

Monday 11 June 2018

The Assembly met at 9.20 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. The Assembly is now in public session. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones and electronic devices or to put them to silent mode, please.

When Members are invited to contribute from the floor, they should clearly state their name and which legislature they come from. I remind Members that the proceedings of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly do not attract parliamentary privilege.

It gives me great pleasure to formally congratulate our colleague, Seán Crowe TD, on his appointment yesterday evening as the new Irish Co-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I wish him well in his new role and look forward to working closely with him in taking forward the important work of the Assembly. Unfortunately, Deputy Crowe is unavoidably absent from this Monday's session but he will join us this evening. I am pleased to welcome the Vice-Chair, Mr Declan Breathnach, who will take over the Co-Chair duties for this Monday's plenary session. I look forward to working with him today.

On behalf of all Members, I put on record our thanks to our former Co-Chair, Kathleen Funchion TD, who oversaw several memorable plenary sessions, including on a visit to her beautiful home city of Kilkenny last year.

I note the Assembly's deep regret at the recent passing of Lord Peter Temple-Morris, who was a founding Co-Chair of the Assembly. As the first United Kingdom Co-Chair, Peter helped to foster closer relations between our Parliaments and enabled us to look at the issues that our islands face. He was a dedicated and much-respected politician and we hope to honour his memory by continuing to forge strong relationships and build on the important work that he commenced.

I welcome all Members to the County of Sligo – this beautiful county of Yeats poetry and of the breathtaking scenery of the Wild Atlantic Way – for the 56th plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. We are delighted to host this plenary session in the established Sligo Park Hotel, which overlooks the majestic mountain of Benbulbin.

All Members have been circulated with an up-to-date list of BIPA membership in their briefing packs. In accordance with rule 2(a), the following Associate Members have been accepted by invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of the session: Senator Gerry Horan, Viscount Bridgeman, the Rt Hon Lord Kilclooney and Dai Lloyd. Apologies have been received from Senator Diarmuid Wilson, Deputy Seán Canney, Deputy Kathleen Funchion, Deputy Joe Carey, Darren Millar AM, Jayne Bryant AM and Deputy Kevin Lewis. We note the absence of colleagues who are unable to travel due to the requirement to attend the House of Commons – the challenges of parliamentary life are familiar to us all. Apologies have therefore been received from Andrew

Bridgen MP, Vernon Coaker MP, the Rt Hon Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Stephen Doughty MP, Paul Farrelly MP, Vicky Ford MP, Stephen Hepburn MP, Helen Jones MP, Conor McGinn MP, Nigel Mills MP, David Morris MP, Martin Vickers MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Jack Lopresti MP, Lord Lexden, Baroness O’Cathain, Nigel Evans MP and Baroness Suttie. I apologise again for the absence of so many UK Westminster parliamentarians.

I offer our congratulations to our friend and colleague, Senator John Le Fondré of Jersey, who has been elected as Chief Minister of the Bailiwick of Jersey. We give him our heartfelt congratulations. [*Applause.*] The sad side of that is that John will cease to be a Member of BIPA in his own right but we have no doubt that he will come back to address the Assembly as one of the chief ministers in these islands. Congratulations, John, and good luck with your appointment.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me pleasure to hand over to the Co-Chair for this morning, Declan Breathnach.

PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Item 2 is the adoption of the proposed programme of business.

I thank Andrew Rosindell for his kind remarks and I, too, acknowledge the commitment of our previous Co-Chair and colleague, Deputy Kathleen Funchion. I know that we will all work in a spirit of co-operation and partnership over this plenary session to make the Assembly even more relevant and topical.

Members will have received a copy of the proposed programme of business. We are, of course, delighted to be marking two significant anniversaries as part of the programme this year: the 100th anniversary of votes for women and the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.

We look forward to stimulating discussions on those issues. As the negotiations on the United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union continue, Brexit will be a feature throughout our debates. We are delighted to welcome Ireland’s Ombudsman for Children and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, who have worked together to highlight the potential impact of Brexit on our young citizens. We will also be examining the challenges that face border and rural regions, many of which are common across all our jurisdictions. We will hear, too, from one of our cross-border bodies, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), on the important projects and programmes that it manages through the EU PEACE and INTERREG funds.

We are looking forward to hearing shortly from Minister of State Joe McHugh, who is a former BIPA Co-Chair. The minister will provide the Irish Government update on Irish-British relations. Later, we will hear from the British ambassador, His Excellency Robin Barnett.

We will finish our session with a panel of female parliamentarians, who will discuss issues facing women in politics today across the BIPA jurisdictions. Indeed, two of our steering committee Members – Karin Smyth MP and Ann Jones AM – along with Christina McKelvie MSP, Rosemary Barton MLA and BIPA Member Senator Catherine Noone will participate

on that panel. Addressing issues around equal participation remains a challenge in many of our Parliaments and Assemblies. I look forward to hearing from our female colleagues, who will give us valuable insights from their experience. Indeed, we need to increase efforts to ensure stronger representation of female politicians across our membership.

We expect to conclude today around 5.30 pm, which will give Members the opportunity to freshen up ahead of travelling to Markree Castle for the reception and formal dinner.

We are delighted that three committees will present reports to the Assembly. The first will be this afternoon, when we will hear from Lord Dubs, who will present Committee D's follow-up report on child obesity to the Assembly and give an update on the next series of meetings that are planned by Committee D.

On Tuesday morning, we will begin with an address marking the 100th anniversary of votes for women and we will hear from Professor Sonja Tiernan of Liverpool Hope University. That will incorporate links to the beautiful county of Sligo, as she presents her paper "The "Votes for Women" Campaign: From Lissadell House to the House of Commons". We will then hear a progress report from Committees A, B and C and will deal with a number of other matters of housekeeping business. The Assembly will adjourn at 12.15 on Tuesday.

It is very fitting to have a plenary in this beautiful and historic county of Sligo as we discuss the future challenges that will impact not only on politics but on all our citizens' lives. It would be remiss of me not to mention a historic and poignant moment in our shared history that took place here in Sligo just over three years ago when Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall visited the village of Mullaghmore, just 20km from where we are presently, and paid tribute to the memory of the prince's uncle, Lord Henry Mountbatten. That visit was a measure of how far we have come in recent years in working together to address our history and to continue together on a path towards peace and reconciliation.

I now move formally to the adoption of the proposed programme of business. Is that programme agreed?

Programme of Business agreed.

WELCOME BY THE CATHAOIRLEACH OF SLIGO COUNTY COUNCIL

9.30 am

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I am pleased to invite the Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council, Councillor Seamus Kilgallon, to address the Assembly. We are delighted to be here in the county of Sligo and it is a great privilege for us that Councillor Kilgallon has been able to come and address us this morning. Members, please give the Cathaoirleach a warm welcome to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. [*Applause.*]

The Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council (Councillor Seamus Kilgallon):

Co-Chairs of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, Minister of State Joe McHugh, chief executive of Sligo County Council Ciarán Hayes, guest speakers, special guests and friends, it is a great pleasure to formally welcome each and every one of you here today.

It is a privilege for our community to host this important forum. In recent times, Sligo has become a favourite venue for meetings and launches of national significance. We recently hosted a Government Cabinet meeting in advance of the launch of the national planning framework. Today, we are honoured by the presence of the members of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Although people might have a general awareness of the work of the Assembly, I see its visit as an opportunity to inform people of the background to this forum, to outline its objectives and to highlight its many achievements.

From its inaugural meeting in December 1999, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has played a pivotal role across a wide spectrum of endeavours. It has certainly fulfilled its stated objectives of promoting positive and practical relationships among the people of these islands and providing a forum for consultation and co-operation. The overriding theme of promoting harmonious and mutually beneficial development has informed and inspired the relationship between members and has earned widespread respect and acclaim for this major international forum. The collective experience and acumen that is brought to its discussions provides a robust and dynamic foundation for positive engagement on key political, economic and social issues.

I know that the issue of Brexit is high on every Member's agenda, and the challenges that it will pose are numerous. Later today, a particular perspective will be considered in a discussion on the impact of Brexit on children. It is a priority issue for the local authority sector and, in the local context, Sligo County Council and our key partners are working to promote Sligo's status as a progressive hub of economic growth in the north west, which was acknowledged in the recently launched national planning framework.

I hope that members enjoy their time with us. We are proud of Sligo's status as one of the jewels along the Wild Atlantic Way. It is a county rich in literary, artistic and cultural heritage and it is blessed with coastal amenities, majestic landscapes and enchanting walkways. In recent years, we had the opportunity to showcase our many attractions to a global audience when we welcomed members of the British royal family and hosted the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann on two successive years. My hope is that members will find the time after their discussions to explore and enjoy our wonderful county. [*Applause.*]

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank Mr Kilgallon for his warm welcome to Sligo. Members look forward to having the opportunity to further engage with him at our reception later today.

OPENING ADDRESS

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I am pleased to invite our next guest speaker. Please give a warm welcome to Mr Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, who will give the opening address. It is a particular pleasure to welcome Minister of State McHugh back to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly because, as Members know, he is a former Co-Chair and a much missed member of this illustrious body. [*Applause.*]

Mr Joe McHugh TD (Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht):

Thank you. It is an absolute pleasure to be among members again. As a former Co-Chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I would like to acknowledge all of its good work and the value that it brings to this ongoing and enduring relationship.

I am greatly heartened to see such sustained engagement with and commitment to this Assembly by parliamentarians from across these islands. To be perfectly frank, sustained engagement with and commitment to the relationship north, south, east and west has never been more vital.

We are at a significant point in the Brexit negotiations with the European Council summit at the end of the month. These past few months have not been easy for British-Irish relations or for the wider relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom. However, I am sure that we will look back on this time as part of the journey that we needed to take in order to find a way to a successful outcome for all of us. Indeed, where we are in our relationship is what will allow us to have a mature conversation in the days and weeks ahead.

On the backstop, as far as the Government are concerned, the draft protocol on Northern Ireland that is contained in the draft withdrawal agreement is a logical working out of the principles and commitments that were the subject of political agreement between the EU and the UK last December. This is no one's ideal scenario. We would prefer an overall EU-UK relationship to resolve all issues but it is essential that there is no hard border in Ireland not only now but in the future and indefinitely. That is about delivering on our shared objectives of protecting the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the peace process – no less, no more. It is about the livelihoods of people in the border region and their ability to go about their daily lives in a way that reflects the progress that has been made on this island in terms of rebuilding communities and normalising relationships.

With the June European Council summit approaching somewhat quickly, we welcome UK proposals on Brexit and the focus on the customs dimension of avoiding a hard border. Last Friday, Michel Barnier confirmed that the EU will reflect on those proposals. In so doing, he set out three core questions that will guide our consideration in the run-up to the upcoming European Council summit. Is it a workable solution to avoid a hard border? Does it respect the integrity of the Single Market and the customs union? Is it an all-weather backstop?

Ireland stands firmly with our EU27 partners and with Michel Barnier and the EU task force in working to secure the closest possible relationship with the EU in the future that, at the same time, protects the integrity of the Single Market and the customs union.

With regard to the Single Market, the additional costs and delays that will be faced by business and industry speak clearly to the reality that there is no upside to unpicking the rules and obligations of the Single Market. That is particularly clear in the border region, where 98% of businesses that are involved in cross-border trade are small businesses that, to say the least, would struggle to cope with the burden if the cost of doing business was to increase. More broadly, the Government have been absolutely clear from the outset that Ireland's future lies at the heart of the European Union and that is an approach that enjoys the resounding support of the Irish people.

With regard to North-South relations, the Good Friday Agreement is the basis for the constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland with the principle of consent at the core. I want to assure everyone here that there is no hidden agenda on the part of the Government in relation to the Brexit negotiations. There is no attempt to seek to somehow change that

constitutional settlement by stealth. The Government's engagement to protect the agreement is guided solely by our responsibility and our concerns as co-guarantor.

On peace, the peace dividend can be seen clearly in this region. Around the border in the north west, my county of Donegal is one of the areas to have benefited hugely. A new cancer care centre opened in Altnagelvin hospital in Derry in 2016; patients from Donegal can now be treated there, which saves each of them hours of journey time and transforms their quality of life. The Letterkenny Institute of Technology signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Ulster formalising a partnership on both sides of the border and cementing the North West Strategic Partnership. We are committed to driving the ambitious city region status for Letterkenny, Derry and Strabane.

A policy for Sligo is enshrined in the new 2040 national development plan and it will be an economic driver. Sligo has also benefited from the peace and reconciliation fund through its close connection with the border and its natural alliance with County Leitrim.

The 20th anniversary of the agreement gives us the opportunity to reaffirm our commitments. If members take one message from me today, let it be this – peace is not just the absence of violence. We must again live up to the promise of the democratic moment when the agreement secured the overwhelming support of people across this island. Collectively, we should invest again in pursuing the full and faithful implementation of the agreement in all its parts.

What better example can there be of investing in future relations than the welcome extended to the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, by the Orange Order in Belfast last Friday? As Minister for the Irish language, the Gaeltacht and the islands, I was impressed to hear loyal members not being afraid to put their cúpla focal to use when greeting the Taoiseach.

Yesterday, Donegal got through to the Ulster final in the Gaelic football championship. I am absolutely delighted that we will have a west Ulster final between Donegal and Fermanagh. It is also worth mentioning that I heard a few warm words from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader, Arlene Foster MLA, a fortnight ago that suggested that she, too, was looking forward to a big day out in Clones so I look forward to meeting her on that day.

We should remember that we are in the middle of what were always going to be difficult negotiations. The situation was always going to present challenges but I believe that the relationships between our countries are strong, the foundations of our friendships are solid and we can emerge on the other side of these negotiations with them intact. As in the past, we will require hard work, patience, mutual respect, understanding and perspective.

I thank members all for your ongoing commitment to the Parliamentary Assembly, whose values become greater all the time. That commitment is all the more apparent given the lengths that some members had to go to in order to be here today. I hope that they all have a productive and fruitful few days here in lovely Sligo – Yeats country – and are inspired by the beauty, creativity and history of everything around them.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir. *[Applause.]*

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I thank the Minister of State for his presentation and invite questions to him.

The Lord Bew:

I welcome the Minister of State. It is wonderful to see him here again. I thank him for the frankness and openness of his speech.

He alluded to the difficulties in the Brexit negotiations. Could I tease out his view on some things?

Last August, he said that there should be no new infrastructure on the border beyond what there is now – I think that that was his phrase. Does that mean that the cameras that are there now are acceptable to the Irish Government? The other thing that he said was that there could be no electronic surveillance of any sort. Does that mean that electronic devices of any sort, which many people have argued could alleviate the obvious difficulties that we face, about which everybody on all sides is concerned, are out of the question?

9.45 am

In the same speech, he said that Ireland was looking to the European Union for a transitional payment to deal with the impact of Brexit. Has any progress been made with the European Union in the past ten or 11 months on a transitional payment to help with the impact of Brexit?

I was really delighted to hear from the Minister of State. That was a very fine speech.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

I contributed to an article a number of months ago – I think that it was in *The Guardian* – in which my point of view was that we have a status quo now as a result of the peace process. Twenty years on, we have, for example, multinational companies in Letterkenny with up to 30% of the labour force travelling daily from Northern Ireland and it is not just one way. In Derry, for example, DuPont, or Seagate as it is now, takes 15% to 20% of its core staff from Donegal. We have that natural movement of people and there is fear about anything that would prevent or disrupt that.

I know that people will argue that there is no fear or no difficulty around the common travel area but if we take Switzerland as an example, which is a non-EU country, there are customs checkpoints – physical checkpoints – on the border with France probably one day a month. In terms of our obligation to the Good Friday Agreement, we cannot do that. One of the most significant contributions to the debate around the Good Friday Agreement is the line that is inserted to protect it in all its parts; our Good Friday Agreement is therefore very much a live process.

The past couple of years have allowed us to appreciate how far we have come. If we think about this body's transition since 1990, when it was known as the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, the focus has been very much on peace and how we win that peace. It is never an end product. We are still on that journey. I believe we are still in the infancy of the process and it is a very fragile process but I know and see the benefits and I feel the benefits for this particular region.

That is being quite selfish about it but I am a politician for Donegal. I am a politician for a region that has been neglected politically because of partition, the hard border, violence and all the negatives of our history. However, we are now enjoying a phenomenal upturn in

tourism and our county is one of the main places for financial services outside the capital, Dublin, and the major cities. We are on the cusp of something very positive. If anything was to set that back, be it electronic surveillance, something different or something new, I do not know what the outcome would be. I just know that because of the delicacy and fragility of the process, it is important that we protect it in all its parts.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

What about the money issue?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

On the debate about the money issue – INTERREG and PEACE money – the conversation is ongoing and that impacts on the north as much as the south. In order for us to build on the peace at an infrastructure level, be that in relation to Narrow Water Bridge, the A5, health services or education services, we have to have infrastructure spend. I think that that conversation is always on the minds of the European Commission and the European Council.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I thank the Minister of State. I am sure that SEUPB, which will be here later, will delve further into that issue.

I call Lord Murphy.

The Lord Murphy:

I welcome Joe McHugh to our gathering. It is great to see him again and to see him doing extremely well in Government.

I want to raise the issue of relations between the United Kingdom and the Irish Governments with regard specifically to Brexit and to negotiations to restore the institutions in Northern Ireland. I do not think that there are two comparable countries in the rest of the European Union that have such a special relationship with the common travel area and, above all else, the fact that the two Governments are joint guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

Two questions arise from that. The first is about the use of the institution that was set up by the agreement. The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference seems to have been dormant over recent years but in my view, it could play a useful part, certainly with regard to the two sets of negotiations that are happening.

The second question relates to something that was touched on by Bertie Ahern not long ago and to a recommendation made by a House of Lords select committee on Brexit and Ireland, which was that there should be simultaneous discussions – I will not call them negotiations – between the two Governments on issues such as the border. We should bear in mind that the Irish Government is one of the 27 member states that are negotiating with the United Kingdom but there is a special relationship between Britain and Ireland. How can that be used for the benefit of both sets of negotiations?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

I thank Lord Murphy; it is good to see him again.

At a broader level, anything that can add to the ongoing communication is welcome. We are all practising politicians and we all know the importance of keeping the lines of communication open. Britain and Ireland have a very strong relationship on an east-west basis. There has been the symbolism of the Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011 and the symbolism and impact of President Higgins's first state visit to mainland Britain. Those events were extremely important and significant but they were the outcome of a lot of hard work and relationship building, a lot of which this body was involved in.

I remember going to a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Brighton, which brought up a lot of history, feelings and emotion. All such events were significant in the journey to where we are now. Because the relationship is so strong at the moment, we have the facility and the opportunity to take a mature look at, and for there to be an honest interpretation of, what we need for the future.

On the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, there have been political calls at different levels, some of which have been from former politicians. The most significant issue for me is that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not up and running, which is the cog that we are missing. It is a weakness not to have a voice in Northern Ireland during the negotiations. It is easy for me to say that, as someone who is looking in, but I appreciate the difficulties, the sensitivities and the obstacles that prevent that from happening. Not having the Assembly up and running is a particular weakness because we are missing the face-to-face dialogue that we get through the natural institutions such as the North/South Ministerial Council. As someone who has been in a ministerial brief since 2014, I value not only the formal but the informal opportunities to meet colleagues in Northern Ireland.

The Lord Empey:

We have already had a question about the land border but the dog that has not barked is the issue of the border in the Irish Sea. The bulk of goods move from the Republic of Ireland to the Welsh ports then through Great Britain as a land bridge to the rest of the European Union. Can the Minister of State give us some indication as to how the negotiations on that matter are going? At the end of the day, however difficult the land issues might be, we need an arrangement for where the bulk of goods go, which is across the Irish Sea.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

As somebody who lives on an island, I know that a large percentage of our trade crosses the Irish Sea. I do not want there to be a sea border any more than I want there to be a land border. In her intervention last week, the British Prime Minister talked about the long-term possibility of some sort of customs arrangement to ensure that we do not have a sea border. That was a small step and the next two to three weeks will be an important juncture in the discussions in determining what sort of outcome there will be. Things are very fluid and they have been moving quickly over the past three to four days. I am aware of all the hard work that is going on. In relation to Lord Empey's concern about the Irish Sea, we are an island, and I certainly do not want to see any impediment to goods traversing the Irish Sea.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Ar dtús báire, déanaim comhghairdeas leis an Aire as an bhua inné. Congratulations on the win yesterday.

The border has been referred to. I was heartened and encouraged by the Government's commitment to the backstop as agreed in December. Aside from the issue of the infrastructure, and to reference Lord Murphy's point about the uniqueness of the dynamics involved and what flows from the Good Friday Agreement, there is the issue of citizenship and where we find ourselves as Irish, British or, indeed, both. We need to keep reinforcing with Government through these channels and for its negotiating position that there cannot be any diminution of our rights as EU citizens.

It is worth highlighting at a gathering such as this one that there are murmurings from the EU that, guaranteed though it may not be, Irish and EU citizens might be entitled to avail of the same rights and opportunities post-Brexit but those who avail of their right under the Good Friday Agreement to be British and Irish might not have the same access to those rights should they so wish. That would certainly cause me and my party a great deal of concern as a separate issue. From the Government's perspective, if we are to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all its parts, we must ensure that we work to protect people's rights to remain as EU citizens.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

There are two parts to Niall's contribution. There is the democratic outcome of the vote in relation to the Belfast Good Friday Agreement that people in Northern Ireland have the right to be Irish, to be British or to be Irish and British. That is one part.

The most important point – I repeat it today – is that there is no attempt by the Irish Government to move away from the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement and the democratic wishes of the people of the North and the South with regard to the Good Friday Agreement and there is no dilution or moving away from the principle of consent.

With regard to the rights of people in Northern Ireland and what will happen after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, there are still a lot of questions about where we will be so we are in the land of speculation. However, I know one thing; we are not even discussing the constitutional question even within our parliamentary party. It is about respect and ensuring that we stay within the confines of the Good Friday Agreement and that – to repeat that line again – we respect the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement “in all its parts”.

10 am

Whether you were born ten or 20 years ago, people have moved into a new era of peace. A lot of people, including a lot of us here, have been in politics for a number of years. I think that Baroness Blood and I came into politics together in 1999. That was 19 years ago this year. Between a person's own life experience and everybody else's life experience of what was, we have to remind ourselves constantly about where we are coming from, what we have had to endure and where we are at now. That is the prize and it also has to be the focus all the time of where we are going in the negotiations.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

I thank the Minister of State for his contribution. He will recall that when negotiations between Britain and the European Union on Britain's exit from the EU commenced, there were three questions to be resolved in the first stage of the negotiations: Britain's financial commitment; the rights of EU citizens in Britain and the rights of British citizens in the EU;

and the Irish border question. We know that the first two issues were resolved and that agreement was reached on them but agreement was not reached on the Irish border question. We were repeatedly told by An Taoiseach and An Tánaiste that we needed the Irish question to be resolved by the time of the June European Council meeting. At present, the media commentary is very strong in the view that that will not be resolved at this month's European Council meeting. What is the Government's position in relation to the need to have that question finalised before we move away from the June heads of Government meeting?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

With regard to the Government's position, there has never been an ultimatum that the border question had to be finished by a certain date – the end of June, for example – but there will continue to be sustained engagement right up to the end of June. I cannot speculate about what the outcome will be at the end of June. Although it was acknowledged last week that a small step had been taken in the right direction, there is still a lot more to do. As far as the Irish Government is concerned, a lot needs to happen before the end of June. We will need to wait until that point. I emphasise that there was never an ultimatum that the border question had to be resolved by the end of June.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

On the Irish side, we should have taken it as an imperative that that question would be resolved before the October Council meeting, at which other issues – I hope that this will not happen – could take precedence. All of us will have welcomed the statements of the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste over the past few months in relation to the need to have that question resolved at the June Council.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

Yes – and October is the timeframe that we are working within.

Senator Frank Feighan:

It is great to have the Minister of State back at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly because he knows its value.

For everyone's information, on this day 30 years ago, Ireland beat England 1-0 in Stuttgart, and it brought a period of enlightenment and joy to this country. [*Laughter.*] Our country has moved on. We have had the Good Friday Agreement and the Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011 and the President's visit to the UK have changed our relationship significantly. I remark in passing that Prince Charles is coming to Cork with his wife in a few days' time and nobody is paying any heed.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Do not forget Killarney.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Sorry about that.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly brings together politicians from all the various Parliaments and Assemblies. We also have the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association, which you set up, and the North/South Ministerial Council. In the event that the UK leaves the EU, we will need more bodies like that. What is the Government doing to set up more bodies to foster, for example, east-west relations? We cannot have enough bodies like the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which has done extremely well in bringing people together. We need good relationships between all the Parliaments. We are in a new era. What does the Minister of State think should be done in that regard?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

I agree that we have come a long way. Last year, I welcomed Prince Charles and Camilla to Donegal. That was a very important juncture. They went to Glenveagh National Park and visited schools and a third-level institution. That was all part of the new normalisation process. As politicians, we sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that it is up to us to create new bodies to lead but people are doing it for themselves. People are visiting places for the first time: people from Mid-Ulster are going down south and people from Coventry are visiting Sligo and Donegal for the first time.

As far as politicians' proposals to set up new bodies are concerned, I think that we have enough north-south and east-west institutions, although their ability to kick into gear relies on the Assembly being set up. I acknowledge your work in that area. Leadership is required and risks have to be taken. In London, you meet a lot of new people; you are taking that communication line to a new level in the networking that you do.

Going back to my earlier point, we want to keep the communication lines open and keep people talking. I remember meeting a taxi driver in Armagh a couple of years ago during a time when the peace process was not in the place that we wanted it to be – it was going through a very difficult time – and he said “keep talking, and keep the lines and the communication channels open.” That is what the likes of this body can do effectively.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Will the Minister of State expand a little on his comments about the border and, in particular, on what he said about not desiring to see a sea border? Does he anticipate that there would be a build-up of border infrastructures on the European mainland at ports and airports, as opposed to their being on the Irish Sea or at the Irish ports? At the moment, there are border facilities at ports, airports and entry and exit facilities. If there was to be no sea border on the Irish Sea, that is the logic. Is that what the Government is thinking at the moment or what the EU is thinking? I have difficulty in conceiving how that might operate. If that is what they are thinking, it would be interesting to hear more about that.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

The Government's position is clear. We would like the Brexit to be of a soft nature and to involve still being part of the Single Market and the customs union. If that is our desire, we obviously do not want a hard border. However, we live in the real world where there is a possibility that there will be a hard border so there are preferences. My desire is for Britain still to be part of some sort of customs union and part of the Single Market, which would alleviate all the fears that we have in Northern Ireland – and across the border – about having a hard mainland border.

We can rationalise the situation and look at the different conundrums of what it might look like but we listened very closely to people such as the private citizens that I met in my constituency. Even straight after the result of the Brexit referendum, people on the ground in Donegal were very circumspect about it. They said, “If Britain – the United Kingdom – is leaving the European Union, there will be a border of some variety.” As a Government, our reaction to that was that we needed to avoid a mainland border at all costs and the only way we feel that that can be avoided is by ensuring that Britain – the United Kingdom – remains part of the Single Market and the customs union.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I have four people indicating that they want to speak. We will take the four questions together, starting with Peter Fitzpatrick TD.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

I thank the Minister of State for coming to Sligo today. Congratulations to Donegal; we are very happy that they beat London yesterday and will be playing Leitrim in the next qualifier.

What are the Irish Government and the UK Government doing to get the Northern Ireland Assembly back up and running? Brexit talks are at a crucial stage at the moment. The Taoiseach commented at the weekend that he thinks that the decision on Brexit will not be made until October. It is very important that pressure is put on the politicians who have been elected by the people of Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are the two countries that seem to be having the most Parliaments.

The Republic of Ireland has a voice, the UK has a voice and the EU has a voice. I feel as though the people of Northern Ireland are being let down by the politicians because they are not getting the Assembly back and up and running. We seem to be taking two steps forward and one step back. We are at a crucial stage, and I think that a lot of pressure should be put on the politicians in Northern Ireland to go back and represent the people of Northern Ireland.

Viscount Bridgeman:

I am Robin Bridgeman from the House of Lords and I am looking to the situation after Brexit. We do not know yet what the UK’s relationship with the European Union will be after Brexit but it will affect our relations in this institution. It will be a tremendous challenge, in an altered situation, to build upon the precious relationship that has been built so far. Tremendous imagination will be required but I am sure that it will be there.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

I will make a few comments in support of Frank Feighan’s proposal to strengthen east-west relations between Ireland and the UK. I declare an interest in that I am half Irish and half Welsh. My father was from Galway and my mother is from north Wales. There is a wealth of support for such a proposal in Wales among politicians from Welsh-Irish backgrounds, including Lord Murphy, Lord Touhig, Paul Flynn MP, Kevin Brennan MP and Stephen Doughty MP. Among Assembly Members, the First Minister is married to a woman from Belfast, John Griffiths AM’s mother is from Valentia Island and Conservatives Darren Millar AM and Mark Isherwood AM have direct Irish connections.

The Welsh-Irish link is strong now but I implore that it be cemented further. Many Irish exports come through Holyhead, Fishguard and Swansea. There is a strong Welsh-Irish connection. My question is this. Ireland used to have a consulate in Cardiff but it was removed some ten to 12 years ago. Will there be any move to put that consulate back in place?

The Lord Kilclooney:

I return to the question that my colleague Lord Empey asked because I was preparing to ask an identical question.

I live near the border so I am keen on having a soft border. Nevertheless, we are talking about two separate nations, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and the main trade between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom is across the water into Wales. What progress has been made on getting a soft border between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain?

10.15 am

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

I disagree with Peter that there is a particular weakness in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Northern Ireland's elected representatives had the opportunity to make that decision. All that we can do is articulate our feelings and sentiments about that.

Peter would not really understand this as a County Louth man, but, as an Ulsterman, I can say that we do not like being told what to do, which can manifest itself in different referendum outcomes in Donegal. We predominantly vote "No", no matter what the subject is.

The issue goes back to how we communicate. It is easy for me, as a Donegal politician, to tell politicians in Northern Ireland, "You should have the Assembly up and running again," but there are constraints and complications. Nevertheless, I agree that it would be better if the Northern Ireland Assembly was up and running.

Robin Bridgeman – visionary that he is – talked about the situation after Brexit. No one knows what machinations will take place but I think that, whatever is in situ, the onus and responsibility will be on us to keep building on what we have. He has contributed much to this body over the years and I think that our natural position is to keep doing what we are doing because we are working not just for this generation but for the next generation as well.

Chris Ruane spoke about the consulate in Wales. He must have read today's Government press release, which says that we are increasing our global footprint. We are opening up a consulate in Colombia, which I do not think will work for him. [*Laughter.*] We are also opening a new embassy in Chile but I am not aware of any conversations about opening up a consulate in Wales.

Nonetheless, it is important that there are different regions in the UK. Last year, I was in Liverpool and Manchester, which have been called the Northern Powerhouse, and they were talking about setting up business linkages. Steve Aiken, who is here today and who made the pioneering move to set up the British Irish Chamber of Commerce, will know the benefits of such linkages. There are many mechanisms. I know that the different islands are also represented here today from Guernsey to Jersey and the Isle of Man.

Among the business community, there is a desire to work ever more closely together, and business will always work on a five to ten-year trajectory. We politicians try to work towards the long term – I certainly do – but we get so caught up in short-term firefighting that we do not really have the space to do it. Chris Ruane and Frankie Feighan suggested potential new mechanisms or new relationships at a political level and we would only be following what the business community is already doing. In Derry, where the British Irish Chamber of Commerce had a meeting a couple of years ago, the port company and the different businesses there have been very strong in saying that they will not be defined by Brexit. They want to continue the relationship and move forward. Therefore, we have a responsibility and an onus to follow through on that.

Lord Kilclooney asked a question about Wales – I am sorry but the questions were coming at me fast and furious.

The Lord Kilclooney:

The Republic's main trade with the UK is not across the border to Northern Ireland; it is with Great Britain. What progress is being made in tackling that problem?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

We are constantly working on new ways of making business easier if we can do so. I remember bringing the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly to Letterkenny back in 2013 – a few of you would have attended that – and the discussion was very much about the areas of energy and synergy and about energy security on a UK-Ireland basis. We made progress back then, although we did not get it over the line. The British Government decided that the matter would be looked at again post-2018 and we are now nearing that time.

That example relates to energy security – we have a single energy market on a North-South basis – but we are constantly looking at new ways of doing new business and of making trade easier. The strong relationship that exists and the respect that we have for sovereignty and constitutional issues are obviously factors as well.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Will Viscount Bridgeman put his question?

Viscount Bridgeman:

I have put it.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

The Minister of State said that the questions have been coming too fast and furious. There are still four people so I am bringing it to a conclusion after them. The next speaker will be Senator Paul Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

None of us wishes to see a border in the Irish Sea – north or south. We can travel in hope, because negotiations are still in progress. Everything that the Minister of State has said about trade is true. As Chris Ruane said, there is a special connection between us Celts – both in

Wales and in Ireland – and I think that that will be cemented yet. I also think that what the British Prime Minister said last week is definitely a stumble in the right direction so we must travel hopefully.

For the record, may I refer to what my good friend and colleague Frank Feighan said about Prince Charles following in the footsteps of his mother in visiting Cork and the English Market in the coming week? I hope that Ambassador Robin Barnett will not mind me saying that on the following day, Prince Charles will be following in the footsteps of his great-great-great-grandmother in visiting Killarney. He is coming to Muckcross House and Killarney House where Queen Victoria stayed in 1861, which was perhaps the foundation of our tourism industry. They will be very welcome there.

Mr Paul Givan MLA:

I welcome the opportunity to attend my first meeting since joining the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. It is a privilege to be appointed to such an august body.

I also welcome the opportunity to renew my friendship with Minister of State Joe McHugh. He is very much a friend of the political process in Northern Ireland. He has been at the heart of relationships there and is held in high esteem by those across the political parties. I welcome him here today.

Relationships are very important. The Minister of State touched on that and on how developing a mature relationship allows us to have honest conversations. Undoubtedly, we are in a turbulent period with Brexit that is leading to a degree of tension but I am confident that as that is resolved, normal relations will resume. In the meantime, it is important that those conversations take place.

I agree that it would be much better if the Northern Ireland Assembly were restored and my party and I have made it clear that we would do that today, without any preconditions, based on the structures that were established through the Good Friday Agreement, as amended at St Andrews. We believe that that would be the right thing to do while we continue to work out how to resolve the issues that led to Sinn Féin bringing down the institutions. I make the point that Northern Ireland has a voice on the issue as my party has ten Members of Parliament and their voices are being heard very loudly in the Brexit process.

I point out to the Minister of State that if the same energy that has been expended on the backstop was spent on getting the type of EU-UK trade deal on which there could be agreement across the board, tension and hostility would not be created around the efforts to establish the backstop. Whenever the Taoiseach makes comments in respect of the backstop – the narrative and the context around that was that no nationalist in Northern Ireland would ever be left behind by the Irish Government – that sends a message to Unionism in Northern Ireland that creates unnecessary tensions. That said, I welcome the visit by the Taoiseach at the weekend, which was important, as was his welcome visit to Lord Bannside's museum, where he met Eileen Paisley.

Relationships are key and this body is very important to ensuring that, as we go through this period of turbulence, we maintain friendships so that, on the other side, we can get back to doing good business with each other.

Mr Tony McLoughlin TD:

I welcome Minister of State Joe McHugh to Sligo. I thank him for opening the conference and for his comments and his frankness in his answers. I am very honoured and privileged in being the TD for this constituency so I represent Sligo and live here. I welcome all my colleagues to Sligo, which is Yeats country and “the land of heart’s desire”. Unfortunately, this is a short period but it is vitally important that members enjoy the wonderful opportunity that they have here in Sligo over the next few days.

I am the TD for the Sligo-Leitrim constituency, which is along the border and part of Donegal. The single biggest issue that we have here is Brexit. People express their fear about that to me every day. It is a major issue for us along the Border – in Sligo-Leitrim and, as the Minister said earlier, in his constituency – because of the amount of cross-border activity that takes place. Perhaps the Minister of State would expand on that.

Mr John Scott MSP:

I, too, welcome Minister of State Joe McHugh back to BIPA. It is great to see him here again and brings back a lot of good memories.

A few short years ago, President Michael D. Higgins and the Minister of State came to Scotland. He spoke very eloquently and movingly about the united future of those on the Celtic fringes. What is the Republic of Ireland doing to build on the relationships that we enjoy currently between Scotland and Ireland?

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

I thank members for the questions. Paul Coghlan did not really ask a question but he talked about Kerry so I will have to acknowledge that. With regard to his point, which is not lost on me, we have come a long way and there are strong relations that have been embedded for a long time. That is based on mutual respect. There is nobody more respectful than the people from the Kingdom when it comes to welcoming people and no doubt there will be a big welcome this weekend.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

We might meet Donegal in the All-Ireland final yet again.

Mr Joe McHugh TD:

We will see.

It is good to see Paul Givan again and I thank him for his kind words. They reminded me of an event in Stormont a number of years ago – he may have been at it himself – when Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness held a reception for 12 members of my parliamentary party, including Frankie Feighan. For a lot of them, it was their first time in Belfast. That was about four years ago. I remember that Peter Robinson opened his speech by saying, “Let’s build this relationship.” Then he stopped and retracted a bit and said, “No – the relationship is already built; it is about what we do with the relationship.”

I agree with the point that when we get through the turbulence or the difficult time and difficult conversations that need to be had, we will be back to business and working together for the betterment of our constituencies. It is always difficult for a Taoiseach to try to reach out to all members of the community in a single message. I do not want to go into the

statement that the Taoiseach made but he is working really hard to reach out to all communities. As recently as last Friday, a member of my political party who is also a member of the Orange Lodge met him and he said that it was a great meeting and was really positive.

10.30 am

In response to Tony McLoughlin, I say that I am delighted to be in Sligo. I was speaking to him a number of weeks ago. We were supposed to be here a couple of months ago but the weather was not as good as it is today. We made it eventually. He is right to articulate the fears of small to medium-sized enterprises and businesses. We have to keep the focus on that. For example, it might be that primary produce that is being manufactured in my constituency of Donegal is coming into Northern Ireland at Derry port and then being exported back into the Republic of Ireland. There is a very complex movement of business processes and I am certainly acutely aware of that.

