamentary dialogue and do our best to try to represent our communities, because what our communities have in common is much greater than the differences between them, which are negligible, frankly. I would not like to continue with membership of either the Irish Parliament or this Assembly and watch the hard work of giants in Irish and British politics fall asunder because of intransigence and indifference to members of other communities. That is not why we are here. It cannot be why we are here.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Alan. It is important, for people who were not here earlier, to say that Reg Empey and Maurice Bradley have been participating here today and will do so later this evening as well, I have no doubt.

Rt Hon the Lord Bruce:

I do not have the weight of experience of the previous contributors, but I reflect that we are talking about current political developments. We have just — I was going to say "elected", but we have not — found ourselves a new Prime Minister. *[Laughter.]* The serious point that I want to make is that I see that his opening statement is, "We face serious economic challenges". That is more than substantially true, but I want to connect it to the debate because part of the economic challenge that the UK faces is the uncertainty of our relationships with these islands and with the EU. We have to get to the point of some form of reset. It seems to me that a message to our new Prime Minister is this: "You may be thinking about markets, tax and spend, but you should be thinking about the threat that the dispute over the protocol poses to the entire UK economy's transactions with the rest of the world for the near and medium-term future". That should be very high up in his in-tray, but I suspect that, right now, it is not in his head. It would be helpful if we, as an Assembly, put it into his head that that is the case and that it really matters to the UK, to Ireland and to the EU that we get past this stalemate and confrontation.

It is with slightly more trepidation that I say that the Good Friday Agreement was a power-sharing agreement that, as has been said on more than one occasion, is not a majoritarian agreement. It requires consensus. My only comment on that is that consensus requires give and take; it cannot just be a veto by one group. I accept what Paul has said. These are very difficult issues. The sensitivities are real and substantive, and I would not decry them, but a solution is necessary, and one solution that has been called for that is not deliverable is no borders anywhere. We have signed an agreement that clearly requires some form of bureaucracy, if you like. What we have to do is to make it as low-level and as constructive as possible and to rebuild trust and transparency. If I were sitting in Downing Street, which I am never likely to be, I would be thinking, "I've got to get over this".

I understand that a Conservative senior Member of Parliament, commenting on the leadership, said, "We need to get back to the 2016 referendum". If they mean that, there was no protocol Bill, no legacy Bill and no repeal of European laws Bill then, so you could argue that, if that is the objective of the Conservative Party, those three pieces of legislation could fall or be put into abeyance to create a much more constructive climate. I would like to be an optimist; I am not sure that I could be that optimistic. These are very serious situations and times, and they require people to appreciate what is at stake, because an awful lot is at stake.

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA:

I have no choice but to speak in relation to this, but I want to commend the previous comments. I look towards the Lords in this case, and I appreciate, honour and respect the conversations that have taken place in the past. I was born and reared in a border town, and I have lived 99% of my time in the North of Ireland. I have come through it, and people rejoiced when the Good Friday Agreement was signed. I have my copy of the Good Friday Agreement sitting there, but I will certainly not auction it off, because I have great pride in it. I look to the leaders whom we have lost, and, in particular, I pay tribute to Martin McGuinness for his role and work, along with that of others.

5.00 pm

The Lords will know this: the co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement are the Irish and British Governments. It seems to me that some have stood up and some have not. I will not get into the debate. There is a debate about what is happening in the Lords, so I will not comment on that. A debate is going on, so let us see how that turns out, but I will say this: I want all of you in the group that is sitting here to influence where you can and to take the conversations back.

I asked the Minister a question this morning. I can speak on behalf of Sinn Féin and say that, when we want to go into the Government, we are ready, and we want to get back. We were given the biggest mandate to get back into the Government. We have always had conversations, and debates have gone on, and I respect the calm way in which the Irish Government have held conversations over the past two weeks. I pay respect to that, but I come back to saying that it takes leadership, and you need to show responsibility, and that lies with others.

None of the people whom I share the mandate or a Monday morning meeting room with is shying away from conversations. I respect the people who played a part in the past. They are as big an influence as anyone else. This is a difficult one for me, Co-Chair, because I am sitting here, and I want to get back. There is nobody else — fair play to Maurice Bradley for coming today, but there are people who should be here, taking the microphone and having conversations with you.

I can clearly state on behalf of the party that I represent that we want to get back into the Government. I want to be making decisions for the people whom I represent; that is what I want to do, and that is what we should do. We have made a lot of progress. Clearly, there are major obstacles, but, when I look around the room, I look to others who can influence the conversations that need to take place in the next short while. The flip-flop nature of what is going on in England at the minute does not do any of us any favours. I encourage the conversation.

I certainly welcome this conference at this time, Co-Chairs, because this is where we can build relationships, have proper conversations and try to influence. If we, the people in the room, are serious about protecting the Good Friday Agreement, we will have conversations and try to have influence wherever we can. Respectfully, I ask people to do that.

I am only one person speaking on behalf of the party that I represent, and I have been given the mandate to do that. We will not be found wanting: we will go into the rooms and have the conversations. Unfortunately, however, there is the wee matter of a Bill at the minute, and that conversation is taking place. I know that there have been good conversations over the past number of weeks, and I hope that those will come to fruition, because people are crying out

about the cost of living: you know, it is either heat or eat. That is what it is about on the ground, and most of the people in this room who are public representatives will be hearing that.

On behalf of Sinn Féin, I say that we want to get back into the Government. We will be there for any conversations to take place, and I encourage the people in this room to support us in trying to get the Assembly back. To be fair to Lord Bew, I acknowledge the conversation that is going on. We know that there are sensitivities there. We have come through a lot of things, and I think that, with mature responsibility and leadership, we can get through this one, but we will need the people inside and outside this room. The co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement are the British Government and the Irish Government. Collectively, those people need to stand up.

Mr John Lahart TD:

Thanks, Co-Chair, for a very successful day. I have, if I may, a couple of reflections. I very much welcome the presence of the Taoiseach here today. I also welcome, as has been commented on, the calming role and non-escalatory language of the Government in Dublin. Curiously, and I do not know whether it will make any difference, there will be a transition in our Government on 15 December. It is the first time that it has happened that the Tánaiste takes the place of the Taoiseach and the Taoiseach becomes the Tánaiste, the Deputy Prime Minister. So, on these islands, we will have two premiers of Indian extraction for the first time. I do not know whether that will make any difference, but it is at least worthy of comment. Who thought that we would ever see it? I think that that is significant in its own way, and maybe there is some hope for some kind of closer collaboration.

Long before I was involved in electoral politics, I worked in government when Albert Reynolds was Taoiseach, and one thing that I do know is this: one of the things that I am proudest of is that the party to which I belong made sacrifices in relation to achieving the Good Friday Agreement, and those sacrifices had electoral consequences, but it was a price worth paying. We made a concession over articles 2 and 3. For those of who may not be so familiar with our constitution, we had claimed a right to the Six Counties, and we relinquished that, which was a pretty major piece of work to do. That was overwhelmingly accepted: by 90% of people in the Republic and by 70% of people in Northern Ireland. As an observer, and as an active politician now, I think that those kinds of sacrifices are the kind of things that need to be looked at seriously: a willingness to see the bigger picture.

I looked at the incoming Prime Minister's statement today. You just wonder how far down the pecking order Northern Ireland is in the greater scheme of things for a British Prime Minister to deal with. At the moment, it clearly has to be a priority.

There are some really positive things going on, even in relation to the European Union. Macron's initiative in setting up the political structure — I think that it is a very generous initiative — is a way of trying to encourage the UK back into a discussion and to facilitate Europe-wide discussion, so that the UK is not isolated and continues to be involved. Ireland misses the presence of the UK in the European Union tremendously. The loss of the UK from the European Union is hugely significant, not least, as I have said to some colleagues here, in that it represents the loss of a very significant liberal democracy. There are precious few liberal democracies in the world, and so, as Alan commented, the loss of the UK — a great ally of Ireland — at the EU level is felt very significantly. It is what it is, though, and we have to get on with that. We in the Republic have discovered that we have a colossal institution at our back, and that is not to be underestimated, either. I do not say that to use it as a bargaining chip;

it is just a fact. It represents the development of the relationship of the Republic with the EU over the 50 years since we acceded to it.

There are so many positive things going on under the radar and in the background that we should not lose sight of, even in the midst of all the complexities at the moment. One thing that strikes me is that I grew up in a generation in which we were afraid to openly fly the tricolour because of its association with violence and all the atrocities that went on. That is looking at the age group here, with the exception of someone like Emer. The young Irish population in the Republic do not have any of that baggage anymore; they have not had that baggage for a while, and the idea of an island being divided makes no sense to them. That is not in the tribal way that it did not make sense to people before, which was fuelled by emotions and old rivalries; it simply does not make sense to them anymore that you can have a small island that simply cannot get on, cooperate and share all its resources, talents and genius in a non-threatening and non-undermining way.

Recently, 5,000 people attended an Ireland's Future conference in Dublin. Some people may have comments about the background of that conference, but it was addressed by all the major parties, and I think that that is just an indication of where it is going. Young Irish people do not have those tribal, historical hang-ups, nor — in the Republic, certainly — do they have the old tribal assumption or desire to reverse-colonise the Six Counties. It is completely different and has its own dynamic. With that dynamic, it has its own momentum. It is kind of unstoppable in its own way, but not in a threatening way. They are having far different conversations than we are having here. They are so far ahead of us.

I have had three nephews living in London. That would have been unthinkable 10, 20 or 30 years ago. One of them and his partner decided that they wanted to move because of changes in their employment. They moved to Belfast. That just would not have happened with citizens of the Republic. The option of living in Belfast was just not something that we considered in my generation; it never came on to the radar.

I hope that the assumed election of Rishi Sunak as PM stabilises things in the UK a little bit. Maybe it at least represents a bit of space from the chaos that we have just witnessed and looked disbelievingly at; an end to using a piece of our island as a plaything. It is hard to watch that. It was used as a bargaining chip, but it is much more important than that.

The final line that I will contribute is that I think that young people will just pass all of that by and make different decisions, when they are given an opportunity in the not-too-distant future, on the island as a whole. They will just get fed up with the whole rigmarole of what is going on. Movement has to happen, so I hope that this gives us an opportunity. Sorry for going on at length, Co-Chair.

Ms Heledd Fychan MS:

Cathal Boylan and Lord Dubs mentioned "people" and emphasised "people". I am glad that Cathal also mentioned the cost-of-living crisis, because if we are talking about recent political developments, it is people who have been suffering from this political fallout – the mess that there has been in the UK Government, and also the focus now. There are not going to be those solutions to help people overnight, and the fact that there is not a legislature in Northern Ireland to be able to address some concerns. We have been able, in Wales and Scotland, to put some interventions in place as additional ones. We need to remember that we are here to serve the people. We are elected to do so, and it is always with a view to people.

We have to remember as well that, since last time we met, there are new people in these isles from Ukraine as a result of the war. We talk about the impact of Ukraine on things like energy, but it has also changed who is here and who we have welcomed, and that has a different dynamic as well. It has highlighted some of the issues that are shared in both Ireland and the UK in terms of the housing crisis and how people are, again, suffering. Some of our poverty records are shocking, and we need to address how we are going to work together to solve some of the huge challenges ahead.

5.15 pm

There are also conversations moving beyond what was outlined by John Lahart just now with Ireland's Future. Also, the Taoiseach mentioned Shared Island. We have to acknowledge that these are not unique within this island; actually, we should be looking at the "Shared Islands" as part of our discussions, because what is happening in Scotland is significant in the future of that referendum. In Wales, the Government are now looking in seriousness at Welsh independence. These are official channels looking at whether Welsh impendence is something that is possible. I think that the conversation is moving beyond anything, and people are engaging. That is what is significant about events like Ireland's Future. These are conversations that are not just owned by political parties or elected representatives; these are questions that people are asking because of everything that has happened because of Brexit.

So, for our discussion, it is not a matter of what happens in one part or another. A lot of it is shifting so quickly that we need to be thinking about how we ensure that we are never in a situation again where, as we saw with Brexit, there is so much hatred and divisiveness and racism as an outpouring of that. As that conversation moves forward in the future of each part of the United Kingdom and whatever happens here in Ireland, it has to be on that basis of respect and understanding and being able to put people first, because it will be the people whom we represent who will continue to suffer if we are not able to put our political differences aside.

Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:

What we need now is dialogue that is open, creative and problem-solving between the EU and Britain, and the big issue is that we need it now. If we do not solve that problem, we are not going to solve other issues that are affecting the North of Ireland in particular, but also affecting the relationship between the two islands. It is clear at this stage that there cannot be a customs border within the island of Ireland, and therefore the protocol, in some form, will remain. However, I also think that the protection of the single market should be done in as unobtrusive and non-invasive a way as possible.

The Good Friday Agreement was about compromise, accommodation and inclusivity, which is very important. Inclusivity means including even those with whom you totally disagree. It is important that we are sensitive to the views of pro-Brexit unionists. One big mistake can be to dismiss anybody in political life. When we talk about that, I am often reminded of the famous saga of the Táin Bó Cúailnge. The Táin Bó Cúailnge was a row between Connaught and Ulster over a bull. Queen Méabh of Connacht and her husband had a row over a bull. The best bull available was in Louth, which was part of Ulster in those times. She sent the delegation to get the best bull on the whole island of Ireland so that she would have a better bull than her husband. The delegation negotiated a solution, and they managed to acquire the bull. The King of the Cooley peninsula invited them to a little bit of socialising afterwards, which included some liquid enjoyment. The conversation went something like, "It was just as well you gave us the bull, because we would have taken it anyway", and that is what started the war.

Triumphalism about a solution on any side is not the way or a thing we need. The whole idea of the Good Friday Agreement was that everybody got the main problem they were concerned about solved within a framework that surprised a lot of people when it came, but solve this we have to. For the future of Northern Ireland and the future of these islands, we have to show total inclusivity, but we also need to get a speedy resolution.

There is one thing that I have always believed in politics: talk never hurt anybody. Not being in talks — whichever side; I am not in the blame game — is a pity, because nothing was ever sorted out without people getting around a table and mediating their differences across a table.

Mr Nigel Mills MP:

I will make a couple of short remarks, because I do not have the seniority or experience of most of the speakers. First, it is really important that this Assembly gets to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. We should try to find a way of meeting next April, preferably in Belfast, to mark that. If we cannot get together and celebrate that progress as the body that is meant to be the epitome of relations between the two nations, what are we for? Hopefully, we can find some way of working that into the calendar next year.

Secondly, I almost regret that we do not have a motion to debate today. I understand why we do not do that, and I expect that is for very good reasons. I think that we could actually have found an agreement urging all sides to negotiate with flexibility to try and find a way forward on the protocol talks. I voted for the protocol Bill with my fingers crossed. I even said that it was a load of rubbish in the Chamber. However, there is a danger that, if we do not make progress, the Government might feel obliged to bring it into place. I cannot see how a dual regulatory zone and dual customs territories in the same place can possibly ever be made to work, and we will end up in a worse situation than we are now, when, actually, most of us can see some ways forward on the most sticky of the issues that can put some flexibilities into place, and we can take some of the tension out of it and find something that works in the vast majority of cases, and then we can try to build the trust and the data sharing that can tackle the real serious threat to the integrity of the single market that quite reasonably is there.

If we do not give some space for that negotiation and recognise that there will need to be some changes on all sides in that, we will be sat here at our next plenary having the same argument that we have had since the referendum in 2016, where people are effectively asking for things they cannot have and know they cannot have, and we cannot find a solution. If there is a role for this body to be meaningful, it is to try to create the space and the consensus that there needs to be some kind of change and concessions by all parties that can make some real progress in these situations. I hope that, in future, we can try and find ways of having some meaningful output from these discussions that can help with these sensitive items.

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thanks, everybody, for your comments. As I was sitting here, I was reflecting on how dominant our British-Irish conversation is and has been every time that we meet. Of necessity, I suppose, the dialogue is dominated in that way, but how much is it to our cost to have to talk about that all the time when we could be also talking about Scotland and about Wales in a much deeper way, when we could be talking about energy security and when we could be talking about the practicalities of defending floating wind energy, interconnectors and pipelines? We have so much to discuss. Obviously, we have had to deal with Brexit, but I feel that we come to these meetings and it is important that we say what we say and we move things on. Of course, the

Irish Government approach these things with continual openness and optimism to try to get a resolution, but all of this is while we are missing the opportunity to further develop engagement and understanding with these other very significant parts of these islands. It is to my cost as a new Member of this Assembly, and I believe that it is to the cost of everyone else as well, that we are strategically missing opportunities by not having the space to discuss these crucial issues of security and energy resilience at this forum as well as every other. I simply make that observation in the hope that we might get to it next time and that the issues will have been resolved and moved on so that we can get on with other work.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Jennifer.

Colleagues, with regard to Nigel and the wording of the motion, Karen and I had to put this formally before the Steering Committee meeting last night. We are in a very fluid political situation, but the one thing that came across, not just in this debate but from the first contributions this morning from Minister Baker, an Taoiseach, the British Ambassador Paul Johnston and others, was the urgency about getting the institutions in Northern Ireland back fully functioning on behalf of the people. The message everywhere today is that we need to respect difference, respect other people's opinions and work together to have the institutions back as they were established. Lord Paul Murphy made the very valid point at the beginning that, going back to pre-1998, the issues that had to be discussed and sorted at that time were much, much more complex than the issues that need to be sorted today. That is not taking away from the need to get these particular issues off the agenda.

Jennifer is 1,000% right to say that, a bit like Zoom meetings, we are a bit "Brexited out" at Committees of our own Parliament and, I am sure, of the British Parliament and the other legislatures. We would like to be moving on, and the programme of work that Karen and I have devised over the next few months is very much touching on new areas of huge common interest and concern, including energy and climate change — all those issues that do not respect borders or boundaries and are common to all of us.

In the frank of exchange of views this evening, it was great to listen to people, as I said earlier, like Paul Murphy, Paul Bew and Alf Dubs on their contribution and experience of the lead-up to 1998 and, subsequently, of the work to get the agreement implemented. That wisdom is extremely important for the people who will be making executive decisions at government level and for those who want to contribute through our parliamentary work.

That concludes our programme of business for today. There will be a reception just outside here at 7.15 pm, followed by dinner at 8.00 pm. We are back in session sharp tomorrow morning at 9.30 am, when we have a very full programme of work. I thank all of you, and I thank our guest speakers. We started off with Minister Baker and an Taoiseach, and the other guest speakers that we had today made for an extremely interesting, comprehensive and varied programme of work. Go raibh míle maith agaibh. Thank you, and see you all later.

Adjourned at 5.26 pm.

Tuesday 25 October 2022

The Assembly met at 9.42 am.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to tell you that we have just become quorate, so we can commence our proceedings. I welcome all of you to our second day. I have been assured that there will be tea and coffee at around 10.30 am for those people who are in desperate need of it. I have seen quite a few people looking anxiously out there, but I am sure that it will come.

This morning we will deal with some Assembly business. Two Committees will present reports. Committee A will present followed by Committee B. We will also hear an update from Committee D. We will then hear from Professor Alvin Jackson from the University of Edinburgh who will speak on the topic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Union from 1800 to 1925 and take questions. The session will conclude with an address by John FitzGerald, who is an adjunct professor at Trinity College Dublin and a member of Ireland's statutory Climate Change Advisory Council.

COMMITTEE A — 'CONSOLIDATING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UK AND IRELAND'

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Emer Currie will present the report, 'Consolidating the Bilateral Relationship between the UK and Ireland'.

Senator Emer Currie:

Thank you very much. I hope that everyone is coping with WhatsApp being down this morning.

Thank you to all the members of Committee A, including our Vice-Chair, Nigel Mills, and, in particular, our Clerks, Chris Morash and Nick Taylor.

Let me start by congratulating you, Karen, as the new British Co-Chair. Sadly, that means that you are no longer on Committee A, but thank you for the commitment and experience that you brought to the Committee. On behalf of the Committee, I also want to welcome our newest member, Craig Williams.

It is an honour to present the report, 'Consolidating the Bilateral Relationship between the UK and Ireland'. Back in February 2021, we agreed that that relationship required specific focus, and, 18 months later, that need is even greater. I am already heartened by the feedback of the Steering Committee, which will consider our recommendations as part of a strategic review of this organisation.

It is clear from the evidence that we heard and from our own experiences, even in the past 24 hours, that the bilateral relationship between Ireland and the UK is of fundamental importance to both countries. Our histories, cultures, economies and people are interconnected and, of course, we are co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. The bilateral relationship was summed up by former President Mary McAleese at the 2011 state dinner in Dublin Castle in honour of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, when she said:

"Though the seas between us have often been stormy, we have chosen to build a solid and enduring bridge of friendship between us and to cross it to a new, a happier future."

The report is an examination of those sometimes stormy seas, but, more importantly, it offers meaningful and practical suggestions on how to strengthen that bridge of friendship and achieve a deeper understanding and cooperation between our respective nations.

9.45 am

Following Brexit, there are fewer opportunities to discuss matters of mutual interest and build personal relationships, and we find ourselves on different paths. For 45 years, Ireland and the UK shared a common framework that brought integration to law and regulation and common membership of the European Convention on Human Rights. Our bilateral relationship now has to manage a much greater degree of divergence.

Over the course of the inquiry, we heard from diplomats, business representatives, academics and a Minister, as well as from civil society organisations and representatives of the British-Irish Council (BIC) and of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC). We examined interparliamentary cooperation, how other countries manage bilateral relationships and our existing Good Friday Agreement structures.

New structures, in our view, are not the answer. Our evidence consistently highlighted the untapped potential of the bodies that were created by the Good Friday Agreement. The agreement recognises the importance of dialogue, which is why it is so important that we work the agreement and its institutions to their fullest extent.

The Committee considered ways in which existing bodies could play an enhanced role in cementing the east-west relationship. In particular, today, we call for all parties to reinvigorate their engagement with the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council. We have suggested that the BIIGC should meet at least twice a year at summit level and that those meetings should include the opportunity for respective Ministers to host breakout meetings and engage a broad range of sectors to ensure that it covers a wide spectrum of intergovernmental interests. The BIC should also hold more regular meetings that have a greater emphasis on a wide array of themes, including economic issues, and are attended by premiers and Ministers.

Turning our focus to this organisation — BIPA — our plenaries and social occasions are examples of strong bilateral engagement. To build upon that, we have suggested more regular plenaries, meetings and events to enable us to build closer and better relationships. We have also suggested that those plenaries be thematic and adequately supported by institutional support. That would allow the Assembly to address sector-specific, complex and evolving bilateral concerns in more detail. So, basically, friends, if we want stronger links, that begins here in BIPA and working the Good Friday Agreement to its strongest extent. If you do not mind me saying, I think that that would go a long way to addressing the issues that we currently face.

We will be moving on from this inquiry to a new inquiry if the report is accepted today. We hope to move on to an inquiry on the common travel area (CTA). As part of that, we will examine the operation of the CTA following Brexit and seek to understand how it functions for British and Irish citizens, as well as for visitors to these islands. We also intend to explore how new legislation has impacted people in border communities, many of whom are neither British nor Irish citizens. We will suggest constructive ways to protect them in the years ahead.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Emer, for your detailed report. There is plenty of food for thought in those proposals, and I am sure that they will meet with widespread welcome. Are there are any comments, suggestions or questions for Emer and her colleagues?

The Lord Empey:

Thank you, Chair. As a member of the Committee, I want to point out that although the BIC was part of the agreement, it has been the Cinderella of the process for many years. It has never had the focus. It was partly supported from the Cabinet Office in London, but it has been very sporadic. It was not that effective, and it could be a very effective body because you are bringing together key decision-makers right across the piece. As the Chair just outlined, the Committee was very much of the view that we did not want to reinvent the wheel, but we wanted to use the existing mechanisms more effectively. That is the message that we wanted to try to get across to people.

The reality is that the existing bodies are not functioning. The North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) is not functioning at the moment and the BIC, even when it has met, has been sporadic and haphazard. It is very hard to judge the full impact of COVID, but I suspect that some of the habits that we have got into as a result of COVID will remain unless we have a concerted effort to get out of them and make sure that things work. The relationships cannot be done on Zoom. It is a tool, and we should use it, but Zoom is not a substitute for people meeting together and having private discussions. So, in supporting the Committee Chair in what she has proposed, that is some of the thinking that went into the report. Thank you, Chair.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Reg.