It is good to see John Scott again. I know from our conversations over the years that we continually challenge each other's perceptions as politicians. I thank him personally for that engagement over the years. We might get a chance to meet up soon as I am going to Glasgow on Thursday evening for an event there on Friday night for the new Causeway Ireland Scotland Business Exchange. I am looking forward to speaking at that event.

The company that builds most of the bridges in Scotland is based in Galway and has 400 back-office staff there. A lot of lads from my county and different parts of the country fly into Glasgow and Edinburgh early on a Monday morning, work there and then come back home on a Thursday evening. That is the type of remote working that is going on. The relationship is getting ever more complex but it is ever more intertwined as well. People used to emigrate to London and stay there and never come home or people from west Mayo or west Clare emigrated to Glasgow and never came home but that is not happening any more. People are more mobile and the situation is more complex. As politicians, we owe it to our citizens to reflect the type of lives that they lead. That is why BIPA is so important because it is reflecting all those citizens in the various parts and it is doing it well. I again acknowledge the Assembly for doing that.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I thank the 16 contributors, some of whom had more than one question. I particularly thank the Minister of State for addressing the issues that have been raised and for giving a comprehensive update on British-Irish and EU relations. I thank him for giving us his time this morning. He deserves a round of applause. [*Applause.*]

PANEL DISCUSSION: MARKING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIGNING OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

In the previous plenary session in Liverpool, we had a debate in which it was recognised how important the absence of a hard border had been for these islands. That key aspect of the peace process was achieved by the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement 20 years ago and its implementation over the past two decades.

Many events have taken place in recent months to mark the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Today, we will hear from Ms Bronagh Hinds and Baroness May Blood, who is a British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Member. Both were centrally involved in the complex negotiations that culminated in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and are founding members of Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, which is widely recognised as bringing an essential voice to the table in Northern Ireland at a very difficult time. There will be opening statements, after which questions will be taken from Members of the Assembly. Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood are very welcome.

Ms Bronagh Hinds:

Good morning, everyone. I am delighted to be here and I thank the Assembly very much for its invitation. I am delighted to see in the audience current friends and friends from the past when we were doing the Good Friday Agreement negotiations. It might seem odd – although not so odd as this is the centenary year of the extension of suffrage to some women – that May Blood and I are here and that there are other people in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly who were there at the time. I pay tribute to a number of the Assembly's members who are here: Lord Empey, Lord Taylor, David Ford, Lord Murphy and Lord Dubs. I cannot see anyone from the Irish Government side who was intimately involved in the negotiations but I know that Joan Burton, for example, was involved and was going up and down during that period.

The Belfast Good Friday Agreement, despite its flaws and the inconstant respect of parties for its spirit and principles, has been exceedingly successful. Twenty years of peace – if not total political coherence – is testimony to that. I am going to do some frank talking, including about some of the issues that have been referred to this morning.

At the recent 20th anniversary celebrations in Belfast, Bill Clinton called the agreement the most successful peace agreement anywhere and said that it had delivered a high level of democracy due to its innovative and lasting power-sharing arrangements. It might be said, "He would say that, wouldn't he?" but that is true because peace agreements have a tendency to fail. Peace agreements that last for 20 years or more are very successful.

I would like to put on record my acknowledgment of the brave leadership that was shown by political leaders of the time who put peace, people and country above party interests – indeed, some of the leading parties suffered as a result – and gave the leadership that was required at the time. Unusually, the agreement was endorsed overwhelmingly by parallel self-determination on the island of Ireland.

Although we strive for higher performance in the outworking of the agreement, not least with regard to the need to address the trauma and legacy of the past in an inclusive and comprehensive manner, many conflict-ridden regions would settle for the peace that we have. Recently – again, at the same celebrations – Senator Mitchell said that the agreement is only part of the story, that the hard part is implementation and that leadership is a significant part of that. It has to be lived every day.

The Women's Coalition went into the negotiations in 1996 determined to reach an accommodation that would deliver a stable and peaceful future. Some might say, "Didn't we all do that?" However, we refused to defend entrenched political positions and we had unionists and nationalists among our number. We were guided by the three key principles of inclusion, human rights and equality, which we used as the basis of our approach as we

worked our way through the negotiations. To us, securing sustainable peace meant that the negotiations had to include all stakeholders and address the comprehensive agenda of issues. The principles that we used are still relevant today.

The agreement is an international agreement. That is sometimes forgotten. It is registered at the United Nations and it cannot be lightly discarded. Agreed by the British and Irish Governments and the majority of political parties, it received the overwhelming consent of the electorate in referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. To speak frankly, British and Irish Governments took their eyes off the ball in following through on their commitments such as their commitment to one of the pieces of architecture in the agreement: the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. That should have been a regular operating part of the implementation architecture and it would not have caused dissension in being raised now, when the Assembly is in hiatus, as that working partnership would have been in being.

The Women's Coalition defended and practised inclusion consistently, whether it was in relation to Sinn Féin and the loyalist parties being excluded due to ceasefire breakdowns, the DUP walking away from the talks or the Women's Coalition itself remaining in the political forum that ran alongside the confidential talks when facing extreme misogyny and abuse. We all have to take responsibility for including ourselves in the process and giving some leadership.

The issue of consent has been raised this morning. It is not a word to be lightly dismissed. A major element in the agreement was unionist and nationalist acceptance of the concept of consent. The agreement is not a forever settlement; rather, it recognises the legitimacy of freely exercised choice on Northern Ireland's status in the context of continuing and equally legitimate different political aspirations. That is important. We trust the people and the people decide. That is our constitutional arrangement in Northern Ireland and, currently, we choose to be part of the United Kingdom.

Twenty years ago, both Governments and the political parties committed to the interlocking and interdependency of the institutional and constitutional arrangements. The totality of relationships and arrangements was made easier by British-Irish partnership within the European Union. The Assembly and the North-South Council on the island of Ireland – with an evolving agenda of co-operation and implementation in agriculture, transport, environment, waterways, inland fisheries, tourism, education, health, social security and social welfare, and urban and rural development – were regarded as

“so closely related that the success of each depends on that of the other.”

The European Union was part of the underpinning of the agreement.

Although the focus of the Brexit debate has been on the important question of a hard or soft border between the two parts of Ireland, concerns underpinning peace in the agreement are much wider and deeper than that involving border crossings; a vibrant unrestricted economy; implications for policing, which was a major success of the agreement; identity and security of rights. Our European identity and the agreement's totality of relationships successfully freed us up to express our identity as British, Irish and both.

In a conflict steeped in past and current challenges on rights and opportunities, the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights are needed to provide people with the

confidence that their rights and equalities will be respected. We need to remember that the most recent outbreak of the conflict was not to do with a territorial border issue; it was to do with issues of civil rights. That is sometimes forgotten in a debate that is only about borders and economy. In a tempestuous world, the human rights agenda is a European and worldwide agenda. Some of our leading international leaders are not living up to standards – there is no need to name names. Rights must be protected and extended. In this context, I am talking about modern rights such as the right to same-sex marriage and rights on reproduction, abortion and language. Northern Ireland cannot be a place apart in these islands.

On the combined anniversaries of the extension of suffrage to some women and the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, you will permit me to wax a little lyrical about the Women's Coalition. The Women's Coalition engaged fully in the tough negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement and the supplementary agreements that followed in the succeeding years. We nudged larger parties to adopt an inclusive approach to introducing the talks agenda. We put forward a novel agenda of ideas. At a time when some would not speak to others, we dialogued with all parties and acted as a channel of communication. We challenged the male chauvinist and politically demonising language and obstructive behaviour that were barriers in the negotiation process. We experimented with ideas to find pathways through contentious issues. I venture to suggest that that approach is still needed.

An inclusive approach – by which I mean one that includes all parties – is needed as part of a step-by-step approach to getting the Assembly and the Executive up and running. We should not focus solely on getting a deal between two parties. As with the success that was achieved between 1972 and 1996, we must have an inclusive approach if we are to be successful now. The asymmetrical power position of Northern Ireland parties is a serious obstacle, as was eloquently expressed by John Major in relation to the relationship between the DUP and the Conservative Government. Parties need to be on a level playing field and all parties need to be treated respectfully and equally in the process.

I turn to some of the challenges and the way forward. Northern Ireland's political leaders must now face up to several challenges. People need an Assembly and an Executive that truly govern for a shared society as opposed to a shared-out society in which the leading parties on either side – no matter which parties they are – continue to divide and rule by trading policy and resources with each other for their side. An Executive that involves all parties, should they choose to be involved, must respect all parties to that Executive and govern with collective Cabinet responsibility. Citizens are weary of the infighting.

With regard to victims, I put on record that it was the Women's Coalition that put the issue on the table in the talks agenda. Attention and resources must be devoted to dealing with the legacy of the past and to victims and trauma. It is absolutely ridiculous that such a major issue is the last one to be paid attention to. Women must be equally included in the framing process and in the outcomes. I suggest that less attention – except in the way of policing – and resources should be devoted to the carrot approach to paramilitaries. People were outraged by the recent paramilitary statement that we will no longer have any criminals within our midst. People were saying, "Are you still around now?" People want paramilitaries to go away.

The Women and Peace Building Project, which was funded by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland and in which the women's sector co-operated, reached more than 1,000 women across Northern Ireland and in the border counties in the south. Women expressed

more fear now than they had done during the conflict because of the inward turning by some paramilitaries in some communities.

10.45 am

They were deeply concerned about the walking around with money, the flashy cars and everything else, including their children, particularly their young sons, being attracted into that lifestyle and holding up such people as heroes. Enough is enough. We need women's full and equal participation and the advancement of women in public life. Members will note that what I am naming through this list is what the Women's Coalition put on the table in the talks on the agreement and on which it has yet to receive total fulfilment.

There has been some improvement in the Assembly and in local government. As Lord Empey and many of you will know, my organisation DemocraShe worked with every single political party. We worked with anti-agreement and pro-agreement parties before the DUP came into the process in order to build women's capacity and get more women into political leadership in the parties. I pay tribute to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee that was co-chaired by Paula Bradley from the DUP and Caitríona Ruane from Sinn Féin, which took forward an agenda on women in politics within the Assembly.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland is pushing an agenda of equality and diversity but, wait for it, we have a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, which has been mentioned in the press of late. How on earth could an Executive appoint a commission of 13 people but have only one woman on it? When one thinks about the contribution that women have made in the negotiations and can make on the pathways for the way forward, that is not acceptable in this day and age.

We need leadership in driving towards greater integration and cohesion in society with integrated education at the leading edge and more integrated housing projects. On a personal note, I can say that I have looked with my daughter to buy a house; young people find it very difficult to get the money together to buy houses. We live in a mixed area and we wanted to live in a mixed area. Back then, the estate agents told us that there was a 20% premium to buy a house in a mixed area. We need to move forward on this agenda.

The civic forum, which was conceived by the Women's Coalition and committed to in the Agreement, was never properly established. It was not established in the way that we conceived and when the first Assembly went down, it was suspended and never resurrected.

We have seen examples of the modern approach to engaging citizens, for example, with the Citizens' Assembly in the south, and there is much discussion in civil society in Northern Ireland about having something similar. Organised civil society – the business groups, trade unions, voluntary sector, community groups and ordinary people – is frustrated. The civic forum should now be instigated to bring together economic, social and cultural actors to support the Assembly's leadership in moving forward.

I will not reiterate the rights issues but it is dangerous for us not to move forward the rights agenda. We cannot be a place apart.

In line with the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland and to provide one of the underpinnings of the agreement, we must retain an effective relationship with the European Union. Despite the way it is sometimes portrayed, this is not a nationalist-unionist zero-sum

issue. I have heard that from all over the community so we have to assert that simple but important point consistently.

I will finish on the positive side of things. We must remember that the heavy lifting has been done on very challenging and deeply painful issues. We have taken substantial steps to peace between enemies; institutions have been designed and operated and policing has been a key success, including political partnership in its oversight, even if it is in abeyance at the moment. We have seen decommissioning of weapons on the whole; there is also the work on prisoner release. Those are really hard issues.

There has been brave leadership on all sides, including from the Northern Ireland parties and the British and Irish Governments, and with active interest from and connections with Scotland and Wales. All that is needed for the way forward. We need to say that we have a successful peace process, that at least three quarters of what needs to be done has been done and that we are able to step on up from that. That needs an enduring partnership, as was said last night, between the British and Irish Governments, whatever the outcome of Brexit. I pay tribute to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly for how it has maintained its relationships along the way.

As a previous speaker said this morning, we are working for future generations. In any case, young people are moving on. If we do not move on, they will move on beyond us.

Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Baroness Blood:

You have now heard the academic. I have to tell you that I am not an academic. Everybody in the room knows that. About a year ago, I was asked to go to a round-table conference in London, which was going to discuss the word “trust”, and I went along. There were people from the health service, Facebook and the banks. They were all top people and they talked round the table. When it came to my turn I said, “Quite honestly – trust me – I do not know why I am here.” I feel that this morning. I relied on people like Bronagh and Monica McWilliams who can go into all the detail that Bronagh has gone into.

I will talk from another point of view about the Good Friday Agreement. I will talk about how it affected community because that is where I am. I work among community all over Northern Ireland and on both sides of the peace line. Some of the effects of the Good Friday Agreement never even touched the edges.

In the Good Friday Agreement, we were promised a number of things. As Bronagh said, we were promised a civic forum, which had a short lifespan. In my area, we were told that we would get investment. It never happened. Any investment that is happening in areas like mine, such as the Falls, the Short Strand and up around Coleraine – all over Northern Ireland – is being done by volunteers or charity. It is not even in the sight of the people up in Stormont.

We celebrated 20 years of the Good Friday Agreement. Lord Kilclooney chided me last night for calling it the Good Friday Agreement but I did not realise that that was not the right title. However, I do not refer to it as the Good Friday Agreement because it was agreed on Good Friday; I simply think that it was a good Friday for the people of Northern Ireland. That is my starting line.

We look to see how we can help young people and children. In working-class areas, we have a tremendous problem of underachievement in education. I know that there is a big thing about Protestant underachievement but there is underachievement on both sides. That has to be dealt with but it is not being dealt with even when the Assembly is sitting. It is just pushing the snowball up the mountain all the time.

We were told in the Good Friday Agreement that we would get a bill of rights. We went down that road. I went to Parliament and was told, “No, you’re not going to have a bill of rights for Northern Ireland. You’ll have a chapter in the bill of rights for the UK.” I have never even heard another word of it this past number of years.

Where does all that go? It goes back into the community where people say, “sure, they don’t want us anyway.” I feel very strongly about certain things. As Bronagh said, the Good Friday Agreement mentions victims. The Women’s Coalition put that forward. It is a big subject at the moment and all the parties are now talking about it. The victims should have been the first thing.

One of the things that we got into the Good Friday Agreement was – I would say this – integrated education but we have had to fight every step of the way for that and have had to take it through the courts over and over again. However, it was a promise in the Good Friday Agreement.

It is very good 20 years on to have Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern and George Mitchell come to Northern Ireland and tell us how wonderful the agreement was but I have to tell members that it has never really filtered through to the communities that I represent, which feel that they have been left behind. They made a lot of sacrifices. I remember Bronagh, myself and Mo Mowlam – one of the downsides for me in the recent celebrations was that Mo Mowlam was airbrushed out of the whole thing – going round different, really hard communities in Northern Ireland trying to sell the early release of prisoners and the decommissioning of weapons. It was a hard fight but the community decided for the greater good that if that was going to create a better future for their kids, they would give on that.

All those things happened. Anyway, we are told that the decommissioning of weapons happened, although I sometimes wonder whether it did. We are also told that all the prisoners were on early release. We know all that. That all happened but the things that affect community did not. They were just brushed over so people on the ground – people in my community and all working-class communities – feel that the Good Friday Agreement is nothing to do with them.

I work among young people. Today, if you went to a young person who is 30 years old and mentioned the Good Friday Agreement to them, they would say, “wasn’t that something that was signed years ago?” It has no bearing on their lives. Lord Empey and I work on different programmes in the Shankill. I work among young people whose alternative is suicide. Somewhere along the line, we have not fulfilled the promise of the Good Friday Agreement. I would love to see the Assembly up and running and all the parties involved but I would also like to see it make meaningful forward movements. The Assembly has been up and down so many times it is like “The Grand Old Duke of York”:

“And when they were up, they were up, and when they were down, they were down.”

After a while, people get fed up with all that.

I know that time is short so I will not talk for much longer but one of the things that worries me is that the Assembly looks like it will not sit for many, many months. A vacuum is already occurring on the streets. I have evidence where that is beginning to take hold in a big and meaningful way. We will never go back to the bombing and all that but we could go back to a situation in which parts of Northern Ireland are ruled by paramilitaries. Do we really want that? Are we happy enough with 70% of the community doing well while the other 30% does not matter? I do not believe that; neither do I believe that this was the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement.

I will finish with a quote from something that I read recently. It is a sentiment to which Joe McHugh referred this morning:

“Real peace is not just the absence of violence, but the ability of people to trust, forgive and learn together. This takes time to achieve and requires sustained effort by civic society, as well as by Governments. Young people are the key to this process, and education and culture are an important part of ensuring that peace lasts.”

Bronagh has pointed out many things that have and have not happened. We really have to get a grip of things and stop talking about our having done it all because we have the Good Friday Agreement. I know that there are people in this room who put a lot of effort into the agreement. I am very grateful for that because I live in an area where the Troubles were horrific. However, I see a different thing happening now and I do not want it to happen.

I thank members for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning. As I have said, I am sorry that I am not an academic like Bronagh but we all make a difference, do we not?

Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood.

We open up the proceedings to discussion from the floor. I call Lord Dubs.

The Lord Dubs:

Thank you for such an insightful – if depressing – presentation from the two speakers.

My question is in two parts. Some time ago at Westminster, May – Baroness Blood – showed us a film about the history of the Women’s Coalition, which encompassed many of the issues that the two speakers have just covered. What is the chance that that film will emerge to see the light of day? I know lots of people who want to see it. It would be helpful to their cause to have that film indicate what happened in the past and what inspired them.

The other part of my question is this: Baroness Blood will remember that, some time ago, Committee D looked at the life chances of young people in the most disadvantaged parts of Belfast. Many of the things that we learned from the advice and help that she gave to the committee – she showed us where to go and who to talk to – are reflected in what she has said today about the people who have been left behind. Even after that, nobody wanted to know. We did the report, it said all the things and it warned what could happen, with a whole left-behind generation to which Baroness Blood referred yet nothing was done. Can anything be done to ensure – hopefully, quickly – but certainly when the Assembly comes back – that the people will be given a stake in their society rather than continue to be left behind?

Baroness Blood:

First of all—

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I am sorry to interrupt Baroness Blood but we will take three questions at a time and then we will come back to her.

I call Joan Burton TD.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

First of all, I am delighted that both Bronagh Hinds and Baroness Blood are reviving all our memories about how bad things once were and how we could, if we are not all careful, fall back to those times. Progress is not inevitable; we make our own progress.

11.00 am

I am delighted that May Blood mentioned Mo Mowlam. I should also mention Clare Short because, before that particular Labour Government came into office, I used to meet her regularly as she was from Dundalk – where my husband is from – and Crossmaglen. Those women came over time and again just to talk to people from different parts of Ireland about how progress could be made. At that time, I was Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and I recall having to run around 1996 and 1997 a mini seminar on what exactly the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition was. Bronagh Hinds mentioned misogyny. Even the delightful people in Iveagh House could not get their heads around the idea of that potentially very disruptive women’s party.

I also thank Bronagh Hinds for her comments about young people in less-well-off communities. We have exactly the same problems in the south. Kids in such communities do not go to college in the same numbers as do those from other communities – I suspect that that is probably true in Wales, Scotland and England – and they no longer have the apprentice opportunities that their grandfathers and fathers had. We face a situation in which we are leaving a lot of young people behind, particularly boys because nowadays there are more opportunities for many young women, who are staying on a little longer in school and getting more qualifications. That is important in all our areas, and it was great to hear Bronagh Hinds speak about that. The Assembly should return to that issue as soon as possible – I know that it has taken it up on many occasions – because we need to look at it in some detail and learn from her experience and the experience of other communities. It is part of the Trump experience; people are being left behind and are becoming extremely distant from any kind of democratic politics.

Mr Steve Aiken MLA:

I thank Bronagh Hinds and May Blood very much. I feel a bit like May because I am a member of a legislative Assembly that is not doing any legislating.

There is a sense of crisis in Northern Ireland. There are two crises. There is a political crisis and a crisis in Government, as we see day in and day out with the renewable heat incentive (RHI) scheme debacle. There is a definite sense in Northern Ireland that people do not think that they are being well served by the Government machine. We need to solve the political

crisis but as leaders of civil society, how can we try to get the Government machine back up and running effectively for all the people in Northern Ireland?

Baroness Blood:

I thank Lord Dubs for his question. He is quite right. The Walt Disney Company in America decided to make a film about three things that happened during the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process. One was the Peace People, the second was the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and the third was the secret talks that happened at Clonard. Three things that never got any real publicity were highlighted. Our film was very successful. It was shown on TV and I took it to Westminster. It then went to America and was shown in Washington. As far as I understand, it is now in the process of being produced to send out to other women's groups. However we have to work through Disney and, unfortunately, it is not within my power to have Disney do what I tell it to do. I agree with Lord Dubs that the film was great and well put together.

If anyone has not had the opportunity to watch Patrick Kielty's smashing programme on the death of his father, I recommend that they do so. All those things are now coming out. People are beginning to talk about it, which is good.

Lord Dubs was quite right about the report. He brought a number of peers and MPs over to the peace line in north Belfast, and I took them to a number of groups to see young people with – I really mean this – life-limiting chances. As I said earlier, for some of them, unfortunately, the only alternative is suicide. The report was very well written and very well received but it was then left on a shelf and we have heard nothing more about it. One of my fears is that people get into Government, talk and produce reports, which is good, but they never go any further or translate into work being done. If we are going to do that, we have to make sure that at least some recommendations see the light of day and that we get the advantage of that.

Steve Aiken was quite right to say that we have a real crisis in Northern Ireland. People are looking at what is happening and saying, "they're no better than we are" and that politicians are a bunch of crooks. I am worried that this will push young people away from even voting. That is one of the serious things in Northern Ireland that I think is not well understood. It is all right to say, "I can go out and wave a flag and everybody will vote" but that is not necessarily true.

I will give a stark example that I mentioned when I was talking to Lord Kilclooney last night. I was talking to a group of young people recently, and this young man said to me, "We're members of the PUL". I said, "Excuse me, what's the PUL?" He said, "Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist". I said, "Oh, they're not all one thing?" "Oh, no!" he said, "Protestants believe in God, unionists believe in politics and the loyalists believe in ourselves." That is how divided we are in the Protestant community never mind what happens across the peace line.

We have a real crisis and we have to move on it. Somebody somewhere has to take leadership. Bronagh Hinds referred to the real leadership that existed during the Good Friday Agreement. A lot of folk in this room put themselves on the line when that was not popular. We must have politicians who will do that again or Northern Ireland will just go into the abyss.

Ms Bronagh Hinds:

I refer to the point Steve Aiken made about the sense of crisis in politics and governance. A lot of things get mixed up because of the conflict in Northern Ireland. People are trying to keep the Executive together and trying to put it back together when there have been a number of scandals that would certainly bring down a Minister, if not a Government, in a non-conflicted society. The RHI scheme scandal is one of those and it is growing by the day as everything becomes public. There are issues over and above that but the Government was suspended over that issue. Despite, I suggest, Martin McGuinness's attempts at the time to keep it together by all sorts of manoeuvrings, it could not be done. That was mainly because the people were so incensed by the scandal: the feedback said that it had to be investigated properly.

I do not want to be depressed. Even though the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement was celebrated only among some people and it was a high-level thing, a lot of us were getting on, and when Bill Clinton, Senator Mitchell and so on came back here, that reminded us of how far we have travelled along the road. We need to keep it in mind that it is a reasonably good agreement and that we have travelled a long way. The cup is three quarters full and not three quarters empty: that is the important thing.

People are going about their daily lives: it is politics and governance that are failing, as Steve Aiken suggested. It is not that people want to go back to direct rule or whatever. They want local governance in Northern Ireland. However, politicians are letting themselves down. People do not believe that they are well served by the politicians in Northern Ireland.

Steve Aiken asked what the steps should be. As I said, I think that the British and Irish Governments need to step up as the co-guarantors of the Agreement. I think that they let the matter drop in the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which, when it started to be proposed as a solution, was seen, or, at least, portrayed, by some on the unionist side as a threat. It was never meant to be that. It was meant to be a solid partnership that was working. That is an important point.

The focus needs to be on trying to get the institutions up and running. Political parties need to be careful of their utterances. This goes back to what the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition said; people need to stop demonising all the other sides and realise that we have to build trust in order to be able genuinely to show people that there can be collective Cabinet Government at some time in the future. I do not know how that can be done in each individual party.

Obviously, there was some of kind of deal on the cards at some time and it was turned down. I do not know how far the deal would have gone and how much it was discussed. During the Belfast Good Friday Agreement negotiation, we saw that party leaders had to take difficult decisions. On the BBC's "Daily Politics" programme, David Kerr from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) gave a good description of the really difficult discussions that the Ulster Unionists had to make around that time when they moved forward to saying that they would accept the Agreement. We also know that Sinn Féin felt that it had not prepared its people enough. People have to do preparation and face the challenges in their parties. This goes for all parties.

Some things, including the Civic Forum for Northern Ireland, have been suspended because they depend on the Northern Ireland Assembly. However, there is absolutely no reason why we should not have that forum when the Assembly is up and running. We should design it

slightly differently from how it was designed by the Ulster Unionists and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in the first place.

In the meantime, it is not beyond our wit to get an informal civic forum of citizens together. We used to have that even before we had the Good Friday Agreement. The voluntary sector, which was led by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA); the business sector, which was led by the Institute of Directors (IOD) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI); the farmers; and the trade unions met the Department of Finance and others. It is not beyond our imagination to put such an economic and social forum together to at least feed into something. We are completely rudderless while Brexit is going on.

On the inclusive party approach, I absolutely and desperately believe that all parties need to be at the table so we need something that brings together all the parties to do business and have discussions together. That cannot be done formally in committees in the Assembly, but there should be a way of getting committees, business or interaction going in a more organised way that involves all the parties so that the public can see that there are steps forward.

I do not think that we will see anything in the next six months or until after Brexit, but at least we could put in place the building blocks of civil society, parties working together, parties having difficult internal discussions and parties being careful about how they talk about other parties and thinking about how they demonise others, which only makes things harder in the long run.

11.15 am

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We are running out of time, and a lot of people want to speak. I intend to call as many people as possible. Everyone should keep their remarks very limited, otherwise we will have to cut people short and not everyone will be able to speak.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

I thank the presenters for a very powerful and frank presentation. In the Isle of Man, we see that poverty is a fast track to disengagement. That really came through in what the speakers said. It is a shame there is no scope in Northern Ireland for an assembly without an executive to at least provide a talking shop that is perhaps needed. My question to the panel is: where are the future guardians and champions of the Good Friday Agreement as its architects slowly start to retire?

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

That was a fascinating and very powerful presentation from both speakers. I thank them for putting women centre stage in the agreement and in the process of politics. I think many of us are very disappointed to see those celebrations without women at the height of that given the work that was done.

It would be helpful to expand on the comments about how we move forward and unblock the assembly from the governmental point of view. Ms Hinds was very optimistic that it might happen six months after Brexit. From what I hear daily in the House of Commons regarding

Brexit and the position of the British Government, it will go on for years. There will be no point at which we can stop talking about Brexit between our countries. Given the focus on that of both Governments and the very clear focus of the British Government that seems to keep saying that nothing can be done until the assembly is up and running, how do those civic forums engage themselves and have that political legitimacy that can take action? What can both Governments do to push them to do that?

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

Joan Burton mentioned education as a route out of poverty and a diversion away from criminality. Lord Dubs mentioned the BIPA Committee D report on the life chances of young people in Belfast. During that report, I put down a parliamentary question because the Northern Ireland Assembly had collapsed at that time asking for the higher education university participation levels in each ward in Northern Ireland. The level in North Down was 70% while the level in Shankill was 2%. I then asked about further education participation rates in each ward in Northern Ireland. This is further education that opens up apprenticeships. The level in Down was 35% while the level in Shankill was 2%. I have tried to put down the question over the past year but was told I was not allowed to. If that question was put down, would there have been any difference over the past 12 years?

The Lord Murphy:

That was a wonderful presentation from Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood. Of course, they made a unique contribution in the talks leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. It was always a refreshing occasion to listen to the good sense that came from them.

My question is simple. If we want to restore the institutions, Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood have said that one of the ways we could do it is to ensure quite rightly that proper formal all-party talks start – not just between the two main parties but between them all. I have two other suggestions on which I would like their comments, the first of which is greater involvement by the two Prime Ministers because at the moment, it is not much of an involvement. The second is the question of whether an independent Chair, like George Mitchell, should be appointed to start the process rolling.

Ms Deidre Brock MP:

Ms Hinds mentioned that it is not beyond the wit of anyone to set up another citizens' forum or assembly in the way that happened in the Republic of Ireland. It was obviously used very effectively recently with the Repeal the Eighth campaign. I notice that the citizens' assembly there has now come out with some very interesting opinions on climate change. Who will lead on that? Who is best placed to lead on that to get this happening now? What needs to happen to give that forum a real legitimacy so that it gives the politicians courage to start tackling these very difficult issues they need to look at head on?

Mr Colin McGrath MLA:

I thank Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood for the presentation. I echo and support the contribution from Lord Murphy. I think that if we had an independent process and an independent Chair and all parties were involved in it, there would be a chance that things might progress rather than things happening behind closed doors. The question I would ask the panel is whether there is any recognition that, whilst the issues are very complex, the

process is quite simple, as in getting people around a table and talking? What is the impact of the parliamentary arithmetic in the House of Commons on being able to deliver any process?

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

I thoroughly enjoyed that presentation, particularly how the speakers explained the issues that the Women's Coalition brought to the table. I was born before the Good Friday Agreement but not long before it. This is something that is entirely learned after the fact for me.

My question relates very much to what was asked earlier about the future guardians of the agreement. How do we get to the point where on the 25th or 30th anniversary, the record will have been corrected and those who were airbrushed out of these 20th anniversary celebrations will have been put back in, because future guardians of the agreement need to understand the context in which it was arrived at?

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

I thank the speakers for their presentation. The most important thing to come out from the Good Friday Agreement was an end to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the peace it brought to all communities, the mutual respect, civil rights and religious liberties for everybody in the community. When one sees two people like Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley working together, it shows a lot of good things in the North. I come from Dundalk in the Border area close to Down and Armagh. I grew up seeing the conflict between republicans and unionists, Catholics and Protestants. It was absolutely dreadful living in the area.

The Good Friday Agreement has been fantastic for the whole of Ireland. Three new institutions were established in the agreement. Could Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood elaborate on these three institutions? I know they spoke about them earlier. The first was the democratically elected Northern Ireland Assembly. The second was the North-South Ministerial Council for cross-Border issues and the third was the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. I am over 50 years of age. I can drive from Dundalk to Belfast and Derry to visit relations. There is a lot of great spirit there. In sport, whether it is GAA, soccer or rugby, the connection between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has been fantastic. In fairness, the Good Friday Agreement has been the main issue in the past 50 years. Could Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood elaborate on the three institutions about which I asked?

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

I think all the questions have been asked already so I will just pass a quick comment. As a woman of my generation growing up through teenage years and young woman years during the 1970s, seeing the troubles that were happening in Northern Ireland - some of them reflected in the west of Scotland where I was raised - becoming politically aware and seeing the Women's Coalition coming together in the 1990s amidst the misogyny and overt sexism that was around through all of these decades - I suspect even more so in Northern Ireland than in the west of Scotland - I must say that the Women's Coalition was magnificent. I thank Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood for everything they did for women like me growing up.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Sixty years ago when I was chairman of the Ulster Young Unionist Council, I led a delegation to Dublin because I was very keen to improve relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Ulster Unionist party said I would get expelled if I did so. We went down and had a very good meeting with the central branch of Fine Gael, returned to Northern Ireland and nothing happened. However, three weeks later, I read in *The Irish Times* that the central branch of Fine Gael had been closed down. That was the reality of Irish politics 60 years ago. I watched Mr. Lemass come to Northern Ireland and be snowballed.

I was very much involved in the Belfast Agreement discussions. I had to lead the Ulster Unionist team one day at the very beginning when David Trimble was not present when Senator Mitchell asked us to agree an agenda for the Belfast Agreement. I suggested that the recognition of Northern Ireland by the Republic of Ireland was fundamental. The then foreign Minister of the Republic of Ireland, David Andrews, hit the roof and said that no way would this happen. I said to Senator Mitchell “sorry, I’m leading the Ulster Unionist delegation out of these talks” and out we went. We stayed in the building all day and at 5 o’ clock that afternoon, we were called back and told that Dublin had changed its mind and that the issue of recognition of Northern Ireland could be on the table.

We have benefited a lot from the Belfast Agreement. Whilst we still have problems in Northern Ireland, I think we are being too pessimistic here this morning. We have peace and much better relations with the Republic of Ireland. Interestingly, last week the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland came to Belfast and was welcomed by the Orange Order no less. He then went to west Belfast where he was picketed by Catholics opposing his views on same-sex marriage, abortion and things of that nature. So things have changed and improved. Not only do we have improved relations within Northern Ireland, we have much better co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. When I was a Minister, we had 15% unemployment. Today, it is 3.1% so let us look at the advantages of the Belfast Agreement. We know there is more to do. Let us do it but certainly let us not be pessimistic all the time.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I will ask Ms Hinds and Baroness Blood to sum up. Unfortunately, we have a very short space of time.

Baroness Blood:

I will be very brief so the Co-Chairperson need not worry. If I could go in reverse, I will deal with Lord Kilclooney’s question first. Nobody here is pessimistic. We are simply putting reality into the picture. I work every day in areas where I see these problems. That does not stop me trying to change them and to make a difference. I understand where Lord Kilclooney is coming from. I am really surprised that Lord Kilclooney used an old trade union technique to get what he wanted. When I was in a trade union and we were negotiating and did not get what we wanted, we walked out. The employer then said “what’s happening?” Everybody had walked out and then we were brought back in again so I was really surprised to hear that Lord Kilclooney did that.

I would like to talk about future guardians. One of the things that is really upbeat in Northern Ireland is the fact that there are a number of young people coming into the system. Ms Hinds alluded to many women who are in the Assembly but right across the board, male and female; they are younger people and are coming in with different ideas. They are coming in

with a new way to look forward and that will be the future guardian of what we have in Northern Ireland. I am not pessimistic and I do not think we are going down the tube. We are not. There are still a lot of problems and we have to work through them but the point is that there are good things happening all over Northern Ireland. There is really good positive work happening even in the areas in which I work. Lord Empey can emphasise that. We both sit on a committee that does a lot of that work.

It is not that we are saying everything is doom and gloom. What we are saying is that we were asked to speak about the Good Friday Agreement. I was simply giving a simple assessment that the Good Friday Agreement means nothing to the young people among whom I work. I am trying to get them interested and to get them into education. One of the things we have done to try to cure the problem of under-achievement is the Sure Start programme, which we got into Northern Ireland ten or 12 years ago. Today, we have 37 Sure Start programmes. This works from when a child is born. Those children will grow up differently and that will change the future so that is where my hope lies. I am going to leave it to the boss.

11.30 am

Ms Bronagh Hinds:

Those areas that fall back into conflict later on do so because people do not remember the history that was there. The history must be told from everybody's side. It does not belong to one person. We must do history from everyone's side. When Patrick Speight was working at the BBC, he did a marvellous project called "A State Apart" where everybody was represented in terms of part of their history being told. One of the things that arose from that project and its work with schools was that teachers were not choosing to teach history from the 1985 period onwards. They had not resolved some of the difficulties and conflicts they were going through and they did not know how to handle the conflict and the conflict that might be fed back into families from what was being taught in the classroom. I am glad to see that Corrymeela is doing substantial work with teachers but the issue about teaching history and allowing history to be taught and challenged and everybody's point of view being there and being challenged is an important part of that.

I think back, particularly to the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP which took a leadership role in bringing together the agreement, although all of us had a part in it. I do not think it is acceptable to be leading government in Northern Ireland today and having the benefit of the legacy of the fundamental part of the peace we had, which is the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, and deny responsibility for that agreement. We have had other agreements over the following ten to 20 years. They can build on and improve it but if someone is running government, they take the whole legacy and architecture of all of the agreements and become the guardian of that. All of our political leaders and all of the parties need to do that. Let me name it. I am sorry Paul Givan is not here but the DUP did walk away from the agreement. I think it had every entitlement to be part of the agreement. I am really pleased by the role Ian Paisley played with Martin McGuinness in trying to sow some collective spirit in respect to leading the process forward but we must accept the whole architecture of that agreement, including the consent principles and all of the elements around it. That is very important.

In respect of the civic forum and unblocking, it will take a lot of time because Brexit has fundamentally destabilised things here. It is more serious than people imagine. It also refers back to some of the things Baroness Blood talked about that is getting a hold and being talked

about in communities as well around paramilitaries. I do not think people want to go back to war by any means because we have made such good progress. In respect of the problem with the civic forum, the Women's Coalition brought two key priorities to the negotiations which were about increasing participation and diversity in politics and political engagement in a broader understanding of democracy that is beyond simply political party representation. That is what a citizen's assembly represents. We wanted to change the voting mechanism in Northern Ireland to bring more diverse people into politics. We did not win our voting mechanism. The agreement settled on six-seater constituencies in order to increase diversity. What did the last Assembly do but reduce it to five. With regard to selling it to the people through the notion that it would save money, the sixth seat was there to preserve more diversity coming into politics so that is one thing gone. The second thing is that the only reason we could not get the civic forum accepted was because politicians are a bit nervous. I am not about giving the civic forum separate political legitimacy. Politicians are elected to run the country. They are the legitimate political people but they should not be nervous about civic forums and citizens' assemblies. It was set up under the agreement under the auspices of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and that is the problem we have. We cannot get it up and running while there is no First and Deputy First Ministers. However, there is no reason it should not have been running when there were First and Deputy First Ministers. What I am saying is that it is not beyond the bounds of possibility to do something in the informal sector as a way towards building towards being able to get that civic forum up and running as one of the minor institutions in the agreement.

I cannot get around everybody but I agree with Lord Murphy's point that it is about a political way forward. I agree that we need more formal all-party talks. I agree that there needs to be greater involvement by the Prime Minister and Taoiseach. I think that is what I was alluding to even in the British-Irish intergovernmental forum. The British Prime Minister is really focused and has a lot on her agenda at the moment with Brexit but I think there needs to be a focus and far more attention with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Northern Ireland Office on the other side. We need the involvement of the two Prime Ministers. Given everything, I think an independent Chair would be exceedingly helpful.
[Applause]

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank Baroness Blood and Ms Hinds for their interesting and insightful contributions this morning. We have had a fantastic morning so far and because of that we are very much short of time so I will give members the bad news – there will be no coffee break. However, I know members will want to hear the next speaker because it is an important topic. Members can pop out in stages to get coffees and teas and bring them back if they choose to do so but we will go straight into the next session. I would ask members not to leave in one go to grab their coffees and to come straight back. Come back in so we can continue our session and show respect to our speakers. I will now hand over to Declan Breathnach to chair the next session.

WORK OF THE SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I reiterate what the Co-Chairperson said. Could people stay for this session? It is very important. Could we stagger times if people want to go out for coffee?

I am very pleased to invite Ms Gina McIntyre, chief executive officer of the Special EU Programmes Body, to the meeting today. The Special EU Programmes Body has played a vital role over the years in managing projects promoting cross-Border, transnational and inter-regional co-operation. I am delighted that BIPA has this opportunity to hear about the valuable work, which covers a number of BIPA jurisdictions. I am very pleased to invite Ms McIntyre to give her address. This will be followed by questions and answers.

Ms Gina McIntyre:

I am delighted to be here today and I thank the assembly for the invitation to provide information about the programmes and work we do in the Special EU Programmes Body. I will present a short presentation because I think some people might not be familiar with the PEACE and INTERREG programmes and what they do.

The Special EU Programmes Body is a body set up within the Good Friday Agreement. It was set up under Strand Two and concerns North-South co-operation with very clear lines of accountability to the North-South Ministerial Council, the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Executive. Of course, because we deliver EU programmes, we are also accountable to the EU.

With regard to the role of the body, we promote cross-community and cross-Border activity through EU structural funds programmes in Northern Ireland, the Border region of Ireland and, since 2007, parts of western Scotland. We specifically look after and manage the programmes known as PEACE and INTERREG. In addition, we also facilitate project participation in the INTERREG transnational programmes so we are like a sign posting for organisations that want to get involved with those programmes.

The areas we have funded over the years are very wide-ranging. They include social cohesion and inclusivity, enterprise, cross-Border health and social care, rural development, energy, transport links and telecommunications.

The PEACE programme is a unique programme across the whole of Europe. It does not exist anywhere else. It came about out of the desire of the European Union to contribute to this region in terms of a peace programme. The first PEACE programme back in 1995 addressed the immediate legacy of the conflict but as the programmes developed, to be frank, the budget got smaller. Throughout the years, we have changed the programme. There were different focuses on each of the programmes as we went through. We learned lessons from each programme when we changed it. This latest programme, which is PEACE IV, has a renewed focus on children and young people. Members will have heard it mentioned already – certainly by Paul Givan – that the Taoiseach went to the Grand Orange Lodge on Friday and visited the museum there. That was funded through PEACE III. Those are the types of projects we fund.

The PEACE programmes themselves – PEACE I to PEACE III – had almost €2 billion. With the inclusion of this latest programme with €270 million, €2.2 billion has been invested here over the years. Here are some examples of the numbers of people who have been involved in these programmes and attended anti-sectarian and anti-racism events and went to trauma counselling. Some people may ask, and I do get the question, as to why we still need a PEACE programme 20 years later. We have peace in the region. Members have already heard here this morning. Bronagh Hinds said it herself. Peace must be lived every day. It is very clear to us that peace is not a cash solution. The peace is fragile and needs repeating. It is

intergenerational and brings with it intergenerational issues. This PEACE programme is only part of a wider and more complex process. It underpins the political peace process but is never to be confused with it.

The impact on development and intergenerational and societal transformation is paramount in the current PEACE programme and going forward. There is a focus on the process of change. We learned through the years that we had to look at the areas of reconciliation and what might bring about change in this region. Indeed, reconciliation and the process of change for individuals and groups was part of that. Post-conflict regions are all about building relationships and changing individuals. The programme was able to do things that were probably politically difficult over the years. We were able to do that within the programme and address some of the issues.

The slide shows the types of project we are funding within the current programme. With regard to shared education, we have 350 schools and 144,000 school years to provide direct, sustained curriculum-based contact. It is different from integrated schools. It is about two schools in different communities, cross-Border links, sharing lessons on a weekly basis together and getting to know one another. As I said, there is a large focus on children and young people within this programme. We provide support for 7,400 marginalised young people aged 14 to 24 years. These are the children who would be the hardest to reach. These are the children who will not even enter a programme such as Sure Start. We are also involved in shared spaces and services, which involves building capital projects and helping victims and survivors with regard to support and to build a more cohesive society. Another strand involves building positive relations all across the region. It is all about promoting cross-community relations, respect and cultural diversity. It would be remiss of me not to mention one of the projects we fund. The project, which is entitled Lifestart, is a small project in terms of value and is partnered with Sligo Family Support. It involves talking to 3,000 parents about how to talk to their children about other communities and perceptions on ethnic groups, appearance etc. This is a fantastic project because it gets children before they start school, when perceptions start to be formed in the home. That is the type of thing we fund through the PEACE programme.

Challenges in this region are no different from those in any other cross-border region. Obviously, it is remote. There are employment difficulties, demographics and physical obstacles in terms of terrain. For those people who do not know Northern Ireland, anyone standing anywhere in Northern Ireland is never much more than an hour from the border. When one actually thinks about it, the entire region is a cross-border region. When one considers the difficulties regions across Europe have, one should remember that they are also exacerbated by post-conflict society. Ongoing challenges in a post-conflict society have been alluded to by Bronagh Hinds. There is considerable research on a worldwide basis that shows that the trauma of conflict and violence is passed on intergenerationally in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Distrust remains and manifests itself in many ways. There is hidden trauma, silences, the use of two words for the same thing or the use of two names for the same place. Those things stay and, unfortunately, the language of violence is etched in the memory of children from a young age and passed on.

While we talk about many of the things in Northern Ireland that do not work and are not working at the minute, I would like to focus on the things that have worked from the PEACE programme. I know that the PEACE programme involves only a small amount of money with regard to projects. We cannot fund everybody but fantastic lessons have been learned from that PEACE programme such as the partnership principle, which is about bringing together

politicians, civil servants, civil society and business. They sat at the same table to make the decisions on the projects. Another lesson is the importance of champions at any time in the community. Right from the very beginning, that was very important in the communities, particularly those that had suffered during the conflict and violence. Champions were found at all different levels at all different times so they ranged from politicians to the person on the street who took brave steps in some of the work they did in their own communities.

Capacity within civil society has been instrumental throughout these programmes. Communities took brave steps but it meant we had transparent decision making. Government structures were put in place for these programmes, there were new skills sets and new ideas were brought to the table in that civil society played such an important role in shaping a more cohesive society. The PEACE programme gave this practical effect with the funding we had.

Definition of reconciliation is something we will be sharing with other parts of the world in terms of post-conflict areas. We defined what reconciliation meant and helped to clarify and encourage better understanding. That definition is necessary in a post-conflict region.

The role of local authorities was very important. We put a lot of money through the local authorities and they built capacity within the communities for those communities that might not have had the capacity to undertake some of the bureaucratic aspects of grant access and funding. Local authorities knew what was needed in the areas. Programme content, particularly in the last round, was developed visibly with citizens on a consultative basis.

11.45 am

Members might be more familiar with the INTERREG programme. The INTERREG programme aims to promote greater territorial cohesion on a border area. It is one of 60 programmes in all the member states. As members can see, we have had several programmes and are into our fifth at this stage.

There has been funding of just under €1 billion with previous programmes. Western Scotland has been included since 2007. That was a very beneficial and important additional aspect that brought in a lot of institutions and some fantastic projects are now being funded. Members can see some examples of the tens of thousands of projects that have been funded in this region.

With regard to the current programme, this is the type of activity that is being funded and these are the interventions, including those in the areas of research and innovation, particularly health and life sciences. It has much to do with PhD research. We have wonderful projects happening between universities, the west of Scotland, Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland that look at health and life sciences. My colleague, John McCandless, will give the assembly some examples later if it would like to hear some more practical examples. Another example that is being funded is the environment because, obviously, rivers, mountains, animals and species know no borders or boundaries. Being able to work together and address some of the river basins that are shared with regard to management has been instrumental within the programme. Another strand is sustainable transport in the way of greenways. One element of the INTERREG programme of which we are particularly proud is the health and social care because we do that on a cross-border basis. More than 50,000 individuals were helped as part of PEACE III. Patients were able to access cross-border healthcare. Indeed, the number in this current programme is 50,000.

This is where we are with regard to the programmes. We are nearly fully committed in both. The INTERREG programme was one of the third fastest committed programmes across the whole of Europe last year. Given the context of Brexit and the challenges we faced, that is no mean feat but that shows just how important cross-border work is here and how it is just second nature.

With regard to benefits to the entire region of EU cross-border funding programmes, I know that in the context of Brexit, some people will ask whether we could just do the same thing if we had money. Of course, there was cross-border work before the Good Friday Agreement and I am sure there will be such work going forward, but what the EU programmes did was allow for an upscaling and a regional approach to cross-border work. It just made sense to do this work on a cross-border basis. In particular, in Northern Ireland, EU funding was very much viewed as neutral funding. It did not belong to one Government or the other. Everybody thought it was EU money and, therefore, it was okay to apply for the funding. With regard to the funding in the programmes, as members all know, within Government cycles, funding might only run for a year, two years or three years. With these programmes, funding could be given for a much longer period, such as five or six years, particularly for projects in this round. Local actors were involved. We were already doing place-sensitive work before place-sensitive became a theme across Europe. Better relationships have been built in areas of research, security, environment, education and culture. With regard to health services, there is a delivery of essential services in a most cost-effective manner because there is the critical mass to be able to do that. It has also enabled innovative solutions to be found to common problems. There has been a joint ownership of those common solutions.

Civil society plays such an important role in the more reconciled and cohesive society. PEACE funding has supported that. The programmes are a valuable part of the regional policy approach. Because of the deadlines and targets that are imposed with all EU programmes, the funding actually gets spent so one gets things manifesting themselves within these programmes, such as small and medium enterprises working together instead of competing. They actually see the benefits of working together. We are able to run new test approaches.

I believe the PEACE and INTERREG programmes complement each other very well because there are the challenges that might not be made a priority at national level. One of the most fabulous aspects of the PEACE programme and the INTERREG programme in particular relate to the fact that Northern Ireland was quite an inward-looking area. The mind borders of people who got involved with the PEACE and INTERREG programmes were opened because not only did they start working with people in the next street or community, they started working across the border. This slide shows some examples of how people who got involved in these programmes went on to get involved in a region of other programmes across the whole of Europe and made contacts. We now find women's groups in Ballybeen working with a group in Poland in the area of training. The work that has occurred with these programmes is unbelievable.

However, we have more work to do and members have heard about it this morning. There has been significant progress towards building peace since the Good Friday Agreement but it cannot be taken for granted. We must preserve and protect that. As the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the Republic of Ireland, Joe McHugh TD, and Baroness Blood said, peace is not just about the absence of violence. We must maintain this and keep working at it. Levels of violence are low but there is a degree of civil unrest. We are a divided society. The proof is there - even with regard to how long it took us to agree

on a community relations policy. There is a lot of important reconciliation work to be done and there must be a focus on building positive relations, a shared future and acknowledging what has happened in the past. We are still addressing those issues in the programme as members can see. We are targeting marginalised communities, combatting sectarianism and reducing segregation.

I am pleased to say that due to the very hard and dedicated work, particularly that of the Irish Government, we have already received news that there will be a future programme post-Brexit. The European Union has put that into its budget. It includes an allocation for what is called the “PEACE PLUS”, which is a combination of the PEACE and INTERREG programmes. The only element of the budget that is known about at the minute is the European Regional Development Fund Irish allocation, which is €60 million for each programme so the total is €120 million. That is no mean feat because the majority of budgets were cut by 20% so I am sure the officials in Brussels did some amount of work to be able to make sure that we have maintained a level. While it is the same as what we have now, it is actually a 20% increase in my view.

The UK has given very positive indications about access to future programmes but at this point in time, the budget is unknown. Obviously, that is not something that is discussed with me. If we have a programme going forward where all parties are involved, they will all be consulted on the content of the programme.

I must mention the impact of Brexit on this region, these programmes and the people involved in these programmes. It goes without saying that there are already challenges for the cross-border region. Brexit will exacerbate some of those. Members will have heard about how frequently people travel across the border. Some people I know travel across the border five times a day doing things like leaving their children at school and going to work and they are very fearful about what would happen. In respect of the cross-border work that is happening in health and social care, there are now fears about the implications of non-convergence of regulations because what they are able to do in some of those social care projects is share doctors and locums because they all have the same employment hours and pay. There might be fewer opportunities to solve problems. There are polarised communities and the danger of tensions being reignited. We heard that expressed very eloquently this morning by Bronagh Hinds and Baroness Blood this morning. In respect of some of the factors that contribute to that, this slide shows some of the research that has been done on polarised communities. In the 2011 census, 40% of the population classified themselves as British, 25% classified themselves as Irish and 21% classified themselves as Northern Irish. This finding shows quite clearly that people from both communities were happy to consider themselves Northern Irish. I am not sure we would get the same result today. Obviously, that is not for me to say. When one looks at the likes of the survey that came out in May about the tensions relating to Brexit and how people in Northern Ireland want to stay in the EU, there is a lot of talk about Brexit, the economic issues and the impact on trade and security but I seriously worry about the psychological impact on the people who have been involved in this cross-border work because they have done fantastic work. People here are very nervous about what the impact will be and how it will affect them.

This is not to end on a negative note but I must say that the work that goes on within our programmes is unbelievable. The work the communities did was brave and the work that is happening now is fantastic. Long may it continue. *[Applause]*

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I think everyone will agree that it was an excellent presentation. The secretariat will arrange for copies of Ms McIntyre's speech to be provided to anyone who would like one. I will open it to the floor. The first speaker is Brendan Smith.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

Like the Vice Chair, I welcome Ms McIntyre's excellent presentation outlining the very important work the programmes have done in assisting communities north and south. In respect of the programmes and their success, be it in the development of community facilities or other programmes that have empowered communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas, we have seen great benefits flow indirectly from the work of the programme as well directly. Is the uncertainty that has existed for some time regarding future funding and the lack of a firm commitment with regard to the total funding that will be provided by the British Government affecting communities that would be in the process of preparing applications? Working with different communities over the years, we know that a very detailed application is necessary. That is very understandable because applications must stand up to very detailed scrutiny and we welcome that. It is taxpayers' money that is being put to use. Has it weakened the resolve of communities to set about preparing good applications for necessary investment in their communities?

Ms Gina McIntyre:

It does not exist at this point in time. Following the outcome of the vote, there was a period where nobody knew what was happening with the programmes. Certainly a lot of projects were very nervous and there was a feeling of "well why would we do anything?" The Irish Government was very supportive right from the beginning with regard to its commitment to keep working with this and trying to find a way because it valued the cross-border co-operation so highly.

Her Majesty's Treasury guarantee was announced in October 2016. From June to October, there was a great period of uncertainty but we kept on working at the application process and encouraging projects that were halfway through it to complete it. That guarantee said that the UK element would be guaranteed for any project that was contracted and funded before March 2016. Obviously, the Irish element was already there through the EU.

It has not directly affected organisations in this current suite. People keep forgetting that we have €0.5 billion worth of funding we deliver to communities. That will run on until 2021 and 2022. Because everybody is focused on what will happen in the future, people forget that there is €0.5 billion worth of funding out there. The community groups have continued to apply for it. We have tried to cut down on the bureaucracy involved in some of the major applications by putting the money through the councils so that the people could go to the council and get the money in an easier way. The answer is "No" at the minute.

12 pm

Viscount Bridgeman:

Ms McIntyre mentioned that the UK reaction was positive. Does that mean the central Government or the two devolved administrations involved in the project – those of Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Ms Gina McIntyre:

What I was referring to in respect of the UK Government was Theresa May's comments. She spoke about getting access to programmes they wanted to get access to, such as Horizon 2020 or Erasmus. I like to think PEACE is in there as well. The one letter that was sent from the then First Minister, Arlene Foster MLA, and Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, did allude very clearly to EU funding in the region and the support for it but there has been no Assembly since that time. The Scottish Government would have been very supportive of maintaining access to INTERREG but given the way the regulations are written, it cannot maintain access to our INTERREG programme in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland because maritime borders, which is how Scotland was originally included from 2007, will now be within the transnational suite of programmes and not our programme.

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Does anyone else wish to ask a question? I think we are getting back on schedule. I acknowledge the work of the programme as somebody who has experienced it in a border constituency and its additional impact in terms of additional spend in a region where communities have greatly benefitted from it. It is important that this programme would continue. I thank Ms McIntyre for making her presentation and informing us about the work of the programme. I look forward to further interaction with her later this evening with regard to a chat around the future of the programme.

Ms Gina McIntyre:

There are a couple of examples of projects. I do not know if members would like to see them or whether they would like to talk to John McCandless later and find out some examples.

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I apologise to Ms McIntyre for failing to acknowledge that. Mr McCandless should feel free to give us any further information.

Mr John McCandless:

I can show members three project examples. These are all funded under the last programme and appeared under PEACE III. These are what we call shared space projects. The ones I have selected are based within the border region. These projects are capital build projects that involve physical structures and are design to encourage greater levels of positive interaction between Catholic and Protestant communities. These are within the more rural areas.

One involves the Peace Link, which is based in Clones. This is a state-of-the-art sports facility and is designed to encourage young people from different backgrounds to come together through their shared interest in sport. It received funding of about €8.3 million and was launched about four or five years. The centre is extremely popular and has exceeded its targets in terms of usage by young people from different backgrounds.

The far left of the slide concerns the International Scout Centre in Castle Saunderson, which is based in County Cavan. It redeveloped quite a neglected space to create a new facility that is now being used by scouting associations across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It received €3.6 million worth of funding and was opened in 2012 by the President of Ireland. Members can see a picture there. It is now known as the World Peace Centre within

the international scouting community so its usage figures are very high with regard to scouts not just from Ireland but from across Europe and the rest of the world.

The far right of the slide concerns the Termon Project, which received €8.3 million worth of funding under PEACE III. It is based on the border of Pettigo in Donegal and Tullyhomon in Fermanagh, an area suffered from quite a serious lack of investment as a direct result of the Troubles. Members can see pictures of the Termon centre, which is a new community hub that hosts a number of cross-community events and draws in Catholic and Protestant residents from both sides of the border. It is doing very well in terms of its facility and usage. It hosts events from young people to older people and a crèche is associated with it. These are all very good examples of the shared space element of the PEACE programme.

Ms McIntyre alluded to the fact that one of the core objectives of the INTERREG programme is to address the lack of investment in terms of research and innovation and capacity of businesses North and South of the border. This has obviously taken on more importance following the UK referendum result. A total of €16.6 million has been awarded to a new business development initiative called Co-Innovate that is being led by InterTrade Ireland. It is quite a long programme in terms of its life span. It is five and a half years and will support more than 1,400 small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-businesses across the border region of the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the and western Scotland. As part of that support, participating businesses have innovation audits. Basically, these are designed to encourage them to develop new products and services. Access is provided to up to 70 “innovation interns”. These interns are tasked with helping participating companies to engage in more long-term research and innovation development activities. The partnership for that is a unique model that involves Enterprise NI Ltd along with a string of local enterprise offices in the border regions of the Republic of Ireland and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise in Scotland.

Another example involves a number of health and social projects that help reduce inequalities within our health and social care services. A lot of support is being used to create better efficiencies of scale in the delivery of vital health services on a cross-border basis. There are a number of projects but I want to bring two of them to the attention of members. These projects are being implemented by the Health and Safety Executive and health services in Northern Ireland as part of Cooperation and Working Together, CAWT. Examples would be the innovation recovery project. This was created in response to an increase in the number of people coming forward with mental health problems. It will create “recovery colleges” that will be based in Derry, Donegal, Belfast, Armagh and Newry along with one that will take in people from Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo and Leitrim. They provide self-help courses and other forms of support to people who suffer from mental illness so that they can play a key role in their own recovery. The project was designed in collaboration with people who have experienced mental illness. That was launched a couple of months ago and is currently recruiting in terms of its implementation phase.

Another example is the “CoH-Sync” project, which helps to reform scheduled and unscheduled health and social care services – again, on a cross-border basis. The scheduled care services would include dermatology, urology and vascular intervention services. Unscheduled care initiatives include more community-based approaches to cardiac care and rehabilitation as well as advanced paramedic services. Again, this is a cross-border project but it also brings in Northern Ireland, the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and western Scotland.

The third pillar of the INTERREG programme looks at sustainable transport. Approximately €23 million has been allocated to three cross-border greenways. These greenways are trying to create a modal shift in terms of how people travel. One of the largest of these is the North West Greenway Network, which will create 46.5 km of new cross-border greenways through three distinct routes connecting Derry-Londonderry to Lifford in County Donegal. These routes are being designed for daily commuters but also offer a lot of health benefits for the people using them. They are being constructed at the moment using a phased approach.

The last project is one of my favourites. This project is developing world-class research on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, COPD, or lung disease. This is obviously an incurable lung disease. Ireland and the south west of Scotland have some of the highest rates of COPD in the world. The Border and Regions Airways Training Hub, BREATH, project brings in three distinct partners: Queen's University Belfast, Dundalk Institute of Technology and the University of the West of Scotland. As part of that, they are undertaking a lot of recruitment for full-time PhD students to work on some very important research into curing lung disease and different treatment models. They are recruiting 16 full-time PhD students. As part of that work, not only can patients get new treatment, the partners are also doing a lot of awareness-raising work with schools and colleges across Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland is talking about the condition and warning about the dangers of smoking. This project has tremendous potential in terms of its research outputs not only within the region but within Europe and across the world. That unique partnership would not exist without the INTERREG programme.

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I refer anybody to the website of the Special EU Programmes Body with regard to its excellent work. I thank Ms McIntyre and Mr McCandless for their presentations. If anybody wishes to discuss the projects with either Ms McIntyre or Mr McCandless, they are joining us for dinner and I am sure they will be only too willing to engage with members. As a local public representative for 25 years before I entered Dáil Éireann, I certainly know the impact the programme has had right across the border counties and beyond. I will now hand over to the Co-Chairperson, Andrew Rosindell.

BREXIT AND THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I welcome Ms Koulla Yiasouma, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, and Dr. Niall Muldoon, the Ombudsman for Children, who are here today to jointly address the Assembly. They have worked together to produce a report on the impact of Brexit on children and young people. I am sure it will be very interesting to hear what they have to say on behalf of our youngest and often most vulnerable citizens. I ask members to welcome Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon.

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

I know members have had a long morning so we will try to make this as interactive and energetic as possible. My name is Niall Muldoon. I am the Ombudsman for Children in the Republic of Ireland while Koulla Yiasouma is Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. We are here today because sometime in late 2016, following the decision in the Brexit referendum in the UK, we got together and realised that there were many

specific issues for children and young people in Northern Ireland and southern Ireland that had not been expressed. Our job is to protect and promote the rights of children across both jurisdictions. We also work with our colleagues in Scotland, Wales, England and, more recently, Jersey to protect the rights of children. We went to the first All-Island Civic Dialogue in Kilmainham in Dublin. I realised that so much work was being done on economics, financial services, tax and customs and that all of these areas were well covered. No disrespect to anybody here who might represent these individual areas but when the next talk I heard concerned the national hill sheep farmers' association, we felt that children were very much being left behind and that it was time to change that and to bring it forward so that children's voices could be heard.

We linked with a number of organisations across Northern Ireland and the south of Ireland to get some young people to come to a potential conference organisation committee. We engaged with them and found that they were very angry about the fact that they had not been heard and not been engaged with whatsoever. Essentially, they felt the fact they did not have a vote did not mean that they do not have a voice. That is what we wanted to bring together. We created an opportunity for them over a six-month period in 2017 to be consulted and to bring together a conference in which they engaged with their own cohort of young people on both sides of the border to try to understand what the issues for them were and what was important to bring to the policymakers and people who were going to make decisions on their behalf into the future. They are the young people who are going to live with the impact of all of this and they have never been consulted.

We ended up with a group of 21 young people from north and south. We worked with them to plan, time, budget, generate the audience, decide the content and invite who they wanted to come to this conference and they ran and organised it fully with the help and facilitation of our staff. In November 2017, they brought together more than 120 young people from all over the island – North and south, including young people from Traveller backgrounds, children from some of the best private schools, people from general organisations, youth groups and various other different schools as well.

12.15 pm

It brought them together. They hosted a magnificent conference. We managed to invite a number of civil servants and high-ranking politicians to the event, including MEPs from both traditions in Northern Ireland. The Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland presented at the conference and there was a video message from the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in the Republic of Ireland, Simon Coveney TD.

The young people really put on a great show and using a world youth café style, allowed 120 young people to give voice to the issues about which they were concerned. The young people facilitated and ran the event. They were MCs and met with the press and politicians. They did every piece of work. Ms Yiasouma and I never had an easier day at a conference because we literally just had to say a few words to open and close it. It really was important.

What we brought together with this final report is the message that "It's our Brexit too." In that, they outlined the concerns they have and a number of key messages, which, hopefully, we will bring to the attention of the assembly today. We agreed with them that we would bring that to as high a level of influence as we could over the next six months or so. We are delighted to have this invitation today to try to bring that to the attention of the assembly. I will hand over to Ms Yiasouma to go through some of the details of it.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

They always say never get between anyone and their lunch so we will really try not to do that. Anyone who has heard me speak before will know that a microphone is rarely what is needed. I can see David Ford is smiling.

The young people came up with a range of themes. The conversation from preparation right through to where we are now was not about reversing the decision. The decision had been made. It was about shaping a post-Brexit Ireland and United Kingdom. The young people came up with particular themes they wanted to discuss.

Before I say what the themes are, some of the issues facing children north and south and across the UK include mental health; poverty, particularly children in Wales as well as in Northern Ireland and the south of Ireland; and education, particularly educational inequalities. That is the background against which we are working 24-7. It was in that context the young people identified their themes.

The first theme was education. The young people sent a clear message. These children were born post-Good Friday Agreement and do not know anything about a hard border or any sort of border across the 300-odd miles that go between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. A total of 500 children under the age of 16 cross that border every single day to go to school, often facilitated by public or educational transport. A total of 300 teachers cross that border every day to go to school. A further 1,500 older young people cross the border every day to go to college so this is very much a live issue for our children and young people. They want that to continue. They want their qualifications to be recognised, they want their schools to be still able to work together and they do not want to see the seamlessness of that experience go.

The opportunities provided by Europe-wide study and the Erasmus+ programme is an issue that is probably something that is just as relevant to children in Scotland, Wales and England. Young people wanted to send that clear message. They do not see their future on the borders either north, south, east or west. They see it beyond them. Young people, particularly those in the Republic of Ireland, see themselves as European. Young people in Great Britain and Northern Ireland see themselves as British, Irish or both but to a lesser extent, they also see themselves as European.

The other big issue our young people talked about was rights. Bearing in mind that this is the post-Good Friday Agreement generation, these young people have been born and brought up in relative peace. Before they talked about the specifics, when we were in Croke Park in December and spoke to young people in Northern Ireland, what we found was a group of young people who said that some of the racist rhetoric that has appeared post-Brexit has given them huge cause for concern. They said that they are citizens of the world and they do not want to close their borders to people, particularly children who are fleeing humanitarian disasters and crises. We need to protect those children. It is true. A colleague organisation in Belfast worked with a group of Roma children about engaging with education. Their fear is “what’s the point? – we’re going to be kicked out anyway.” We need to send very clear messages to our newcomer and migrant children and young people that they are welcome. This is something of concern to many of the young people with whom both Dr. Muldoon and I and our offices have been speaking.

We come to the particular circumstances of the Good Friday Agreement. Please be clear that young people with whom we have spoken do not want a border north and south nor do they want one east and west. Both are equally important to them. They welcome the huge attention being paid to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the negotiations but are very concerned. They are very concerned about one particular issue that has come up, which is the issue of citizenship and passports. The Good Friday Agreement was magnificent in that it allowed people to assign themselves Irish, British or both. If the agreement proceeds the way it looks like it might be going, it gives different rights to people who assign themselves as Irish and that is not appropriate. Children in west Belfast are just as worried about their peers in the Shankill Road who may not feel comfortable assigning themselves as Irish not even to get European citizenships. I will say a bit more towards the end. This is something we consistently bring up because it is something about which children and young people said they wanted to talk to us.

Another thing, which we have begun to see coming out of the European Union, is the post-Brexit funding for PEACE in Northern Ireland. I do not need to tell anybody how significant that has been, particularly in the areas of poverty and shared space but we still have a way to go. We welcome some of the conversations coming out of Europe that this may well continue.

Young people have expressed concerns about their rights and what losing the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights may mean. We have welcomed some of the debates in the House of Lords concerning the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

The next very important piece for the children was child protection and the idea that Brexit will somehow be less secure for children in the future on either side of the border. Cross-border EU co-operation in child protection has worked very well. It has tightened up the way our police forces and civil servants work with regard to child protection. Areas such as trafficking and inter-parental kidnapping are much more to the fore if the border is in some way changed from where it is now. We know that at least 80 EU instruments currently entitle children to protection and welfare and we need to know they are going to be protected and continued into the future. Things like child protection services in law and the way they fit need to be fit for purpose prior to Brexit so that children and all adults concerned about children will be able to understand and trust the new system into the future because we know that those who want to traffic, take people cross borders and take advantage of children in any way through sexual exploitation or even for work purposes will take advantage of any loopholes. We therefore need to know they are as watertight as possible. Again, this is the children saying this. The children have researched this for themselves and put it out there.

They are very concerned about the security of common approaches to data sharing and the European arrest warrant. They are very much aware that things like the European Criminal Records Information System could be in some way impacted if there is a change in the processes between the UK police and other European police. Things like Europol and Eurojust are crucial to the way we have protected our children up to now. I was born and bred in Donegal on the border. These young people have never seen a border or violence and have never felt any fear crossing from one side to the other. That is something we really need to protect. We need to embellish that and make it a priority for all of us. These sorts of child protection issues are crucial. Law enforcement services on both sides of the border have worked very hard to make this a safer island for all of our children and we really need to

make sure that continues. Even in September 2017, the UK Government acknowledged that there is a likelihood of increased security risks post-Brexit. Ironically, by imposing a border, we actually increase our risks. It is about acknowledging that those risks exist and making sure we provide all of us with the security of knowing that the child protection system that is currently in place will be maintained or indeed enhanced if we are lucky. In that way, children and their future children can feel safe because these are the young people who are thinking into the future and thinking that years from now they will be a father or a mother and they want to know the safety they enjoy will still be in place for their children and for their nieces or nephews.

As members can hear from what Ms Yiasouma said, these young people are not very self-centred. They are looking to the future and are looking out for all children. They want to make sure that the future post-Brexit is something of which they can be very proud and where they can be safe.

The next issue concerns health and disability and Ms Yiasouma will take us through that.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

I have already spoken about education. Because the island of Ireland is quite small, we have small island networks, particularly involving paediatric and cardiac care, and that is incredibly important where the surgery is now being done in Dublin and some of the outpatient work is being done in Belfast. While the common travel area will be allowed, there are still some questions to be asked around these arrangements but, again, the signs are good.

Young people are also talking about things like the European Health Insurance Card and what that will mean when they travel. They have also asked as part of quite detailed conversations whether qualifications will be portable, whether doctors, nurses and radiologists can work between the two jurisdictions, and whether we will be able to have a place where they are portable.

I will move on to what happened after the conference. As members heard from Dr. Muldoon, we published a couple of reports. We felt like we went on tour for a while. The first slide shows some of the young people from Northern Ireland who went to Westminster. They never got bored trying to get through that security. Over two days, we were in and out of the Palace of Westminster several times and really did not get bored with the security, even for Portcullis House. They met with members of the committee, Ministers from the Northern Ireland Office, some of our own local MPs and Members of the House of Lords who were very helpful and quoted them in a debate that followed straight afterwards. One of the main reasons for going was to be involved in a Great Britain-wide conversation about Brexit and young people involving other young people from England, Scotland and Wales talking about their experiences; and they did that in the evening.

I assure members that we got permission from their schools and parents to take them out and cart them around the place. Two weeks later, the same young people, went with a group of young people from the south to the European Parliament and met with MEPs from north and south and the permanent representative from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is fair to say that the highlight was meeting members of the task force who were able to engage with them on the details of what it meant, including the passport and a possible Border in the Irish Sea. Again, they were quite astonishing. At 10 o'clock on the middle night, I was dispatched by one of the young people to find out about poverty levels in their

local community. It took quite a lot of detail so I was emailing Belfast to get the information because that is the level of detail they wanted. They wanted to talk about their experiences and what Brexit meant for them.

Some members will be aware that the all-island dialogue happened a few weeks ago in Dundalk. Michel Barnier was there. Again, the young people were able to have their say. I want to read a quote, not from young people because we will have copies of the report, but from the CBI, which has warned against throwing away a generation of progress in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement. Its director general stated that:

“With less than a year to go until the UK leaves the EU, the Government must not just declare that a hard border will not return, but explain precisely how this will be achieved after Brexit.”

She went on to state that:

“20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, we face a choice. To reaffirm the principle of consent that underpins that Agreement and its legacy of civil rights, prosperity and peace or to see a new division across the island of Ireland, with all that that entails for people’s jobs, rights and livelihoods.”

Children’s rights and experiences are not separate from the needs of our businesses, our rural communities, our jobs, our economy and our prosperity. They are all entwined.

12.30 pm

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

To wrap up, there were a number of key messages. Again, we have a number of hard copies of the reports here but members can find copies on both our websites - <https://www.oco.ie/> and <http://www.niccy.org.uk>. One of the key messages that came from the children and young people is that we must listen to children and young people. This is something we have failed spectacularly to do on this issue. The referendum was built around adults talking about money, economics, borders, free trade and who can save money. It was a political thing that did not include children in its thinking. We need to do that because they are the ones who will have to live with this into the future.

Second, we need to make sure we protect all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement. From our point of view, it is the area of human rights and children’s rights that is crucial because it sets a fantastic template for how we can do things properly and with consent so that nobody is disrespected. That is a crucial part of what has happened and the changes in the past 20 years across both sides of the border.

The other one is to maintain the equivalent standards and co-operative agreements across the island. It concerns the idea that we can still work together in the most positive way and it involves things like health, education and child protection where we currently work very hard to make them as smooth as possible for people crossing borders and utilising skills on both sides. Coming from Donegal, the Altnagelvin connection in Derry is hugely important for us, otherwise we would be sending some of our cancer patients all the way down to Galway. Those small things that have taken so long to build up a standard of expertise in and a clinical governance way to do it are hugely important. I have mentioned child protection.

Those are some of the key messages that are coming out from children and young people. They also recognise that much of the political encouragement was about saving money from the EU and how it would be spent. They feel that any money that is saved from being out of

the EU should be put back into children's services and making sure nothing is lost in the Border areas. At the conference, young people asked the civil servants and politicians what was the one key positive coming out of Brexit. It was very difficult to find one that people were able to stand over. There are many possibilities. What the children and young people are hearing is a constant barrage of "No", negatives and statements that this or that is not going to work and that we cannot do this or that. That is the nature of negotiation. We have no problem with that part of it but if we are trying to inspire our future generation and future voters and constituents to buy into and love this and to make sure this is going to be their future and that of their children, we need to find a better message. We need to give them a positive message because without that inspiration, politicians as leaders will have nowhere to go with the people who are following up as voters. Politicians are giving them nothing to latch on to or to dream about. They have no new dreams coming from this Brexit. All they are hearing is negativity and what they might lose.

We need to find a way to make this work for all of our children and young people. There were 21 people in our consultancy group. Four of them are ready to vote. By 2020 and 2021, which may or may not be the end of the transition period, all of them will be ready to vote and they will want to see what their Brexit is, what it will give them, how it will encourage them, what has changed and what they have gained from it. We turn to members as leaders to make sure they give these young people a message that is positive, that allows them to see a post-Brexit world as being as good as and, hopefully, better than what they have grown up with.

I thank members for their time. *[Applause]*

Senator Victor Boyhan:

I thank Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon for the very inspirational and positive message they have given us. I do not think it is anything we did not already know but they have reinforced that, which is really important. Members will recall that young people have appeared before us previously. As I was listening to Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon, who are great advocates for young people, I was thinking that there is no greater substitute than to have young people here themselves. I propose we would hear from young people at some future plenary because I can still remember those six or seven people who spoke to us and what they talked about. What I took away from that was that they were very pro-European, as Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon said. They were really compassionate and talked about humanitarian responses to humanitarian crises or need. They inspired me. It is not about us inspiring them. I went away inspired by them.

With regard to the two earlier presentations by Baroness Blood and her colleague, we saw that issue of young people, bottom up, community and humanitarian response. Ms Yiasouma spoke about migration and how children would be welcome. These young people want to break down barriers and borders and that is a clear message that both speakers have reiterated to us today. It is about looking to the future. It is about them and their future but it also about our shared futures together. I just want to say "well done". Of course, we all want to inspire people. We all want to dream, to learn and, more importantly, to lead. We all need to support each other in that process. I want to say "well done" to both speakers for reinforcing what many of us already knew. Let us have young people back in here to talk about their experiences because that is really important.