Rt Hon the Lord Murphy:

To support what Reg just said, I thought that the report was extremely good and, if I might say so, very well presented. We ought not to underestimate the significance of its recommendations because when strand three set up the east-west bodies, Britain and Ireland were both members of the European Union, and they assumed, rightly so, that there would be a great deal of contact between the two Governments and the two Parliaments as a consequence of their meeting all the time in European institutions. That is gone. The institutions set up by the Good Friday Agreement under strand three now have a greater and much more significant role to play, and the recommendation that there be more frequent meetings of the BIIGC and breakaway meetings is an excellent idea. The thing now is whether we can persuade the two Governments to accept these very important proposals. I do not think that we could have had more important proposals this week, and I hope that they can be taken on by the British and Irish Governments because, in the absence of our joint membership of the European Union, they are very significant.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Paul.

Mr Seán Crowe TD:

I agree with the point around the idea about the presence of the premiers — the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach — being a key element. What sort of a message does it send out to other Ministers if the Prime Minister or the Taoiseach are not there? Their attendance draws attention to the importance of these meetings, so if people at that level are not engaging, it sends a bad message out to the other members of the various bodies.

The idea of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly meeting more regularly has been going around for a long time. When I was Co-Chair, we talked about it, but, again, both Governments need to take that on board and accept that there is a cost element to it. It is a unique body and everyone accepts that it works. Every time we have the Taoiseach or Ministers from various jurisdictions at our meetings, they all accept that there is something special about it and all agree that it is working. There are a lot of resources put into the meetings. So, it makes sense for us to meet on a more regular basis.

I commend the report. The recommendations in it are sensible. Well done to everyone involved.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Seán.

Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD:

Thank you, Co-Chair. While listening to the conversation about the report, I was reminded that we had Bertie Ahern at the Good Friday Agreement Committee last week as part of our work in the Oireachtas looking at 25 years of the agreement. The point about functionality and how often teams are meeting was raised. He pointed out that the BIIGC is the forum for that and was created specifically for that and that there is no need to go looking for anything else. However, he said that it needed to be worked more effectively, as Senator Currie set out in the Committee A report. I would like to add my support for that. It is the most important part of this. We will welcome the new Prime Minister later today, but a strong commitment to that at an early stage will set a very helpful tone.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Jennifer.

I ask the Assembly to formally adopt the report of Committee A.

Report agreed.

COMMITTEE B — 'REPORT ON VACCINE ROLLOUT IN BIPA JURISDICTIONS'

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

The Chair of Committee B, Darren Millar MS, will present Committee B's report on the vaccine roll-out in BIPA jurisdictions.

Mr Darren Millar MS:

Thank you, Co-Chair. With your indulgence, in addition to presenting today's report, I would like to bring Members up to speed on our current work programme.

We have had a very busy summer. Over the summer recess, we developed lines of enquiry for a new inquiry into UK and EU defence and security cooperation post Brexit, and we undertook our first oral evidence session on 13 October. In that inquiry, we want to consider the approaches of the UK and Irish Governments, the devolved legislatures and the EU in response to the current crisis in Ukraine, and we are very interested in looking at what cooperation there has been between each Administration and how effective that cooperation has been, in addition to the impact that Brexit has had on that cooperation and what lessons we might be able to learn on cooperation thus far. In addition, we want to learn more about the longer-term outlook for UK/EU cooperation on defence and security and the impact that global changes in the defence and security landscape might have.

The week before last, we took evidence from Ian Bond of the Centre for European Reform, Dr Nicholas Wright of the University of Surrey and Vice Admiral Mark Mellett, the former chief of staff of the Irish Defence Forces. All three gave us some excellent evidence to consider, particularly on the vulnerability of critical infrastructure and energy supplies and the need for coordinated action between all Governments in order to address those risks.

We also considered scoping notes and draft terms of reference for the next parts of that inquiry that we want to move to, which include cybersecurity and cooperation on intelligence and policing. On cyber issues, we want to look at some of the biggest challenges that are facing the UK, Ireland and the EU. Of course, we know that there has already been some divergence in approaches, and we want to see what the impact of that has been.

We know that there are deep relationships in intelligence and policing. We are interested in the practical arrangements under the EU and UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, as well as the impact of Brexit on that area, including on the exchange of operational information and, of course, the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland.

All three parts of the inquiry have been published, including the terms of reference, and a call for evidence has been issued. Details are available for Members on the BIPA website. We want as much written evidence as possible to be submitted to us by early December, and we will then take some evidence in Brussels, and probably Dublin, in the new year. We want to be in a position to present an interim report on the first part of that inquiry — in relation to Ukraine — at our next plenary session, which is in Jersey.

10.00 am

I will turn now to the report on vaccines and vaccine roll-out in the various BIPA jurisdictions. We formally agreed our report, which I present to you today. Just to give you a bit of context and background, it was in July of last year, which seems a long time ago now, that Committee B agreed to undertake the inquiry into vaccine roll-outs in BIPA jurisdictions.

We will all remember that, at that time, vaccines had really only recently been approved. We were just six months into the roll-out, and there was variability at that time on the pace of vaccine roll-outs in the different jurisdictions, so we decided to undertake an inquiry and to split it into two parts.

We held some evidence sessions in September 2021, and we received lots of written briefings from different witnesses. We looked at information on data sharing on vaccination programmes; differences in vaccine approval processes; the production and procurement exercises that were undertaken in each jurisdiction; the use of vaccine status for the reopening

of economies and society; and the cooperation between Ireland and the UK and the global vaccine programme.

That interim report was presented at the London plenary by the Vice-Chair of the Committee, John Lahart TD. We expressed concerns and our intention to explore further in our part 2 report some key issues on the roll-out of vaccines. In that part 2 report, which we present to you today, we looked at the numbers of people who were vaccinated, boosted and unvaccinated in each of the jurisdictions; how those numbers were impacting on the health systems of each country; how the jurisdictions intended to embed COVID vaccines into their existing public health programmes in the longer term; and how, in the event of future outbreaks, travel between the jurisdictions could be managed better.

We considered evidence on those issues from the various Health Departments and Chief Medical Officers across the islands, and, indeed, from the EU Commission. This final report, which we present today, captures all the information that we received, draws a number of conclusions and makes recommendations that are based on that evidence.

It demonstrates clearly that Ireland, the UK and the Crown dependencies have adopted pretty similar approaches when it comes to the future management of COVID-19, with a strong emphasis on embedding vaccines into the national public health programmes in each jurisdiction. We agree that careful monitoring and consistent contingency plans will ensure that there is less risk and harm to the public, with fewer restrictions in the future.

In light of that, we make a number of key recommendations. We note the high vaccine rates, as set out in the body of the report, and we welcome the introduction of the new bivalent boosters, which will form part of national vaccination programmes. We recommend that each jurisdiction put in place a strong campaign for the roll-out of the bivalent boosters in particular in order to ensure that all cohorts of the population that are eligible to receive a vaccine booster are reached in a timely and efficient manner.

Secondly, while vaccination should be the primary measure for preventing a return to severe restrictions, robust contingency plans should be in place in all jurisdictions in order to ensure a consistent approach within the common travel area in the event of future pandemics. We note in the report that there were issues with cross-border travel not just between Ireland and Northern Ireland but within various parts of Great Britain, even within jurisdictions, with local lockdowns that were sometimes in place. Those presented all sorts of challenges for the public, and compliance was difficult to monitor in some respects.

We agree that it is important not to lose the key learnings from the pandemic and that there should be logistical preparedness in the event of a similar event. There are inquiries going on in different parts of these islands. In particular, the UK Government and the Scottish Government have proceeded with COVID inquiries to consider how they responded and the lessons that can be learned.

We call for coordination in the future in order to ensure that vaccine stocks and other essentials such as PPE are readily available without an unnecessarily severe reliance on supply chains that could be affected by changes in security relationships around the globe.

Publicly available data relating to vaccination should continue to be maintained in future roll-outs. We think that there is a need for greater consistency — this issue was brought up yesterday — in the reporting of that data across the various jurisdictions so that we can all hold our

Governments to account in an easier way. Finally, we agree that the publicly available data should be expanded to include death rates, with a more coordinated and consistent approach to how they are measured in individual jurisdictions. Those are the key conclusions and recommendations that we make, and I commend the report to the Assembly.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Darren.

Rt Hon the Lord Bruce:

I am a member of the Committee, and one obvious thing that is nevertheless worth emphasising is the need for cooperation, coordination and data sharing, because there was unevenness in that, not surprisingly given that we were not prepared for it. We found that there was a need for devolution because the different circumstances in different places required different approaches. For example, in the Channel Islands, it was recognised that the travel issues required priority for people such as pilots and boat captains. Nevertheless, we are currently experiencing something of a spike, partly, it appears, because of the lack of full take-up of vaccination, so it is clearly still important to promote that.

We suggest that all the various authorities, the devolved Administrations and so on should have ongoing coordination for any further incidents so that we do not waste time going off in different directions but, instead, share best practice and best experience. Essentially, that is what we deduced. By the end of the process, a lot of that had happened, but, during it, it absolutely did not. There was a lot of divergence and a lot of missteps and misrepresentation.

The Committee has produced a useful report, and, as COVID disappears, we hope, into the rear-view mirror, we must not forget what we have learned and should keep up to date in ensuring that we have the capacity to respond again. I do not think that the kind of lockdowns that we had would be politically acceptable again. Never say never, but people really had enough of it. However, at the same time, when there is a spike, people may have to accept some restrictions, such as mask wearing and so forth. Coordination and common ground help an awful lot, if that is the case. That is a big message from our report.

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much.

Mr Stephen Doughty MP:

Thanks for the report, Darren. One point struck me in what you said: the security of our supply chains in pharmaceuticals, PPE and other things and our geographic security on those things. That is critical going forward. I was really struck by how little capacity there was for the manufacture of vaccines in the fill-and-finish process. Of course, even with the capacity that was there, it would only take one malfunction, one fire, one collapse or one contamination of a factory or facility and suddenly you would be unable to produce vaccines or get them into the vials or whatever.

We will inevitably face another pandemic, possibly an even more serious one, and, collectively, we need to look at our geographic isolation on the edge of Europe and ensure that we have those facilities across the islands for all stages of the process, because, otherwise, we will always be reliant on things coming far distances. We were flying PPE into Wales from the Far

East, like many people were. We must have our own capacity to do these things, as well as the stocks and also that crucial bit, which is the manufacturing capability. During the pandemic, a brand-new facility was built near Oxford that has the ability to create all the different types of vaccines that we have now, and there have been huge advances in the technology, particularly the RNA vaccine processes.

We have to make sure that there is that resilience across all our islands, otherwise a pandemic will happen again and will be potentially more serious. It is a really good report. Thanks very much for it.

Ms Emma Harper MSP:

Good morning, everybody. I am a newbie to BIPA, and I am interested in the report about vaccine roll-out. I was able to hold on to my nursing registration, so I participated in vaccine roll-out as one of the team in NHS Dumfries and Galloway. We came across a lot of fake news, a lot of scepticism and a lot of folk who did not want to take the vaccine. One young Polish lady was told that she would not get pregnant if she took it. I am interested in how we will continue to address vaccine scepticism, increase uptake and look at the challenges with uptake, especially among ethnic minority people. It is really important that we provide the best evidence and best education to make sure that people are not overcome by fake news and what they see on social media.

Mr Darren Millar MS:

I will briefly respond to the points that were raised by Members. I am pleased that there has been such an interest in our report. First, when it comes to public health campaigns, as mentioned by Lord Bruce and Emma Harper, I will say this: in the first part of our inquiry, we discussed the scepticism out there and some of the conspiracy theories that were being thrown around wildly, particularly on social media, and the impact of that, with certain groups not coming forward to have the vaccine even though they were eligible and very often at high-risk.

There was very good practice in some of the jurisdictions. We took evidence from Guernsey, for example, on the work that they had done with mums-to-be and how they had overcome some of the challenges. They took a more personal approach, with health visitors and others coming alongside mums-to-be to make sure that they were properly informed about the levels of risk to them and their unborn child if they did not get themselves vaccinated or, indeed, boosted. Those are really important elements that need to be taken on board for future public health campaigns. That is particularly the case when it comes to boosters, because there appears to be a prevailing thought in some parts of our communities that the risks of COVID are over and that we do not need to get boosted any more. I know somebody who had COVID but did not have severe symptoms and who therefore thought, “I’ll be all right, Jack”. Of course, we know that it is not like that; we know that the problem with coronavirus is that it is unpredictable. It is, therefore, very important that there is a greater emphasis on reaching the unreached, if you like, through the public health campaigns that we embed in our various jurisdictions.