As someone who is involved in the Gaisce awards, which are similar to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, I think we need again to develop and allow people from all parts of this island to validly partake in such awards, be they the Duke of Edinburgh Award down in County Cork or the Gaisce award in Derry, and feel it is meaningful. We should look at how we can build relationships with those two awards and acknowledge the great significance for young people.

Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony TD:

I thank Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon for a fantastic presentation. The whole idea was fantastic. Children are our future. As Dr. Muldoon said, two of them are already of voting age so that is how fast this is going to happen. As Dr. Muldoon said, these are the people who will be living with the impact and who would not have been consulted. Their conversation must have been very interesting seeing as they had no memory of the border and they were coming at this with a fresh canvas. Again, it was a fantastic idea.

I am disability spokesperson for Fianna Fáil and, obviously, I have a big interest in it and am delighted that the topic was covered. Did any of the young people on the committee have a disability? How were these people picked? How many applications were there? Were they from all different backgrounds?

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

If memory serves me right, one or two of them did have a disability. In respect of picking the young people from the steering group, I have a youth panel and there were a couple of organisations - one of which was an online youth forum that has a broad membership - which had already done some work on Brexit. They were on the steering group.

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

From our point of view, we would have gone to Foróige and the National Youth Council of Ireland to ask them for nominees for the steering group. It was very broad geographically. We had people from down as far as Tipperary through Mayo and into inner-city Dublin. We were not as broad on that representative side with regard to disability. Who was available was more of an issue in that situation.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

It is also important to say that the young people who attended the event were from a very broad range. Between setting up the steering group and sending the invitations out, our staff and our young people went out to various groups. In particular, we went rural-urban and Unionist-nationalist in Northern Ireland. It is incredibly important that one does that. Even if they did not come to the event in Newry, we incorporated their views and they were part of the background materials. It was also very important that we reached out to Travellers as well.

Mr Dai Lloyd AM:

Diolch yn fawr iawn. Thank you very much. I congratulate Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon on some very powerful presentations. The view from Wales matches the views of the young people on the island of Ireland. I must say there was a very impressive level of engagement with the young people and elected representatives at all levels in several locations.

Did Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon get a feel as Commissioner and Ombudsman, respectively, for the level of response to those representations from the children and young people in governmental circles, in particular how these important issues about rights are finding their way into the Brexit negotiations scenario? Children and young people in Wales have said similar things. I have a briefing in front of me along similar lines. Do the speakers feel that vitally important information is finding its way into where it needs to be heard?

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

The individuals we targeted to meet were people who were going to have that influence. From Ms Yiasouma's interaction in Westminster, quotations were being used in the debate that night. Even when we got as far as Michel Barnier, he was very much aware of the issues but, again, as Senator Boyhan said, when one hears it directly from the mouths of babes, one can use that very powerfully. It was not necessarily that we felt people were not aware of the issues. It was more a case that they may not have placed the importance of those issues as high as they would place the issue of a multinational technology company that makes lots of money. We felt the importance was highlighted much more by young people speaking to us.

One thing I would like to say here, and I will say it to my own Government as well, is that Michel Barnier was very clear that he puts two hours per week away in his diary to speak to children and young people. If every politician started doing that, we would find ourselves in a completely different type of environment and we would hear about compassion, empathy and children's points of view on a more regular basis. As a full-time political career man, that is a crucial thing to pass on as well. He was very much in touch with what was being said.

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

The issue of Brexit is not an easy one to share with anybody. I do not know about Mr. Lloyd but I know that whenever I tell adults and friends that I am dealing with Brexit, their eyes glaze over – never mind young people who really should not be worrying about things like this. This is where we were unique and our offices were unique because we were able to invest the time, and young people had the interest to do the reading because there is only so much reading one can do on EU charters and this and that. They really got into working out. There is a little bit of investment of time and resources needed. Most of the relevant jurisdictions have used participation mechanisms. Members have spoken about bringing young people into this forum on a regular basis. They can do that.

It is also fair to say we have our own particular situation in Northern Ireland, as always, so we had to look to where the influences were. That did include Stormont, where they have been very well received. That is why we went out to other bodies as well. They have been well received but members should not underestimate the challenge of getting not only young people but everybody out there to understand Brexit.

The Lord Kilclooney:

As a former MEP, I can understand why people think Brexit is very complicated. I certainly find it complicated. Young people are bound to be very confused and worried. The speakers mentioned three items about which I would like greater clarification. One is human rights. There are several chapters in the Belfast Agreement, the negotiations on which I was involved. There is not a single reference to the European Union. All are to the Council of

Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, so why does Brexit pose a problem for human rights when the European Union was not mentioned in the Belfast Agreement?

12.45 pm

As someone living near the border, I think the speakers mentioned an interesting issue, namely, that something like 500 teachers and hundreds of pupils cross the border every day. However, since Dublin, London, Belfast and Brussels have already agreed that the common travel area will continue, why is that a problem? Will they not still be able to freely cross the Border through their education?

Dr. Muldoon mentioned about how patients from County Donegal have gone to Altnagelvin Area Hospital in Londonderry. Who pays for these patients? Is it the Irish taxpayer, the UK taxpayer or the European Union? Why is Brexit a problem when it comes to them going to hospital?

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

What we are portraying are concerns and some of the answers have yet to be found. I know my accent belies this but I was in Northern Ireland at the time of the Good Friday Agreement. One would not think that I have been in Northern Ireland for over 25 years. I have protected my accent something shocking. The Good Friday Agreement talks about a parity of rights north and south. My understanding is that the premise that both the Republic of Ireland and the UK are members of the European Union and the Council of Europe underpins that. Therefore, in the broader picture, rights that emanate from those two bodies also come to the citizens of both those countries.

Regardless of whether it is real or not, the concerns are there that Brexit poses the risk of destabilising the Good Friday Agreement. It speaks to what Dr. Muldoon said about the conversations and rhetoric coming out of the debate. Notwithstanding the fact that in respect of the headline on the agreement coming out of the European Union and the British Government in December and March and the fact that the first line on the Irish protocol talks about how the Good Friday agreement will not be compromised in any way, the rhetoric has still given people, particularly children and young people, cause for concern. I understand what Lord Kilclooney is saying but the Good Friday Agreement is based on the premise that there would be no differentiation of rights and that having an Irish or British passport would mean exactly the same thing regardless of whether the person was in Ireland, Great Britain, Spain, France or my country, Cyprus. Those are some of the things young people are saying. They are asking “what does it mean now that I might have to have an Irish passport?” These are some of the conversations that were had. To be honest, we did not get a clear answer to the question in Westminster and Brussels. The confidence around this issue that Lord Kilclooney seems to have did not exist there so I would welcome further conversation with him. We will be here for the rest of the evening. I would welcome a conversation with him.

He also talked about the common travel area, which is incredibly important. Again, he is right. It has been enshrined as long as it does not impact on EU law. The issue with the common travel area and education involves the portability of qualifications. Lord Kilclooney knows far better than I do that the common travel area was there before our border became militarised and it was there because of the customs checks. People wanted to have a go at customs officers so the police came in. People then had a go at the police officers and the soldiers came in. Regardless of the common travel area, until the early part of this century,

we had a hard border. We still had the common travel area then. Do I think we are going back to the Troubles on day one of Brexit? No, I do not but I cannot predict 20 or 30 years from now when I will be drawing my pension and my children will be running the country. That is the sort of assurances for which young people are looking. I hope I have answered some of Lord Kilclooney's question – probably not all of it.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Yes

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

Dr. Muldoon will answer the rest of it.

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

My understanding, and there are probably better experts in the room in respect of cross-border co-operation in health, is that from an Irish point of view, one can pay for it through the cross-border directive or the treatment abroad scheme so the Irish patient going from Donegal to Northern Ireland can be paid for by the Irish Government as long as it is no more expensive than it would have been in the south. However, what has built up here is more of a process. There is clinical governance and a custom and practice that are engaged in on a cross-border basis. I know there are professionals in Letterkenny University Hospital who will work in Altnagelvin Area Hospital over a period of time across a number of months. They are on the rotas because what happens is that there are not enough bodies to keep the expertise in the two separate entities.

Again, what we are saying is that we do not know if this will work. That is where the children are concerned. It concerns that uncertainty and the real sense of having something that is working very well in a very important aspect of our lives. Some of these children would have had parents who experienced cancer and who have benefitted from the cross-border idea and they do not want to lose that. If it is not going to be lost, let us put that message out there. Let us put out the message that it will be fixed and secure. My understanding is that at the moment, it is secure until 2021 but we are not 100% about what will happen after that. I could be corrected.

The Lord Kilclooney:

Dr. Muldoon explained that the Irish taxpayer is apparently paying for these patients to go to the hospital. After Brexit, is there any reason why the Irish taxpayer should not continue to pay for this?

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

I do not think it is all about the payment. I do not think that is necessarily the sole issue. If one is crossing borders, there are other issues about which we are not sure. That is part of the concern we have.

Again, we are talking about children making known their concerns. As Brexit negotiations devolve and evolve, we will get answers to these questions but what we are presenting here are the concerns they had as of November 2017. Some of things may become clearer over time but it is important that we recognise that the children are concerned about these things.

What has happened up to now is that people have felt that this is an adults' issue but the children are acutely aware of those concerns.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will have three final questions and then we will close the session and have our photograph taken so could we have three very swift questions? I will make it four questions but then that is it.

Mr Neil Hamilton AM:

To return to Lord Kilclooney's first question about human rights following Brexit in the UK. Great Britain was one of the original signatories of the European Convention on Human Rights. In 1998, the Blair Government legislated in the Human Rights Act to make claims under the European Convention on Human Rights justiciable on the British courts. There is no reason whatsoever to think this position will change post-Brexit so I am just wondering how these fears have arisen. Ms Yiasouma is quite right to say that fears have been raised by the rhetoric but the rhetoric comes from those who want to use Ireland as a bargaining chip in the Brexit negotiations so that it assists M. Barnier in his task of making things difficult for the UK. It would be much more sensible to regard the reality of the legal situation in Great Britain. There is no possible risk to human rights post-Brexit.

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

Obviously, rights are complex. We often talk about other rights as human rights when they are in separate bits of legislation and guaranteed by something else. One area of rights that is clearly under threat is the rights relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights. This is particularly relevant for young people because our rights around personal data, for example, are completely embedded in that charter. This is of significant concern if one is a young person whose life is embedded in the digital sphere. Therefore, the concern that rights are at risk because the Charter of Fundamental Rights is at risk in the UK because of Brexit is a very valid one.

Dr. Muldoon made a very important point around young people deserving a positive and hopeful message about the future. We all deserve to believe that our best days are ahead of us as a society and as individuals but young people and children also deserve to be told the truth. Most young people who are old enough to vote overwhelmingly voted in every area of the UK to stay in the EU. I was one of them. I believe that Brexit will be profoundly disastrous, particularly for young people and my generation, so how do we balance telling young people what we believe is the honest truth with giving them a message of hope because they deserve both?

Mr David Ford MLA:

I thank Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon for bringing a breath of fresh air and getting us away from the dismal science of economics. Unfortunately, we seem to have had much concentration on economics as we look at future relationships. Given my past role, I am concerned about the absence of any discussion on justice matters. Sometimes criminal justice gets in but I thank Dr. Muldoon for introducing the issue of child protection. I would also add that in respect of issues like defaulting on child maintenance payments, very few people may default and move from Strabane to Lyon but they may well move from Strabane to Lifford.

In terms of their discussions, have Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon had any reassurance that those civil justice matters are being addressed?

Viscount Bridgeman:

This is an observation rather than a question. Without going into the realm of politics too much, there is a perception that sometimes in Brussels, the unique British-Irish relationship is not taken account of. This presentation, which was beautifully presented, is a real example of the obligation of the Brexit negotiators to ensure this kind of cross-Border relationship is maintained.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Could Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon sum up?

Ms Koulla Yiasouma:

With regard to rights, we are not talking just about the European Convention on Human rights, which, of course, will stay because it involves the Council of Europe and the UK has the Human Rights Act. We are talking about other rights such those that come under the Fundamental Charter of Human Rights but also rights that are enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement and how the Good Friday Agreement is going to be maintained. Young people are not being given sufficient answers. With regard to truth and hope, 52% of people across these islands voted for Brexit. We need to know where the hope was around that and what that was about. Let us have those conversations because like it or not, the UK is leaving the EU and we must create a more hopeful world for our children and young people.

With regard to the point about 18 to 24-year-olds and voting, voters in this group hardly came out to vote. If they had come out, the result might have been different but they did not come out. To be clear, I have challenged every child who has said to me “it’s those old people.” They exercise their right to vote and I would protect that. I do not blame older people or adults for voting the way they did. I do not blame anyone for not going. It is what it is.

A question was asked about child maintenance and security, which are huge issues. From talking to the civil servants in Northern Ireland, our understanding is that they are in dialogue with their colleagues in the Republic of Ireland but that is probably all part of understanding. What we are being told with regard to justice is that it is still not in the headline processes. Even if one takes it with a pinch of salt, we have seen what the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland has said about a post-Brexit scenario if the UK crashes out. He thinks he will need 400 extra officers and all these other things. There are many instruments – Dr. Muldoon has enumerated some of them – that protect our children in the here and now. We need to keep those going – not only around Lifford but also in Lisbon in Portugal and across the EU. We are hearing that they are talking about it but we have not seen any agreement because of the line that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Dr. Niall Muldoon:

The only thing I would add in respect of human rights is that the young people with whom we were involved are very bright. They recognise that the safety and protections are there but they are concerned about what will happen five or ten years down the line when Europe changes its rules and upgrades its laws and human rights standards and it does not happen in

the UK. They recognise that immediate situation will be the same, however, things are evolving all the time and, hopefully, human rights and children's rights will be always improving across Europe. There may be losses there into the future and, again, they are looking at the long term. That is their fear. If there is an answer to that, we can take that on board but that is what they presented to us.

As regards truth and hope, lets us always balance these elements. I am afraid it is a tricky one. If there is no hope to be had, we need to think about what we are offering all of our society. If there is truth to be had, children should be always given the truth in the right and appropriate language and in a way they understand. It is about finding that balance all the time. We should always strive for that. It should not be a question of "should we?"; we should always provide truth to our children and young people with regard to this. I wish everyone well in making sure Brexit becomes the most positive thing it can be. I thank the members for their time. *[Applause]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

On behalf of members, I thank Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon for their thought-provoking and illuminating contribution to the Assembly's discussions this morning. I also commend the great example they have set in working together in harmony to address the challenges facing us in the future as the UK prepares to depart the EU.

That concludes the morning sessions. I will now hand over to the Vice Chairman, Declan Breathnach, to formally suspend the Assembly until after lunch but also to outline what we will do in terms of the photograph.

The Vice Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I also thank Ms Yiasouma and Dr. Muldoon for their excellent presentation. I was privileged to attend the conference in Newry to which they referred. It was a great example of youth participation and young people having their say with regard to their concerns.

The sitting was suspended at 1 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.30 pm

ADDRESS BY THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO IRELAND

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Good afternoon, we will now start the next session. Since taking up this post in August 2016, Ambassador Robin Barnett has offered the true hand of friendship to me and to our opposite members. He has travelled the length and breadth of the country to visit communities and politicians and has endeavoured to be in the true sense an ambassadorial spirit to Ireland. It gives me great pleasure to welcome His Excellency Ambassador Robin Barnett today. We are all looking forward to hearing his views on the UK-Ireland relationships.

H.E. Robin Barnett:

Co-Chairs, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for inviting me back to address the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary. It is a great honour and I am delighted to join you in Sligo, where I am not only paying my first proper

visit but following in the footsteps of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall on their visit to Ireland here in Sligo back in 2015. I am happy to be in Yeats country, and later perhaps I may have a stab at a quotation. Also, the rescheduling of our session has spared me the delicate task of attempting to speak about the closeness of the Ireland-UK relationship in the middle of a hard-fought, though as it turned out not terribly close, Six Nations campaign. But this new timing brings its own challenges. As you will know, this is a significant week in international affairs, with important votes on Europe in the House of Commons and an historic summit on the future of the Korean peninsula in Singapore.

Last year, I spoke at some length about the UK's decision to leave the European Union. I will address that a little later. This year, I want to reflect more on the relationship between our countries. At that time, I could still just about get away with being a new ambassador. I reflected on the strong foundations on which our relations are built. I am delighted to report that since I last spoke to the Assembly, I have seen even more evidence that our unique and special relationship is underpinned by a broad range of concrete and mutually beneficial activity.

It is so true that no country is fully represented by its capital city, and while Dublin undoubtedly has many charms, over the past year, my team and I have continued to get out of the bubble to see the exciting opportunities out there across the length and breadth of the country. We have explored cutting-edge science and research at the Tyndall Centre in Cork, and a genuine personal highlight – the National Ploughing Championships in Tullamore in County Offaly, where you can meet the heart and soul of Ireland and see all that the agricultural sector has to offer. By the way, I seem to be one of the few people who goes to the ploughing championships who actually watches the ploughing. Perhaps I may also give a reassurance that the British consumer remains as discerning as ever. I see no slackening in the demand of the UK for the high-quality food from this island and indeed *vice versa*. We have exciting plans to significantly develop relations between Ireland's southern powerhouse in and around Cork and Limerick and our own Northern Powerhouse, as well as a new honorary consul based in Cork who is soon to be appointed and will cover prosperity issues. We have commissioned a study to identify the synergies and opportunities between those regions and to get our companies talking business and trading with each other in new areas of opportunity.

While we are looking to the future, at this halfway point in the decade of commemorations, we continue to respectfully remember the events of 100 years ago. Last autumn we partnered with the National Gallery of Ireland on a retrospective exhibition of works by William Orpen, the Irish artist who served in the British Army as a war artist and documented spectacularly well the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme. In January his works were interpreted and put into context in a lecture at the National Gallery given by the director-general of the Imperial War Museum.

Much attention has also rightly focused on the Irish soldier in that conflict. This year, we will remember the airmen and airwomen as we mark 100 years of the Royal Air Force and I pay tribute to the many Irish RAF veterans. Earlier this year I was delighted to attend the launch at Trinity College of an inspiring project to recreate the national archives, which were destroyed during the Civil War. It was not just the application of archival and research expertise that impressed me or the cutting-edge virtual reality space in which the archives will be recreated. It was the partnership between Trinity College and the National Archives of Ireland and their counterparts at the National Archives in Kew and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in Belfast. This partnership is the first international collaboration by the

National Archives. Some 700 years' worth of records were destroyed: births, deaths, marriages, taxes, land and church records. I cannot think of a better example of east/west and north/south co-operation as this lost archive is retrieved for our generations and those of the future.

Looking across the water, we have Culture Ireland's "GB18: Promoting Irish Arts in Britain" programme. It will present more than 60 vibrant and contemporary performances, tours, exhibitions and concerts across England, Scotland and Wales. I am confident that the links between our people, our businesses – with trade in both directions up over the past 12 months – our cultural institutions and, dare I say it, our sporting teams, are thriving. So too are our Parliament-to-Parliament links. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and your presence here today is proof of the deep and enduring link between the Irish and British Parliaments – the Houses of the Oireachtas, Westminster, the devolved Assemblies and the Parliaments of the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, as well as between political partners.

2.45 pm

The history and depth of that relationship shows clearly with the presentation this year of a portrait of the Countess Constance Markievicz by the Ceann Comhairle to his counterpart, John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons. We remember the Countess not just for her origins here in Sligo but for her unique achievement of being elected to Westminster in the 1918 general election before taking her seat in the newly established Dáil. She was then and is today an enduring pioneer for women in politics.

Speaking of parliamentary links, I also pay tribute to the work of the CHAMP group of parliamentarians, some of whom are present today. Senator Frank Feighan and his colleagues have promoted inter-parliamentary dialogue, understanding and friendships. Connections such as these will, of course, take on an enhanced importance as the UK leaves the European Union. My embassy, along with our counterparts in London, continues to facilitate a steady stream of visits in both directions by parliamentarians and committees. Here we have welcomed, among others, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Sir Vince Cable, MP; the Exiting the European Union Committee chaired by the Right Honourable Hilary Benn, MP; the Welsh Affairs Committee led by David T.C. Davies MP; the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee led by Dr. Andrew Murrison MP; and the Foreign Affairs Committee led by Tom Tugendhat MP. That is not bad for a year's work.

The Foreign Affairs Committee was particularly focused on the bilateral relationship through and beyond our departure from the European Union. It produced a thoughtful and detailed report which is receiving careful examination in London. We are as one in our determination to build an ever stronger and ever closer bilateral relationship between Ireland and the UK and we will continue to work on it. That was also the very clear sense we had from the visit to Dublin last autumn by the Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson. We heard it in official talks with the Tánaiste and we heard it at the Science Gallery where he met young people, entrepreneurs and scientists. He was clear that our young people should continue to study in each other's countries and that our academies must continue to collaborate.

When the Tánaiste visited London and met the Foreign Secretary, the focus of their discussion was not totally on EU exit. It focused very much on important areas of foreign policy where we can work together, such as on development in Africa and overseas aid more broadly, and those most difficult and complex but incredibly important subjects: the Middle East peace process and the dreadful war in Syria.

Perhaps I may turn now to the decision of the UK to leave the European Union. As the Prime Minister has acknowledged, our departure from the EU creates challenges for Northern Ireland and for Ireland. As she said in her Mansion House speech:

“We chose to leave; we have a responsibility to help find a solution.”

We recognise the importance of finding solutions that work for Northern Ireland and for Ireland. Those solutions must reflect Northern Ireland’s unique circumstances, not least in the future as the only part of the UK which will share a land border with an EU member state. We also appreciate the extent to which the Northern Ireland economy, while an integral part of the UK economy, is so closely integrated with Ireland, especially in areas such as agri-food. We understand too the flow of traffic across the border on a daily basis by people going about their daily business, be it to work, study, shop or simply visit friends and relatives. Recently, I took the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington, to both sides of the border so that he could hear for himself at first hand about the issues involved, including those of a range of business people.

We know very well the ties of family and shared history that exist between people on the island of Ireland as well as between Ireland and Great Britain. This is very much reflected in our approach, which will see the upholding of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement at its heart. We are committed to its protection, including the constitutional principles that underpin it, the political institutions it establishes and the citizens’ rights it guarantees. We have been equally clear that we are fully committed to avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland while maintaining the economic and constitutional integrity of the UK. We mean what we say and the Prime Minister has personally given that commitment. We have ruled out any physical infrastructure at the border or any related checks and controls and we are working proactively with the European Commission and with Ireland to find solutions.

We understand that this goes deeper than finding an answer to our future customs arrangements as it must also address common regulatory standards, health and safety issues and checks and controls on agriculture and plant products.

We are also firmly committed to maintaining the common travel area and to protecting the rights enjoyed by UK and Irish nationals when in each other’s countries. The Commission has made clear that it will continue to recognise and respect this arrangement, one that has worked so well between our respective countries. To reflect this, members will know that there is already an agreed draft legal text in the protocol to the withdrawal agreement which ensures that we will preserve the common travel area and all the associated rights that go with it.

At the same time, however, we need to ensure that the integrity of the UK single market is not undermined. Its importance can be underlined by the fact that in 2016 companies in Northern Ireland sold four times as much to Great Britain as they did to Ireland. Just as we joined the Common Market in 1973 as one United Kingdom so we will leave the European Union in 2019 as one United Kingdom. These commitments were reflected in December’s joint report agreed between the UK and the Commission and they are part of the current ongoing negotiations with the Commission. As for the negotiations themselves, it is worth noting that we have made significant progress in turning December’s joint report into legal text for the withdrawal agreement and we have locked down the full chapters on citizens’ rights and the financial settlement. Having a time-limited implementation period will also help us to minimise uncertainty and allow us to deliver a smooth and successful Brexit.

There are of course some questions on the withdrawal agreement which remain to be resolved before the deal can be finalised but we have worked very hard and have reached a consensus on the full set of issues that need to be addressed in relation to Northern Ireland and there is a programme of work to work out how we can uphold our commitments in that respect. It remains our absolute priority that this should be done through a deep and special partnership for the whole of the United Kingdom with the European Union, one that allows for strong trade and the closest co-operation on the issues that really matter to us all. The joint report sets out our plan to address Northern Ireland's unique circumstances and the border with Ireland in the context of the wider UK-EU deep and special partnership. Should this not be possible, the UK has made it clear that it will propose specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland. That is the right approach because we want a deal that works for all parts of the UK while recognising Northern Ireland's unique situation.

I fully appreciate that this is something that is of vital importance to Ireland. We must ensure that full and frictionless access remains to the UK market for Irish exporters. Given the £47.5 billion annual trade in goods and services between our two nations, I can assure members that this is something which is equally important to the UK. We are not just focused on preserving the bilateral trade we already have. Recently, I chaired a seminar in Manchester which brought Irish construction companies to the Northern Powerhouse to look at the exciting opportunities in that sector and everyone went away enthused about the potential for doing even more.

We also committed in the joint report to establishing a legally operative version of the so-called backstop commitment in the withdrawal agreement, which would apply if we cannot reach the deep overall agreement that we want. As members will know, the Commission has published a draft version of the protocol. We can agree with some aspects of it, particularly the preservation of the common travel area and the single electricity market. However, as it stands, we simply cannot accept some aspects of the proposed text, which the Prime Minister has made very clear. Members will appreciate that we must ensure, as any Government would, that our own internal market is not affected by our exit. We must ensure that the UK's constitutional and economic integrity is protected in the overall withdrawal process.

The Prime Minister tabled our counterproposal late last week. Although, as we are moving into negotiations, I will not discuss it in great detail. I will say that we are clear that this will be used only in very specific circumstances and will be strictly time-limited. It is not our preferred option but our proposal will ensure that if a customs arrangement is not in place by the end of the implementation period, there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland or between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Given political will on all sides, we remain confident of moving forward to reach agreement on the withdrawal agreement by October 2018.

I should say a word about Northern Ireland. In this, the year of the 20th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, I – like everyone in this room – am reminded of the historic progress and transformation achieved in Northern Ireland, as well as the co-operation and work that the UK and Ireland have undertaken together to support that. Our debate this morning eloquently summed up just how much has been achieved. However, serious challenges do remain. Northern Ireland has now been without a functioning Executive for more than a year. The UK and Irish Governments continue to work closely together to encourage the parties to reach an accommodation that will restore a devolved Government.

I echo the words of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and thank the Tánaiste and his team for all their work and efforts. I also want to repeat the strong words of both the Taoiseach and my Prime Minister and say that we remain steadfast in our support for devolution under the terms of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Some have sought to question parts of that agreement in recent weeks but the UK and Irish Governments have rightly reaffirmed their support for the agreement and its successors. The constitutional arrangements and political institutions established in those agreements offer our best chance of restoring devolution and it is under those terms that we will continue to press for a resolution.

Let me end by saying this: we are in challenging times. We need to get the terms of the UK's departure from the EU right, for Ireland as much as for the UK. Believe me when I say that I, the embassy team and all our colleagues back in London continue to work hard and closely with the Irish Government and our EU partners to do that. However, I am optimistic from the evidence I have personally seen that the deep links between Ireland and the UK, across all parts of society, will see us through the task ahead and that our relationship will continue to thrive in the future. Many WB Yeats quotes will rightly be recited over the next few days. One has to be very careful in the presence of what I suspect are a fair few Yeats experts in this room, but he once said:

“There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't yet met.”

For me, there can be no better description of the country, people and Ireland and I hope to meet many new friends during the course of my visit here and my forthcoming trips. I thank members for their attention and I wish them well in the remainder of their deliberations.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I thank the ambassador. I already have one speaker indicating that they want to make a comment but I want to give Andrew Rosindell the opportunity to take leave so I will hand over to him to say a few words in advance.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I thank Declan for standing in as Co-Chairperson. I am afraid that I have to go back to London now, sadly, so I will take my leave. I want to thank the ambassador not only for his excellent remarks outlining the current British position but for emphasising how important it is to us all that the very special relationship we all have is maintained and strengthened in the years ahead. I apologise that I have to go but I am afraid that when the Chief Whip insists that we return, we have to do so. I can say with great pleasure that my Vice-Chairperson, Karin Smyth, will now take over the co-chairpersonship for the remainder of the day.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Two speakers are indicating. I will start with Seanadóir Terry Leyden.

Senator Terry Leyden:

Go raibh maith agat. Thank you very much. Just before Andrew leaves, I want to thank him for his excellent co-chairmanship of this British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly and his excellent work in relation to a report on Brexit and the future British-Irish relationships that Robin talked about. I thank him for your work in that regard and wish him well in London.

I thank the ambassador, Robin Barnett, for his excellent contribution. I will not repeat anything that he said because I think that what he said was so comprehensive. In the circumstances, I certainly say well done to the ambassador. Since his appointment in August 2016, he has been a tremendous representative of the British people. The fact that he has been to so many parts of Ireland has also been very helpful. I just want to say that we have a special relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland. It must be maintained – as has been encouraged by the ambassador’s words – post-Brexit. The Irish border between the United Kingdom and the European Union cannot be enforced post-Brexit so the two islands must be a special zone of economic and cultural development in the European Union. There must be totally free trade and movement of citizens, as occurs at present between our two nations. This existed before the establishment of the EU and must continue after the UK departs the EU. No other solution is practical, workable or in the interests of both sovereign nations. The border is unenforceable by the European Union, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The only way, as far as I can see it as a former trade Minister – I was involved in the negotiations for the Single European Act – is for all exports from the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland to be subject to EU regulations and all exports from Ireland to the EU to be exempt from those tariffs or trade rights with a right of passage through the United Kingdom to mainland Europe.

Finally, if this political decision is made – if we can create this special zone in the European Union called “the United Kingdom and Ireland” – it will totally guarantee the Good Friday Agreement, which has been mentioned so many times today. It is an international agreement signed by the United Kingdom and Ireland, registered in the United Nations and supported by the European Union. So, in the interests of everyone, I make this appeal: we will seek a meeting with Mr Barnier fairly shortly to discuss the report that was agreed by this Assembly. It is a good report on Brexit and the future of British-Irish relations. Our committee intends to go to Brussels to meet the negotiators and put our point of view forward. I would certainly like the endorsement of this Assembly for that approach in the future – basically, endorsing what the ambassador so rightly put forward.

3 pm

Senator Victor Boyhan:

First, I warmly welcome the ambassador and say “well done” for a very well-crafted and nuanced speech. Clearly, the position that he holds has to be respected. The ambassador clearly set this out but I want to draw out the context. The Minister of State, Joe McHugh TD, told us here this morning, and I support this, that Ireland’s future lies at the heart of Europe. That is a clear position and it is the position of the people. We heard earlier how many young people in Northern Ireland talk about their proud association with Europe; they see themselves, and want to be, very much at the centre of Europe. We also see what the Scottish people have said in relation to Europe. There is a proud tradition and a desire to collaborate and be part of the European Union.

However, I accept, as we all must respect, that the United Kingdom, currently as it stands, has taken a different decision. Once we get that understanding, which has come clearly from what the ambassador said to us here today, we need to return again to that vexed question of agriculture and the challenges in terms of the island of Ireland. I like to talk about the island of Ireland in terms of its potential rather than its boundaries and borders and look at agriculture and food. I notice from the ambassador’s CV that he has strong links in commerce and business, which is really important. He echoed that in his speech in terms of the

challenges and relationships in commerce and business. Of course, that is important because we live in an economy and that has to happen.

The only issue I want to focus on today is that Brexit runs the risk of destabilising the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. That is a fact. Everyone says so. That is the biggest challenge for us. There are many other challenges but that is a particularly big one. I would like the ambassador to perhaps focus on the fact that this is an international agreement, which the co-signatories know, and we have to safeguard it. I would like to hear more on how we can safeguard the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. That is at the kernel of our debate today. Again, I want to acknowledge Mr. Barnett's tremendous work as an ambassador in building relationships. There is a great old expression that goes

"You win their hearts, you win their minds."

The ambassador certainly won the hearts of the Irish people and I am sure he won the hearts of everyone here. He really is that person and I want to acknowledge it. All of our colleagues last night were speaking on the fringes of our celebrations and were acknowledging the ambassador's enormous friendship, commitment and good will. I think it is important to put that on the record of the Assembly today.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

Perhaps the ambassador could deal with that and we will then hear from two other speakers.

H.E. Robin Barnett:

Two very important questions were asked there. Some of the issues combine a little. A lot of them are around the special nature of the border. The first thing I would say is that we are well aware of the specific circumstances of the border. As I said, I have been in and around the border many times attending Brexit-related events. We have very good working relationships with what I call the border CEOs' group. These are the heads of county councils on both sides of the border and people who, day to day, have responsibility for a lot of the services around the border. It was a pleasure to be able to bring David Lidington to meet them.

I meet very regularly with the Irish Farmers' Association and the other farmers' bodies. I would also like to pay tribute to Verona Murphy and the Irish Road Haulage Association, who have been absolutely assiduous in helping to educate me, my colleagues and some experts from Whitehall on some of the challenges. We are well aware of the issues. We are in the process of a negotiation but we are very clear that we want to see a frictionless border that works, north and south. That is often helpful for smaller companies but it needs to work east and west as well. That is tremendously important for bigger companies. Although today there is understandably much talk today of a backstop, to be frank, the real way forward is surely for a deep and special partnership between the European Union and the United Kingdom.

That brings me on to points that are as much heart as they are head but they are no less important because of that; points such as the feeling that somehow Great Britain is leaving Europe. We are not leaving Europe; we are leaving the European Union. The Prime Minister has been very clear that she wants us to have a close relationship. She has been very clear that a successful EU is very much in the UK's interests in the future. We have talked about wanting to collaborate in areas such as education, science and innovation. The clear message from both sides – I hear it every day of the week in Dublin, too – is that we need to preserve

the habit of co-operation that exists between our two islands and which has built up over an incredibly long period between us and our EU partners. Again, that, frankly, long predates the establishment of the European Union itself. The points that both Senators have made are incredibly well understood and very much in the minds of our negotiators.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

I particularly want to thank Robin for his talk. I acknowledge his very busy and productive year, if I may say so. I thank him for the way he has reached out beyond Dublin to groups all over the country. He mentioned David Lidington in his talk. I must say that when our committee met Mr Lidington in London, we found him most helpful. I do not want to compare him to other British Ministers but I think that he shone out.

The ambassador acknowledged the work of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, this body and how its strengthening, post-Brexit, will be important. As he said, the UK is not leaving Europe. I am one of those more optimistic people who believes that maybe we will get beyond this summit, whichever way they word it. The wordsmiths are always brilliant but a few late nights in October will secure a deal. As the ambassador says, it will encompass the entire island of Ireland and the entire island of Great Britain and the relationships with Europe. That should be a happy situation, please God, for all of us.

I particularly want to acknowledge the ambassador's recent successful visit: the recce you led to Muckross and Killarney and deep Cork. Please God, we will have a very successful visit. Thank you.

Senator Frank Feighan:

I thank the ambassador, for his submission and kind words. I go back to Westminster tomorrow. I can leave my house at 9 a.m. and for €9.99 with Michael O'Leary's Ryanair, I can be in Stansted and then in the House of Commons tomorrow at 12.30 pm. It just shows how close we are.

I really believe that what is happening here in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly is unique and something that we need to enhance. I have said this on many occasions. I wish to ask two questions. Today, we launched Global Ireland. The Taoiseach announced that we are increasing our footprint around the world with new embassies, IDA, et cetera. We are also increasing our foreign aid spend from €707 million to 0.7% of national income, which will be €2.5 billion. To ensure that that aid is well spent, we need to work with other agencies and countries. With so many different aids, does the ambassador have any views on getting value for money and better bang for our buck? We are very proud of our contribution now that we are in a better situation and able to do this.

Secondly, and finally, I will talk about the EU and our collaboration. In the 40 years since the United Kingdom and Ireland joined the EU together, officials from both sides have had an average of 26 meetings a day. I have no doubt that this collaboration and those friendships brought about the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Good Friday Agreement and our presence here today. However, I am concerned about those public servant meetings. What can we do to ensure that that kind of engagement carries on? Politicians come and go but the public service is there for life. They have made friendships which have brought our two islands much closer and ensured peace.

H.E. Robin Barnett:

On the question of the negotiations, as I have already said, we are working extremely hard to find solutions. I only observe that, thus far, we have achieved the targets we set ourselves, for example in terms of making progress on the withdrawal agreement and on a time-limited implementation period. We will continue to work hard to make sure that we are in the right place by the time we reach October.

Senator Feighan asked specific questions. By chance, we are already engaging with our Irish partners on overseas development assistance. We have worked together already in places such as Sierra Leone. We agree that in places such as Africa, there are plenty of opportunities for future bilateral collaboration. Overseas development assistance is very much on our agenda. In terms of bilateral contacts, the first thing I would say is that both the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have suggested that there is scope for some form of annual intergovernmental consultation. We have responded very openly to that proposal. Below that, there are already mechanisms set up to bring together senior civil servants, including secretaries-general of Irish departments with their permanent secretary counterparts. We are extremely keen to ensure that these relationships, which have been built up over a long period of time, are very live. To my certain knowledge, there has been at least one secretary-general/permanent secretary meeting in the last two weeks alone. However, as the Senator rightly says, we need to make sure that we maintain that when we stop meeting on a weekly basis in Brussels. That is very much a focus of the work of my embassy and the Foreign Office.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I will call Ms Deidre Brock MP, followed by Mr Brendan Smith TD and Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD, and ask them to be as brief as possible.

Ms Deidre Brock MP:

I will try. The ambassador spoke about the oft-stated importance to the UK Government of maintaining the integrity of the internal market. We hear about that a lot in Scotland as well but we have yet to see the detail of what structures the Government really envisages will support that ideal after Brexit. How might the devolved Governments be able to defend their position on policy decisions in the future if there is disagreement? Is the ambassador able to give us some assurances that the UK Government is working on such structures somewhere behind the scenes?

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

I welcome the ambassador's statement and the fact that he brought some members of the British Government to the border region. It would be helpful if it was possible to get more of them to visit the region. Having had some parliamentary groups from other jurisdictions visit my own border region of Cavan-Monaghan and Fermanagh and Tyrone, it was a real learning curve for them to witness the seamless border at first hand. In reality, we do not have a border as envisaged elsewhere. I welcome the ambassador's commitment to the workings of the Good Friday Agreement. We have to ensure that there is no diminution in the workings or the potential of that agreement when the arrangements for Great Britain's withdrawal from the European Union are finalised.

3.15 pm

One other thing that has happened is a remarkable growth in business and trade on this island both south and north and east and west. The ambassador quoted the €60 billion-plus bilateral trade every year. Some commentary from London in recent days would seem to try to minimise the importance of that trade. It is hugely important and trade has grown because of the political atmosphere since the signing of the Good Friday agreement. Unfortunately, those institutions are not working today. I think it was Lord Murphy who made the point earlier today that even though the institutions are not working – much to our disappointment – we are still in a much better place than we were in April 1998. Some of us had the opportunity to attend some of the commemorations of the signing of the agreement back in April. In the commentary, all the speeches and the dialogue – whether it was Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, Bill Clinton, George Mitchell, David Trimble, Monica McWilliams or Mark Durkan of the SDLP – the message and theme that came across clearly was that in those difficult negotiations, there was a generosity to the other side and an understanding of the problems that the other side faced in trying to bring a certain constituency or community with them. It is a pity that that does not exist today in Northern Ireland. I have to re-emphasise that it is extremely important that both Governments are as active as possible in trying to get those institutions up and running again.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

I am sorry I am somewhat late but I had commitments yesterday and today. Before I ask my question in relation to the statement by the ambassador, I remind the Assembly of the huge and important role that the European Union has played in the peace process, through the International Fund for Ireland and the PEACE and INTERREG programme. The Union also played a role in removing the economic border between north and south. To me, apart from peace, that was the major achievement in our lifetime. It now appears to me that we are going back to a time when there was a border. We are deluding ourselves by saying: “No, there will be no border. It will be all right on the day.” Let us look at the facts. If Britain does not change its mind – one never knows – or it decides to go into EFTA and there will be free trade—

The Lord Kilclooney:

The Irish might change their minds.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

I did not interrupt you, John. We know where you stand. You think you are in another country when you are down here, but we are in one country.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

The Deputy is addressing the ambassador.

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

I am not interrupting.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

[Inaudible]

Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher TD:

It was the Right Honourable Lord Kilclooney, who does not normally interrupt.

Having said that, could somebody be factual about this? If that is the situation – that it will be okay on the day – does the ambassador see a situation where there will be free trade, post-Brexit, north/south or east/west? I have been around long enough to know – and there are a few more around long enough to know – about going to Lifford, Dundalk, Monaghan and queuing up to get your forms filled to try and get to the boat on time to get across the water. That situation could arise again and we are deluding ourselves if we say: “No, it will be okay.” Does the ambassador see a situation where there could be free trade north/south and east/west? If there is not, there are no winners here. Both the UK and Ireland will be losers.

H.E. Robin Barnett:

On the point about the role of the devolved Administrations, I have to be honest that, sitting as ambassador in Dublin, I am not an expert on that. I know from my own contacts with people like Minister Mike Russell that David Lidington is in regular contact with him. However, if I may I, will report back what Deidre Brock said. I should also say that we do have, within the embassy in Dublin, both a Scottish and a Welsh Government hub. I think they both make a really important contribution to strengthening our collective relationship with Ireland.

In response to Brendan Smith, I absolutely agree that it is important to keep in touch with what is happening on the border. I promise that is happening and it does not only involve me. We have further plans to bring people to the border in future. I think that the effect of the visits that have been made is to give people a much clearer picture of the specific challenges around the border. On the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, I cannot add much to what I said in my speech. I see a strong commitment on behalf of both the UK and Irish Governments. I am very well aware of the amount of contact between the Tánaiste and Karen Bradley. Their meetings are frequent, the contact between officials is constant and my embassy plays a part in that as well. I can promise the Deputy that there is an incredibly strong commitment to the totality of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

In response to Pat the Cope Gallagher, “Yes” is my straightforward answer. I believe that there is every possibility of negotiating a strong economic partnership between the UK and the EU. It can be something which ensures that we avoid a hard border. Also, as I have said before, in terms of the role of the British embassy in Dublin, we are not only focused on trying to get the right solution for everybody to the issues of the border but are already focused on looking at the new opportunities for strengthening UK-Ireland trade. I have already mentioned the construction centre; I could mention fintech, medtech and many more areas. From what I know, my counterpart, Adrian O’Neill, in London is seeing a regular flow of Irish businesses coming to the UK to explore those same opportunities.

It has been a privilege to speak to members. I am here for the rest of the day, so if anyone has any further questions, you know where to find me.

The Vice-Chairperson (Mr Declan Breathnach TD):

I thank the ambassador for his most interesting and insightful contribution today, and, indeed, the seven Members for their robust questioning.

We are now going to move on to the next panel. It is my pleasure to introduce the Acting Co-Chairperson Karin Smyth MP, who is vice-chair of the Steering Committee.

PANEL DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES FACING REGIONS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

Many people present are from the border regions and areas. Earlier, we heard from the Special EU Programmes Body about some of the work that it is doing to support people in such areas and regions. We will further explore those challenges with the next panel of speakers.

I welcome Professor Edgar Morgenroth, professor of economics at Dublin City University; Denis Kelly, the assistant director of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly; and Ciarán Hayes, the chief executive of Sligo County Council. The witnesses are all very welcome; we thank them for their time and look forward to hearing from them. Speakers will speak for approximately five to seven minutes each, after which we will take some questions.

Mr Denis Kelly:

Good afternoon. My name is Denis Kelly and I am the assistant director and senior planner at the Northern and Western Regional Assembly. I have found the discussion thus far very interesting as the Northern and Western Regional Assembly covers Connacht and the Ulster counties within the Republic. I am from Northern Ireland – I am a Fermanagh man living in Tyrone – and I have spent a lot of my career working in England, Northern Ireland and substantially here in the Republic of Ireland with Donegal County Council.

The organisation I work for is a regional assembly so it sits between the national Government and county council levels. We cover the nine local authorities shown on the map on the slide. There are eight counties with a significant cross-border context. The regional population is just under 850,000, which is a fifth of the national population. Compared with the state proportion at 55.3%, the age dependency in some of the counties in our region, for example, Leitrim, Roscommon and Mayo, is over 60%. For Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo and Donegal, which are on the border, we are talking about 57%, 58% or 59%. That gives a little context.

On housing, 75% of the population owns their own home. The substantial employment sectors are manufacturing, which at 10.5% is slightly higher than the state average of 8.75%; wholesale and retail, which is around 11%; and human health and social work, which is around 10%. Overall, those three sectors cover a third of the population; I am sure that Edgar will have more to say on that. We are an ageing population so health and wellbeing are important.

The regional assembly is new, having been set up in 2015. We want to do three particular things. First, we want to create better places by having good, effective planning and economic development policies. Secondly, we want to enhance the region's competitiveness

by taking advantage of the opportunities for funding, particularly EU funding, for which we are the managing authority for the border, midland and west region. We manage €320 million in that regard. It is significant that we see ourselves as a platform for collaboration, because continually collaborating with others is particularly important to enable our region to prosper.

3.30 pm

Ireland just got a new national planning framework. The regional assembly's role is to implement and amplify that framework at a regional level. We will do that in respect of Connacht and Ulster within the Republic. There are two other regional assemblies in the Republic that will do similar work for their parts of the country. We have to deliver on ten strategic outcomes. We are looking at the issue of compact growth because in this region, the urban settlements are particularly weak. We will also look at the regional accessibility and the area's mobility. We are endowed with a particularly fantastic landscape and we are rich in heritage and amenities. The region also has significant opportunities for becoming a low-carbon society through harnessing our resources. That would include the whole plethora of low-carbon measures. We border the Atlantic Ocean, which also gives rise to opportunities.

Brexit is an issue, although I will leave it to my colleague Ciarán Hayes, the chief executive of Sligo County Council, to talk about that in more depth. For context, though, as we are preparing our regional strategies, we are obviously in consultation with the Departments in the north of Ireland, and with local government there, too.

I have touched on the fact that this region is well endowed with fantastic landscapes. We also have Galway 2020 coming up, and we have "the best place to go wild" in Ireland. We have all these different messages that we are building so that people can see the opportunities we have and the quality of life in the region. We also have an extensive international industry, with which people will be familiar, as well as smaller businesses. Quite a lot of that is in the agri-food sector.

When we set out to develop the regional spatial and economic strategy, one critical thing we found was that although we are responsible for the administrative area, we are thinking of people and places so it is particularly important not to think within the confines of the administrative area but to think beyond that. The Wild Atlantic Way links Letterkenny and Derry/Londonderry city in the north with Galway in the south and here we are in Sligo in the centre. In the national planning framework, those three settlements are seen as significant settlements for which we need to increase growth. I wanted to pick up the point that when we look at the north-west – the Donegal area – it actually flows over into Derry and Tyrone. Similarly, Sligo has a great interaction with Fermanagh. In the Cavan and Monaghan area, there is significant collaboration across the border. If I was in Galway, I would be talking about the implications there that go down into Clare and Limerick. It is important to see that we reach out beyond our administrative boundaries and think about the people who live in the wider catchment areas.

This area has quite a significant number of third-sector education facilities. My kids would be educated in the Republic and in the universities in the north and that is not dissimilar for people here in the Republic, who might receive their third-level education over in the UK or up at Queen's University. Something significantly different is going on in the Letterkenny and Derry/Londonderry area, where Ulster University is. There is a lot of interaction between those local authorities and that is something to be built on. That is the shape of it. The Letterkenny and Derry/Londonderry area in the north has been a significant settlement and

there is a lot of cross-border interaction and trade crossing on a daily basis. Galway is to the south and we are also looking to build Sligo's significance. Sligo is just half an hour from where I was born over in Fermanagh. We are very close to the border.

Let me quickly run through what we are doing with the spatial and economic strategy. We are particularly looking to ensure that we have a vibrant and connected place. Connectivity is very important, whether it is physical connectivity or community connectivity. We are a natural place and we are inclusive. One significant thing to look into is smart places and the role of technology for the future. We need to make sure that we are able to design places for the people of our future.

Mr Ciarán Hayes:

I am Ciarán Hayes, the chief executive of Sligo County Council. I wish to add my voice to that of the Chairperson who welcomed people here this morning. Representatives from all political hues from both sides of the border and both sides of the Irish Sea are all very welcome and I hope that they enjoy their stay in Sligo.

I shall speak a bit about Sligo but also about the impact of Brexit on Sligo and the counties in the north west on both sides of the border. We have some challenges here in the north west and in Sligo. We have had stagnant population growth; indeed, we have had some depopulation in more recent decades. In effect, we have been educating our next generations for export. We also have some infrastructural deficits.

We have been thinking outside the box and implementing some pretty good schemes to try to deal with some of our issues and some of our deficits. Seven local authorities in the north west have come together to partner with Ireland West Airport at Knock to try to fill some of the infrastructure gaps. A number of local authorities have come together to open a trade office in Providence, Rhode Island, to provide an export outlet for some of our local small and medium-sized enterprises. We have also been investing in infrastructure separately.

I was delighted to hear His Excellency the British ambassador mention the royal visit in 2015, which we were delighted to be able to facilitate. It certainly helped us to draw a line under some very difficult and wrong incidents from the past and allowed Sligo to move on. We saw far greater interaction between ourselves here in Sligo and our colleagues and neighbours across the border. We saw the benefits. A cloud lifted and Sligo was able to move on from the awful events of the past.

And then we had Brexit. When the Brexit decision was announced, we immediately saw a 40% drop in commercial planning applications in Sligo and that has continued. A lot of that is because of the uncertainty. We have had a flight of retail across the border but I do not think that there is anything particularly new in that given that the retail trade has tended to flow one way or the other, depending on currency fluctuation. There has certainly been uncertainty, though.

There are 11 border county councils, north and south. We have come together and produced a report entitled "Brexit and the Border Corridor", which was launched last October in Brussels. The report was intended to act as a contribution to the debate around the risks, opportunities and issues that might arise in the region as a result of Brexit. It was also intended to provide an evidence base on which to base advocacy for the interests of the border regions. The region is likely to be one of the most exposed to Brexit impacts given the

possibility of the UK exit creating a new external border. We were very conscious that it will no longer be a border issue between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; it will become an EU border, which will create its own issues. I am conscious that some of the issues created for Louth in the north east, for example, would be very different for the challenges presented further west along the border, and particularly in the north west.

The local authorities came together as a group to assess the extent to which the border corridor has continued to lag behind national or regional averages in areas such as productivity and household incomes. In other words, the region currently faces challenges, as I have outlined in a Sligo context, to the production of the economic growth that will see it converge with levels elsewhere on the island, both north and south. Employment forecasts to 2026 were developed for the report and show that the current position is likely to continue for the corridor. Other scenarios have been modelled showing that given the current levels of cross-border co-dependency and co-operation across council areas, a poorly managed Brexit could lead to economic outcomes that cause the region to fall further behind. Again, that is for north and south; it is not just in a Sligo context. The report identified the need not only for measures to mitigate against any negative Brexit impacts but for the creation of solutions that ensure that future border management is as seamless as possible. I think everybody is singing off pretty much the same hymn sheet on that.

The group recently met the British ambassador, and we were grateful for those meetings. We also met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 24 May when we were asked for our opinion on two potential solutions to the Irish border. We are currently putting together our response but what I am saying now is in effect the thrust of that response. We were asked to comment on the two issues that were being examined: maximum facilitation, or max fac, and the new customs partnership, or NCP. The chief executives' understanding of the options from the two papers on the future customs arrangements and the Ireland/Northern Ireland question issued by the Department for Exiting the European Union in August was that neither paper spelt out in much detail how max fac or NCP might work. The business group has taken further detail from briefings. We have accessed what we could to come up with our opinion as 11 chief executives.

Maximum facilitation is presented as streamlined customs arrangements designed to make trade as seamless as possible and there is no argument with that. A combination of exemptions and technology lie behind the idea. The exemptions are based on a figure of 80% of Northern Ireland-to-Ireland trade being undertaken by smaller traders and being economically insignificant international trade.

The max fac option faces two particular challenges in respect of the Irish border. First, the proposed exemptions need to operate on the basis of a great deal of trust and co-operation. The idea asks a lot of the intelligence-led oversight given the number of firms involved. The smaller traders referred to include all Northern Ireland cross-border trading SMEs – that is, businesses with fewer than 250 employees – which make up more than 98% of all businesses in Northern Ireland. In 2015, 7,395 SMEs were engaged in cross-border trade. That number is greater than the total number of Northern Ireland businesses selling to Great Britain. Those smaller traders include 88% of Northern Ireland's exporting SMEs, which suggests that they are likely to be engaged in other markets, including the rest of the EU. Fewer than 100 exporting non-SMEs would not be exempt.

The second problem with max fac is that the technology solution for trade facilitation is not a new or cheap solution. Ideas for single-window portals for customs clearance administration

have been in development for a number of different borders. One example is the US-Canada border, where they have had such portals for several decades. Thus far, no practical solution has been found that does not include the physical checking of goods at or near the borders. Most technology solutions have either failed at the implementation stage or been rejected on the basis of cost. The border corridor report concluded that a technological solution alone would not be sufficient for a new system of border management that was frictionless. An agreement on a system of exemptions would certainly remove from the tariffs net most cross-border traders from the region, at least on the Northern Ireland side. However, the number of businesses involved makes such a system of exemptions very difficult to envisage.

3.45 pm

To conclude on max fac, the recent floating of the idea, which I am not sure took much traction, of a buffer zone around the border shows the difficulties recognised by those exploring the idea of a technological solution to the border question. That shows how difficult the issue really is.

On the second option, the new customs partnership aims to allow the UK to have access to the EU market as if it was inside the customs union but to have the freedom to negotiate other trade deals with different tariffs with non-EU countries. In essence, it would mean that goods imported to the UK's supply chains and intended for consumption in the EU would need to align precisely with the EU external customs border. Tariffs would have to be collected at the EU level and any difference between the EU and UK tariffs paid to the EU by the UK Government.

The NCP focuses on those businesses with supply chains outside their jurisdiction and the issues that they might face in any post-Brexit landscape. The border corridor and the all-island supply chains have become seamless, particularly since the Good Friday agreement. For the border corridor, there has been a particular emphasis on the agri-food sector, particularly the dairy and meat-processing industries. Although the NCP might resolve any issues around differences in tariffs, it has been criticised for being over-complicated and based on untested processes for the tracking of imports.

The border corridor report concluded that the best solution for goods trade was for the UK to remain in the EU customs union on a permanent or temporary basis until a new free trade agreement was signed that was as close as possible to the current position. If that is judged to be impossible, the common trade area should continue and consideration should be given to the creation of an economic zone, at least including the border corridor, in which the free movement of goods and people will continue as now.

It should be noted that neither the max fac nor the NCP options deal with the issue of regulatory alignment between the UK or Northern Ireland and the EU post-Brexit so neither appears to meet the test envisaged by the 11 local authorities of a solution to the issues facing their areas in the light of Brexit. On those grounds alone, such options would be unlikely to command community support in the border corridor.

I appreciate that I have been quite detailed and I am not sure that we wish to get into the detail today, but that gives a flavour of the difficulties we are facing, not just here in Sligo but among the 11 councils both north and south of the border. The report gives an implication of the complexities involved. I am sorry, but I am afraid that I do not see any advantages arising out of Brexit.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

Thank you for that detail, which it is helpful to have sometimes. I am sure that some good questions will come back to you. Thank you very much, Mr Hayes.

Let us hear the final speech before questions from Professor Morgenroth.

Professor Edgar Morgenroth:

Good afternoon, and thank you very much for inviting me to address the Assembly; it is a great pleasure to be here. I have been engaged in work on regional development for the past 20 years or so and in work on Brexit since 2013. Indeed, the first time that I ever presented on Brexit, Joe McHugh, who addressed the Assembly this morning, was the Chair. That was in Donegal.

I shall talk a little about the general challenges with which local and regional areas have to deal. I shall come to Brexit at the end because it is, of course, not everything in respect of the challenges out there. Some of the most important challenges are more general economic challenges. A really striking feature in the Republic of Ireland is that in 2016, 20% of the smaller areas had a population smaller than it was in 1986. They have experienced depopulation over a long period. On the other hand, 26% of the population live in areas where the population has doubled over the same period. There are then very different development experiences across the population. Politicians will come across that regularly. There are areas that are absolutely thriving and there are areas that are not doing well at all. That is a challenge. On the one hand, we have congestion, and on the other, we have under development. That is an important thing to address.

What are the factors driving economic development? We have a lot of research evidence and I recently published some in an international journal which looks into the important factors. It is interesting to see that the factors seem to have changed over the years but regional development strategies do not often reflect that. When I see regional development strategies, I tend to see wish lists for all kinds of infrastructure. What do we find is the most important factor for regional development? It is human capital, not infrastructure – and that is by a factor of at least ten or 20. Human capital is important. As we have heard already, the areas that are depopulating, including in this part of Ireland, are losing their population, and in particular their educated population. Without an educated population, you are not going to get very good businesses coming into the area. It is a “chicken and egg” thing – a circular problem and a vicious circle.

What is the second most important thing for regional development? Again, it is not infrastructure but scale. If we look at the island of Ireland, places such as Dublin and Belfast are clearly of significant scale but there are large parts of Ireland, north and south, that do not have scale at all. That includes not only this part of Ireland but across the border into Fermanagh and Tyrone. The urban centres in those areas are small. Where do big firms go? They go into bigger centres because they need a bigger labour force. We have depopulation, loss of human capital and a lack of scale. That is a very significant challenge.

The third factor - now we are getting into infrastructure – is broadband, with which we have further significant issues. It is important to understand what drives economic development.

Another important challenge that we face generally, but particularly in certain areas, relates to sustainability and climate change. We have significant climate change adaptation issues. For example, flooding is a local event. Some counties face repeated and significant such events. That requires resources, management and so on and that is a big challenge.

Governance has been mentioned a few times, and that is another important challenge. As we have already heard, we have new regional assemblies in Ireland. The UK has regional structures and Parliaments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There is nothing in England as such and, of course, the one in Northern Ireland is not currently functioning properly. That is a challenge. For the Republic of Ireland, the challenge is that a lot of people do not even know about our assemblies. We need to do something about that.

Let me turn to Brexit. As I said, I will be reasonably quick. I have a couple of statements to make. First, I have done more than 10 different reports or research studies on Brexit. There is no net upside when you add it all in. This is a bad thing and it is worst for the UK. There is no doubt about it.

Secondly, Theresa May does say that she wants a special and deep relationship, which is great. I think we are all looking for such a relationship. However, it is important and needs to be stated that the most deep and special relationship that could exist between the UK and the EU is the one that we currently have. The UK is looking for something less special and deep than what we already have. That is really important.

At this stage, Brexit has been analysed almost to death by academics but their analysis has almost always been at the national level considering how countries are affected. It is interesting that if one starts to look at the potential effects, there are big spatial differences. I have done quite a lot of work on the Republic of Ireland. We know that if there was a really hard Brexit that involved tariffs, the agri-food sector would be the most exposed sector. That is well understood but the agri-food sector is not equally important everywhere in Ireland.

For example, in Cavan-Monaghan – I live in County Monaghan – agri-food accounts for one fifth of all jobs. So if something happens to agri-food – it does not necessarily have to be Brexit; Trump could do something, too – those two counties would be particularly affected. I see Brendan Smith is looking at me; he is from Cavan so he knows the story. It is really important and we have not looked at that sufficiently. Agri-food is not that important for Dublin. If one does the sums, just for manufacturing, on the effect on overall employment of a hard Brexit, one sees that Monaghan could be hit by a reduction of 2.5% whereas Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown could be hit by basically zero – there could be no impact. The regional dimension to Brexit is really important and we need to understand it more.

Let me say a couple more things about Brexit. First, we tend to look at manufacturing, which is the easy one to look at. I am guilty of it myself – as an academic, I pick the low-hanging fruit first – but I would be much, much more scared about services. The most recent trade deal that the EU struck with Canada, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, is around 1,100 pages long – if you want to get to sleep well, read it – and it is mostly about services. At the end of a seven-year transition period, just seven products are still subject to tariffs or tariff quotas. Why do they need 1,100 pages, then? It is because a large number of services are not freely traded. There are things that are relevant to our discussions. For example, ambulance services could easily be provided on a cross-border basis. Under CETA, ambulance services cannot be traded. There is zero trade. I worry quite a bit about services and they do not receive enough attention.

4 pm

Secondly, when it comes to the eventual arrangements for the border, people are making the mistake of thinking about the existing, legitimate, trusted traders who trade every day. Nobody is really worried about them. The problem is that deviations in customs and regulatory regimes between the UK and the EU will provide an opportunity for criminal elements to smuggle. They are the ones we are worried about and they are not going to use some technological solution to announce that they are about to smuggle whatever it is across the border. That is the real problem. It is not the legitimate trade, which we can handle; we have a problem with the illegitimate trade.

That brings me to my last point, which is that a last-minute fudge is not going to work. You might get the signature but it will not work because, ultimately, it will be tested in the courts. When that lorry load comes across the border and someone disputes whether it should be paying a tariff, it will be tested in the courts. If you do not have the precision up-front in the agreement, the courts will deliver a precision that you might not like. That is why you have to get this right and why it is important not to let things go to October but to get some progress much, much sooner. I shall leave it there. I am open to questions.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

Thank you very much. I have one question from Senator Boyhan.

Senator Victor Boyhan:

I welcome Denis, Edgar and Ciarán. They were given a broad brief and it was quite technical. I was thinking about how I would fit into this session if I was living in Scotland or Wales.

On the Republic of Ireland, there was no reference to the national planning framework or to the national development plan, which are two major pieces of legislative work. Perhaps the witnesses could share something about that for the bigger audience – I know that it would be tight saying it in a few sentences, but is important – and about the mutual benefits. I was interested to hear what Ciarán had to say about the synergies, co-operation and engagement among the 11 local authorities. Perhaps that has not really been sold, and it is for another day, but it is important to make the point that there is a national development planning framework and a national development plan.

I do not know how many people on the panel know this but there are plans to consider having a national maritime or marine spatial strategy. That is a really important thing for the whole island of Ireland. These are the sorts of issues that we need to talk about when it comes to co-operation because BIPA's key responsibility is greater co-operation between the parliamentarians in all the jurisdictions. Could the panel touch on the national planning framework, the national development plan and the national marine spatial plan? Those are three important aspects of future economic planning and local governance in this country.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

We have one question from Brendan Smith; then we will take the questions together.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

I welcome the three contributions, which were excellent. We could spend a day discussing the detail of each of them.

On the contribution of our esteemed economist from the Economic and Social Research Institute, Professor Morgenroth, and the importance of infrastructure, I think that at times we talk about creating jobs that are needed in areas such as Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan – rural Ireland – but we do not put enough emphasis on maintaining jobs. If we are to maintain jobs in the agri-food sector if there is not a good deal and Brexit brings us unforeseen problems, the only thing that will be within our own Government's competence will be to try to ensure that our sector remains as competitive as possible. We would need infrastructure for the transport of goods out of the region because we do not have a good road network and we do not have a rail network in the south of Ulster either. From that point of view, I would like to hear the panel's comments about the need to prioritise infrastructure in that region, which is vulnerable.

Alongside our huge dependence in Cavan-Monaghan on the agri-food sector, the two other sectors on which we are highly dependent for jobs are construction products and the engineering sector. They are two other sectors that are more heavily dependent on the Northern Irish and British market than other sectors of the economy. I would like to hear the panel's comments on the need to upgrade infrastructure to try to help those sectors to remain competitive.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

We would be grateful if all three panel members could contribute answers.

Professor Edgar Morgenroth:

I shall start with Brendan's question, which is the freshest. First, he is right that construction and engineering are also very important and will potentially also be hit. They would be less hard hit by a hard Brexit because the tariffs for them are lower. Construction is a tricky one because it is really a service so it would be down to what happens to services.

Maintaining jobs and competitiveness is vital but there is more to competitiveness than just infrastructure. For example, wages are important; they tend to pop up higher as an issue than infrastructure. Brendan is right, though, to raise infrastructure as an issue in the context of Brexit. If the worst happened, we could find ourselves in a situation in which hauliers were stopped twice coming from Donegal simply to serve the Irish market in Dublin, never mind going further afield. That raises some interesting infrastructure challenges and there is a question as to whether the N2-A5 project is appropriate in that context. Perhaps it might be better to improve the road to Sligo to motorway standard and build a better road up through Donegal. That might be the more appropriate response. It is absolutely correct to start to think about some of the responses with regard to appropriate investment prioritisation in the border region. Lots of roads cross the border. If someone goes from Castleblayney to Dundalk, they will cross the border. If we had a hard border and two crossings, it would be a nonsense but it is an issue.

Senator Boyhan is quite right that the NPF is a very important Government initiative. I did the background economic analysis for the NPF so I was pretty centrally involved in it. It does pick up on the issues that I mentioned at the start of my comments about the different development experiences in different parts of Ireland – the same happens in parts of the UK,

so I should not leave it out – and the lack of the big cities that drive the regional growth. Ultimately, the NPF aims to drive growth through a small number of cities. The north-west has a particular challenge in that Sligo town is quite small. That is very difficult to address, particularly in the short term. The growth rate of Sligo itself has not been particularly impressive and it takes special effort to turn something like that around. Sometimes we cannot do it but we will have to try harder. The key message from the NPF is that if we want to change things, we are going to have to change how we do things. There is no point in pretending that we can do the same things again and again but get a different outcome.

Mr Ciarán Hayes:

I have some brief comments. First, the NPF was referred to. There is not much point in my adding to the comments that have already been made. Given the time frame that we had, we could have delved into an awful lot of other issues. I absolutely agree that the NPF is an important strategic planning document for the country.

I have to say that the collaboration among the 11 local authorities is one of the better pieces of collaboration in which I have been involved. I am conscious of the political environment in which we are operating, particularly given the current absence of the northern Assembly. The joint report is probably the only one with a democratic voice because it has gone through 11 locally elected councils. There is a fear that the democratic voice of Northern Ireland is not being heard, except perhaps in our report. I cannot understate the strength and importance of our collaboration.

Edgar adverted to the whole issue of infrastructure and investment. In the report, we identified some of the infrastructural deficiencies and weaknesses, including the A5. Given the lack of scale that Edgar spoke about, the infrastructural deficits and the absence of talent and population growth, I am of the view that we need a certain amount of positive discrimination towards the region. Brexit aggravates an already difficult situation; it certainly does not lend itself to it. There are challenges for us as a nation in the priorities and options that we have to pick.

Mr Denis Kelly:

As a planner, I should say that the national planning framework is central, which is why I had it and the ten strategic outcomes on the fourth or fifth slide of my presentation.

As a regional planner, the issues with human capital, scale and broadband infrastructure resonated with me. That is why I picked out the significance of third-level education in this region. We really do need to build up the scale of some of our settlements, including Sligo.

In relation to the national planning framework, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly, along with the other local authorities in our region, fought strongly in calling for recognition of the importance of hard infrastructure for the region and we got significant support from some Members present. If you look at the depopulation in this region, you will see that it is in those counties with the least infrastructure, as was shown on one of my slides.

Regardless of being on one side of the border or the other, the A6 and A5 and how they interlink with Donegal and the rest of the Republic are particularly important. We should bear in mind that we are talking about roads. I cannot remember how many different roads cross the border but it is significant that there are fields, which were historically where a lot of the

illegitimate trading took place. We hear stories of our forefathers and would have thought that such things were in the past but perhaps they are not.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

We have one more question from John Scott.

Mr John Scott MSP:

Senator Boyhan was wondering how this discussion applied to parts of the United Kingdom other than Northern Ireland. It seems to me from what Professor Morgenroth said that his analysis has a universality that applies throughout the whole United Kingdom. Certainly from the perspective that I have in Scotland, but this is also true elsewhere, our cities are powering ahead, our towns are just about standing still and our rural areas are struggling. That is a function of ageing populations being left, and almost trapped, in rural areas. It is also a function of broadband, as Professor Morgenroth rightly said. Young people now simply will not stay in rural areas without broadband. Everybody has to be connected to their screens. For people of my age, that is not quite so important. That is driving young people out of rural areas right across the whole UK, as well as Ireland. If it is a difficult and awkward situation at the moment, it is only going to get worse with Brexit. How do we make it better?

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

Before you gentlemen respond, my colleague Deidre Brock wants to get a final point in.

Ms Deidre Brock MP:

Further to what John said, the Scottish Government is putting a lot of investment into dualling the A9 up to Inverness and are putting something like £600 million into increasing broadband, particularly throughout rural communities. Forgive me for not being as familiar with it as many folk here are, but what is the mood from the national Government in Ireland in respect of investment? I take it that the regional assemblies are a first step in trying to make sure that more investment flows out of Dublin and into those areas. Is that right?

Mr Ciarán Hayes:

In a word, yes.

4.15 pm

Professor Edgar Morgenroth:

I shall say something quickly. There is a national broadband plan. We have in Ireland an issue that we see in other countries, which is that because the markets in rural areas are typically small, they will not get privately provided broadband. That is where the Government has to step in to ensure provision. We can discuss and argue about the merits and speed of our broadband plan. Most people would probably argue that it is a bit slow to get there. I live in a rural area and I have atrocious broadband. It is a real issue. That is one issue on which one can start to use investment to try to address some of the imbalances.

A wider issue on which the rural areas can perhaps capitalise is that highly educated people tend to like a pretty good quality of life and quality of life is good in a lot of rural areas. It is

just not capitalised upon. Let us consider the Irish case. Some delegates from the UK may have been to Westport, which is one of our premier holiday destinations, but it is also doing quite well industrially. It is about the most remote place one could find in Ireland in respect of road access – they do not have a motorway – but they are doing quite well in employment and that is because they have created a really good quality of life. If asked whether they would take a job in Westport, very few young people would say no. Ultimately, in those areas that are currently not doing well, we have to try to address some of the issues to make people, particularly those who are more mobile, say yes. A lot of people are not mobile – they tend to be the ones who stay – but there are mobile people and they can be attracted into places.

Mr Ciarán Hayes:

I have one final comment. If we are to solve the problems of today, we have to change the thinking that caused those problems in the first place. To touch on Edgar's point, we in Sligo are looking to position and present ourselves as a smart city destination. We are very conscious that the likes of Apple have home workers in every county in every region. They are working off the back of broadband solutions. Given that that is the tool of the future – indeed, it is the future – it behoves us in local and central Government to position ourselves to take advantage. That might also help us to deal with the other challenges in the context of Brexit.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

I thank the speakers for their time and for their thoughtful, well-briefed and detailed presentations. They were really helpful and I think we all found them fascinating. As was said, the challenges for communities across the piece and some of the comments about cities are relevant despite Brexit but we also appreciate the comments on Brexit. We will circulate the presentations for some of our colleagues who have had to leave. We very much thank the panel for their time; it was a very worthwhile discussion.

COMMITTEE D (ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL): “CHILDHOOD OBESITY: FOLLOW-UP REPORT”

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

Before Lord Alf Dubs presents the Committee D report, I welcome back Co-Chairperson Seán Crowe, whom am I delighted to see back after he had to leave yesterday evening. He will take his rightful place on the podium. I thank Declan Breathnach for his sterling effort all day.

The Lord Dubs:

I wish to cover two points. I wish to update the plenary on the committee's work in progress, but before that, I shall present for your approval a brief report on childhood obesity that has come out today. We worked on childhood obesity previously but thought we should do a bit more so took further evidence in Dublin and London. This report summarises the earlier report, which was agreed at the Kilkenny plenary in July 2017, and provides an update on where we are now.

In the course of our work, there have been significant developments in pretty much all the jurisdictions. It is worth noting that childhood obesity has risen high up the agenda at all our

Parliaments and Assemblies so we are hitting the right moment. For example, new sugary drinks levies were introduced in Ireland and, in spring, the UK. Many food manufacturers are reformulating their products to lower their sugar and fat contents. The issue is being taken more seriously in all the jurisdictions.

The British Government's 2016 childhood obesity plan was widely regarded as having been watered down a bit but we understand that a beefed-up version will be published before too long. In the meantime, the Scottish Government has announced that it will publish a healthy weight plan in the coming weeks. There are now several measures to tackle things such as multi-buy offers. When products that are high in sugar, fat and salt are featured in multi-buy offers – such as two for one or buy one, get one free – it encourages more purchases. If the products are relatively inexpensive but high in the things that are not healthy, poor people in particular have an incentive to buy them. It is a perverse way of going forward, though, because they are damaging to people's health. In Ireland, there is a new code of practice for non-broadcast media advertising and marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages so there is interest in the advertising side as well. I shall come to that in a moment.

At a local level, there are innovative approaches associated with trying to get better planning controls. For example, we heard about the “no fry zones” banning new fast-food outlets that have been pioneered by Wicklow County Council. The Mayor of London has taken a leaf out of that book and is working in the same direction. He has also announced that he intends to ban the advertising of products that are high in fat, sugar and salt from public transport in London, which carries quite a lot of advertising.

There is a case for extending the ban on sugary drinks to other sugary products. Sugary drinks are the obvious one because children drink them so much but there are other sugary products, such as confectionary and cakes, and a possible ban or reduction of their sugar level is on the agenda.

The committee concluded that the time has come to introduce a pre-nine o'clock watershed across all BIPA jurisdictions for the advertising of products that are high in sugar, fat and salt. The argument is that although children have special children's programmes, they watch other programmes, too. The problem is that young people also record programmes so watersheds are not quite as effective as they used to be. Still, it would be helpful to proceed in that direction.

Several witnesses underlined the importance of co-operation across BIPA jurisdictions. Quite a number of the products on sale in our various jurisdictions are made by single manufacturers. Co-operation across the jurisdictions on taxation, regulation, advertising and product reformulation would therefore be helpful.

In conclusion, the medical advice is that if it is not tackled, childhood obesity is an enormous threat to all our countries and to the health of all our people. It will be critical for our health services in the years to come. There is going to be a real crisis in all our countries so there is no time to be wasted. It is urgent, as is reflected in the report. I hope that the plenary will endorse the report and that, where possible, Members of each individual Assembly or Parliament will raise the issue with their Governments. Governments are doing things, but the Committee contends that they could do more.

Shall I continue with the other part of what I wish to say or would the Co-Chairperson like to deal with this first?

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

We will take questions on this first.

Mr Dai Lloyd AM:

I thank Lord Dubs for chairing such an excellent Committee report and for his introduction of it. I have been a GP in Swansea for the past 34 years; intermittently, I get elected to the Welsh Assembly. In a previous incarnation, I served on Committee D, which was ably chaired by Lord Dubs at that point, so I well know the strength of his chairpersonship. It is an excellent report.

To concentrate on the headlines, sugar is the enemy. We used to think that cholesterol and fats were the enemy but sugar is now the enemy. To a lesser but still quite high degree, carbohydrates are also the enemy because they are broken down into sugars in the body. We used to think like that around 40 years ago, we have dabbled in cholesterol and lipids and we have now come around to that way of thinking again because that is the way forward.

There are some excellent recommendations in the report, particularly those on the need to start from day one; on the promotion of pre-conception and early-childhood health; and on the promotion of breastfeeding because childhood obesity really does start in the womb.

Mr Chris Ruane MP:

I serve on Committee D and wish to congratulate Alf Dubs on the leadership that he has shown on this issue and many others.

The issue of childhood obesity, or of obesity in general, will go up the political agenda. Smoking is currently the biggest cause of preventable death in the British Isles but childhood obesity will soon overtake it. Of the 35 countries in the OECD, the UK is the ninth worst and Ireland is the 12th worst so it is an issue that we need to face together.

We have five legislatures in our islands and we should learn from them. There is excellent good practice out there with a sugar tax in Ireland and in the UK, and school initiatives promoting fruit and “mile a day” initiatives in UK primary schools.

Currently, one in 11 deaths is down to obesity and that will rise. Consider the actions that we have taken against smoking over the past 15 to 20 years: we banned smoking in public places, and they kicked and screamed about that; we have taxed cigarettes to the hilt; we have banned advertising; and we have even banned advertising on cigarette packets, and they are now locked away safe. That is the level of intervention that we need to combat this increasing threat to our children’s lives.

There are regional disparities within Ireland and within the UK. Certain regions suffer more and certain wards within those regions suffer more still. Obesity is a disease of poverty: the richer suffer less with obesity and diabetes and the poor areas suffer more.