Stephen Doughty is quite right. Our manufacturing capacity is not where it needs to be, particularly for PPE, which can be produced very inexpensively in other places where labour costs, in particular, are lower. Our jurisdictions have to do something about that to make sure that we have access to supplies when we need them without relying in the future on what could be hostile states to provide us with those things. It is very important that the recommendations

in the reports are listened to by the Governments in our different jurisdictions and that there is some coordination of the efforts to address some of the concerns that we have raised.

Deputy Al Brouard:

Thank you very much indeed for the report, Darren. One of the things that we struggled with in our small community, as we all do in our jurisdictions, is that a small story can have a very big impact, especially when you mention death rates. One of the problems that we suffered from a little bit was the causal effect of the vaccine. It was not because you had the vaccine that your washing machine stopped working; it was because of something else. We have had that dilemma of trying to prove what was caused by the vaccine and what was not. Yellow card reporting takes a long time. That can have quite a dramatic effect in a very small area. People talked to one another, "I had the vaccine in my arm, and granny died yesterday." It is really difficult to get that message across and to try to separate fact from pure coincidence. That was one of the struggles that we had.

10.15 am

Mr Darren Millar MS:

The way in which the data was recorded in the UK is relevant. Any death within 28 days of somebody having received a positive test for COVID was attributed to COVID. That caused huge confusion amongst members of the public as to the reality of the risks associated with it. You are quite right: there needs to be better analysis of the data so that we can understand things better. The UK COVID inquiry will help, certainly on the UK side, in delving into these figures in more detail to reassure the public about the accuracy of the links between the cause of death, whether it is COVID or vaccination.

We know that these vaccines are overwhelmingly safe. The serious side effects are very limited. Where risks have been identified, as there were with the AstraZeneca vaccines for people of a certain age, action was taken to address them. There has to be commendation across the board, in EU nations and across the UK, for the speed with which those vaccines were approved and for getting them out there.

Before we close this debate and discussion, I will just put on record my appreciation of the Committee Clerks, Simon Horswell and Claudia Zelli, who helped us with the preparation of this report. We are very ably served by our Clerks, and we appreciate the work that they put in in making sure that we find high-quality evidence and witnesses for the sessions that we hold. Thank you.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much. I ask the plenary to formally adopt the report of Committee B.

Report agreed.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

I commend the members of Committees A and B and their Clerks for their work in completing their reports. The joint Clerks will arrange to send the reports to the British and Irish Governments.

COMMITTEE D — INDIGENOUS MINORITY LANGUAGES

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will now hear from the Chair of Committee D, Lord Alf Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Committee D is looking at indigenous minority languages. We started this before the pandemic. We took evidence in Wales and in Scotland, and we were due to go to Dublin to take further evidence, but the death of Her Majesty meant that we had to cancel that. We now have two dates to take evidence in Dublin in January, and then we will go to Belfast in March. We had quite a long discussion as to whether we should also go to Derry and Donegal, and, on balance, we decided to do a scoping exercise to see whether we should do that. We would then be in the area where the Gaelic language is spoken most, and it would give us a certain additional credibility if we had a chance to meet with community groups and others in the area. However, that is still open. We will decide in Dublin what to do when we go to Belfast. We have to go to Belfast, though, as we have to meet some of the decision-makers.

It is interesting. When we started this, I did not think that there were that many indigenous minority languages, but they keep coming. There are so many of them. We cannot possibly visit all the areas, so we will take written evidence on languages such as Manx, Cornish and indigenous Channel Islands languages. There are quite a lot of languages. When we produce our final report, I will give you the total, and we will see who can get nearest to guessing what the total is. There are quite a few of them. When we were in Scotland, we had Scots and Gaelic, there is Ulster Scots in Belfast and so on.

So it is quite a big subject, and it seems to have attracted more political interest as time has gone by. Yesterday, if you remember, the Minister spoke quite a bit about indigenous minority languages and the importance of the relationship between language and a sense of identity. So, that is where we are. I regret that we do not have the report yet, but we will have it in time for the next plenary meeting.

We are also looking at where we go in future inquiries. We have a shortlist of two, and we will decide when we meet in Dublin which of those we will go forward with. That will, of course, be after the Jersey plenary meeting. One of the two that we are looking at is to do with what we call “just transition”. That is a nice bit of jargon but the description is:

“a framework that encompasses a range of social interventions”,

with the aim to protect rights and secure livelihoods as economies shift to sustainable production, due to combating climate change.

“Just transition” is an interesting one, but we also have a more pressing and immediate issue, which is, of course, looking at what is happening in the areas of poverty, high energy costs and pressures on domestic households. We will decide between the two. At one point, we felt that, if we do not start until after May, that will be a long way ahead, and, maybe, looking at poverty will have gone. I am afraid that when we thought about it, we realised that poverty will not be gone by May; it will still be relevant. The Committee will decide between those two issues.

Finally, I want to thank the Clerks, Tristan Stubbs and Emma McCarron. In particular, may I say thank you to Emma McCarron, who is moving to other responsibilities within BIPA, for

the work that she has done. We are very grateful to her for what she has done for the Committee, as we are to Tristan, who continues with the Committee. I thank the members of the Committee for the work, energy and enthusiasm that they are putting in. We are all grateful for what they are doing.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Lord Dubs.

IRELAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND THE UNION, 1800-1925

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

I invite Professor Alvin Jackson, from the University of Edinburgh, to address the Assembly.

Professor Alvin Jackson (University of Edinburgh):

Thank you very much indeed, Co-Chairpersons, for your kind invitation to speak with you today. It is a very great honour to be here and to be continuing the tradition of historians addressing this Assembly, which goes back, as I understand it, a number of years.

We are approaching the end of the decade of centenaries here in Ireland, reflecting upon the events before, during and after the achievement of Irish independence in the early 1920s. Today, speaking as an Irish historian, I want to think about Ireland's experience with union before 1921 but to do so in a comparative context, thinking a bit about Scotland and Wales as well. I am trying to do the history, but I hope that there will be some contemporary resonances or linkages as well in all of this.

Ireland, Scotland and Wales have, of course, distinctive histories and relationships with England and with Britain, but the premise of my talk is that there is a sufficient basis for comparison to make that effort worthwhile. Scotland and Ireland certainly share the experience of parliamentary union. At the very least, in the period that I am thinking about, they were all united into the one complex Union state.

Given the constraints of time, there will be huge areas that I cannot cover. So the overall structure of my talk will involve considering, first of all, some of the shared limits or constraints with union across Ireland, Scotland and Wales and, secondly, the relationships between these nations and some of the central features — the bolsters or props — of the Union and the United Kingdom.

Let me make a first and very local point, which is that there are few better places than here on the Farnham estate to reflect upon Ireland's complex and difficult relationship with union and with the United Kingdom in the 19th century, as well as on that of the Scots and Welsh people.

The Maxwell family — the Lords Farnham — owned this property from the late 17th century through to the new millennium. They were originally Scots. They were closely tied up with the politics of the Irish union. They were tightly bound by politics and marriage to a critical group of landed gentry who came to combine an evangelical Protestantism with unionism and, sometimes, Orangeism. Other Cavan gentry families of that type included the Saundersons of Castle Saunderson at Belturbet, which is a few miles up the road from here. I think that the house is now the international scout centre for Ireland. Edward Saunderson (1837-1906) was,

effectively, the first leader of Irish unionism. He was very closely tied by politics and marriage to the Maxwells of Farnham.

The Farnhams and this house neatly illustrate some of the historical complexities within the Union and its support base in Ireland. The Maxwell family and their neighbours up the road — the Saundersons — were actually opponents, in part, of the Irish Act of Union in 1801 and fought to sustain the separate Irish Parliament in the late 18th century, but, across the 19th century, they were won over to unionism and became, for a time, strong supporters of Edward Carson and Ulster unionist resistance to home rule. However, for a time, they were also anti-partitionist, all-Ireland unionists, and they, effectively, broke with Belfast unionism in 1916 over the idea of a six-county/26-county partition of the island.

In case anyone here thinks that Irish unionism has been a predictable phenomenon, it is worth remembering the story of where we all are today. The Farnhams and their south Ulster allies were late-18th century Irish patriots who turned unionist but remained, for the most part, anti-partitionist. They, essentially, tailored their politics according to changing circumstances and changing ideas of their own collective interests. Unionist gunrunning was organised from here in 1913-14, and Irish unionism was led from Castle Saunderson up the road, so, to repeat my earlier thought, Farnham is an appropriate place to think about the nations of these isles and their historic relationship with the Union.

Let me turn quickly, if I may, to some of the wider points that I seek to make about the Irish, Scots and Welsh union. In the rest of my talk, I will principally discuss the varying relationships between those national communities and the Union state and unionism, with the long 19th century as my key focus. I begin by suggesting that the Irish, Scots and Welsh unions all lacked what I think the first George Bush would have called "the vision thing". The unions of the 19th century UK were originally pragmatic bargains between the English Parliament and Scots, Irish and Welsh elites — the British and Irish ascendancy elite. They were concerned with immediate commercial and military realities. Money, warfare and security were the critical contexts to union in 1706, 1707 and 1801, not elaborate, popularly articulated ideals. Other complex union states across modern Europe were in a similar position and focused on deals rather than ideals.

The unions of the UK not only lacked the "vision thing" but were associated from the beginning with a moral deficit. In Scotland, there has been a strong popular and historical tradition that suggested that the union of 1707 was carried by bribery and corruption. In Ireland, there has been an equivalent and more persistently successful tradition that has asserted that the Irish political class of 1800 had swapped the country's legislative independence for cash or personal gain. Each of those parliamentary unions of the UK, especially the Irish one, has long carried that burden of taint. The historical accuracy of the traditions in a Scots context have been frequently interrogated and debated, but, to some extent, that is less significant than the tenacity of their survival. The core point is that Britain and the UK in the 19th and 20th centuries lacked any compelling or unifying creation story.

10.30 am

The lack of Bush's "vision thing" meant, in part, that the unions were uncommemorated. In the 19th century and beyond, there was little culture of celebration of the anniversaries of the creation of Great Britain or the UK. As I said, Ireland is coming towards the end of its decade of centenaries, a protracted opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the independent Irish state and its creators. There have been state occasions, academic debates, and a mixture of the

public and the academic, such as with President Higgins's 'Machnamh' series of reflections. In the UK, it is the coronations, birthdays and jubilees of the monarch as head of the Union state that have been the focus of celebration, rather than the birthday or anniversaries of the state itself. Monarchy has been a very important unifier in complex union polities such as the United Kingdom.

There was no significant commemoration of the Irish union in 1901; not, of course, by nationalists, but not even by Irish unionists either, to my knowledge. There was some, very limited, commemoration of the various centenaries of the Scots union in 1707 — the centenary in 1807, the bicentenary in 1907, the tercentenary in 2007 — but, thinking back, for example, to 2007, there was very little indeed. Some small-scale initiatives were pushed by Gordon Brown. I am not aware of the commemoration of the anniversaries associated with the laws in Wales, the Acts of the 1530s and 1540s, which were seen by home-rule-era liberals as a kind of Act of Union. In other words, there has been no equivalent in the UK of the Easter Sunday parades here in Ireland, Independence Day in the USA, Bastille Day or whatever — no "Union Day".

The 19th-century United Kingdom did not possess a clearly unifying political identity. Historians and political scientists debate issues of national identity extensively, but we can say, in the words of the great 19th-century constitutional lawyer A V Dicey:

"The union did not originate in a sort of feeling which is now called nationalism, though it resulted in the creation of a new state of Great Britain."

We can also say that a complex popular British national identity arose largely in the wake of the union between England and Scotland in 1707, drawing strength, if we accept the arguments of the Princeton historian Linda Colley, from Protestantism, the monarchy and foreign wars. That Britishness had been largely established and defined well before the union with Ireland in 1801. Moreover, back in the 18th century, Britishness had been defined largely in opposition to a Catholic, continental — primarily a French — "other". Yet, after 1801, Britishness and the United Kingdom state somehow had to accommodate this "other", at least in its Irish formulation. There was thus, from the beginning, it seems to me, a tension between the United Kingdom state and its supposedly unifying political identity.

The Union was associated with, and originally underpinned by, religion — Protestantism. Let me take that point a wee bit further. The argument for the Scottish union in 1707 was associated with a Protestant monarchy — the Hanoverian monarchy — and was bolstered by contemporary guarantees given to the Kirk —the Church of Scotland. In Ireland, union became effectively associated with Protestant ascendancy in 1801, in the context of the absence of a Catholic emancipation that had been promised as part of the Union deal. Union in 1801 established not just a single London Parliament but a single, overarching Union Church — the united Anglican Church of England and Ireland.