It is an excellent report and there is much to learn from in it. We politicians need to keep a special eye on obesity, because it will spread like the waistlines.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

It is great to be able to say a few words from this end and ask a few questions. Many of you will know that I spent 35 years in primary education. I have to say that it is good to see reference to education on page four, in particular. Not being a member of this committee, I would just like to ask Lord Dubs about the opportunities in respect of all of the Parliamentary Assembly members that are here and the degree of repetition. Obesity is a problem right across all of our Assemblies but in respect of the need to co-ordinate programmes, while obesity is different in regions, it is basically the same problem, as are an awful lot of Learning for Life programmes. I am asking about the degree to which there should be collaboration between, for example, departments of health in terms of developing excellent programmes instead of everybody developing their own programmes.

I will just give an instance. Back in my old days at the health board, we in the north-east looked at developing a whole series of programmes where we took in teachers to look at the whole Learning for Life area, including healthy eating. At that time, the North Western Health Board had a programme, which was pertinent to this area here in Sligo, called the BÍ Folláin programme, which meant healthy eating, for those who would not have Gaeilge here. When we went to use it in the north east, although money was spent by the Department of Health, the whole issue of copyright became a problem, as it did with many other programmes. The reality is that these programmes are out there and have been developed somewhere. Now, I know, obviously, when we are teaching it in Ireland, we would want someone who is speaking in our dialect or whatever it might be but I just wonder whether there is collaboration and whether the committee looked at the collaboration that could be achieved by different sectors taking it and doing excellent programmes rather than repeating the thing over and over again.

4.30 pm

Senator Catherine Noone:

Just to say that I am on this committee as well. I thank Lord Dubs and the other members of the committee for agreeing to do a report on this and actually a follow-up report as well. I suppose it is my hobby horse, really, since I got elected over seven years ago now. I do not want to repeat what others have said but it is fair to say that we are all struggling in all four jurisdictions. Indeed, we travelled to Amsterdam, which was unusual, but I think the feeling was that we were all struggling so we needed to hear from people from a country that was actually performing better in this space. So I am hoping that the report will be useful to Members of Parliament in order to take some of the really helpful initiatives that are in there.

I would agree with the good doctor in this regard: sugar is arguably the new tobacco in the sense of the damage that is being caused. One in four children is either overweight or obese in this jurisdiction and we are on track to be the fattest country in Europe by 2030. There is always a lot of talk about fiscal space but, most definitely, if we do something about obesity among children and adults, our fiscal space will be a lot larger because the amount of money that is spent in the public health services on obesity-related illnesses, be they cancer or diabetes, is absolutely phenomenal. As Chris said, it is going to take a lot of different initiatives coming from a wide variety of angles. Many of them are unpopular, it has to be said, and come under the realm of nanny state. I have been called Queen Nanny and all the rest of it myself but it is a very serious issue and I am very proud that we have produced such good material on it. I thank all of the committee.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

And a nanny award, if I remember rightly from one of our meetings – the Queen Nanny award, which we all aspire to.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

With an issue like obesity, we always seem to go and blame or start using the education or schooling system as an excuse to do things right. I find that the biggest problem, especially with schools and colleges at the moment, is funding. If we can divert some more funding from the Exchequer or whatever it is to schools – I know that there are families who cannot afford to send Billy, Jack or Fiona to swimming, tennis, rugby or Gaelic football – I think that the Government should be pressurised into having more physical education in schools for children. I do not know what it is like in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland but I know what it is like in the Republic of Ireland. In some of the reports, we are talking about extending into playgrounds. Most schools in the Republic of Ireland have no playgrounds. With most schools in the Republic of Ireland, if the mother and father, or the family, do not pay for the physical education to take their child to swimming that day, it does not happen.

There is an epidemic of obesity that has been going on for years and years. We are all in the habit of blaming the fast-food chains and everything else but I think it is about time that parents and schools stood up for themselves and took responsibility because blaming fast food and everything else is a very handy way of trying to solve the problem.

I agree with putting extra taxes on sugars but I think it is about time now to start investing money in the schools to get children more involved in physical education. I saw a tweet this morning from Senator Neale Richmond in the Senate. I am a big sports person and, in fairness, when you are involved in sport, all you want to do in sport – and I put my hand up – is win. The problem that I find at the moment is that people who are not good enough to actually make the team are falling away and are put on the wayside. Then they end up maybe socialising, drinking or smoking. We should have some way of encouraging people to get involved in some kind of sport such as is horse riding. It does not have to be any of the major sports but we should be diverting a lot more money into physical education and into getting children and young people involved in sport at an early age. There is this thing of looking for excuses the whole time. It will never ever get better unless we start investing money.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

I am also a member of Committee D and I thank Lord Dubs for his great chairmanship. Does Lord Dubs want to make any comments on some of those excellent points?

The Lord Dubs:

First of all, I thank all the contributors. I pretty well agree with everything that has been said. The problem is that the more one looks at childhood obesity, the more one realises it is a matter of a total lifestyle. It is not just one single thing that does it; it is everything. In a way, we could have gone much wider than the report but it would have taken us a year or two to do. But certainly there is no end to the co-operation that is desirable and helpful.

I will make a few specific points. One is that I should recognise the work done by all committee members, for which I am grateful, and Catherine Noone in particular. I think she was the person who first suggested we do this. She came on the committee and we accepted her suggestion so it is really a credit to her that we went on this path. I thank Dai Lloyd for

his medical endorsement and Chris Ruane for his statistics. I will make a few points. It is quite true that obesity among children can be more prevalent in poorer areas than in more affluent areas. Of course, we know the reason. It is because poor people have to buy cheaper food and cheaper food tends to be less healthy so they are the victims of not being as well off as other people. Partly, it is also a matter of education. When we went to Amsterdam, we discovered that a lot of the work being done was done at a very local level – local authority level – and they involved migrant communities who also needed more education and information about the consequences of diets and so on and needed help. Yes, the better the co-operation between health and education is, the more likely it is to be successful. The co-operation is important and, of course, bringing parents along is important, not by saying they are bad parents – of course, we would not suggest that – but by saying that we would like to have their co-operation in being helpful.

On the basis of where we have been and where there has been some of this, it does seem to work and parents are quite enthusiastic about looking after the health of their children. We were very impressed in Amsterdam where good things are happening and where the levels of childhood obesity are lower. We were taking evidence in Wales and the person from the health service in Wales said, “look, you really ought to go to the Netherlands or Finland to see where there is better practice.” Not that the Dutch said they were all that brilliant; they also said they have problems.

One of the things that I enjoyed in the earlier report and enjoyed learning about was that they had co-operation with the local supermarket, Albert Heijn, and they had schools that went on treasure hunts in the department store identifying healthy and unhealthy foods by the labelling. The department store co-operated and the kids went through and picked out the things that were good and the things that were not so good, all as part of their education. Another thing is that they said to get away from fizzy drinks, they wanted – if I can use the pun – to make water cool for children and they were actually successful. I do not know how they did it but they said they have been quite successful.

Senator Catherine Noone:

They did engraving on bottles of water with kids. That was the main way they did it.

The Lord Dubs:

Okay, all that – and then, of course, sport and lifestyle. Yes, clearly, exercise combined with healthy eating is the best combination.

So I thank members who have contributed. I think there is an awful lot there. I am quite awed by the need for action because there are ominous implications for our young people as they get older and for the health of our countries. So I hope that the report will help to encourage the Governments and administrations on their way.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

I ask whether the Assembly adopts the report of Committee D?

Report agreed.

Although I am one as well, I thank all of the members of Committee D for their work in completing the report. The joint clerks will now arrange to send the report to the British and

Irish Governments and we will all do our best to do our own bit to promote it within our own jurisdictions. Does Lord Dubs wish to proceed to the second part of the committee's update?

The Lord Dubs:

The other issue is clearly unanimous but abortion may not be. We started looking at abortion, that is to say, the implications of travel across jurisdictions because of the different legislative bases for abortion in the different jurisdictions. In other words, in short hand, it involves the number of women have travelled from one country to another or from one area to another because they could not get an abortion where they lived. We all know what I am talking about.

We started this before we even knew there was going to be a referendum in Ireland and we had to stop taking evidence for a while. We took evidence in Liverpool and London and we were then asked to stop. It was regarded as inappropriate that we should take evidence while there was a referendum debate going on and Catherine Noone, in particular, was busy enough with her own committee and so on at the time. So we stopped and we propose to go back.

The suggestion is that as things have moved on at a great pace compared to what the attitudes were beforehand, we go to Belfast, hopefully, in early October because we know that there is a lot of discussion now, and we make a point of taking evidence from all sides – absolutely. This is not meant to be an inquiry where we have one answer and we only want evidence to take us to that answer. We are aware of the difficulties, the tensions and the sensitivities and so we want to hear all the voices and make sure that we have as much of a balanced input of information so that we can make as balanced a report as possible. So our thinking is that we will go to Belfast, as I said, in early October and we will then go to Dublin a bit later. The advice was that if we went to Dublin first, the referendum is so recent that, probably, the results still need to be digested in Dublin so that we know what further action is going to be taken legislatively. The advice was to go later to Dublin so we would think of going to Dublin after Christmas, hopefully, in order to be able to produce a report for the Plenary in the spring of next year.

The Acting Co-Chairperson (Ms Karin Smyth MP):

We are short of time. Are there any quick comments on that or are we okay to move on? Okay, I thank Lord Dubs. I now hand over to Co-Chairperson, Mr. Seán Crowe TD, for the final part of the session.

PANEL DISCUSSION: WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT TODAY

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We have now come to our final panel today. We welcome our panel of female parliamentarians to address us on the challenges facing women in politics and the progress, or lack thereof, over the 100 years since the first female MP-TD, Countess Markievicz, was elected. I welcome the following members who will address us today: Karin Smyth MP; Senator Catherine Noone; Ann Jones AM; Christina McKelvie MSP; and Rosemary Barton MLA. They are all very welcome. The plan is that each of our panellists will make opening remarks of about five minutes. Is that okay? We will then take comments and questions from members. Can I ask members to be succinct in their contributions to allow as many members as possible to contribute? So who is going to kick us off? Go ahead, I am in your hands.

Ms Christina McKelvie MSP:

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for inviting me along. I am Christina McKelvie and I am the MSP for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse in the beautiful Lanarkshire area of Scotland. I feel a bit like I am coming home today because my grandparents came from Sligo, my great-grandparents came from Sligo, my mother met my father singing in the O'Neills pub in Bundoran in 1966 and I was a result of that union so it feels a bit like coming home.

We are here to talk about 100 years, the progress we have made and whether we have made any real progress. We know the Representation of the People Act 1918 gave some women the right to vote in 1918 and it was about ten years later before we moved that on. We were asked to say a bit about our journey into politics. As the daughter of a shipyard worker and a trade unionist, members will not be surprised that my household was incredibly political from my inception, I think. Coming from a very strong Scottish heritage, Burnsies and McKies, and a very strong Irish heritage of McGintys, as you can imagine, the dinner table was always vibrant with people's opinions.

From a very early stage, I was involved in political campaigning for the area where I grew up, which is the east end of Glasgow, an area of multiple deprivation. As I said, my father was a shipyard worker and he was a steelmaker as well. He developed motor neurone disease when I was about nine, it was in the middle of the factory years when things were really tough and we grew up with my father losing his job and my mother having to cope with four kids in the house during that so members will not be surprised at how political we all became.

My journey through politics, because I was a trade union representative as well, and into politics was not, I would say, rosy, but it was not that difficult because the party that I chose is the party for independence for Scotland. This meant that we had many iconic women who were not the exception in our party but the rule. The Assembly has one of them in the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly with it most times in Linda Fabiani. We have always mentored each other, as women, through our party. Deidre Brock, one of the Assembly's old members, is one of those mentees, along with me. So, as members can see, there are a lot of women in our group who are not the exception but the rule.

4.45 pm

We needed to change some of that in our party so we changed our constitution, we changed how we select candidates, we assembled a women's academy, we appointed a national women's officer and we appointed women's officers in every single branch of our party. The result of that was that in the 2011 elections, the 2016 elections, the 2015 Westminster elections, the snap election last year and two council elections, we had almost 50:50 representation in our candidate selection panels – deeds not words, which takes us back to where we started.

We also have support from our First Minister for the Women 50:50 campaign; we have a 50:50 gender-balanced Cabinet, which is deliberate. We also have the First Minister's mentoring programme, which allows us and the First Minister to mentor young women, irrespective of their politics. It allows us then to ensure that they have that safe journey through the political landscape within which many of us came up against barriers and burdens.

Another role that I have is that I am currently the Convener – Convener is Chair, it is an old Scottish word for “chairperson” – in the Scottish Parliament for the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. So members will not be surprised that many of the things that I currently believe in politically are things that we are realising in Government and in our Parliament as we move forward. The history of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee is that, with our old Equal Opportunities Committee in 2016, we decided to change what that had been in its genesis – not to be a reactive committee but to be a proactive and legislating committee. The upshot of that now is that we have gender representation on public boards in Scotland, we have up to 50% on public boards and we have pushed that along very effectively. That will get Royal Assent very soon and become law in Scotland.

We have also taken forward gender budgeting with submissions to a national performance framework just announced this morning by the First Minister. We have gender budgeting as a very strong pillar or thread running through that. We have also dealt with gender-based violence in schools because if we do not deal with it at the early stages, if we do not nip it in the bud, if we do not talk about consent and if we do not talk about how men behave towards women, we do not change society and that is the whole function of my legacy of 100 years on. That resulted in the new anti-bullying strategy for Scotland, which is absolutely gendered in its essence and an Equally Safe programme, which is delivered in schools now.

We also undertook a piece of work on asylum destitution and insecure immigration status. Members will be wondering: why would a devolved Parliament want to be doing that? That issue is reserved. No, actually, the outcome is not reserved and the outcome is very much gendered with many women losing their right to support either through no recourse to public funds or other ways such as the insecure asylum status of their husbands or their partners or because they have become victims of domestic violence and have had to leave said partners. So that became a very gendered issue very quickly and we now have an update at my committee next Thursday on how much progress has been made in the year on that – another reason why, 100 years on, we still have work to do.

We have also undertaken some work on the diversity of committee witnesses who come before our committees. How gendered is that? How bad is it for some committees? Believe me, it is bad. But, actually, if we look at the function of our Parliament and our Parliament becoming that guarantor then we can change because for young women, you cannot be what you cannot see and if you can see that in our committees and in front of our committees, you can see that difference. We also have the girl guides’ Citizen Girl campaign, which is working very hard with the Young Women Lead programme, which my colleague, Linda Fabiani, chairs.

Our parliamentary corporate body, when it reconvened in 2016, was all men. All of the appointees to our parliamentary corporate body were men so we decided to change that. So it has now changed. We are actually gender balanced too and the Standing Orders of the Parliament have been changed so that that never happens again. Parties will need to take cognisance of gender balance when appointing to the corporate body after any other elections – again, deeds not words.

Why is that really important? Because let us not forget the suffrage movement and suffragists and what they experienced. Just up the road from our Parliament, they were force-fed, they were imprisoned, they were beaten, they were marginalised and they were taken home to their husbands to be disciplined where domestic violence was used as a means to control women. We are still not completely there yet. That is why we have a new domestic violence

Bill in Scotland, and a new sexual violence Bill in Scotland soon to become an Act through Royal Assent – again, deeds not words.

One of the quotes I remember from the suffrage movement is:

“I am a lawbreaker because I want to be a lawmaker.”

I am quite happy to say that I have never broken any laws but I intend to break lots of learned behaviour and some of the issues and the barriers that women face and that includes making those laws to break down those barriers.

There is a great book that I was given after an International Women’s Day event, which is called *These Dangerous Women*. We have lots of dangerous women in our party and I know across many parties, we have lots of dangerous women – regiments of women. But do you know what? We would not have got there if it was not for the allies in the men that we work with and we are really keen to continue that. So let us keep up that positive fight. Let us do what we do to make life better for women and girls because when it is better for women and girls, it will be better for our boys and men too.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Does Ann want to go next?

Ms Ann Jones AM:

I think my journey is pretty similar to Christina’s. I joined the Labour Party through the trade union movement. My trade union was the Fire Brigades Union and at the time when I became a union official, I was one of two women, trade union officials, within the Fire Brigades Union. I had the unpleasant task very early on of having to defend a woman firefighter who had experienced what male firefighters called “a bit of fun” but which actually turned out to be sexual harassment on the fire station. We soon found out that the rule book from the Fire Brigades Union actually did not protect her any more than it protected the people who had perpetrated the acts. We then went on to successfully defend her and then we went on to change the rule book and it was at that point, I think, that I decided that this was the route into politics for me. I came from a background where my father had been sacked for starting up a trade union in his local workplace and where my mother had been a cleaner but my mother always said to me, “never mind you didn’t go to university. The university of life is what will carry you through.”

I was aged 10 and my mother went to buy a washing machine and was told that she had to take the hire purchase agreement home for her husband to sign it to which my mum then replied “he wouldn’t know whether we’ve got the money or not because I do it all.” That washing machine came into our house. I cannot remember whether my mother took the agreement home and then forged his signature on it to get it but that does not matter. That washing machine came into our house and I learnt from there that, actually, that is where we have to be and we have to challenge. That is not all that long ago.

So, I then embarked on a political career. I stood for Parliament and for many positions within the Labour Party in all areas. I was good enough to do all the minutes and take all the secretarial work. Then when it came to trying to get into Parliament, it was “oh, I don’t think so.” So it was thanks to Anita Gale, who was the general secretary of the Welsh Labour Party at the time. Anita Gale decided that when the Assembly was to be set up, she was going to do

something to make sure that women took their rightful place in society and in elected representation. She set about a situation whereby we set about twinning. Of the 40 constituencies, we paired them together, and each of the constituencies then had to pick one man and one woman candidate to represent them who would then go forward for the electorate to vote on. That resulted in the fact, then, that we ended up at one stage, in 2003, of being the first legislature to have perfect gender balance. We have slightly fallen away from that, which proves that you cannot afford to take your foot off that pedal and that you really do have to keep on and on.

The reason that we are able to keep the gender balance high is because the National Assembly was established in 1999 with the principle of equality actually enshrined in law. I look round and I see various people who helped to do that such as Lord Murphy, who was in the Welsh Labour Party then and as an MP, and various other MPs such as Peter Hain who actually made sure that when we were putting that law together, we actually did make it reflective of what and whom we were trying to represent.

So we have a situation whereby now in the Assembly, 43% of Assembly Members and 33% of Cabinet members in the Welsh Government are women. Two out of the three Presiding Officers have been women, the current Presiding Officer being a woman, and, of course, I am the Deputy Presiding Officer. I am leading now on a specific piece of work stream, which is “women in politics”. It is one where we are trying to go out to talk to future politicians about how they should come forward and how they should be looking at that. We are doing quite a lot and there is a bit of a hand out that has gone round there for members to see.

I just want members to think about the unconscious bias that we all have when we talk in meetings. I am very good at staffing a party stall. I am very good at staffing a tea bar – I am no good at manning it but I am very good at staffing it. I am an excellent, I think, chair. I am not a chairman. I cannot be a chairman; I am a chair. So those are the unconscious biases I think that we have to be aware of when we are talking to people around where we come from. I think, sadly, that the membership of BIPA really does need to look at the way in which we do things. BIPA falls sadly below even the poor national average of 24% of women’s representation. As I say, while we lead the way in Wales with 43%, that is not as good as it should be and so there is a lot that we are doing.

On International Women’s Day this year, I have been saying to people, not just because it is 100 years since some women got the vote and then we have to go another ten years, but that, every day, we should be celebrating what women do in society and what women do to make lives better for everybody else. Because we do change agendas, we can change agendas, and we have proved that when we have got that right to do it, we have made the world a better place. We do it alongside our colleagues and I think Christina McKelvie said that we do it alongside our colleagues who actually support us. So I thank those of you who support women and make sure that women’s voices are heard. I do want to give particular thanks to Baroness Blood for what she has done. Baroness Blood was the first woman ever to receive a peerage from Northern Ireland and that was in 1999. God, we have got some way to go, have we not? But I say “well done” to her and thank her for what she has done to help women coming through – people like me – and I promise that I will do as much as she and Anita Gale have done to make sure that women continue to come forward. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Senator Catherine Noone TD:

Good afternoon. I am very privileged to sit here with these four great women to speak about this issue but I am conscious that it is late in the afternoon after a long day and I am talking to a mostly male audience about women in politics. So I commend members' fortitude in still being here and still being willing to listen. The centenary of women's suffrage provides us in Ireland in particular with a great opportunity to reflect on how women's rights have improved in Ireland over the last 100 years and to look at what still needs to be done to improve them further.

5.00 pm

We have had a particularly momentous year for women in Ireland when it comes to the recent result in the referendum and I will come back to that but it is not about special treatment for women at all and it is not about alienating men. Politics has been a male-dominated environment for a long time. That is not men's fault; that is just the way it has been. There are many significant events in my own political career that I would not say were disadvantaged by the fact that I am a woman. So I think it is important to say that and I think probably a lot of you would agree with that but many barriers still exist and, as I said, the environment being quite male, there are the subtle issues that have been mentioned. It is not necessarily something that men would even notice.

I had a very funny incident where a previous Cabinet Minister, who was actually in my own party at one stage – there was talk of sexism – and he said “I never noticed any sexism in the 25 years I was in Leinster House” and I thought “well if there was ever a statement that was proof positive that it does exist, that is it.” We have introduced gender quotas in Ireland, which means that 30% of candidates must be female or else political parties are punished where it hurts – financially. So we have made some gains but it is slow enough and there is still a lot of work to be done.

We were told to speak about our own personal journey. People have been speaking a lot in this country about journeys of late. I was elected to the council in 2009 and, unlike the two women to my right, I had no previous involvement in politics and indeed came from a household where my parents were quite horrified that I wanted to go into politics and said they thought it might be beneath me. In recent times, with some of the comments that have come my direction, I often think “God, maybe they were right.” I am a solicitor by trade and that can be helpful, I suppose, in terms of the legislative process and all that goes with that.

So just two years after I was elected to the council, I decided I would run for the Senate and I spoke to the powers that be in my own party and they said “Oh God, you are setting yourself up for serious disappointment. You don't have a chance.” I think I was the only one actually who thought I had a chance during the campaign because I was quite junior, for want of a better word. I got elected so that was a thrill, got re-elected in 2016 and was made Deputy Leader of the Senate. Then I was appointed chair of the Oireachtas committee on abortion last year. To say this was a challenge would probably be putting it mildly.

But, really, just to tell those of you who are not that familiar – I will not get into the substantive issue here today – that the process is a very good example of a deliberative process that has worked extremely well on an issue that is quite difficult to deal with. The previous Taoiseach, who was also from my party, suggested the process, which was a three-pronged process. There was a citizen's assembly appointed – there was talk of a citizen's assembly earlier on – which consisted of 99 ordinary citizens. They reviewed the issue and did fantastically detailed work. That report was submitted to the Oireachtas – the Parliament

– and the committee I chaired reviewed it for three months. We had three months in public session, which seemed very little, and I think a lot of people thought that we would not get to do the work that was required and to report within the timeframe but we did.

How would I best describe the experience? I think you learn a lot about the human condition. I do not think any Chair in the history of the state has been treated in the way that I was treated. I am not saying it looking for pity but I think it is fair to say that, both inside and outside the Houses of the Oireachtas, no Chair of any committee has ever been treated the way that I have been treated – I suppose because of the issue. It is a very emotional and divisive issue and I completely understood that. More or less half of the members of the committee were female and I think it is an issue, along with many others, that attracts female interest and women tend to, obviously, take more of an interest in it. I am very grateful that it was and I learnt on the journey about different colleagues of my own who are actually very pro-women. Fergus O’Dowd is somebody I got to know better during this campaign. I would consider him very pro-women and, equally, Peter Fitzpatrick, who is another colleague of mine. We would have disagreed on the substantive issue but he was always extremely respectful. I would also mention Lord Dubs with whom I have worked a lot. So it is important to say that, as has been said, we require men to support us and I think the whole of society recognises that women have a huge role to play.

It has been the privilege of my professional career to do it and it has been career changing for me as well. The decisive result I suppose means that the legislative process now will be somewhat less difficult for us and I think that is to be welcomed. I think it highlights the fact that sometimes women need to be put into positions in order to show that we have some skills that are relevant and helpful in the overall organisation.

I will sum up now. I read an excellent article in the one of the Sunday papers yesterday and the title was ‘Are we all difficult women now?’ One of the sub-headings was ‘She’s a bit much, isn’t she?’ I’ll just read a bit from the article:

“As a woman, you do not have to go to great lengths to be called difficult. The bar is set low. Stick rigidly to an opinion, foster great ambition, question the status quo, call someone out on bad behaviour and there you have it – now you are mouthy, feisty, emotional, thin-skinned.”

So I think it is interesting. Again, it is subtle. On the online area, it is something on which I think we could usefully report in one of the committees on a cross-jurisdictional basis. Regarding the online space, it is all good and well to say “oh, these are strange people who feel they have to comment negatively and we, as a political body, accept that.” I do not think that is good enough given the type of language that is used now. It is easy to say “ignore it” and it is easy to acknowledge that there is a difficult space but I think there is a particular type of language – and, again, there are subtleties – that is used towards women. I have been threatened with being raped and various things. I never actually felt that they were going to call around to my house or that I was going to be accosted but it is never easy, and no matter how much you decide that you are going to take the right approach and not let it in on you, we are human beings at the end of the day and I think as politicians across all of these islands, we should work together. I think it would be a very interesting report just on online abuse in general, which has become so prevalent.

On a more positive note, we should celebrate the fact that we have made a lot of progress in the past 100 years. It is a pleasure to sit here, as I said, with these four women, to be here for these two days and to have so many men who support women here as well. So, thank you.
[Applause.]

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

I would certainly echo that. It is a great pleasure to be here. I have been a Labour MP since 2015 – so just three years – and I spent most of my life not wanting to be an MP but in the organisation of the Labour Party. On how I got here, I was not in a political family. I was born and raised in London of Irish parents from Mayo and Cavan. We were not political but we were very conscious that growing up English in an Irish family in London in the 1970s and 1980s was not an easy experience. From that, I think what I learnt was difference and that perhaps history and what you are told is not always what it looks like so it involved learning, an inquisitive and curious mind and making great friendships with other immigrant families, particularly Afro-Caribbean and Indian, in the part of west London where I grew up. We brought with us some great culture, different food, different holidays and different holiday experiences, which we could share with all the English families we grew up with. When I went to university – and I was greatly privileged to be the first in my family to go to university – when I met other people, they told me that I was in fact political, and that if I wanted to make the changes I wanted to see, because I did very much believe in equality and feminism by that point, I needed to join a political party and that I should join the Labour Party.

Now I was not entirely convinced about this because the Labour Party, when I was joining in the early 1980s, was a pretty horrific place. I said to people – and I said this frequently when I first became an MP – that all the Labour Party was interested in in the early 1980s was nuclear weapons and Europe and I was completely uninterested in either of those two things. I was interested in poverty, equality and opportunity for working-class people like me and I did not want to spend my time talking about Europe and nuclear weapons. So you can imagine how delighted I was in 2015 to join Parliament as a Labour MP to talk about almost nothing apart from nuclear weapons, what our current policy was and Europe. Now that we are at a time when we are also talking about Brexit and relationships with Ireland, I somewhat feel that I have missed 30 years of my life and have come back to some weird place.

During the days when I joined the party, it was a difficult place to be but what I found amongst people that I joined with and young people at that time was a great space for talking, debating and learning from other people. We formed ourselves community groups and feminist groups within the Labour Party that were very strong and very old women in their 50s – because I thought they were very old – came to talk to us. I remember Jo Richardson coming to talk to us at one point. I thought she was a real icon. She talked to a group of women and told a tale of, I think, a national executive committee meeting – it might have been a trade union meeting – where there was just her and one other person in the room who were women. Every week, the tea tray came around – some of you will have heard this – and nobody got up to make the tea so she and Barbara Castle, I think it was, would always get up and start pouring the tea because they were gasping for a cup of tea. Then one week, they thought they would not do this and, of course, nobody poured the tea. So one of her big instructions was: never be the first to pour a cup of tea. Except I am always dying for a cup of tea, so I sometimes cannot resist it. It is little subtle things like that – women giving us a real debt.

What I learnt in those Labour Party meetings was that it was all very well having our discussions and debates but we had no power. I was very supportive then of how we in the Labour Party made sure we had power because the visibility issue is really important. You cannot make decisions and make things change unless you have power, which we had to do. I

am sad to say that it is the only way that it could happen but we had to force all-women shortlists on our Labour Party colleagues. I do not think a single one of those discussions has been easy. Each one of them requires people to be moved out of the way and each one of them, as other sisters have said, required other men to support us in that work. But without all-women shortlists or quotas – whatever you want to call them – we would not have been able to then come into power in 1997 with 100 women. The 100 women in that Labour Government in 1997 – many members worked with them and I worked for one of them – made huge, massive changes. They did that across parties because they understood the issues that needed to be discussed, raised and changed. So visibility is really important and it really struck me this morning listening to the fantastic presentation by Bronagh Hinds and May Blood that we are talking again about community and working beneath and outwith the political structures that are currently failing us. That is good but we still need women in those political structures to make the power. We need both. That is the lesson I learnt when I was younger and today, I think Bronagh Hinds and May Blood really reinforced that for me. You need both.

We have talked about some of the nuances. I can say that it is true without, again, complaining about it because then I would be told I was a complaining woman – not here but maybe by others. I am conscious, every day, even in my duties and work as a Member of Parliament around the House of Commons in other areas, of comments, odd occasions, nuances, exclusion in different ways. That happens. I think I am wily enough and tough enough now to know how to bat that back. Some of the discussion we have had around sexual harassment in Westminster – and it goes on everywhere so it is not exclusive – has highlighted again the duty that all of us have to call things out. So very much in my day-to-day work, which I really enjoy and it is a great privilege to represent my constituency and do this work, I really am conscious of the great debt that I owe women like Jo Richardson, Barbara Castle and women who have come before me in the Labour Party and elsewhere. I feel a very strong sense of duty to support others coming up behind and work with other people. It is a great privilege to be able to do so on this 100-year anniversary. Thank you.
[Applause.]

Ms Rosemary Barton MLA:

I thank members very much for the opportunity this afternoon to address them. My name is Rosemary Barton and I am the MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Perhaps I live nearest to here of all five panel members; I am about an hour's journey from here. I have had a very different experience in entering politics compared to these other ladies present. My first career was as a teacher and I am really quite new to politics. I came into politics originally in 2011. I taught in Fermanagh up until 2011 and was then elected to the local council. In 2016, I was elected as an MLA.

5.15 pm

How would you describe it? I have had a very different experience. In teaching, I went into a profession that was mainly women; I worked with mainly women. Obviously, there were men, in particular all the headmasters I worked with were obviously all men so that was a big problem. However, as I was leaving teaching, there were quite a lot of heads of department and ladies were very much on the increase in relation to promotion within teaching. I went into politics and found the opposite. I was a lady among lots and lots of men. While we had a number of ladies in the Ulster Unionist Party recently, there have been – not issues with women – but, unfortunately, with our last results, I am down to being the one lady MLA at

the moment. However, I do represent a constituency where out of five MLAs, four of them are women so that is a good step forward for us.

In the Ulster Unionist Party, we are very conscious of trying to remedy this situation. We have run a programme called the Dame Dehra Parker programme, which is named after one of our main ladies who represented us on Belfast City Council for quite a long time. This programme aims to encourage young people, younger ladies within the party, to put themselves forward for election and put themselves forward to go into politics and perhaps even offers them bursaries to study politics. So we are trying to look at something very positively in trying to sort out our situation. That was successful up until the last election, 2016, when, unfortunately, the snap election of 2017 was called and we lost quite a few women.

I grew up on the border in County Fermanagh so I was very interested in the various Brexit talks that were happening. I am one of the people in this room who has had the most experience. I travel back and forth on a daily basis, socially and with work, back and forth across the border in and out of Clones. So I am very aware of the problems we have with Brexit, the to-ing and fro-ing and the importance of having a soft border but that is by the way.

How did I become involved in politics? Again, growing up on the border, I have always had an active interest in politics. Unfortunately, I grew up during the Troubles so I was always aware of politics and the different political views. Throughout my teenage years, I never would have considered going into politics as a career at all. For me, there was too much uncertainty. Maybe I was too conservative in my view and too cautious. I did not want to take the jump, go into politics and perhaps then lose a seat and have no job, etc., so I took the safe option and went into teaching. However, after 30 years, I thought I had had enough of teaching and that now was the time to move. So it was at the end of my teaching career that I went into politics and I have been successful in all the elections that I have fought.

As I say, our party has had some quite famous women. In Ulster Unionist politics, we have had Grace Bannister, who was one of the first ladies elected onto Belfast City Council. She represented the Ulster Unionist Party into the 1970s and then ran for the 1973 Northern Ireland Assembly election. However, she was not elected. Of course, we had Dame Dehra Parker who was first elected as a Member of Parliament for Londonderry in the 1920s and 1930s. So we have had quite famous ladies – even some who have represented us across the water.

So, that is, really, just a brief résumé – I know that time is short – of my entrance into politics. I do not think that I have had the same experience as the other speakers. I had a little bit of trade union experience through the teachers' unions but it is not quite the same as a lot of the other trade unions. So I did have experience that way. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am now going to invite comments from the floor – Juan Watterson and Lord Dubs.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

I congratulate the august panel for a debate that is probably overdue. They would expect the delegate from the Isle of Man to mention that we were the first country to give women the

vote on a par with men back in 1881. Unfortunately, we did not get our first Member of the House of Keys until 1933 and our first female President until 2011 but we are growing female representation. In our small system, we have five out of 24 directly elected Members and five out of eight indirectly elected Members in our Upper House. What is surprising about that is that, actually, we have so few barriers to entry. We do not have a mainstream party system, we do not require deposits and a person only needs 20 signatures to stand. What we find is that the number of women who are elected is directly proportionate to the number of women who stand. So the problem in the first place is why more women do not stand and put their names forward in the first place. That is something that we have wrestled and struggled with and I would really welcome the views of the panel on that.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Can I take a few speakers and then come back to the panel?

The Lord Dubs:

Those five contributions were fascinating. Could I make a point and ask a couple of questions? One relates to the fact that we have all-women shortlists in the Labour Party in London. I do not know whether all of the speakers believe that all-women shortlists are the way forward. I think they are but that is just my view. I wonder whether that is a way, or presumably in a PR system, that at least 50% of the nominations by any one party should be women. In other words, if there is a six-seater then there should be at least three women. Anyway, I have asked the question.

Secondly, there is an area of political appointment, not for politicians but for non-governmental bodies. It was a long time ago but Mo Mowlam, who was my boss, said we had to make sure it was 45%— I do not know why it was 45% of women in Northern Ireland instead of 50%. I cannot remember why it was not 50%. Anyway, it was quite a struggle to make sure that there were names put forward and that there were enough names so that the Minister who chose from the last three had women to choose from. It was a real battle, and I was given all sorts of excuses like “this woman is not eligible because she had not done any public sector work in the last few years” to which I replied “Why not?” I was then told “because she has been at home having babies.” That was an excuse. There is nothing original in this: we found then that if the criteria involved people having to have particular experience, the people who were most experienced were older white men, just by definition, so they keep appointing each other. You have to break through that. One of the suggestions that we made was that one should look not just for actual experience but for potential. You then stop discriminating against younger people altogether, and particularly against women, because it is only the men that have the experience. So that was a thing that we did.

Catherine Noone mentioned the abuse. As a man, I get very little. I get some hostile stuff but I am shocked when I have learned of the sort of abuse women in politics get. It is just unrepeatable the abuse they get. Catherine Noone mentioned some of it but it is appalling. Somehow, the people who abuse politicians seem to pick on women far more than they pick on men and it is outrageous. I do not know what we can do about it except that we have to be aware of it and be understanding of it. I wish there was some answer to it, anything we can do, because it must get to one. No matter how tough one is, it gets to one in the end. I do not see how it could not get to one. So, I wonder whether the panel have any suggestions as to what in our societies we can do to tackle that.

Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony TD:

First of all, I would like to thank the five panellists for their contributions. They are five very different people with five very different backgrounds but I think the one thing that they have in common is strength of character. I wish all five of them luck going forward with their political careers and personal lives.

I will make few comments. Perhaps the speakers will come back to me with what they think on them. I think where it all needs to change is the public mindset of who should stay at home, who should mind children and who should do housework. So the public mindset and public tradition needs to change across the board, not only in politics but throughout.

I had the great honour of being the first female TD elected from any party in Cork South West. I was elected the same night as two male TDs and may I add that I beat the two of them, which was nicer as well. *[Laughter.]* However, when we were interviewed after, I was the one who got the questions such as “and what about your children?” and “what is going to happen at home now?” One of the male TDs actually had younger children than I have. I answered away but I said to one of the journalists afterwards “why did you ask me those questions and not the two lads?” and he said “you know, you are right. I was wrong but it just came into my head and I asked.” So I just think it all needs to change.

Another thing is that I think our own mindset as women needs to change as well. I think we need to get out there that we are equal but we are different. Some female politicians and some females in general want us to be like men. I have no interest in being like a man. I want to be equal to them but different. So I would just like to hear the speakers' comments on that.

Senator Catherine Noone TD:

I will come in briefly. I suppose we all want to give a few comments. Just on the question raised about women getting on the ticket, the reality is that in a lot of these jurisdictions, certainly in Ireland, it is not traditionally an attractive career for women and it touches on a point that Margaret was making. There are certain things that can be done in politics such as the time at which voting takes place that would be advantageous to women and men and that would make it a little bit more family friendly rather than being necessarily female friendly. So I think there is a lot of work to be done but I suppose that will only really change when we actually have more women in politics.

Things like the gender quotas mentioned by Lord Dubs are a good segue into the question. Quotas are not something that women necessarily want but until we have a critical mass of women in politics and it becomes the norm, it is never going to change. So we have to get to that point and then we will obviate the necessity for any measures like that. I personally do not like the idea of any woman being on a ticket just because she is a woman but that is the reality until we get more women.

Lord Dubs mentioned boards. We have a policy in Ireland where we are going towards 50:50 on all state boards. In fact, a lot of the judges who are appointed now are women and there are huge improvements on that front. Lord Dubs specifically mentioned the abuse. I attended a conference in Washington recently and I was with women from all around the world. Some of them had experienced physical violence in their political advancement. Today, for example, there was a tweet saying “you are a vile, evil woman” on my Twitter feed. That is just one of maybe 30 negative comments that I have had today that I happened to look at

because I knew I was going to be sitting up here but that I mostly try to ignore because as Lord Dubs said, we are human beings. I am traditionally a very sensitive person and probably not your normal politician, whatever that means, in that sense. I would agree totally with Margaret that you need to maintain that difference because women and men are different for a reason and there is a reason why both sexes should work together to run the country better or to run any organisation better. I think Margaret is totally right about that when it comes to being equal but different. I think it is a nice way of putting it so I thank her.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

We have something called the Labour Women's Network and a lot of those women I spoke about set up a lot of support to encourage women to stand, to ask and to then demystify what needs to happen because if the environment is all men then it is partly, "well, why should I bother? It's hard work, I've got other things to do and I might find my track in other ways", which is why I said earlier that you do need both. We need to reinforce the visibility issue but those organisations and support networks are really important.

I would just like to address what is defined as "political experience". I was always involved in politics, in the organisation; I was an election agent and that is really what I quite enjoyed doing. I accidentally became a candidate because there was a vacancy and I said "well, I'll do it." I've got three teenage boys now and the youngest was 10 when I started but when I was doing other things and at home with them for a few years in between my career, I learnt more about my community, the people I work with, how services work on the ground and what is really important, particularly how people are going through the social care system, education and how it is working, what it is like to be on the other end of teaching in schools, what it is like trying to get around on buses with three kids and a buggy – all of those things. So, I would say I learnt more doing that, as part of my political education that keeps me in touch with what is happening in my constituency, than I ever did organising elections since 1985 or, indeed, in the past three years. As we have just heard from Rosemary, you will bring fantastic experience to your work from being in teaching, and understanding actually how the organisations that politicians are in charge of actually operate and that is a fantastic thing.

5.30 pm

What I find shocking in the House of Commons, which does not feel too bad these days – I am very lucky to have come in when I have – is that on Wednesday, it is transformed. It is much more male and that is because the journalists, the photographers, the lobbyists, the charity leaders – all of these groups, some of them pretend that they are a bit more right-on than others—are all headed by men. So in respect of Lord Dubs's point about NGOs and so on, we seem to have spent a lot of time getting the visibility right and getting women into positions of power and we absolutely have to do it but the eye needs to really focus on the other apparatus around the political environment, which is why Margaret had that dreadful question to her placed on the record.

I would just finally add that when I stood, they did a very nice piece locally when I stood in Bristol and the journalist got slammed by one of my colleagues for saying that I had three children. It was something like "Mum of three gets safe Labour seat". He had two kids and he said to me "hats off to you, Karin, I don't know how you and your family are going to cope. Thinking about it, we can barely get each other to work every day." He genuinely meant it as a compliment. Other women said to me "it's just amazing. You've got three teenage kids and now you are just taking off with this complete change in your career and going off." So you

can say the wrong thing and the right thing at different times but I think if we think about politics and the experience in a slightly different way then all women will feel more like they have got something to give as well and you do not have to be the same as the old.

Ms Rosemary Barton MLA:

I will just make a short comment because time is moving on. I think in relation to women putting their names forward on a ticket, we have got an equality issue there. We still have an equality issue between women and men. While, men are starting to do more housework and starting to look after the children more, I think there is still a little bit more work needed to perhaps give their wives or partners the opportunity to get out and follow their careers as they have chosen and I think there is an equality issue there that still needs to be slightly addressed in relation to that.

With regard to my experience of abuse, really, I am in a lucky position, touch wood. I have not, as yet, had any abuse in relation to my life in politics. That was with the local council; I have not really been in Stormont that long. I have not experienced abuse either by members of the party or by other members that I sit with and work with throughout my political career. I have been very lucky in relation to that.

In relation to quotas, I am not sure that they would work. I can understand where one is coming from in relation to quotas and the need for quotas but I think women like to be chosen in their own right and for their own experience. I do not think women, perhaps, would welcome quotas that much.

Ms Ann Jones AM:

I was just going to say that I think all three of them tie into the unconscious bias that I was talking about in terms of why we think women do not stand. To be quite honest, looking at Parliament, when I was trying to stand to go to Parliament, I was thinking, “why do I want to do it?” That was the only way in for me and by that time, I had been hooked in by the trade union movement. I wanted to make some changes, one of which was that I did not want to sit until 2 a.m. voting. We ought to do it at a time when we can think about what we are voting on and certainly not with half an eye open and trying to go to sleep. So it was that element of it.

It is about work-lifestyle balance and it ties in with the question then of “why do you want to stand?” When I first stood for any public office, it was for a town council seat in my hometown of Rhyl and my son was six months old. I faced that and I kept saying “ask his father what he’s going to do if I get elected.” But people were saying – and it was mainly women who were saying this – “are you really sure you want to do this?” I think we have moved on from there because we have proved that women can do these jobs and it is not just about the childcare being the responsibility of one partner.

On the political appointments to NGOs, I think Lord Dubs is right. We have tried in Wales to look at putting women onto boards and we had a successful drive to get women on housing association boards and women as board members. It is about then protecting and supporting them when they are there and not just going “oh, we’ve put you there now and that’s it, that’s job done.” It is about putting a network around them. That is why I think the Labour Party women’s network is very important, and I am sure other political parties do the same thing.

At the end of the day, having come through what was a very male-dominated trade union, I am very proud of the Fire Brigades Union for the way in which they are now addressing the issue around abuse and sexual harassment. The strapline “All different, all equal” actually was from their job-sharing equality booklet that we were involved in. People said, “firefighters can’t job share”; yes, they can. Within the Assembly, an expert group is looking to move us to a Parliament and to move us on and there is the question of whether we need more Members. The public will not like that but we are looking at ways in which people work and we are talking about job sharing. People are saying “politicians can’t job share.” Let us look at it, let us not throw it out and let us look at where we can get it because that might help people to come through. But I do think it is around the unconscious bias of “it’s always women in the home and it’s always women on whom the childcare will fall.” That is changing and we have to embrace that but we have to stand up and call it out at every opportunity.

Carwyn Jones, who is First Minister of Wales, announced recently that he is standing down. I walked out of the conference in tears because I did not want him to go but he is going and immediately afterwards, there was a microphone under my nose and I was asked “go on then, is it candidate Mr So-and-so or candidate Mr So-and-so that you’re going to be supporting?” I just turned round and went “it could be candidate Ann Jones” and walked away. I started a bit of a hare running, which I had to stop because there is no way I want to be the First Minister of Wales, but the reason why I said that was because immediately women had become invisible as politicians to the journalists and I am not going to stand for that. It is back down to calling it out. I had a bit of fun for a couple of days and then it got quite frightening so I had to say, “no, no, no” because there is no way I want to be the First Minister of Wales but only because it is at the wrong end of my career, I think. If I was 30 years younger, I might be in there. Nevertheless, I think it is about us tackling that unconscious bias.

Ms Christina McKelvie MSP:

As we have realised listening to the other four outstanding women who have spoken today, it is not one single measure that is going to solve this problem. For our party, it was never one single measure. We had a number of male politicians stepping down at the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections, and those spaces were all filled by all-women shortlists because that was a quick and easy way to do it. However, we also realise at candidate selection level, that you cannot just have male candidates going forward. The candidate selections have to be gender-balanced as well and that is party policy – Standing Order policy – in our party now, which meant that we then had better representation of the candidates going forward and that was reflected in the candidates who were then elected. So there are lots of measures that would need to be brought in in order to address that single problem. One single response is not going to deal with that.

On Lord Dubs’s question on public boards, we realised very, very quickly in Scotland that a lot of the boards, NGOs and charities in Scotland were very male dominated. Through some voluntary measures on public boards, we managed to get that level up from 25% of public boards being women up to the mid to high thirties. You will say, “if you’ve done that in voluntary measures, why did you legislate?” It was because we managed to get it up to 48%. The reason why we had to legislate was to make sure it did not fall back down to 25%. So we took that clear measure in Scotland in order to legislate for public boards and if we had the power, which we do not yet have, we would probably legislate right across the board when it comes to any boards in our Parliament.

A total of 35% of our Parliament's elected representatives right now who are women. I have to say, most of the parties in the Parliament have good representation of women. There is one that does not, which was the one that did not support gender balance on public board law, so members can see where the correlation comes from on that. We are also looking at public sector equality duties and how we can use them to ensure that we advance that equality across the board. It is not just about gender balance; it is about the intersectionality of those women whether you are LGBT, whether you are black or ethnic minority or whether you have a disability. We need to reflect the diversity in our land in all of the work that we do so we are looking at public sector equality duties and how we do that.

When it comes to abuse in politics, the time really is up. It has to stop and it has to stop with quite strong measures. We have a zero-tolerance practice in Scotland to abuse towards our elected members with the police being involved on many occasions. You might think that that is a bit extreme. However, it does have to stop because you get from one stage, which could just be abuse on Twitter, to being harassed and intimidated at your surgery, to – Heaven forbid – the outcome that we have all seen in the past couple of years, which we would not want to see.

I want to address the the caring role and being asked about who is going to look after the children. My son was eight when I was first elected. I am now in my third term and when he was nine and I came back from Parliament one day, he said to me “oh it's you. We see more of you on the telly that we do in this house.” I had to deal with that because my son was growing up thinking that actually I did not have a right to be doing what I was doing because he was being neglected in his mind. What that made me do was think about my caring role and how I made that quality time about being with him and instilling in him that his mother had the right to expect that she has a career and that a career would sometimes impact on the family. However, it has an impact in both ways for him. He felt it was negative. For me, I felt it was positive. I had to educate him in that and more of that – mothers educating their sons – would maybe change some of this.

The final bit is about party policy and how we develop party policy, which we hope will become Government policy in Scotland. We had our conference at the weekend. One of our male members went up and moved a policy on doubling paternity leave because when we equalise fathers' roles as carers to that of mothers then we change that culture. That political leadership has to come from the top and I am glad to say that that policy was passed at conference on Saturday.

Baroness Blood:

I will not ask questions. I just have three quick comments to make listening to the women here. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition was formed simply because we knew we were going to have talks about the future of Northern Ireland and there were going to be no women at the front table and we were determined women were going to be there. So the women's coalition was formed for that reason – just to get women to the front table. A leading politician, who is now in the House of Lords, said to me at the time “you do realise that women going into politics is the end of family life as we know it” and I said “what does that mean?” He did not know what it meant; it just sounded good. *[Laughter.]* The women's coalition at that time was considered a bit of a joke, a bit of a novelty. It did not turn out that way because the women's coalition, even though it is not there today, without a doubt changed politics in Northern Ireland.

I was listening to Ann Jones talking about being introduced to the conference. On one occasion, Kevin McNamara was introducing me at a union conference. He turned around and he said, “chairperson, chairwoman – I am not sure what to call you” and I said “I do not care what you call me, Kevin, just do not try to sit on me.” *[Laughter.]*

5.45 pm

I remember being at a meeting when we were trying to convince the loyalist paramilitaries to give up their guns. Mr Paisley – the Reverend Ian Paisley – came along to address them. I was the only woman in the room. I have no idea why I was there but I was the only woman and he came up the room and said “we will start this meeting – you can go and make the tea, love.” *[Laughter.]* Nobody moved and he could not take his eyes off me the whole meeting. He could not understand. He did not mean that in a derogatory sense – that is just the way life was in Northern Ireland. He could not understand why “love” did not want to put the teapot on but “love” was not there to put the teapot on. *[Laughter.] [Applause.]*

Ms Joan Burton TD:

I was going to make a brief comment, first of all, to thank everybody for sharing their experiences. I am a really strong believer in quotas. Certainly in the Republic nothing except some form of quota will work because there is always a reason why the person elected should be a man and the reasons just simply are not as compelling in relation to women. If you look at the history of Ireland post-independence, once Ireland got its independence and Cumann na nGaedheal – what would eventually become the Fine Gael Government – you can see that women who had been really active during the revolutionary period in both the lock-out in 1913 and subsequently in the independence movement basically got shut down and shut out. I think it is important that when we remember Countess Markievicz, who was the first woman who was elected, we note that a number of women stood in the 1918 election but vanished very quickly from politics. The most outstanding woman was Kathleen Lynn who was a doctor and who went on to found the first children’s hospital for poor children in Dublin, Saint Ultan’s. Those members who have ever watched Mrs Brown’s Boys may or may not know that Brendan O’Carroll’s mother was Maureen O’Carroll. Her nickname was alternatively “the Housewives’ Choice” because she campaigned on prices. She was elected in 1951 and 1952, and was the first female Labour TD in the Dáil. So it is that kind of gap. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, a politician in the 1970s and 1980s who subsequently became a commissioner, was the first female Minister. Certainly in Ireland, women in Government have tended to hold soft jobs or caring jobs – education, health and so on. There has been no female Minister for Finance and no female Minister for Foreign affairs.

Recently I was speaking to a group of senior female civil servants with their union. We have made fantastic strides but I would just be conscious that there are an awful lot of women who really have not yet found a place in the sun. There is a lot about patriarchy and perhaps unthought-about misogyny and women really have to swim in that. Part of the Twitter storm comes from that confidence. The Guardian survey on the abuse of people in politics showed that women get about 80% to 90% of it. The reason is that people feel empowered, mentally and sometimes physically, to kick women around. So I just think it is important to recognise all the gains and all the successes but, as they say in the ad, “we are not there yet.”

Mr Ross Greer MSP:

We had an event at the Scottish Parliament relatively recently around how we could use our education system to attract more young people into careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, STEM. Immediately, the single biggest challenge we came up against was the gender stereotypes around STEM. The evidence that we came across was really clear that actually a lot of these unhelpful gender stereotypes that boys should take on strong leadership roles and girls should take on more caring roles, which are automatically less visible, were embedded by the age of seven. So most of the time we spent was talking about how we get children at an early age. How do we break these stereotypes and stop them from being embedded in the first place? Because it was not just that it was discouraging girls from taking on leadership roles or taking an interest in these kinds of areas, which I think applies just as much to politics. It is also creating a kind of toxic masculinity in boys where when there are women in these kinds of roles and when there are strong women, boys and men often feel threatened by that because they have been brought up in a kind of toxic masculinity. So we are looking at how we tackle that for both girls and boys because to do it at that very young age is very challenging, especially when we are talking about something like politics, which people do not usually interact. Politics with a capital P does not usually come into it until later on in education. So we were particularly interested. I do not know the level of school Rosemary Barton taught at but how do we get in with kids at that young age, between about three and seven, to stop those stereotypes from being embedded in the first place?

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

What I was going to say follows on exactly from that and also ties in with what Margaret Murphy O'Mahony was saying about society having to change. In a lot of ways, we have got better – I do not think that can be denied – but there are other ways in which I actually sometimes feel that we are going backwards and it is about the way society thinks of the stereotypes. The one that horrified me lately in the media was when Theresa May came up to Edinburgh so many months ago to talk to Nicola Sturgeon about Brexit for the first time. The front page of the best-selling newspaper in our country was just their legs asking readers who won the competition of the legs. It was disgusting, and it would not happen to men. You would not get a photograph like that with men. So there is an issue there right across the country and it is that unconscious bias that Ann talked about that invades so much of our day-to-day lives. It does discourage girls from going into leadership roles and engineering jobs but it also discourages boys from going into the caring professions. We have a huge expansion going on in childcare at the moment and we are trying very hard to encourage boys to come into the childcare profession. Again, there is an unconscious bias there against males coming into jobs that are seen as caring for young children. So we have got to deal with all of it. We have got to deal with what Joan Burton was saying about women not coming forward in the first place for election. That is about the unconscious bias that is there right through from a very early stage that creates more of a confidence in young men to say “yes, I can do that” whereas young women say “oh, I do not quite think I am ready for that yet.” So it is about schools very early on, all our education systems, but it is also about equality training for those who are giving that education because unconscious bias exists at every single level of education in all our societies. So equality training is necessary to wipe that out and it will not be a quick thing but if we do it properly, we can see differences within maybe two generations that would be for the benefit of all of us and take away that need for the quotas and for the measures.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We will take a last comment from Deidre Brock. I am conscious that it is 5.55 pm and the bus is leaving at 6.45 pm.

Ms Deidre Brock MP:

It was just with regard to what Rosemary Barton was saying about equalities and the equality issue still needing to be slightly addressed. I would argue that it really needs to be addressed and it sort of follows on from what Ross Greer and Linda Fabiani were saying. Within this unconscious bias that Linda is talking about, many men, and women, still expect that the women do the housework, pick up the kids, care for the elderly relatives, drop the dog down to the vets and do the shopping. They do not have any space in their lives for thinking and studying to improve their life chances. They are exhausted. I was thinking about one woman in particular who has a disabled child and was just running her life from 7 a.m. until 11 p.m., falling into bed and then starting it all over again, seven days a week. All of us, women and men, have to realise that women need space too. Women have the right to have space to think about these things, to study and to attend political meetings in the evenings and on the weekends. That has to be made available to them as well. So I just wanted to really add to that.

Senator Catherine Noone:

I just have one tiny comment. Seeing as we are in Ireland, I just thought I would point out that our constitution actually has a provision in it that says the woman's place is in the home. We have made a significant change to our constitution recently but it just shows you what you are dealing with. It is kind of phenomenal that this provision is still in the constitution.

Ms Rosemary Barton MLA:

I will address young people, STEM subjects and children in schools. I believe part of the reason, in relation to schools and young people, is that a lot of the primary school teachers are women. A lot of the primary school teachers are women and I think there is a major problem there with regard to stereotyping children there. There is a concerted effort in Northern Ireland to try and get more men into the profession and also to get them to teach – not just to be principals but to teach at primary 1, year 1, year 2 and year 3. That is a concerted effort to try and encourage that.

The second thing concerns the toys – toys in the classroom. Parents need to be educated regarding toys. You have your train sets for the chaps and dolls for the girls, etc. So that there is another issue. There is a parental issue and parents need to look at how they address that.

The third thing, and perhaps I am being more encouraging here, is that in A-level maths, which is part of the STEM subjects, over 50% of the students sitting A-level maths in Northern Ireland this year were girls. So there is a movement in that direction.

Ms Karin Smyth MP:

I was going to end on a positive note. In respect of Christina McKelvie's point. I was really surprised – genuinely surprised – at the attitude of my boys to me becoming a Member of Parliament after the first few months. They were enormously proud. I do not think it was because they suddenly thought I was brilliant or a different person but other people had told them what an amazing thing it was to become a Member of Parliament and for their mum to

be a Member of Parliament. So they came back, sheepishly at times, because teachers, the dinner ladies, other parents and other people they met had spoken to them or were talking about it. That was a great surprise to me but really encouraging. Then, as boys, they think that that is a normal state of affairs. So there are a lot of really good positive things about having women reflected in that position as well.

Ms Christina McKelvie MSP:

I have to say that the little eight-year-old is 20 this year and is one of the biggest political activists you could meet. He has had a good education; he is just finishing a course in social sciences, politics and history so the influence has been well done there.

Regarding STEM: the funding council in Scotland that funds our colleges and universities pushed a few years ago in order to have better gender balance across STEM subjects, and the same in caring subjects so our Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas in social care, care and healthcare are all pushed to get a better gender balance to get more men to come into them. Actually, gender segregation starts the minute the midwife slaps your backside and says “it is a girl.” So it starts at that very early stage with pink and blue. How do we change that? We ensure that our teachers and our childcare workers have that educated out of them and into our children.

One of the ways that we are doing that in Scotland right now is that we are expanding childcare. We need 11,000 new members of staff. The recruitment process for that has been very much pushing men in order to take up those roles. Just two weeks ago, I hosted an event with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and our young women who are involved in the domestic violence cross-party group on work that they had done to ensure that the training modules for those members of staff built in training on unconscious bias. They showed a fantastic wee video where they took two healthcare workers, a male and a female, and two babies, one a boy, one a girl. They swapped the clothes on the babies, gave the boy to the woman and gave the girl to the man, but they were dressed in opposite sexes, and gave them a task to do. The wee boy – who was a wee girl dressed up – was given all the Meccano, the building things and all the dangerous things to do and the wee girl – who was actually the wee boy dressed up as a wee girl – was given the soft toys to play with. When that was presented to the childcare workers afterwards, they were astounded at their own unconscious bias. Both of them were very professional, long-time members of staff who are now using their experience to change how that training is done for childcare workers. So the earliest we can get that in the better.

Our teaching unions have been really helpful in schools. The Educational Institute of Scotland has produced a fantastic working book both for primary teachers and secondary teachers about how to deal with misogyny in the classroom. Again, with that societal change, if we build it into our education systems and if we do not put up with it as adults when we see it where we have influence to change it, that is where we make the big difference. We are seeing some of that. Is it enough? Not yet, but we are marching forward on it and we hope to see that difference soon.

6.00 pm

Ms Ann Jones AM:

I am just going to very briefly say that it has been great to have this discussion here, and I know it is getting late now. I think we should return to this because I think we should keep women's participation fully on the agenda, not just because it is 2018 and it is 100 years, but because we should celebrate all that we have done, but, by God, has it not told us that we have got a hell of a long way to go? So, returning to Mary Poppins: well done, sister suffragettes, but we still have got to keep going.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Again, on members' behalf, I thank all our guest speakers and members for their stimulating contributions during the Plenary session. I think there are lessons for us all. In her final contribution, Ann Jones said that we need to return to this and I think we do. I think we need to look at our membership. I think we also need to look at the whole area of the cyberbullying, the shocking remarks that Catherine Noone spoke about, the fact that men are saying "I'll rape you" and so on. So there is a lot of work that we can do collectively. Maybe one of our committees might take on some of the role of this but I think we do need to come back to this. Perhaps there might be another opportunity later in the year where we might return to this, particularly given the year we are in. So, again, I thank everyone for taking part in all the contributions today.

That concludes our programme of business for today. Members have the opportunity now to freshen up ahead of the reception at the dinner at Markree Castle. I am told that a coach will depart at 6.45 p.m. so this is where the pressure is on. The coach will return from the castle at 10 p.m. I look forward to seeing members in their finery later on.

The Plenary session is suspended until 9.15 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The sitting was suspended at 6.02 pm.

Tuesday 12 June 2018

The Assembly met at 9.35 am

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome to members as we begin our second day of deliberations. I trust they have had a rest after yesterday's dinner at Markree Castle and I look forward to the remainder of our Assembly and to further stimulating engagement.

This morning, we will begin with an address on the 100th anniversary of votes for women. We will hear from Professor Sonja Tiernan from Liverpool Hope University, who will incorporate historical links to the beautiful county of Sligo as she presents her paper: "The "Votes for Women" Campaign: From Lissadell House to the House of Commons". We will then hear progress reports from Committees A, B and C and deal with other matters of domestic business. We have two Committee reports ready to present at the Tuesday Plenary session and, following approval by the Steering Committee, Committee C and Committee A will present their reports to the Assembly before the conclusion of business.

I am also told that there will be a presentation some time in July from the Speaker of the Irish Parliament, the Ceann Comhairle, to the Speaker of the House of the Commons. It is a painting of Countess Markievicz. I think that was supposed to be done earlier in the year but because of the adverse weather, it never went ahead so that is something to look forward to.

THE “VOTES FOR WOMEN” CAMPAIGN:

FROM LISSADELL HOUSE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Good morning, colleagues. Thank you, Seán. I am very pleased to invite Professor Sonja Tiernan here today to present her paper; “The “Votes for Women” Campaign: From Lissadell House to the House of Commons”. It is extremely fitting that, 100 years after the Representation of the People Act 1918 and the election of the first female MP and TD, we look back and reflect on the achievements of the women leading this movement over 100 years ago and so I have great pleasure in calling on Professor Tiernan to give her address.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Thank you very much. Chair, distinguished members and guests, I am honoured to have been invited to address the Assembly during the centenary year of the partial extension of votes to women and I particularly thank Dervila Flynn for the invitation.

The first wave of the feminist movement was based on a single issue: securing votes for women. This may seem like the most straightforward feminist campaign in modern times; however, what I hope to show this morning is that in Ireland, it was a complex political issue that was tied in with ideologies of nationalism and unionism during the height of the Irish home rule movement. When the feminist and social reform campaigner Hanna Sheehy Skeffington called on Irish women to join her suffragette organisation and at that stage, the movement was then sweeping across Britain with increased militancy, an editorial in a 1909 *Bean na hÉireann* journal – “Woman of Ireland” – by the feminist and labour activist Helena Molony responded that:

“The English parliamentary vote is but a shadow of power.”

The monthly paper identified itself as “advocating militancy, separatism and feminism” and to Molony, it was clear that:

“The feminist cause in Ireland is best served by ignoring England and English politicians.”

Such views were echoed by popular journalists who often belittled Irish suffragettes for aligning themselves with English activists. An article in D. P. Moran’s newspaper, *The Leader*, animates this view, noting how:

“The movement in Ireland smacks rather of imitation of the English, and we do not regard it as a native and spontaneous growth.”

The article was in response to a public talk at the Rotunda in Dublin by the infamous English suffragette Christabel Pankhurst. This journalist had clearly decided that the suffragette movement was not native to Ireland essentially yet Pankhurst had, in fact, been mentored by

an Irish woman – Eva Gore-Booth – local to this area. She encouraged Pankhurst to register for a law degree and to campaign for votes for women in earnest.

In her animated address in Dublin, Pankhurst was forthright in her assertion that Irish women should dedicate themselves to the cause of suffrage first and home rule second. Ignoring such directions, Irish feminists attempted to combine the two goals and sought to include female suffrage in the terms of the home rule Bill that was sought. The leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, refused point blank to support this tactic. Redmond was concerned that this would outrage the British Prime Minister at the time, Henry Asquith, who was, infamously, absolutely opposed to female suffrage. In 1912, in fact, the two men were attacked by suffragettes as their carriage passed the GPO in Dublin. A hatchet was thrown through the window and managed to cut Redmond just above the right ear after missing the British Prime Minister. The following year, Redmond was very happy to vote against the introduction of the women's franchise Bill in the House of Commons, a move that really incited the political cartoonist Ernest Kavanagh to depict John Redmond as this "New Liberator" but, of course, with liberation for men only. Redmond's vote against suffrage also inspired Geraldine Manning, a member of the Irish Women's Franchise League, which had been established by Sheehy Skeffington, to deface a bust of Redmond on display in Dublin in the Royal Hibernian Academy. Manning left a note alongside the green paint-smearred statue that read:

"Why didn't you get us the vote, Mr Redmond? A traitor's face is no adornment to our picture gallery!"

So, in fact, this kind of lack of engagement in the home rule movement meant that it just inspired even greater militancy in Ireland that was following the same tactic as was happening in England. Redmond's colleague, the MP John Dillon, went further in his condemnation of female suffrage. He maintained that granting votes for women at general elections would be:

"the ruin of our western civilisation. It will destroy the home, challenging the headship of man, laid down by God",

no less.

Meanwhile, the labour movement in Ireland was not generally sympathetic to the suffrage cause. Working men were concerned that votes for women would mean votes for women with property further oppressing the working classes – of course, they had a basis for this concern – or that equality would threaten male wages. This was a fact also realised by suffragists in Britain and when Eva Gore-Booth moved there and attempted to combine her work in Manchester as secretary of the Women's Trades Union Council with the cause of suffrage, she was forced to relinquish her position. The chair of the Trades Union Council maintained that the campaign for women's suffrage was a separate and unrelated issue to labour politics but Eva Gore-Booth and her older sister Countess Markievicz, both from this area and brought up in Lissadell House nearby, argued that the suffrage and labour movements were intrinsically linked. They campaigned quite differently in Ireland and England, which generated feminist links during an otherwise hostile time between the two countries. In 1896, they established the very first suffrage organisation in this area, which was the Sligo branch of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. At that meeting, held in the Milltown National Protestant School in Drumcliffe, quite nearby to where we are now, Gore-Booth called on:

“Irishwomen to follow the example of the farmers of Drumcliffe, and to insist, in spite of opposition, in taking affairs into their own hands.”

In this way, we actually see Gore-Booth aligning the economic organisation of low-paid farmers who established the Drumcliffe co-operative creamery with suffrage. Here is a picture of the two sisters around this time. This, interestingly, is actually a marketing picture that was taken. If you look on the right-hand side, the armbands are advertising Drumcliffe co-operative creamery. Judging by the size of the waists of the two women, they were not actually indulging in any of its products at the time.

So we have this idea of them with this suffrage organisation established in Drumcliffe, and a lot of the locals were pretty shocked by the meetings and many objections were raised. At that first meeting, for example, a local bachelor, Percy Clarke, warned that:

“enfranchisement of women would be Home Rule with a vengeance — petticoat government”,

Now we get an example from this time of how suffragists and suffragettes were viewed as man-hating and often man-like, if you like the term. The first meeting in Sligo gained much media attention. They could not be put into the same category – we saw the picture of what they looked like earlier – but they were reported in the acclaimed *Vanity Fair* and many of those reports were unfavourable. You can see in this one that the meeting was reported in a very condescending manner as generating amusement, concluding that:

“the sisters make a pretty picture on the platform; but it is not women of their type who need to assert themselves over Man. However, it amuses them – and others; and I doubt if the tyrant has much to fear from their little arrows.”

Now, I would argue, as I hope to show, that, actually, the tyrant had a lot to fear and their arrows were not just little.

9.45 am

Eva returned to Manchester and she moved to live there in 1897. At that stage, there were more Irish people living in Manchester than in her entire home county here in Sligo. She moved into this house, which was quite unusual because – not that there is anything wrong with this house in Manchester, which still stands there – it was in the midst of the smog-bound industrial city of Manchester. Manchester was pretty unbearable at the turn of the century with these huge textile industries. At this stage, we certainly know that Eva’s breathing was not very good. She suffered from some kind of asthmatic attacks at these stages.

Also, if we think about where she moved from – I have tried to do this as dramatically as possible – and this is where she had moved from: Lissadell House, which still stands in the area. It is a 72-roomed Greek revival mansion. At that stage, it was based on 32,000 acres. The Gore-Booth family were the biggest landlords in the area. So for Eva to have moved into this is actually pretty remarkable.

At this stage, she devoted herself to organising women workers into trade unions and towards her ultimate goal of obtaining votes for women in general elections. By 1908, Eva was an established and respected trade union organiser. Her main focus that year was on protecting the employment of barmaids.

The Liberal Government were then proposing a Licensing Bill that would control the sale and consumption of alcohol. Now these controls were welcome because intervention certainly was needed when there was a huge rise in alcohol abuse, a cause of major social issues, especially in industrial cities. However, Eva Gore-Booth had realised there was a subsection in the Licensing Bill that would exclude women from working in public houses. That might seem like a pretty radical move but, actually, in Glasgow from 1902, women had been excluded from working in pubs unless they were related to the owner of the public house. Eva estimated that, if the Bill was brought in, 100,000 women across Britain and Ireland would be flung, literally, into unemployment.

The controversy regarding the Licensing Bill would reach an all-time high after a Cabinet reshuffle when a young MP was promoted to President of the Board of Trade. It was no less than Winston Churchill. Due to contemporary law at this time, Churchill was forced to resign as MP in his constituency, which was Manchester North West, and stand for an election there. Generally, at this stage, when somebody was promoted to the Cabinet, they stood unopposed but in this instance, this did not happen. He had also become a central figure in the barmaid issue. Winston Churchill also promoted the idea of restricting women's work in many other ways, including working in the evenings.

We can see Churchill arriving in Manchester to begin his campaign. He was confident of a victory and he gained a huge amount of attention as well. The controversy regarding this would reach an all-time high. At this stage, he did not account for the sisters from Sligo. The women launched an intense campaign. As they could not stand in that election, they supported the Conservative candidate William Joynson-Hicks. He was a rather unlikely candidate for their support. He was staunchly evangelical and *The Manchester Catholic Herald* accused him of being anti-Catholic and anti-Irish home rule as well. Irish home rulers deplored Conservative politics and actively campaigned against him.

As a Liberal candidate, Churchill supported Irish home rule. At the time, an Irish nationalist, Patrick Hickey, spoke in support at that by-election. In response, we see Markievicz coming over to Manchester to help her sister with the campaign, and she announced:

"I have come over from Ireland to help because I am a woman. I am not a Conservative — I am a Home Ruler — but I have come over here to ask everyone to vote for [the Conservative candidate] Mr Joynson-Hicks because he, of the three candidates who are standing, is the only one who takes a straight and decent view of the barmaids' question."

Indeed, Hicks – or "Jix" as he later became known – could be accused of many prejudices but when he rose to the rank of Home Secretary, he was responsible for ensuring that women in Britain were granted votes on an equal basis with men in 1928.

For their campaign, Eva organised a rather striking coach, drawn by four white horses, to be driven around Manchester with the expert horsewoman Constance at the whip. When the coach stopped, Eva and Constance made rousing speeches and we can see the attention that they gained here. When Markievicz at one stage was heckled by a man in the crowd with that inevitable male query "can you cook a dinner?", she replied "certainly" and cracked her whip in his direction adding "but can you drive a coach and four?".

Through their consistent efforts, the sisters successfully orchestrated the defeat of a prestigious politician at that election. Winston Churchill lost his seat by a decent margin and

was temporarily forced out of politics. The following day, *The Daily Telegraph* was jubilant in its headline: “Winston Churchill is out, OUT, OUT!”. He later secured a constituency in the far-off Scottish town of Dundee.

The sisters continued lobbying against the Licensing Bill. Within months, the barmaids’ league overwhelmingly won its campaign. It actually won its campaign with 294 out of 355 MPs rejecting the Bill. This was an immense victory, especially considering that the two sisters from Sligo had swayed a political decision without even having the power to vote in or stand for election. When Markievicz returned to Dublin, she promoted the value of labour movements in giving women power, which, she argued, would ultimately pave the way for votes. In her address at the foundation of the Irish Women Workers’ Union, Markievicz implored women to join the union, attesting that:

“As you are all aware, women have at present no vote, but a union such as has now been formed will not alone help you to obtain better wages, but will also be a great means of helping you to get votes ... and thus make men of you all.”

Around this time, Markievicz began to view home rule as too weak a measure and became involved in the nationalist campaign seeking total independence from Britain. Unlike Redmond’s Parliamentary Party, the main orchestrators of the Easter Rising promised gender equality in an independent Ireland. The subjection of women became a vital concern to those who signed the proclamation. The sisters’ close ally, James Connolly, viewed the “re-establishment of the Irish State” as useless unless it embodied the “emancipation of womanhood”. The proclamation itself guaranteed:

“religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens”.

The provisional Government distinctly acknowledged Irishwomen and Irishmen on equal terms, vowing that a future

“permanent National Government...would be elected by the suffrages of all her men and women”.

The Irish proclamation is actually quite a modern, feminist document when you really read into it. Numerous women, including Markievicz, took active roles in the fight for independence because of the expressions of the proclamation.

Markievicz was one of the final prisoners released after the rising. She was released – we can see her here – in June 1917. However, she would spend numerous periods incarcerated over the following years. In April 1918, Markievicz was arrested and imprisoned in Holloway as part of a supposed Sinn Féin plot with Germany. The Representation of the People Act 1918, granting some women over 30 the vote at general elections, had recently been passed. While she was still in Holloway, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 was also passed finally allowing women to stand for election and, of course, sit in Parliament.

Seventeen female candidates stood in the British general election in 1918, including Christabel Pankhurst, the infamous suffragette. Markievicz stood as a Sinn Féin candidate. It is significant, I think, that her election campaign was run equally by her suffrage and republican supporters. Markievicz was the only female candidate to be elected in that election. She was returned as an MP for the St Patrick’s division of Dublin making her the first woman ever to be elected to the House of Commons. Of course, in line with Sinn Féin policy, Markievicz rejected her seat. She did, however, receive a letter from Prime Minister Lloyd George inviting her to the opening day of sessions. I have a copy of it, which I have

transcribed because it is too small to read. You can see, first of all, that it was sent, obviously indiscriminately, to all elected MPs. It is addressed “Sir” and is inviting her, saying:

“I hope you may find it convenient to be in your place.”

Markievicz writes how she thoroughly enjoyed replying to this. We can also see on a copy of the envelope that the address was changed to Holloway gaol in London so it is interesting that the letter made it to her in prison.

The elected members of Sinn Féin formed the first Dáil Éireann in 1919. When she was released from prison, Markievicz returned to Ireland and to her first sitting at the Dáil. She was later nominated as Minister for Labour, making her the first female Cabinet Minister in either Ireland or Britain. She proved herself effective in the role possessing a unique way of solving employment disputes. During a particularly difficult negotiation between her and a certain employer and with no sign of an outcome, Markievicz strode through the room, pulled out her gun, pointed it at the terrified employer and said, “ten minutes to settle or I shoot”. You will be delighted to know that the employer settled within seven minutes. *[Laughter.]* Yes, absolutely.

Markievicz joined Fianna Fáil on its establishment in 1926 and was elected as a Fianna Fáil candidate for Dublin South in the 1927 election. She is seen here with party members. When we zoom in, we can see that this was during Markievicz’s final illness because she has a cast on her arm. I like to think, when you zoom in, that it looks as if she is kind of smirking at de Valera, which I quite enjoy.

Markievicz, unfortunately, died five weeks later at the age of 59. As leader of the upcoming political party, gender equality did not appear as a central concern for Éamon de Valera at this stage. Arguably, de Valera included Markievicz as a Fianna Fáil candidate not out of concern for gender balance, clearly, or for her feminist politics but because he was dependent on public support. Markievicz was known at this stage as the “People’s Countess” and was an intrinsic element in order for Fianna Fáil to gain followers. When she died in a public ward of Sir Patrick Dun’s Hospital, her legacy quickly began to unfold. Due to ongoing hostilities with the Free State Government, Markievicz was denied a state funeral. Her body lay in the Pillar Room of the Rotunda Hospital, and she received a public funeral. However, she proved to have earned the respect of the people of Ireland. This is an image of O’Connell Bridge, where thousands upon thousands of people lined the streets to honour her funeral cortège.