A key point here is that, in Scotland and Wales, union was swiftly associated with the needs of the majority faith, whereas in Ireland, given that rejection of emancipation — Catholic civil rights — in 1800, the reverse was true. Linked with that has been the fact that the knock-on political structure of 19th-century Ireland increasingly largely coincided with religious division — Protestant-unionist and Catholic-nationalist — whereas, in Scotland and Wales, the party structure largely came to transcend the religious divide.

OK. Why, then, has the Union survived for as long as it has in Wales and in Scotland? Why did it ultimately fail for most of Ireland and the Irish, though surviving even in Ireland for 120

years or so? How did the different national identities of these islands relate to the central institutions of the Union state across the 19th century? Why did some of those unifiers work in Scotland and Wales and not in Ireland? Now, those are indeed big questions for a Tuesday morning *[Laughter]*, and I can only begin to attempt a very few answers today. Let me give it a go, however. For the rest of my talk, I will focus on some of the props of union and their working across these islands.

To take up the point about political parties: the Union was promoted for most of the 19th and 20th centuries by political parties dedicated to its survival: Irish conservatives; conservatism in Scotland and Wales; liberals in Ireland, Scotland and Wales until the 1870s-1880s; and Labour in Scotland and Wales from at least the mid-20th century onwards. A key point about the small "u" unionist parties in Scotland and Wales was that they long functioned credibly as vehicles for the expression of Scottish and Welsh patriotic feeling. Both Labour and conservatism in Scotland and Wales may have been unionist, but they were each also deeply patriotic in terms of their hinterlands. By contrast, unionism in Ireland in the 19th and early 20th centuries never successfully gained a purchase on Irish patriotism. To express that another way: the Scots and Welsh unions were supported by a civic unionism that transcended a variety of social and religious divisions, while unionism in Ireland struggled in the 19th century to articulate a strong civic dimension.

Economic growth clearly helped to underpin pragmatic support for the union between England, Scotland and Wales in the 18th century and afterwards. The economic plight of the Scots in the 1690s and the aftermath of the Darien adventure in Panama in the late 1690s provided arguments for union in 1706-07. The failure of union in the short term to effect economic improvement in Scotland fed into some disillusionment, but, in the end, Scotland gained easier access to English capital and English markets. The substantial growth of the Scots economy and of urban Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries was, on the whole, credited by Scots to union. Wales similarly prospered in tandem with the industrial growth of 18th and 19th century Britain. Scotland had its central belt powerhousing industrial growth. Wales had, for heavy industry, south Wales and the so-called imperial Rhondda.

Those arguments did not work in the same way for Ireland, where, outside of the north-east of the island, the Union did not bring spectacular economic gain. Indeed, it brought emphatically the reverse, given the onset of cataclysmic famine between 1845 and the early 1850s. Essentially, for most of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Union appeared to bring economic gain for Wales and Scotland but, at best, only for a part of Ireland — the north-east; eastern Ulster. In fact, where the Union and economic growth were linked until the early 20th century for Wales and Scotland, the Union was linked with famine and an alien landed class for the Irish for much of the era of the Union, with only eastern Ulster as an exception.

Closely linked with this is empire. Empire has been seen by many over the years, most polemically and directly by the Scots radical Tom Nairn, as a central if now redundant prop or bolster of the Union. Scots gained full commercial access to England's overseas empire after 1707. The growth of the British Empire across the 18th and 19th centuries gave Scots economic and professional opportunities. However, empire worked differently for Ireland and the Irish. Ireland joined in a Union with Great Britain when the definition and growth of the British Empire were already well under way, so the Irish were catching up with empire in a way that the Scots were not. The Irish had a stronger case than the Scots and Welsh for being seen as victims of an internal colonialism, not least given the history of conquest and colonisation on the island. The structures of government in Ireland also had a colonial-style inflection. Ireland, unlike Scotland or Wales but like India, had its viceroy — its Lord Lieutenant — in Dublin.

There is a flip side to this, and that is that a great deal of historical research has underlined the extensive Irish participation — Protestant and Catholic — in empire in the 19th century. That participation was through Irish service in the Crown forces, in colonial Administrations, through the Churches, not least the Catholic Church, and in civil society. In the end, empire bound Wales to the Union because it facilitated, certainly early 20th-century Welsh liberals argued, the exercise of a distinctive Welshness on a global stage. Empire worked for Wales, so it was said, because it identified, defined and liberated Welshness. Indeed, on the eve of the First World War, Welsh patriots like Gwilym Griffith echoed and elaborated on the Irish Home Ruler John Redmond in his attempt to locate home rule within a specific imperial framework. Griffith argued that Welsh home rule was required, not because the Welsh hated Britain and Britishness and empire but because the Welsh had contributed so extensively to empire. In Ireland, John Redmond saw nationality in pretty much that same relationship with an imperial Britishness.

Monarchy has been a prop of union, and the Crown forces have been props of union. I mentioned the centrality of monarchy earlier. Thinking very quickly about Ireland and those issues, there was the late Queen Elizabeth's highly successful visit to Ireland in May 2011. Public reflection in Ireland recently at the time of her death suggests that the relationship between the Irish and the British monarchy is more complicated than might otherwise superficially have been thought. Irish republicanism was defined in the 1790s and has been sustained over the years through key bodies such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood from the 1850s onwards. The idea of monarchy has also been firmly embedded within different Catholic, Gaelic and Jacobite traditions in Ireland.

There is evidence for the period up to the Home Rule era to suggest that the monarchy might have served as a mediating force between Catholic Ireland and the Union state. Monarchy elsewhere in Europe, in other complex union polities, has fulfilled that kind of role, such as, for example, in central Europe with the Habsburgs.

10.45 am

There is evidence to suggest that the monarchy retained reasonable traction with many Irish people until the eve of the First World War. John Redmond, the Irish home rule leader, certainly had a good relationship with George V, and, in my view, a far better relationship with George V than did Edward Carson. Edward Carson, the slick Dublin lawyer, had very little basis of communication with George V. John Redmond, the tweedy country squire, got on broadly like a house on fire. Other constitutional nationalists or patriots, dating back to at least Daniel O'Connell, enjoyed similarly good relations with the Crown. Paradoxically, O'Connell's great vehicle for repeal of the Act of Union was the Loyal National Repeal Association.

In fact, maybe the visit of 2011 underlines in some ways that the British monarchy did not make the same sustained effort with Ireland as it did with Scotland. There were indeed occasional successful royal tours in Ireland in the union period but, critically, there was no permanent royal residence in Ireland like Balmoral or Holyrood Palace in Scotland. There was therefore no pattern of annual visitations. Queen Victoria resolutely resisted the idea of an Irish official residence. There was no sustained royal identification with Irish culture in the same way that there was with the Scots. There was no Irish equivalent of Queen Victoria's bestselling publication, her 'Highland Journals' from the 1860s. There was no Irish equivalent of her embrace of the tartan of the Kirk. There was no Hibernian John Brown. In fact, the monarch, as supreme governor of the Church of England, always had a more sympathetic relationship with the Church of Scotland than with either Roman Catholicism or Welsh Nonconformity.

In the end, however, the Scots and the Welsh had ownership over the British monarchy, much more so than the Irish. Welsh patriots in the 19th century were fond of emphasising the Welsh origins of the Tudor dynasty. The increasing ceremonial around the idea of the Princes of Wales, reinvented with the investiture at Caernarfon in 1911, underpinned some of that connectivity. However, the distance between Ireland and monarchy was always much greater.

The Crown forces, especially the army, served to bind Scots to the cause of monarchy and union across this period. Both the Scots and the Irish served disproportionately in the army in the 19th century. Both were distinctive and disproportionate presences in the 19th century and early 20th century British Army. In 1830, it is frequently forgotten, the Irish comprised 42% of the British Army's ranks at a time when they were one third of the UK population. However, the Scottish military tradition was much more comprehensively celebrated in the Victorian army than its Irish counterpart. The standard images and icons of Victorian military prowess frequently embodied Highland rather than Irish or Welsh imagery.

There is a related issue in all of this in terms of bolsters or props of union, and that is one defined by my late colleague, the Edinburgh sociologist David McCrone, who, thinking of the great global struggles of the 20th century – the First and Second World Wars – talked about war and welfare as being twin bolsters of union. Let me turn very quickly to think about welfare and its involvement with union.

Both in Ireland and in Scotland and Wales, the size and the embrace of the Union state were growing across the 19th and 20th centuries, but only Scotland and Wales experienced the full impact of those two binding agents of the United Kingdom – in the 20th century, at any rate — nationalisation and social welfare. The Union state expanded significantly from the late 19th century onwards, with an enlarged bureaucracy and ever greater pressures towards official interference, regularity and uniformity in the lives of its citizens. One critical aspect of that was uniform social welfare provision, building up from the liberal legislative experiments of the early 20th century in the field of old age pensions, National Insurance and support for the unemployed and developing under Attlee and other Labour Governments in the second half of the 20th century.

If one of the binding agents of union was a bigger state, then a critical aspect of this bigger state was a uniform system of welfare support applied throughout the United Kingdom. In effect, that meant, in conjunction with beneficial funding formulae, the sponsorship of the richer areas of the union for those with fewer resources and greater poverty, such as, by the mid-20th century, Scotland and Wales. There seems little doubt that this provision helped to ease a range of political and economic difficulties and to supply arguments for the union as having a redistributive function and, indeed, purpose — in fact, to borrow the tag of a recent Prime Minister, a version of levelling up.

However, welfare provision, in effect, came too late in the history of the Irish union to have an effect on its survival. Indeed, one of the central criticisms of the Irish union in the 19th century was that it failed to direct resources from the richest areas of the UK, particularly to the crisis-stricken Ireland of the Great Famine period. In other words, the big state, and welfare support in particular, served as an argument for union in Scotland and Wales but not for Ireland and the Irish.

The last of my substantive points before trying to draw the threads of this to a conclusion is the idea of the flexibility of union. The union, I suggest, was relatively flexible. It was, by and large, incomplete, and it therefore offered, as a consequence, some space for at least Scots and

Welsh patriotism. One of my predecessors at the University of Edinburgh, a man called Richard Lodge, argued a hundred years ago that the Scots union – these are his words – was:

"at its origin illogical, and will probably be illogical at its end. It may well be that this is the secret of its success."

The success certainly of the union of England and Scotland in the 19th century arose partly from the fact that it was a parliamentary and fiscal union, but it was not a judicial, educational or religious union. The educational, judicial and religious establishments in Edinburgh survived in 1707, and they provided a vehicle for Scottish national pride within the framework of union. So the Scots union, in essence, was able for long to embrace Scottish patriotism, but the Irish union largely did not. After the Irish union, distinctive Irish administrative and government institutions remained, but, in the absence of full Catholic civil rights, they continued for long in the hands of the Irish Protestant landed elite: people like the Maxwells and the Lords Farnham of this house. They therefore did not wholly function as a medium of embrace for the mass of the Irish people. Institutional focuses for patriotic feeling still existed in Scotland, where it was still possible to participate fully within the Union state, but, in Ireland, that was not the case.

So, by way of conclusion, what then were the differences between the Irish and the Scots and Welsh in their relationship with England, Britain and union in the 19th century and afterwards? Let me offer some final parting thoughts.

First, as I said at the beginning, Farnham is not just a nice hotel, although it is certainly a nice hotel. It is one of a handful of Irish houses which, by nature of their history and location, fervently invite reflection on the historic Irish interrelationship with the union. This house stands on some of the great fault lines of modern Irish history.

Secondly, the Irish union ended in 1921, certainly for the south and west of the island. That ending came for many reasons. Over the past 10 years, others have reflected on the positive expressions of a national movement in the era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and on the achievements of that movement. My concern today, given the spread of you as an audience, has been to think about the comparative relationships with union. Indeed, some of the failings of the Irish union were shared by Scotland and Wales: the lack of the vision thing and of a compelling birth narrative, and the issue of moral deficit. Some failings were shared and some were not.

Moreover, Ireland could not and did not always buy into many of the conventional props of union which were, at that time, otherwise so significant for the Scots and Welsh. Ireland was not fully embraced by the central identity that was associated with UK Britishness. The Scottish and Welsh Unions survived because they were, in fact, able to contain and represent much Scottish and Welsh patriotic feeling. The Irish union did not work in the same way for Irish patriots. Ireland had less ownership of the union monarchy than the Scots and Welsh. It had a more ambiguous relationship with empire. It had fewer economic gains from empire. Indeed, the union period was overshadowed by an economic and social cataclysm, the Great Famine. Welfare support across the union arrived too late to be a unifying force.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Irish home rule leader, John Redmond, tried to tweak some of those relationships in association with his reimagining of Irish home rule in the years before the First World War, but the war intervened and his pitch failed dramatically. It still took the First World War, however, to create the circumstances for the death of the Irish union. The war dramatically accelerated the differences that I have been describing and widened the

gap between the experience of most Irish people on the one hand and Scots and Welsh people on the other.

To summarise, in the end, the Scots and Welsh had significant ownership of the 19th century Union state, but the Irish did not. Outside the north, their grip on union was slighter. For most of them, it was, ultimately, easy to let go in 1921. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Alvin, thank you very much for that insightful and thoughtful overview of relationships across these islands over the past hundreds of years. All of us in this room are well aware that those relationships are complex, but I think that, in your contribution and address this morning, you have added a new tier for our consideration. It is very much appreciated.

Unfortunately, we are running a bit behind schedule, and people have commitments in Parliament later today. If people have comments or questions for Alvin, I ask that they be as brief as possible, please.

11.00 am

Ms Annabelle Ewing MSP:

Thank you very much for that very interesting overview. I will be careful because I am here representing the Scottish Parliament, as Deputy Presiding Officer, and not wearing my party-political hat. I was interested in your reference to the coming about of the Act of Union in Scotland. You said that it is reported to have come about through bribery, in effect. Can you clarify what you meant by that phraseology? Of course, it is also reported that, when the proclamation was made on the result of the vote and the decision of the Scottish Parliament, the bells of St Giles' Cathedral rang out with the tune, 'Why Should I Be So Sad On My Wedding Day'.

Professor Alvin Jackson:

Thank you. It is a great question. My hesitation reflects that, on the whole, historians identify a bit of blue water between the circumstances of the Scottish union and the Irish union. Each of these historiographies is about as thoroughly politicised as party divisions within any of your respective Parliaments. However, on the whole, the Irish union is seen as a much more egregious example of the application of official patronage and pressure, which goes further beyond the norms of the era — far beyond the norms of the era given the amount of money dispensed — than the Scottish counterpart at the beginning of the 18th century. There is no doubt whatsoever that a variety of Scottish magnates emerged wealthier and more enhanced in their social standing. Look at some of the — dare I say it? — Scottish dukedoms from the period. However, transactional politics were normative across the 18th century. What distinguishes the Irish Union is that those went beyond the bounds of the normal.

Mr Seán Crowe TD:

We cannot underestimate the impact of the catastrophe of the Great Hunger. It dominated the lives of people right into the 1900s. Its impact is still just a generation away. It changed forever many Irish people's relationship with the British Crown. It impacted on Irish people who were forced to leave these shores. It impacted on politics in the US and in Canada, where there was the possible Fenian invasion. It was the big issue of that period. To this day, people do not

really understand the impact that it had on the people at the time. In Ireland today, we do not grasp the significance of that. The Irish people spread all over the world — in Australia, Canada or wherever — have a greater sense of it than people in Ireland. I do not know if that is due to a guilt complex or whatever. The Great Hunger changed, utterly, the relationship between Ireland and Britain.

Professor Alvin Jackson:

I agree. The Great Famine's impact on Irish society and culture was utterly devastating. It is not an exaggeration to talk about the essential removal of a class of people — landless labourers and cottiers — in the country. Decimation does not begin to describe the impact of the famine on those in the cottier class, who were the poorest in Irish society. So much else in Ireland, and so much of the shaping of our understanding of modern Irish society and politics, dates from that period. As you rightly say, it created a degree of bitterness and resentment that had not been there before. It did not create the Irish republican ideal, which, as we know, dates from the 1790s. It did not create a revolutionary nationalism, but it certainly embittered a much wider swathe of Irish people.

Historians always like to think about contingencies, so I will make a mild suggestion to you. Certainly, in 1914, the vision associated with Redmond and Redmondism was still for a limited form of legislative autonomy for Ireland, and that is what served as a focal point for mainstream Irish nationalism at that time. Even Pádraig Pearse signed up momentarily to the euphoria of Redmond's apparent — that was, of course, the great problem — victory over home rule, but the war speedily demonstrated how feeble the foundations of all of that were.

Mr Darren Millar MS:

I was very interested in your presentation, in particular your analysis of Wales's role in the Union. You referred to the differences in denominations and different approaches. Obviously, Wales has a very strong Nonconformist history. I want to ask you about the impact of the various revival movements in Wales and whether you think that they had a positive or negative impact on the Welsh psyche in terms of its attitude towards the Union. Obviously, the period that you have been talking about was particularly endowed, if you like, with revivals across the nation of Wales, including the national revival in 1904. To what extent do you think that that affected the mood?

Professor Alvin Jackson:

Thank you very much for your very interesting question. On the whole, Nonconformity, including revivalist Nonconformity, acted subtly as a bolster for the Union, because Nonconformity was part of a shared experience across these islands and, indeed, across much of the north Atlantic world. You referred to the 1904 revival. That spilled over into the North of Ireland where, of course, evangelical Protestantism is, culturally and politically, a very significant phenomenon. The very example that you chose illustrates that because of its overflow effects and, more generally, because of the intercommunication between Welsh Nonconformists and Irish and Ulster unionist politicians rooted in evangelical Protestantism. That interchange is hugely significant for the politics of the Union. As a throwaway remark, I will simply note that the late Lord Bannside had part of his religious education in Wales. You will see that if you look at his biography. That further illustrates those lines of intercommunication, binding evangelical religious faith and unionism across the two islands.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Thank you very much. It is an interesting debate on which we spend could probably spend a lot more hours. The role that geography played was not hinted at. As well as the different times that union happened in the islands, geography played a substantial part and should not be overlooked. The geography of the island allowed the population of Ireland to see themselves as separate, never mind language and all of the other traits that make up a nation, nationhood or identity.

Another issue is the influence of Europe and European thinking, especially in the 18th century. There was still a lot of European influence in that period. We have seen a reflection of that downstairs with the Wine Goose bar, but there were the wild geese. There was the influence of Irish nobility who had gone to France or Spain. Deputy Crowe mentioned the famine. At that stage, money and influence was coming back. Those who had money went to France for their education and came back to Ireland with ideas. I do not know that much about Scottish or Welsh history and whether there was the same amount of influence there. Priests who were trained on the continent came back with different ideas and visions. That is especially important because of the role that the Catholic Church played, in particular around the west coast where they had the Irish language. There are other traits. As I said, you could probably spend hours talking about it, but those are important issues in the debate.

Professor Alvin Jackson:

Indeed. You highlighted the broad issue of geography and the specific issue of European interconnectivity. As you rightly say, and as you know as well as I do, we could spend hours on each of those respective themes. I will begin with geography. In critiquing Redmondite and home rule politics on the eve of the First World War, my late friend Ronan Fanning made the point that Redmond — and, indeed, maybe the treaty-ites subsequently — essentially made the mistake of seeing Ireland as a Canada or Australia, overlooking the fact that Canadian autonomy was substantially achievable given the distances involved. You mentioned the issue of distance. I throw that out as a consideration.

Other geographical or politico-cum-geographical issues that come to mind include the way in which union polities such as the United Kingdom function. A great part of their functionality relates to geography and the relationship between the size of the different components. An overwhelmingly pre-eminent partner — such as England in the United Kingdom or, at that same time, Austria and Hungary in Austria-Hungary — will dominate and overshadow smaller polities within the union embrace. We have to think about what union claims to do and what actually turns out to be the case given the power differentials in those relationships.

Lastly, you broached the issue of Europe, and you raised the Scottish issue. Those distinctive interconnections apply to Scotland as they do to Ireland. Sixteenth-century Scotland had intercommunication with the Netherlands, the Low Lands and, in particular, what has sometimes been called a "Calvinist International", which sidestepped England and the English Reformation and looked to Dutch trading, educational and cultural opportunities beyond the English, in the same way that Catholic Ireland had its interconnections with Catholic Europe, France and, in particular, Habsburg Europe. We could indeed speak for much longer about this.

11.15 am

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, Alvin. Again, unfortunately, time has caught up with us. On behalf of my Co-Chair, Karen, and all our colleagues in the Assembly, I wish to thank you most sincerely for your very insightful contribution this morning.

The sitting was suspended at 11.16 am

The sitting was resumed at 11.32 am.

TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE IN IRELAND

The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, we will resume. Thank you for your promptness in returning. I am sure that others will join you. I now invite Professor John FitzGerald, adjunct professor at Trinity College Dublin and member of the Climate Change Advisory Council, to address the Assembly. This session is very timely given the discussions that we have had over the last couple of days about how we are all very interested, on behalf of our constituents, in this important issue.

Professor John FitzGerald (Climate Change Advisory Council):

Thank you very much. We are all concerned about how we tackle climate change. It is one area where it is important to learn from what other countries do, and we have learned from the United Kingdom's experience. I have circulated two slides. Ireland has been less successful than the United Kingdom. In the UK, greenhouse gas emissions per head of population have fallen pretty continuously over the past 30 years. In Ireland, we have been less successful. While Northern Ireland has been a bit more successful than the Republic, it has also been a laggard in tackling climate change. On the second slide, I show some of the reasons, one of which is that agriculture, North and South, is a problem. However, unless you ask questions about agriculture, I do not want to get lost in methane emissions this morning.

There are two interesting areas, one of which is residential emissions. Emissions per household in Ireland, North and South, are substantially higher than those in Britain, and that is because, in Britain, most heating is produced from gas. In the Republic and in Northern Ireland, an awful lot is from kerosene, which is more expensive and much more polluting under normal circumstances. That leaves rural Ireland and a lot of Northern Ireland less affected by the current gas crisis.

The other area is transport, emissions from which are also higher per head in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. There is a much less dense population. Belfast was run down, pushing population out of Belfast. In Ireland, population is more centralised in Dublin and Cork. One of the planning issues is to try to create a denser development around the cities. From a climate change point of view, that will be better. In London, you have good public transport that delivers lower emissions. That is just some background.

We have common objectives on decarbonising, and, in Ireland, the current Government have upped the ante by planning to cut emissions by 50% over this decade. That is the objective. Northern Ireland had previously not introduced legislation. Our sister body, the Climate Change Committee in Britain, which also covers Northern Ireland, was pretty critical of things, but new legislation has been passed that expresses a greater ambition to join in meeting the joint UK target on dramatically reducing emissions and reaching net zero by 2050. You can

introduce legislation on targets, but both jurisdictions are failing to deliver the policies. The policies are not in place to ensure that we meet our targets.

I will say something on electricity. The success of Great Britain — not the United Kingdom, but Great Britain — in reducing electricity emissions is quite striking. One of the reasons for that is that, in Great Britain, you introduced a tax on emissions because the EU emissions trading system was not making the price high enough to drive out coal. You raised that tax. It is interesting that, in March 2018, the French Government tried to put a coalition of countries together — Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, and also including the United Kingdom — to basically introduce that UK approach to north-western Europe. It did not go ahead because the Germans vetoed it, but it was interesting that the United Kingdom was recognised as having been a leader on that, despite what was happening in the background.

On this island, we have a single electricity market, which began in 2007. It was designed to reduce costs, increase security and reduce emissions in a more efficient system. The progress in decarbonising is therefore closely linked, North and South, and has been quite successful in the last decade. In Ireland, North and South, there has been a major penetration of renewables, moving towards 40%; we both need to reach 80% renewable electricity by 2030. What has been interesting, in the experience of the Republic, is that the expansion of renewables has reduced the cost for consumers. While there is a subsidy, the mechanism that was used in the Republic was more effective. The subsidy was not very large, and the reduction in the price when the wind blew has more than offset the subsidy, so the people of the Republic are better off as a result of decarbonising. That is an interesting example of a win-win situation. It may become a bit more costly when we move to 80%, but having a market mechanism that will deliver this efficiently is important.

The failure to deliver —. I was on the Northern Ireland Authority for Energy Regulation 15 years ago. I was one of the team from Northern Ireland that was negotiating the all-island electricity market. One of the conditions in that negotiation was that we would build more wires on this island to connect the two systems. That has still not been delivered. In the first decade, it was the Republic's planning laws that held things up, and now it is Northern Ireland. The research shows that that means that there are higher emissions on this island, that it costs the consumers, North and South, more and that, in Northern Ireland in particular, it makes for a more insecure electricity system. Delivering on the wires would make the system work and help to decarbonise this island.

The current priority for those of us on these islands and in Europe as a whole is the security issue. The current crisis in Europe, particularly in relation to gas, is that we are burning more coal on these islands and across Europe. That is bad for climate change. In the longer term, however, it shows that there is a need to decarbonise our systems with renewables, which come for free and neither Putin nor anybody else can interfere with the sun shining or the wind blowing. Also, the rise in the gas price is equivalent to a carbon tax of €700 a tonne, and that will really drive people, companies, households and Governments to make changes, which, in the long term, will help us to decarbonise.

The security of the gas supply is important. Something that people do not talk about in the Republic — it was redacted from a recent report on security by the Department — is concerns about UK policy regarding the security of gas supply. In 1947, Manny Shinwell, the then Labour Minister for Energy, cut off coal supplies to the Republic, leaving us to freeze that winter. There is a concern that, because the bulk of our gas supplies come through the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom could affect us when securing its own supplies. The experience

of this summer, however, has been that the United Kingdom has exported gas from its liquified natural gas (LNG) plants to the rest of Europe, and it has consistently exported electricity to France. If the United Kingdom had chopped off the exports, the prices would have been lower in the United Kingdom. That suggests that we can probably rely on supplies from Britain in the future, as we have in the past. That has, however, been a concern.

The second area of concern that the current crisis has shown up is inadequate generation capacity on this island. The market was changed in 2017, ironically because of EU requirements to allow us to trade more effectively with Great Britain, and there was a problem that trade in electricity was not happening in an efficient manner. Until then, there was a payment for each megawatt of capacity that was on the system, which delivered adequate capacity. It moved to an auctioning system, which has not worked. One of the reasons for the move was that it was going to save money, and, in particular, the Northern Ireland authorities wanted to save money for consumers in the short run. The consequence is that we do not have adequate generation capacity on the island, and that is a concern. It means that we will burn more coal, North and South, and that emissions will be higher. So, there is an issue, and if we are going to electrify heating and transport on this island, we need a reliable electricity supply.

This is not just an Irish problem, and it is not just a British problem. It is a Europe-wide problem. The electricity market in Great Britain has not worked for the last decade, and there have been a series of sticking-plaster solutions. It is not working well in Ireland, and it is certainly not working well in the rest of Europe. We need to change where we pay for it. If you are moving to a renewables system, where it is all the capital cost of solar power or windmills, you need to pay for capacity. You also need to pay for flexibility, because when the wind does not blow, you need a flexible system. The way that we remunerate the electricity markets in Europe has to change for a renewables world. In order to make it work effectively on this island, it is important that in Great Britain and in the rest of the EU, there is a degree of consistency in how we reform the electricity markets if we are to electrify heating and transport in a reliable way for the future.

In order to tackle the current crisis and climate change, it is important to encourage energy efficiency and long-term decarbonisation. The IMF set out how Governments should approach insulating their households from the full effects of price rises. The best way is to target support for the most needy households, and that is one of the things that the Government here have done through fuel allowances and a number of other measures. A substantial amount of the money goes directly on supporting those who are on low incomes and who spend a much higher share of their budget on energy.

The second-best way is to pay the same to everyone, and that is the second option adopted by the Government here, where the same amount is paid to every household to knock off their electricity bill. You do not end up paying more to those who are on the highest incomes, and it retains the incentive cut to be energy efficient. If you consume more electricity, you are going to have to pay an awful lot for those additional units. The incentives to decarbonise are there for households.

The least effective method is capping bills. I note that the new Government are likely to look at the current measure, which is very expensive and weakens the incentive to decarbonise for households and companies. The Government are going to look at that measure in six months' time.

11.45 am

Finally, I will turn to the macroeconomic significance of supports. We in Ireland, you in Great Britain and those across the EU were three percentage points worse off in national income, so it is a question of how we distribute those costs. The estimates, certainly for this island and, I think, for Great Britain and for much of the rest of the developed world, are that it will cost us 3% of national income to tackle climate change. That is 3% that we could spend on other things over the coming decade. It is a challenge for the legislatures across Europe and these islands to legislate for higher taxes to fund the very substantial investment that needs to take place.

Some of that investment will be done by the private sector, and if the gas price were to remain where it is today, households would be incentivised to change. However, if you look at the UK Climate Change Committee's estimates for Great Britain and Northern Ireland, you will see that the really expensive element, if we are going to decarbonise, is the cost for households. At a normal gas price, or what was previously normal, it would not pay you to decarbonise. In the recent Budget in the Republic, there was a very substantial provision of funds to help households to decarbonise. In Northern Ireland, unless there is substantial additional support, households will not take the measures that are necessary. There is a likely cost for Governments across the developed world if we are serious about tackling climate change.

Before I finish, I want to touch on two areas: energy saving and efficiency; and the challenges that we jointly face. First, it is about replacing the revenue that Governments receive from fossil-fuelled vehicles. You have excise tax, motor vehicle duties and a whole range of things. We had a seminar on that when the person in the Treasury who deals with it came over. Governments will have to replace that revenue and maintain the incentives to move to electrifying transport. How we do that may require some degree of coordination. For example, if you have a charge per kilometre travelled and a car from the Republic travels through the North, how do those people pay for the distance that they have travelled in the North and vice versa? How we replace the current revenue with, for example, congestion charges — that may be easier in London, Manchester, Dublin or Belfast — or with technology that is fitted to cars to raise the revenue, is something that the Treasury and the Department of Finance are looking at here. It would be better if there were a degree of coordination on that, because cars drive across borders on these islands and beyond.

The second area is retrofitting homes, which I mentioned. Until the current crisis, it was not economical, and Governments will face a significant bill to fund it over the coming decade. It is about not just price, however, but convenience and the capacity of the building industry. All those are issues across the United Kingdom and in the Republic. I will not say that it almost caused divorce, but, when I did a job in my house — it was me who was driving the job — the disruption to my household, when I had no kitchen for a month, drove me mad, although my wife was much more tolerant. It is about those issues. How do you help people? It is not just about the price; it is about other policies to help households and companies to decarbonise.

There is not a single right answer. Experiments are carried out in different jurisdictions. Scotland has somewhat different policies from England, as does Northern Ireland. It is about learning from each other in that regard. Households are rather similar in how they react across these islands. We are not all that different, so finding a solution that works in Wales could well work in Ireland or Northern Ireland. It is an area of common interest.

The final area is agriculture. There are common challenges in Northern Ireland and the Republic in particular that do not really apply across the United Kingdom. In the long term, the solution will probably be partly technological whereby there are feed additives that can dramatically reduce methane emissions from cattle, but that will be for 2040 not 2030. To meet

our targets for 2030, there has to be substantial change, and one of the obstacles to change, certainly in the Republic, has been that there is a block on farmers planting trees and shifting land from cattle to actually growing trees, which suck carbon out of the atmosphere. The failure to deal with those obstacles in the Republic is a further barrier because, potentially, a major part of the solution in the Republic, where there is very little woodland, is to move towards a more UK-like coverage of woodland. That would suck carbon out of the atmosphere.

Finally, I welcome the announcement yesterday of a joint research programme involving the British Government. Edwin Poots announced for Northern Ireland and Minister Simon Harris announced for the Republic a joint programme on research on centres of excellence in two areas, one of which is tackling climate change. The need to develop key technologies is really important. Somewhere in the agriculture area, very interesting work is being done in Armagh on how planting trees in pasture is good for climate. Work is being done by a Northern Ireland company called Devenish, and the research is being done in the Republic.

So, in the agriculture area, work is ongoing, but it is not just about agriculture. We need further research on renewables, hydrogen and a whole range of areas to find solutions that will allow us to maintain something like our current standard of living and to decarbonise. Asking us to go back to the 19th century is just not going to happen. We have to find ways of decarbonising while maintaining broadly the kind of standard of living that people want and expect.

The research also needs to understand how people behave. It is not just about engineers, and it is interesting that the research in the Republic shows that engineers say, "If you insulate a building and do the following, you are going to reduce energy consumption by x". Actually, you do not. Households consume a lot more energy than the engineers say, so it is about understanding why and how and understanding how people will respond. You need the price to be right, but that is only a beginning with retrofitting. We have a carbon tax now that is approaching between €40 and €50 a tonne over the coming year. That aims to incentivise people, but just getting the price right is not enough. If you do not get the price right and tell people that it is going to save them money, you are going nowhere. Just saving you money, even if it saves you a lot of money, is not enough. You have to find other methods. So, the research needs to look at how we behave and not just at engineering solutions.

Finally, we need tools for the analysis of climate change. It is interesting that the model that is used by the CCC in Britain to look at the United Kingdom and the different nations is a very similar model to the one that was developed in University College, Cork for the Republic. Those are the tools that we need, so I really welcome this promotion of joint research, which will benefit us all. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you very much, Professor Fitzgerald. That was incredibly inspiring, and it really brought home the challenges that we all face in energy security and decarbonising. It is probably worth saying that a vote on fracking was the thing that brought down the last Prime Minister, so it really is one of those things that is incredibly controversial for policymakers around the world.

Mr Maurice Bradley MLA:

Thank you very much, Professor, for your presentation. I represent a very rural community, and I am very worried about you not wanting to discuss methane, but we will drop it there. You mentioned higher taxes, but to me the most important thing that we can do is speed up the

planning legislation in order to allow renewable energy sources and firms that wish to pursue that route greater flexibility in getting projects up and running. That is a major one, and it is not just wind, it is solar, hydro and hydrogen, especially in Northern Ireland where hydrogen energy is being looked at. Have you any thoughts on that?

Professor John Fitzgerald

I could not agree with you more that planning is a huge obstacle. It is the obstacle to the wires connecting North and South; it is the obstacle to onshore wind; it is the obstacle to offshore wind; and it is the obstacle to forestry. It is a really big problem, and it is one that the just recently past British Government talked about addressing. We need to take that seriously on this island because, of course, Northern Ireland's planning system works differently from the system in England. I think that that is really important.

Hydrogen is likely to be part of the solution, but we do not know exactly what part. One of the concerns is this: if Ireland invests heavily in offshore wind to make hydrogen, it could turn out to be more profitable to build wires to France or Britain for export. It is more likely to be France than Britain because the wind blows at the same time on these islands, unfortunately. You might lose money on hydrogen because the wires to France could make more money. So, it is experimental. A very good study was done for the Scottish Government on how best to use hydrogen. I was on the panel that advised the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland on its energy strategy. One of the benefits of being on that panel was that I learned about what was happening elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The Scottish study looks at the best usage of hydrogen, and it is probably best used to balance the power system rather than in heating homes. However, this is at an initial stage, and we need more research because, whatever the different solutions may be, huge sums of money will be invested. A Government could have a stranded asset because it has taken on a huge liability and does not get the money back. We need to suss this out better. It is like Betamax and VHS, if any of you are of an age to remember videotape recorders. The best technology did not win; it was the one that got there first. We need some more work on hydrogen. Hydrogen will be part of the solution, but we do not know exactly what part of the solution yet.

Mr Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:

Following on from that debate, another big debate is on how to store the energy created by wind and whether it is green energy. In the past, there was the Spirit of Ireland concept. The concept did not go anywhere because of the investment that was required to use the energy from dammed fjords to pump water. That water would be used to create a constant that could be used to create electricity. It was a huge undertaking at a huge cost, but science has not yet helped us to know how to store that energy cheaply.

My question is on grants for businesses to ensure that they play a bigger role in retrofitting — it may be a grant or loan — and a business would get a reduced payment based on the energy that it puts into the grid. In Ireland, and Britain is the same, there is warehousing that has flat roofs, and that is an unutilised space. That falls into the debate in Ireland — I do not know about the debate in England, Scotland or Wales — on the energy usage of data centres. For example, a business that has been very successful in reducing its reliance on electricity to some degree is TG4. The TG4 building is in Connemara on the west coast. It does not use wind; it uses solar and has changed lightbulbs and so on to improve efficiency. It is a TV station that has reduced its electricity consumption by two thirds. It is also planning to build a small solar

farm with its own resources to increase that production. If other businesses could be encouraged to do that, it would help and maybe accelerate the use of solar by businesses in that area, rather than their relying on the major electricity generators.

Professor John FitzGerald:

On storage, for three weeks in January 2010, high pressure over these islands meant that the temperature fell below zero, and the wind did not blow. The problem is that you cannot store three weeks of energy in batteries or in pump storage. That is why you need hydrogen, potentially, but storing three weeks of energy in hydrogen is difficult, so, for the moment, finding long-term solutions is a major issue.

12.00 noon

On businesses, my first approach is that businesses should be incentivised to do the thing; Governments should not have to subsidise them. That is why the carbon tax is really important in Ireland. The research shows that companies actually do respond to prices, if they can save a load of money. We did a study of the energy efficiency of a number of firms in Ireland 20 years ago, and we found that breweries got everything that they could out of the energy, because they were big and had the capacity.

The worst sector in the Republic was the third-level sector. Universities invested because they had a long-term budget for investment, but the institutes of technology were under the Department of Education, and, unless they could show that they would save all the cost of their retrofitting within the year, they were not allowed to do it. The public sector needs to look at itself in that regard. If you make the price high enough, companies will do the job. On solar and the capacity to buy back, they would take an opportunity that you offered them to make money out of it. There is an interesting experiment involving the data centre in Tallaght, Dublin. The waste heat from the data centre is being used as district heating to heat the institute of technology at the university. It is about how you make use of it, and that will be part of the solution in the Republic. The Republic is further ahead than Northern Ireland on this, and Dublin is denser than Belfast, but it is estimated that up to 10% of the heat needs of Dublin is wasted from data centres and other parts of Dublin.

On retrofitting, a recent study shows that the buildings that the Government rent are pretty awful for energy efficiency. I was on the board of the Central Bank, and the new building that we built was rated A2 in advance, and, in practice, it is A2. In the heatwave of summer 2018, it performed to specification — it kept the bankers cool, which is an important function some of the time, *[Laughter]*, and it worked. The state needs to look at this, but the problem is that the state does not own a lot of its buildings but rents them, and how you deal with that is a challenge for us in the Republic.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

I am interested to hear about your focus on heat, Professor. In Scotland, we have done really well on decarbonising our electricity supply, but we are only now getting to grips with our heat networks. I was particularly interested in what you said about transition away from kerosene for home heating. How much of the discussion is about moving straight towards clean sources — heat pumps and the like — versus so-called transition fuels, which are less dirty than kerosene but are still fossil fuels and still polluting?

Professor John FitzGerald:

The Climate Change Advisory Council has advised the Government to concentrate on subsidising kerosene households, which is where you can make the biggest win on carbon emissions — they may have to change their minds given the price of gas today — because rural Ireland, which uses kerosene for heating, accounts for over half the households in the Republic. That is even more the case in Northern Ireland, and rural Scotland is probably similar. You go after the kerosene households first. It is the same for electric cars. If you are going to give incentives, give them to people in rural areas to buy electric cars, because they drive much further than people in urban areas. Target the incentives if you can, but it is a bit difficult for a Government to say, "You are a rural household; we will help you" and "You are an urban household with the same income; we will not help you". I acknowledge that there are political difficulties with this, but the kerosene households are, from a climate change point of view, the ones that you want to go after.

You do not want to shift those households on to gas; you want to shift them on to heat pumps, but then you need a reliable electricity system. Reliability is one of the issues that we have to look at. With climate change and increased storms, trees at mainline electricity wires are well maintained to stop the trees falling on them, which is what brought down the whole north-eastern US system 15 years ago and, similarly, in Italy.

On some of the other wires, we may need to look at rural distribution because households could be out for a fortnight in the case of a storm. The combination of climate change and electrification brings new issues in respect of security supply, which will particularly apply on this island and in Scotland but much less so in England.

The Lord Empey:

I had the opportunity to be energy Minister for three years in Belfast. We opened up the South/North gas pipeline, and we did the first electricity interconnector. However, because wind is unreliable — you referred to the 2010 experience — that means that you will have to keep making payments to generators to sit there and do nothing. So, that is problem number one, but the biggest problem that I foresee is that we have a fairly hard line in Europe on climate change when it comes to making the changes. We may argue about the year, but it does not matter what we do; it depends on what the rest of the world does. In many cases, we are adding cost to our production, and the risk is that we export our production to China and places like that, which are building coal-fired power stations as fast as they can. So, is there not a case for us and Europe generally to apply a tax on imports from locations where they are not making a genuine effort to decarbonise? Otherwise, we are just making our own industry uncompetitive and allowing those people to get away with it.

Professor John FitzGerald:

I totally agree with you. I think that there could be a carbon border tax, which the EU is proposing. My concern is that it could get caught up in other disputes and affect this island adversely. For example, to date, the UK has followed a very similar policy in Europe on discouraging emissions of carbon. Take, for example, cement. At the moment, the bulk of the cement used in the Republic is manufactured in the Republic, and the bulk of the cement used in Northern Ireland is manufactured in Northern Ireland. If Europe were to apply a carbon border tax on cement, and the United Kingdom were outside, that would mean that it could distort the market and cause problems in respect of cement. So, it should go ahead for exactly

the reasons that you identify, but I am concerned that there should be some talks, possibly secret, between the United Kingdom and Europe to make sure that, if the UK is pursuing sensible policies, the carbon border tax is not applied to the United Kingdom, because, for us, it would complicate matters very considerably and cause distortions.

For 15 years, Dieter Helm, of New College, Oxford, who is the leading energy economist in Europe, has been saying that Europe collectively — I am not talking about the EU — has exported its dirty industry to China. If you look at the emissions on what we consume, you see that they are far greater than what we produce. So, does it make sense to move steel from Port Talbot to China when China might be producing far more carbon using coal than is produced by an efficient plant in Port Talbot? We need a carbon border tax adjustment, but I am concerned that it should be done in a way that does not upset these islands, assuming that the United Kingdom Government continue to pursue a strong policy of decarbonisation.

Mr Seán Crowe TD:

I think that, if this is to work, particularly around the retrofit schemes, it cannot be just for people who have money. That is the big challenge. I am glad that you mentioned the data centre in Tallaght. There is potential there: you have the hospital there and the county council. There is forward thinking from the council and the councillors in that area, who looked at the heating scheme from the data centres.

Nevertheless, the same local authority recently did a scoping exercise in relation to local authority housing. Again, in the same area, we have some of the poorest households in Ireland. They came up with a figure indicating that around 9,000 houses needed to be retrofitted. They got permission for 100 last year, and, I think, it is 130 this year. We are talking about decades before we retrofit the houses that are there, never mind looking at the ones that are being built at the moment. We need to be much more ambitious, and, if we are really serious about it, we need the funding.

That is the next thing: how do you fund it? Should there be, as in other countries, a transition bond? You talked in terms of a tax on things. There are people, particularly older people, in Ireland who have a few bob. They want to do something about climate change; they are conscious of their grandchildren and so on and the world that they are going to inherit. People may have that money in their accounts or wherever else, and it just seems a no-brainer that we would have some sort of support in relation to funding for the next step in that transformation.

Professor John FitzGerald:

The council, of which I am a member — when I was previously its chairman — recommended that the Government targeted the retrofitting of local authority social housing. That recommendation has been accepted by the Government. If you look at the budget for next year, you will see that there is a substantial increase in allocation to that.

A very interesting experiment was done in Kilkenny. The local authority there had an estate of local authority houses, about half of which had been sold off. The county engineer sourced a builder and said what needed to be done. They went in and did the job on the local authority dwellings. What happened was that people in the privately-owned dwellings next door said, "Me too. Can we pay? You have sourced the builder; you are going to check that the builder has done a decent job. You have worked out what has to be done. Our house is identical. Can we buy into this?". It was interesting that they did it at scale. I would not say to do just the local

authority houses: do estates, because economies of scale here are important. Yes, you should target low-income households — I mentioned earlier rural households on kerosene — that will not be able to afford it.

Unfortunately, nobody is going to give Ireland money. We are one of the richest countries in the world, so we have to pay for it ourselves through taxation. That is why we need higher taxes, if you are serious about climate change. For the bulk of households, you want them to finance it themselves and to be putting in place financing packages. My sister-in-law, who was 76 at the time, and her husband, who was 79, went to the credit union to look for a loan to retrofit their house. They got the loan, and what is more, the credit union sourced the builder and project-managed the scheme for them.

I mentioned that at a board meeting of the Central Bank, and the board had a canary. They said that credit unions were small and did not know how to handle risk and that this was introducing new risk. We saw with the disaster in London that the cost of building materials and retrofitting is huge. If the builder was doing a bad job, the credit union would find itself liable for it. We have seen with the mica payments that the state may end up paying €3·5 billion. So, actually, you need finance and project management, but the state needs to take the risk on the project management, not the financial sector, because you put at risk the credit union movement.

That was instructive. I had not spotted that. I thought, "This is great. The credit union is the solution". Yes to the credit union, but the project management risk must be carried by the state. There is a major role for people to help me. I am out in the market looking for a builder to do the job on my house at the moment. If somebody helps me to find the builder and tells me that the builder is reliable, it would be very helpful and I might move even faster. I will pay for it, but the taxpayer will not.

12.15 pm

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

We will have to close after this question, so can it be a short one from David Johnson?

Connétable David Johnson:

Thank you, Co-Chair. It is not so much a question as an observation. If I heard the professor correctly, he responded to an earlier comment by saying that it might be more economical to buy in electricity from France rather than to create their own facility. For someone living in Jersey, which has imported more than 90% of its energy from France for a considerable time, and clean energy at that, because it is mainly nuclear, it raises the question of energy security, particularly as the one unwise French politician at the time of the French fishery disputes suggested that she should cut us off. I simply highlight the fact that energy security must be a major consideration in any future plans, especially as the UK and the EU have yet to carry out negotiations on certain importing rights of their own.

Professor John FitzGerald:

I saw that threat by the French politician, and I was shocked and horrified by it. The Norwegians have talked about stopping exports, and we saw the German grid operator do so. If Europe breaks up in that way, it will cause chaos. The threat to cut off Jersey as part of another dispute was an outrage and a risk to us all. You were not on your own when you thought about that. Looking at it from an Irish point of view, that would be disastrous. The responsible

approach of the United Kingdom Government this summer should be emulated across Europe, and we would all be the better for it.

The Co-Chairperson (Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP):

Thank you so much, Professor FitzGerald. That was absolutely fascinating. I had not heard "the responsible approach of the UK Government" said by anybody for some time, so thank you. I am very grateful to hear it.

We have all taken a great deal from that contribution. You can tell from the quality of the interventions just how interested everyone is in this. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

On behalf of my Co-Chair, Karen, and all Members of the Assembly, I thank all our guest speakers over the past two days; our secretariat, drawn from all the legislatures, and I mention in particular the work of our Clerks to the Assembly, Regina and Martin; and, indeed, all the support staff from each of the parliaments that have supported our work. Particular mention of the outstanding work done by Veronica Carr is appropriate. She managed all the logistics of putting this Assembly plenary meeting together, and she was ably supported, as she told us, by colleagues from the Houses of the Oireachtas. I thank all our support staff. A huge amount of work goes on to put in place, literally, a parliament moving here for two and a half days, with the official recording of all proceedings as well.

We are delighted to have had such a good line-up of speakers, including an Taoiseach and Minister Baker. We are glad that Ambassador Fraser and Ambassador Johnston were with us as well, accompanied by senior colleagues from their respective embassies. I am also glad that senior officials have been with us from the Department of an Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and have been observing and getting to meet the participants as well. We can all look back on a successful two and a half days. They did not happen without huge commitment on the part of all the people who attended over the weekend. I also think it appropriate that we thank the staff of the Farnham Estate hotel for their welcome and hospitality and for the quality of the accommodation.

On behalf of Karen and myself, thank you all for your contributions, and safe travelling. Regina tells me that people who are getting the bus at 1.00 pm may have the opportunity to get some food first.

I ask David Johnson to move the Adjournment of the Assembly.

Connétable David Johnson:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am pleased to do so. I move that the Assembly be adjourned and be reconvened to meet again in Jersey on 14 May 2023. We look forward to seeing you then. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Brendan Smith TD):

Thank you very much, David. We all look forward to travelling to Jersey. I declare the sixty-second plenary session of the Assembly closed. We will next meet in plenary in Jersey next

May. The plenary session now stands adjourned. Lunch will be served in Maxwell's restaurant. Thank you all very much.

Adjourned at 12.20 pm.