The next female after Markievicz in a Cabinet role in Dáil Éireann was Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, who was not appointed until 1979, as Minister for the Gaeltacht. So, while you had the nationalist Free State Government proclaiming when Markievicz was elected as a Cabinet Minister that this was what the future Government would look like, it took 60 years for another female to be appointed as a Minister in Dáil Éireann. Arguably, we could say that de Valera wiped out a lot of the successes when he redrafted the 1937 constitution. Women were positioned as inferior. Articles were inserted into that document declaring women’s ultimate place as being in the domestic sphere. Article 41, which still remains, includes a section declaring:

“the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.”

The release of the draft version inspired Hanna Sheehy Skeffington to write to the ‘Irish Independent’ asserting that the constitution is:

“a fascist model, in which women would be relegated to permanent inferiority”.

Of course, the implications of the 1937 constitution, as we know, were far-reaching.

10.00 am

There is a concern, again as we know, that Irish politics is still male dominated. In efforts to improve gender balance, it is Markievicz who appears as the icon for change. A full-length painting of the countess hanging on the stairs of Seanad Éireann, which was actually painted by her husband, Count Markievicz, was removed during renovations to the building. During a Seanad debate, Senator Mary Henry noted the importance of ensuring that the painting was returned to its rightful position. Her speech in the Seanad highlights the importance not only of Markievicz’s work in the shaping of modern Ireland but as a symbol to inspire future generations. Henry insisted that:

“It is of great importance to show women were involved in our past. It is essential that women are put before all children, particularly girls, so there is some sort of role model for them in political life.”

It is now time to question the legacy of the Gore-Booth sisters as presented by W B Yeats in his poem “In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz”. In it, Yeats’s reference to Constance and Eva suggests that they were unfocused and unsuccessful political activists, as he attests that Markievicz:

“drags out lonely years

Conspiring among the ignorant”,

while politics turned Gore-Booth:

“withered old and skeleton-gaunt”.

In fact, neither woman made it to old age; they both died in their fifties. The poem is undoubtedly one of Yeats’s most admired and has caused him to be associated with Eva and Constance’s childhood home of Lissadell House. On 22 July 2015, in a significant move, the Irish Cabinet meeting was held at Lissadell House. Of course, the venue was chosen to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Yeats’s birth. However, for the first time, the legacy of Constance and Eva overshadowed the memory of Yeats. The owners of Lissadell House posted on their website to remind how the Gore-Booth sisters’:

“achievement was the legislative change allowing women both to stand for election and to vote. One hundred and nineteen years ago Constance and Eva stood on a platform in Drumcliff, Sligo, campaigning for women’s rights. For this they were mocked and derided. Constance and Eva would be so proud to see four women ministers at Lissadell, sitting in cabinet, with a female Attorney-General in attendance. They would be so proud that one such minister holds the office of Tánaiste.”

That, of course, was our former Cabinet. While women’s participation in Irish politics remains below the European average, it is, I suggest, the legacy of Markievicz and Gore-Booth that is a central inspiration for change. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Thank you, Professor, for that brilliant address and wonderful story. It fits in very much with what we were talking about yesterday. Your great story of Countess Markievicz this morning

reminds me of my grandmother. She was the exact same age as the countess - her father had come from Waterford – but she did not get the vote in 1918. She was a working-class woman who could not read or write. She had to wait another ten years, until 1928, before she was allowed to vote, at the age of 53. Often when I, as do many members, I am sure, go through our constituencies and talk to, perhaps, young women who do not want to vote, I sometimes have to remind them of the struggle that people like my grandmother had to be allowed to vote until she was well into her middle age.

It was really a great address and I am sure that colleagues will want to make some comments or ask some questions.

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

Thank you very much, convener. Sonja, that was great; thank you for that.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Thanks.

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

I would be really interested to know how much prominence the two sisters are given in the teaching of Irish history of the time to children in school, along with Collins, de Valera and the heroes of the revolution.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

That is such an interesting question. Certainly, I made it all the way through primary school, secondary school and undergraduate university without ever knowing about Eva Gore-Booth. I had never heard of her. Constance Markievicz is, I would say, perhaps the only woman in modern Irish history to make it to iconic status. However, that is only for her role in the nationalist movement, I would suggest, as in taking up arms in the Easter Rising. Some may disagree but I think she was a formidable politician and she did a huge amount of work, especially in the labour movement. It was labour that she was devoted to. There is less focus on her as a politician and it seems to be more about the nationalist struggle, which, I always thought, is more buying into that traditional male history, if you like, that she took up arms and that was the bit that was celebrated.

The Lord Bew:

I thank Professor Tiernan. That was a really superb paper and I have benefited in the past from reading Professor Tiernan's work. There is some wonderful material there.

Can I just ask a bit more about the 1908 by-election? Everything Professor Tiernan said about it is correct but there are two other aspects to this, are there not? One is that Churchill was a late convert to home rule. He did not convert in 1906. In fact, this by-election speeded up his conversion to home rule but quite a lot of Irish voters would not have known that he was in transition and how far he had gone down that road. One, the Irish Party's support for him

came in very late and, two, the Catholic Church supported Joynson-Hicks because of his position on denominational education. Churchill put his defeat down not to the barmaids but to the priests, because of that issue. How does the barmaids question fit in with all those other issues?

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

I know certainly from Churchill's own memoirs – there is a wonderful body of work that has been released again, even more recently, about Churchill's own work – I have never found any reference to the women and the women's campaign against him in that by-election. There are a huge amount of newspaper reports – *The Illustrated London News*, *The Daily Telegraph* – and images of the sisters and that campaign. There is even a wonderful cover of *The Illustrated London News* of Eva Gore-Booth campaigning against him. So I think, really, the fact that he does not mention it, to me, is more out of embarrassment. There is huge support for the women's trade union movement at the time and he is very forthright in this idea of curtailing women's working hours, which, I know, at the time was part of this kind of philanthropic ideal that women should not have to work late hours or long hours. It was a way of protecting them, which is what he would have argued, but that's not the way working-class women saw it because this was a huge dint in the real-life wages that they were going to live off.

Certainly, yes, *The Manchester Catholic Herald* talks about Hicks as being anti-Catholic so I suppose that is where I am getting that. There are probably differences of opinion on that one, I think, but, yes, absolutely, Lord Bew is right. I know that Churchill was a late convert and, of course, he crossed parties as well so this is part of the move into home rule and supporting home rule. I agree with Lord Bew there, absolutely.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

I just want to say that that was really a great lecture. I really enjoyed it and there are a couple of things I might say. Countess Markievicz brought her dog Poppet with her to the 1916 rebellion. There is a photograph of her there in City Hall or where they were doing the printing at the time – sorry, Liberty Hall, excuse me. The second thing is that she was also a very important person for Fianna Éireann, which was the young people's movement. I met Eddi Reader, who is a famous Scotch folk singer. Her grand-uncle, Seamus Reader, has written about the time when he stayed with Countess Markievicz in Leinster Road and, apparently, her home was very much open and a friendly place for young people. So she was a very interesting person but there are some not so nice things about her as well. Allegedly, anyway, she was one of the first people to kill a policeman in 1916. Allegedly, she shot stone dead without warning some guy who was just walking in uniform in Stephen's Green. That is part of our history but she is certainly an iconic figure and very important and I welcome Professor Tiernan's enlightening and informed debate.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

I am so glad Fergus O'Dowd brought that up because that is one of those really contentious debates. Certain historians and people support the idea that she shot and celebrated shooting an unarmed policeman whereas there is no actual evidence of that. She was in a different

place with Kathleen Lynn when Constable Lahiff was shot and killed. So there is no concrete evidence that it was her.

A Dublin Abbey actor was actually the first man killed in the rising but he had shot an unarmed Dublin Metropolitan policeman and that has been celebrated. So you kind of get this sense that it was during warfare and because it was a woman who is thought to have shot a policeman, she is kind of derided for it whereas you have a man doing the exact same thing and even though it is during warfare, that is celebrated.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

I think the historian that I read is a pretty reputable guy but it is the only commentary I have read on it and it did surprise me. But about her dog.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Oh, absolutely, you are absolutely right: she talks about it. At one stage, when she is being brought over to England for prison, the dog arrives, seemingly, and boards the ship with her and nobody can stop it because the dog was actually quite vicious to other people on her command. They got all the way to England and then Eva had to take the dog in because she was living in London and nobody could go near it. She famously wrote how she had trained her dog to bite anything English. *[Laughter.]* You are absolutely right: it was Poppet. There is a great statue just beside *The Irish Times* building of her with the dog. It was a cocker spaniel. But you are right, yes.

Ms Ann Jones AM:

That was really interesting, and thank Professor very much for that. Today is the 135th birthday of Lady Rhondda – Margaret Mackworth – from Wales, our area. I was at a fantastic Welsh National Opera operetta by an all-female cast of her life called “Rhondda Rips It Up!”, which was all about the Rhondda rebels. That is just a bit of history – sort of saying that the Celts had a really good story to tell in the women’s suffrage movement.

Are there any plans to collate all this history and weave that into educational curricula? Social history should be taught in schools and, sadly, I do not think it is. Certainly, we need to know about these brave women.

It is interesting that they were mostly from the middle classes when they started. I wonder whether it was because they were able not to hide but to stand alongside their husbands. In fact, Lady Rhondda divorced – or he divorced her – and she fell into some sort of poor state. So I just wonder whether we ought to be teaching that in schools and how do Professor Tiernan thinks we can collate all this history to teach in schools?

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Yes, absolutely. I totally agree with you. Parts of that speech by Senator Mary Henry include the idea that we need female role models to be taught to all children – girls and boys – so that we know exactly. For too long, women have been excluded from history. The issues with these things, especially when we are talking about a country such as Ireland that is a very new country in many ways, is that we had that opportunity to begin and to write to ensure that that full history was written but, in fact, it is only, I would argue, in the last two decades that we are starting to recover the history of women and how important women were, even in the

formation of our state and the history of the country. It is coming along in leaps and bounds but it is certainly not good enough yet.

I agree with you totally. I certainly make it my job to instil it into the universities where I teach but it needs to be, as you say, instilled at primary and secondary level so that we have children being brought up with this, which will lead them to uncover and write more history, so it has a knock-on effect. It has to be brought into curriculums much more and that really needs to start within the educational structure but I do not know how we do that except for, you know — [*Interruption.*] unfortunately.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Thank you very much. John Scott.

Mr John Scott MSP:

The Vice-Chairperson must have misunderstood me. Forgive me, I must have been waving my arm [*Laughter.*] I have nothing intelligent to say.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I am sure that Joan Burton has.

10.15 am

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Just so that people are aware, on Professor Tiernan's last point, in recent years we have introduced a political and social studies course for our Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, which are the equivalent of GCSEs and A-levels in the UK. In fact, a lot of boys and girls are fairly active in looking into women's history for projects in both programmes.

It was a really enjoyable presentation and I am glad that Professor Tiernan mentioned the meeting at Lissadell House, because it was very moving to be in the room where Constance and Eva lived and Yeats wrote the poem. In Dublin, certainly when I was growing up in the city centre, Constance was remembered for her role in the 1913 lock-out. She was one of a number of women who were in the headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in Liberty Hall, in a city where according to James Connolly the poverty was as bad as it was in Calcutta. The extent of the slums and the level of poverty in Dublin, along with the casual labour on the docks, provided the momentum for people to try to organise a union so that people could have jobs with terms and conditions, which resonates today.

Constance in particular, along with other women, was heavily involved in supporting workers' families. Interestingly, workers and workers' councils throughout the UK sent money and food to Dublin. That carried on as a legend, along with the legend of the women who worked to improve conditions for families who had been left destitute. Constance therefore had a very positive image in Dublin, certainly when I was in school and growing up, but her political role has emerged much more strongly only in recent times.

We have just celebrated the 150th anniversary of Connolly's death. Connolly's executor would have been Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, who was a pacifist, but he was murdered by a rogue British officer as part of the execution of a number of civilians during Easter week. After Sheehy-Skeffington died, his wife, Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, went on a tour of the United States and was one of the few women to succeed in meeting the then President of the United States to make the case about 1916. All this has been emerging thanks to historians like Sonja, in the context of the anniversary decade, celebrating the revolutionary years and the years to independence. We have several years to run so it is interesting that more will emerge, particularly in respect of the War of Independence, the Civil War and the Treaty. It will be fascinating if historians are able to find out more about the women who were involved in that.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

I absolutely agree. Take the role of women in the Treaty process: as we know, Cumann na mBan never stepped down and never accepted the Treaty so a huge amount of the history is very specific to the women. There are different things that I think the public was probably not aware of. Even on Saturday, we had the centenary of Lá na mBan – the Women's Day – when the women from the trade unions famously marched and signed a petition against the extension of conscription. At that stage, the extension of conscription was being sought in Ireland but the women from the trade unions refused to support it; in other words, they refused to take up any jobs left by men conscripted into the army. They were actually successful – I think because of the women's activity generally – so conscription was never extended into Ireland. There are those sorts of things but there is also a huge amount more; it is not just about 1916. In many senses, the women possibly were not as central but there was the 1913 Lockout and then women really came more into play after the rising. We have many more events to uncover.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

I thank Professor Tiernan for a fascinating and enjoyable talk. The praise for her this morning is very much warranted.

One of my first observations about the talk was that given the TV and film obsession with this era, I do not know why a movie has not been made about Countess Markievicz and Eva Gore-Booth. It is probably unfair but we do primarily look at Markievicz through the prism of Easter week and her role in that period, which is why talks such as this are so important in enabling us to learn more about the awe-inspiring history of her life.

Where does Professor Tiernan think Countess Markievicz sits within the current feminist movement and revival and in relation to what is currently happening throughout the island? It might not necessarily need to be the case but she has not really been a visible symbol over the past few months. On the one hand, we unjustly look upon her solely through Easter week but on the other, is there now, because of that role, almost a reluctance to look at her or evoke her in the current feminist movement and the current context?

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

It is an interesting question. It is sometimes difficult to start appropriating historical figures for contemporary feminist movements and events. For example, it really annoys me to see a historical figure such as Markievicz used on a poster in a contemporary campaign, saying

“She would have repealed the eighth” or something. How do we know that? We cannot appropriate people like that. When it comes to different feminist movements with which she would have been involved, labour is central.

The gender pay gap is an absolutely huge current issue and Markievicz certainly does come up in different talks about gender pay. I have often thought about taking out an excerpt of what Eva and Constance were writing at the time and sending it to *The Irish Times* with my name under it to see whether it would be published because it is the exact same argument. Unfortunately, it has not been resolved. The gender pay gap is not as obvious as it was then but she certainly comes up within that discussion.

Markievicz plays a central role in discussions of women and politics and does come up. Fianna Fáil called its inquiry into gender balance within the party the Markievicz commission and the paper published afterwards was also named after her. The political parties with which she was involved – Sinn Féin and then later Fianna Fáil – have especially appropriated her. She appears in discussions about the movements that she was talking about at the time. In respect of the other modern movements that we are concerned with as feminists, it is difficult to start to think about how she or Eva would have responded because we simply do not know.

Senator Catherine Noone:

I thank Professor Tiernan for her very interesting presentation. I have a comment, more than anything. We are talking about history, the way it has been documented, who is remembered and all those things. I am sure that a lot of female politicians could relate to this. We obviously had a pretty historic event recently and I was in a photograph in some media with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health. On one online site – I am sensitive to this because I was actually in the photo – it said, “Here is the Minister for Health with the Taoiseach on the stage in Dublin Castle.” There were plenty of instances of my being documented as being there but in one or two, only the two of them were mentioned. I was clearly standing in between them but I was not mentioned. I know my place in the world – I know am not a Minister and I know I am not anywhere near being the Taoiseach – but, not to blow my own trumpet, I did have a fairly fundamental role in the way things evolved.

It is interesting that it is sometimes difficult to document historic moments. It was actually a female journalist who wrote the article. I cannot remember what article it was and it is not something that I worry about too much but it is interesting, and I am sure the likes of Joan Burton could probably relate to it. A woman might be a Minister or hold a certain position but a lot of the time, it is the men who get the focus. I do not know whether that is paranoia or whether I am over-sensitive. Is it even fair to comment that it needs to be documented properly in the present for it to be relevant in the future?

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Absolutely; that is actually an extremely significant point. First of all, yes, we need to question these things straight off. Why was Senator Noone not mentioned?

Senator Catherine Noone:

It was only one and I was mentioned in plenty of others – I am not looking for notice.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

But still, I can see what the Senator means when it comes to a historical document. As a historian, I think about how future historians are going to record these movements or issues. It is not a million miles away from something like the surrender by Pádraic Pearse at the end of the 1916 Rising when a woman, Elizabeth O'Farrell, was standing right beside him but because she was not fully in the picture, she was never noticed and, eventually, they have airbrushed her out of that photograph so that it is him standing there on his own. What Senator Noone is talking about is not a million miles away from that. Who is to say that in 50, 60 or 70 years' time, it will be forgotten that the Senator was part of that movement and just the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health are mentioned? It might be just—

Senator Catherine Noone:

A. N. Other Woman.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Yes, absolutely. It is extremely important and a really valid point.

Senator Catherine Noone:

It is a challenge with journalists on a daily basis. I was obviously a more junior person so it is not necessarily about gender but it is an example of the kinds of subtle biases that exist. Sometimes we are referred to as emotional and other things by female journalists who intend to paint some sort of picture but from a feminist point of view, they do not actually do us any favours by portraying us in such a light.

Professor Sonja Tiernan:

Absolutely.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

That was a fascinating address and we had great contributions from the floor. I thank Professor Tiernan for presenting that brilliant paper. I wonder what Countess Markievicz would have made of progress so far. I would have thought she was pretty well pleased but she would probably say that there was a lot more to be done. Thank you very much indeed, Professor Tiernan.

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We now return to the business of the Assembly. First, the Steering Committee has agreed without amendment the draft annual report 2017, copies of which were circulated to all Members. I ask that the plenary session take note of the 22nd annual report 2017. Is that agreed?

Report agreed.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We will now hear updates from Committees A, B and C on their work. We will be updated on the progress of work plans and we will take committee reports after all the Chairs have delivered their updates. We are going to take two sections together, but we will start with the individual reports.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE A (SOVEREIGN MATTERS)

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD)

I call the Chairman of Committee A, Peter Fitzpatrick TD.

10.30 am

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Thank you very much, Mr Co-Chair. I am delighted to give a progress report on Committee A on sovereign matters. Since the last plenary meeting in Liverpool in October 2017, the committee has focused on trade and border inquiries in the context of Brexit. At the meeting in London in November, evidence was heard from the Swiss Ambassador to the UK, from Lord Jay, and from Dr. Andrew Murrison MP in respect of the capacities of Committee Chairs of the UK Parliament. A further private meeting was held in Belfast in January to agree broadly the recommendations in the Committee's report. I am pleased to say that after Sunday afternoon's meeting with the Steering Committee, the committee will recommend the report for adoption by the plenary this afternoon.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS)

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Next is Committee B and Fergus O'Dowd TD.

Mr Fergus O'Dowd TD:

Our Chairman, Andrew Rosindell MP, has stood down. Darren Millar AM, who unfortunately cannot be here, was elected as our new Chairperson and I was elected as Vice-Chair. Further to the Committee's summary of our recommendations and conclusions on Brexit that were presented at the Liverpool plenary, we published a compendium of evidence on our website. On Sunday, the committee agreed terms of reference for two new inquiries on European security co-operation and EU external borders. Our Chairman has invited us to Holyhead to consider security issues and we will go to Brussels, Belfast, Dublin and London during the course of the inquiry.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE C (ECONOMIC)

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I call Joan Burton TD, Chair of Committee C.

Senator Joan Burton:

I was recently appointed as the new Chair of Committee C. I thank the former Chair of the Committee, Senator Denis Landy, who has now retired, for his work, and Co-Chair Helen

Jones MP, who stood in for Senator Landy in his absence. Since the last plenary, the committee has visited London and Edinburgh as part of our inquiry into the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector. We held a number of informative meetings on our visits and while in Edinburgh, we took the opportunity to visit a farm.

At the committee's meeting on Sunday, we agreed a final report on our inquiry into the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector and I will present the report to the Plenary shortly. The committee agreed to begin work on a new inquiry. We plan to look at the revitalisation of high streets and local businesses along with the implications of online trading as it is developing.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe):

I commend the Chairs and committee members for their valuable work on behalf of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I also acknowledge the work and support of the Committee Clerks and the Secretariat.

We now move on to the presentation of the remaining two reports to the Assembly.

COMMITTEE C (ECONOMIC): "THE IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT FOR THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR"

COMMITTEE A (SOVEREIGN MATTERS): "THE BRITISH-IRISH TRADE RELATIONSHIP AND THE BORDER WHEN UK LEAVES THE EU"

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I understand that the Committee Chairs have agreed to present their reports to the Assembly jointly. I shall call the Chairs to present their reports and we will then take questions and comments on both.

I invite Joan Burton to present her report on the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Thank you very much, Chairperson. I am pleased to be here today as the Chair of BIPA's Committee C on economic affairs and to talk about our report on the implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector. My colleague, Peter Fitzpatrick, will take the Assembly through Committee A's report on Brexit. We decided to combine our presentations to make better use of the time.

I thank all the witnesses who came before the committee, as well as those who submitted written proposals, for their respective contributions, along with the people who helped with the organisation of our meetings. The insight and information provided to the committee by all stakeholders was really valuable for the drafting of the report. Our report reflects what people told us throughout our inquiry.

In July 2016, in the aftermath of the UK referendum on leaving the European Union, the committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the consequences of the UK's decision for the agri-food sector across BIPA member jurisdictions. The committee was conscious that the sector plays an important role in the UK and Ireland, north and south, and that the significant

trading relationships between the jurisdictions would be affected by the UK's decision to leave the EU. The committee believed that it would be prudent to undertake an inquiry on this important matter.

It was clear from the witnesses we met during the course of our inquiry that there was a palpable sense of nervousness in the industry and among farmers. However, there was also a level of resilience and determination, such that whatever arrangements are agreed, people will do their best to make it work.

The Committee has made the following recommendations and observations in our report. On trade between the member jurisdictions post-Brexit, it is important that the Joint Ministerial Council and other policy co-ordination groups across the UK work constructively together to ensure that agri-food policy is made in the best interests of the whole UK. I think it is fair to say that people in Ireland would prefer it if a way could be found for Brexit not to happen. That applies as much in the north as in the south.

The UK Government should prioritise food security over the UK being self-sufficient in food production. It should prioritise high animal welfare and environmental standards in its negotiations on trade deals. That came up again and again, right across our meetings. People are conscious that the EU has developed very high food standards in respect of both animal welfare and consumer protection. It is really important for the quality of agricultural products that we are in a position to maintain that.

Aside from wishing, in the context of recent comments, that the British Foreign Secretary, Mr Boris Johnson MP, gets an opportunity to walk the border so that he finds out that it is not quite as small as he appears to think, the committee believes that every effort should be made to prevent a physical border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, in the worst-case scenario – let us be clear: it would be a worst-case scenario – of a physical border, technology should be availed of and systems should be put in place to allow for as-frictionless-as-possible transit from one side of the border to the other. Contingency plans for this eventuality should be drafted well in advance of any determination.

Communities and companies that currently transit and trade over the border – many of them several times a day, which demonstrates the complexity of the current open border, with which people who live near and on it are very familiar – need to be provided with advice and supported in planning for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

The Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive – when one is formed – should work in close collaboration to mitigate against the potential risks to the agri-food sector of a physical border. It is imperative that skilled workers who currently work in both jurisdictions retain the right to work and reside after withdrawal. That is a practical recommendation from people who live on either side of the border.

Significant research and development grants should be offered to farmers to trial new technology to assist in the improvement of productivity and to offset the reliance on manual labour. No barriers should be constructed that hamper European Union students attending university courses of whatever kind, right across the UK and the European Union. The UK Government should ensure that any necessary labour schemes are in place to ensure that agri-food workers who would otherwise not be able to work in the UK have access to the UK labour market.

UK farmers and others in the agri-food sector are currently experiencing challenges, including on labour and income, as a result of the depreciation of the pound sterling and the general uncertainty about movements in sterling, which is subject to fluctuation. The UK Government and the devolved Administrations in the UK should take steps to provide stability and certainty to the agri-food sector so that it can plan for a sustainable future. Governments and Administrations in BIPA jurisdictions, especially the UK Government, should work with the sector and its representatives to highlight how it can be more productive in times of currency depreciation and fluctuation.

On EU funding and the common agricultural policy, in any further consultation by the UK Government on its draft agriculture Bill, it should seek proactively the views of Governments and administrations in all BIPA jurisdictions, including those outside the UK, as well as relevant stakeholders, such as farm unions, in those jurisdictions. When we visited Edinburgh, people there stressed how difficult the process is for Scotland, given the Scottish Parliament's complex devolved relationship.

The UK should work closely with the devolved Governments to devise a UK-wide replacement for the CAP. It should have sufficient flexibility to meet local needs and differences and it should ensure that the devolved Governments retain competence over agricultural policy. Furthermore, given how closely linked the UK and Irish agricultural sectors are, a specific assessment of the impact of the UK's CAP replacement on the Irish agri-food sector should be undertaken jointly by the UK and Irish Governments. Essentially, the two sectors are not only interdependent but intertwined. Therein lies the challenge.

As part of the EU negotiations on the UK's future relationship with the EU, consideration should be given to whether the UK will still be able to receive any EU funding for research work that it undertakes that would either be of benefit to other EU member states or is undertaken jointly with an EU member state, for example, the Republic of Ireland.

In conclusion, our examination of this policy area has led us to make a number of recommendations for reform and for consideration, as I have just set out. The Committee is optimistic that our recommendations will be taken on board, and we are committed to monitoring the progress made on their implementation. It was a continuous difficulty that the UK's negotiating position is still very much under consideration by the UK Government. It was therefore not possible to be definitive or to establish exactly what the UK intends to do at this point in time.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Thank you very much, Joan.

I call on Peter Fitzpatrick to present his committee's report.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair, and thank you, Joan, for your comprehensive report.

I am pleased to present Committee A's report on the British-Irish trade relationship and the border when the UK leaves the EU. The report is the result of seven hearings during which we heard evidence from academics, non-governmental organisations, think tanks, parliamentarians and others on the potential impact of Brexit on cross-border trade. I thank

all those who gave evidence to the inquiry for their contributions and the committee members for their significant work on the inquiry. I particularly thank my predecessor as Chair of the Committee, Joe Carey TD, who chaired the Committee for much of the inquiry.

10.45 am

The committee heard a substantial body of evidence that emphasised the importance of frictionless cross-border trade for the economy of the border areas and the lives of people who live in those areas. It is profoundly in the interests of both the UK and Ireland that frictionless trade across the border remains in place after the UK's departure from the European Union.

Let me give some background. On 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum on its membership of the EU: 52% voted for the UK to leave the EU and 48% voted for the UK to remain in the EU. In Northern Ireland, the result was 56% for remain and 44% for leave. In the light of the referendum outcome, the committee agreed in July 2016 to hold an inquiry into the implications of the referendum result for the British-Irish trade relationship and the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The committee focused its inquiry on the impact that the UK's withdrawal from the EU will have on trade, economics and business relations between Ireland and the UK; the implications for the border; membership of the customs union; and access to the single market. During the inquiry, the committee held a series of meetings in Liverpool, London, Belfast and Dublin.

Instead of going through the whole report, which I hope most people have read, I will just say that it is an excellent report. The MPs, MLAs, TDs and Senators put a fantastic effort into it over the past two years. I think we all became friends and realised that we never want to lose the unique relationship between Ireland and the UK. If members read the report and listen to what the committee has to say, they will realise that there is a lot of friendship there.

We looked at the challenges ahead and grouped them under seven headings, the first of which was "The movement of people". Our conclusion A was:

"The free movement of people between Ireland and Northern Ireland is an integral part of the daily lives of thousands of people who live on both sides of the border. This must not be compromised by the UK's decision to leave the EU."

Conclusion B, on the movement of goods, was:

"The current border arrangements between Northern Ireland and Ireland facilitate frictionless trade and make it easy for businesses to operate across the island of Ireland. Changes to these arrangements, in particular the establishment of physical infrastructure at the border, and/or the imposition of border checks, would have serious adverse consequences for both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The importance of avoiding a hard border cannot be overstated."

Conclusion C, on the political significance of the border, was:

"In addition to the practical benefits of a frictionless border, ease of crossing the border has allowed border communities to be less divided and isolated, and has contributed positively to the Peace Process. Any change to this would be a retrograde step. The Committee also heard fears that physical installations on the border could be a target for dissident groups."

The latter is actually happening at the moment.

On the consideration of the challenges, we said:

"Despite the considerable work which has been conducted in this area, one notable absence in the debate has been the Northern Ireland Executive. The absence of a Northern Ireland Executive has meant that, unlike Wales and Scotland, Northern Ireland has not had a devolved administration to represent Northern Ireland in UK discussions—and particularly at the Joint Ministerial Committee on European Negotiations, which brings together UK ministers and ministers of the devolved administrations to discuss Brexit. The

Committee heard that this absence had meant the interests of Northern Ireland were not adequately represented at internal UK discussions.”

Conclusion D was:

“It is undeniable that the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive has adversely affected how the interests of Northern Ireland have been represented during internal UK discussions on Brexit. The UK and Irish Governments should continue to support efforts to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.”

Conclusion E, on the UK-EU negotiations, was:

“The Committee welcomes the commitments made by both the UK Government and the EU, and the priority that this issue has been given during negotiations. It is essential that the commitments made in the Joint Report of December 2017 be met in the Withdrawal Agreement concluded between the EU and the UK. In the event that such an Agreement is not reached, the UK Government must fulfil its guarantee of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland.”

Conclusion F, on the future of the UK-EU relationship, was

“The easiest way to ensure that there are no complications to the movement of goods between Ireland and Northern Ireland is for the UK to remain within the European Single Market and EU Customs Union. We note that this option is incompatible with the UK Government’s stated policy. In the absence of membership of the European Single Market and EU Customs Union, we agree that it would be desirable for the UK and EU to agree a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, but this in itself will not be sufficient to prevent the creation of new barriers to the movements of goods between Ireland and Northern Ireland.”

Finally, conclusion G, on technological solutions and international experience, was:

“Although technology can reduce the extent to which checks need to be conducted at the border, it is clear that there is no existing model which would enable the current border arrangements on the island of Ireland to continue as they are if the UK’s withdrawal from the EU results in new customs arrangements and regulatory divergence between Ireland and Northern Ireland.”

Those are the main conclusions of the report. As I said, a lot of work was put into it. We all agree that Brexit is changing on a daily basis. Even last week, the UK presented a written proposal that ended up in progress being made and that is very welcome. Mr Barnier is assessing the situation. It is clear that a great deal of work remains to be done and it is important that we all work together. There are key challenges but I hope that we all keep the relationship together.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Thank you, Peter.

I call on members for comments or questions. We will start with John Scott.

Mr John Scott MSP:

I declare an interest as a farmer. My comments are for Joan Burton. She will be only too well aware that farming and food production in the remote and peripheral areas of Ireland and the United Kingdom is already under significant threat in the situation we currently enjoy. Will she quantify the level of threat to Irish and British food production and farming that is likely to result from the UK entering into trade deals with, for example, American and Australia post-Brexit?

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I will take two questions at a time and then the Chairs can respond. I call Dai Lloyd.

Mr Dai Lloyd AM:

Diolch yn fawr, Co-Chair – thank you very much indeed. I suppose I should declare that practically everybody else in my family has been a farmer on the hills of north and west Wales since around the 12th century.

Let me flesh out a couple of points. As a late arrival to membership of Committee C, I welcome the report. As part of the inquiry, the committee visited Cardiff at the end of 2016 to take evidence. The situation has moved on a little. I have some figures to hand. We are concerned about the CAP and the level of funding because in Wales in 2014-15 directly payments under pillar 1 of the CAP accounted for an average of 81% of net Welsh farm profit for all Welsh farm types. Without that CAP payment, Welsh farming is unsustainable. The committee of which I am a member in the National Assembly for Wales met Michael Gove from the UK Government last month in Westminster. We heard that agricultural funding is going to stay until 2022 but there is no guarantee of any ring-fenced funding after that.

Let me flesh out John Scott's point about what happens in our marginalised rural areas. A large proportion of the agricultural land in Wales is considered to be less favourable for agriculture. In fact, only 5% of the land in Wales is used for crops and horticulture, compared with 55% of the agricultural land in England.

On trade, in 2016 some 92.7% of Welsh meat exports that left the UK went to the EU. That is why the Welsh Government are still pitching for some sort of frictionless membership or otherwise of both the Single Market and the customs union. Nearly a third of Welsh lamb flock is sold to the EU. It is estimated that under the worst-case scenario of World Trade Organization rules, the effective tariff rate could be 46% for lamb carcasses and 61% for cuts of lamb. Those are the official figures from the Welsh Government body Hybu Cig Cymru.

My final point is about the effect on rural communities. It is not just the payment situation; our rural communities in north and west Wales are the backbone of the Welsh language and culture. By and large, those communities are at least 50% Welsh speaking, and in some areas, 70% to 80% Welsh speaking. The backbone of those Welsh-speaking communities is the small Welsh family farm, largely in the less favourable upland areas. The implications of Brexit for the agri-food sector certainly present a challenge to us all in Wales.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Any comments on those two contributions, Joan and Peter?

Ms Joan Burton TD:

Both Peter and I reflected exactly what we heard from people. They were very nervous and concerned. As one would expect from people who had been farming since the 12th century, there was also a lot of resilience and people would seek to make the best of it. Bearing in mind the Remain vote in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the Leave vote in Wales, the interdependence in respect of agriculture is enormous.

A couple of themes came across. Traditionally and historically, part of the UK discussion of food has veered towards a cheap food policy. In a way, Dai Lloyd was saying that Welsh lamb is not a cheap food; it is a high-quality food, as are Scottish agri-products and Irish agri-products, whether from the north or the south. Increasingly with Irish agri-products, some of it is from the north and some from the south, and a lot of it travels via Wales to go to its

wider market. There is an incredible level of integration. To paraphrase the quote attributed to Mary Wilson recently, following her death, unscrambling it is going to be very difficult to do. That is why we must retain some principles, including not reverting to a cheap food policy and not accepting veterinary and food product standards that are distinctly lower, from the point of view of both consumers and the industry. In Scotland in particular, people talked about the need for labour availability at certain times of the year. Long traditions have built up in respect of where that labour comes from in busy periods.

The main thing should be to have as much preparedness in the devolved Administrations for the detail of what is happening. The EU is certainly preparing in detail; the UK needs to have as comprehensive a picture. We were conscious that the UK constitutional arrangements between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations are obviously complex and, sadly, the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland is not currently operating. If it is all possible, we really need to have a northern Executive operating so that Northern Ireland's interests are fully represented.

There are enormous implications. For the rural communities that have been referred to, it will be really important to have a replacement for the CAP if the UK opts for leaving. As I said at the end of my summary, it may be that the UK and Ireland, as a continuing member of the EU, are able to continue to work together in a longer transition period. That would help to provide a cushion for rural communities right across the BIPA jurisdictions in what could turn out to be a very difficult time.

We should bear in mind that from the time of the Brexit vote until very recently, sterling fell significantly. We all know that there are certain advantages to that for traders but we should bear in mind that for the migrant workers who come to the UK to do agricultural labour, the value of the earnings that they remit home are falling significantly. That means that the UK is no longer as attractive as it traditionally was. The implications and complications are extensive.

11 am

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

First, as an Irishman, I should say that the last thing that we wanted was for the UK to leave the EU. We did not want that to happen but, again, we respect the UK referendum and we will get on with that. I come from a border area, Dundalk, and up there, agriculture plays a massive part. Think about the amount that we export to the UK. Ireland has a fantastic relationship with Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. It is great. Think about the amount of people who live in the border area from Donegal the whole way across as far as my hometown, Dundalk. Perhaps 30,000 people cross the border every day. There are currently 200 border crossings. It is a pity that this is happening but it is happening. We are part of the 27 countries in the EU but we do not want to lose the relationship that we have with the UK. It took years and years to achieve that. If someone goes to Dublin airport or Belfast airport, they will see that the amount of people travelling over the border and back on a daily, weekly or monthly basis is unreal. We currently have a unique friendship. Agriculture is a massive part of Ireland and a massive part of the EU. All I hope is that we can keep our relationship together. The questions so far have been mostly about agriculture and Joan has answered them comprehensively.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

Thank you, Peter. The next question is from Colin McGrath.

Mr Colin McGrath MLA:

Thank you very much. I am going to ask questions of Peter and his committee; I have nothing against Joan's committee but I serve on it so I know that information.

On conclusion D and the effect that the lack of a Northern Ireland Executive is having on the north with respect to the process, it is often overlooked but people on the ground do not realise exactly what they are losing by their not having a voice. The whole Brexit process is complicated and unless members of the public realise that there is not somebody battling and contributing on their behalf, they will not work out exactly what is lost. Were that happening in any other part of these islands, there would be a major move to try to address it.

The report recommends that the two Governments should continue to work to form an Executive so that we get that voice at the table. There can be a school of thought among the public, rightly or wrongly, that we will not get a resolution to the establishment of the Executive and the Assembly until there are some conclusions to the Brexit process. We are asking the Governments to put pressure on and deliver an Executive so that we have people at the table for Brexit conversations but that is not going to happen because it is unlikely that we will resolve any of the issues until after Brexit.

Perhaps Peter could give us a flavour of some of the groups that presented to the committee and tell us how much they felt they were losing. Is there a good grip and understanding of the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland? Could consideration be given to putting pressure on the Governments to give some voice for Northern Ireland now, before the issue of the Executive is resolved because I do not see that happening this side of Christmas?

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

The next question is from Lord Bew.

The Lord Bew:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair.

I thank the Chair of Committee A for his excellent delivery of our committee's report. I just want to tease out whether there is a contradiction – I do not think there is – between our conclusion that there is currently no technological model and the conclusion in Joan's report that we should do some work on the issue. I do not think that our conclusion at all goes against Joan's conclusion in the Committee C report that work should be done. The former head of the World Customs Organization, nominated by all 27 member states, Lars Karlsson, who is also the former deputy director-general of Swedish Customs and who reported on the smart border for the European Parliament, repeated in London that, as he has said to our select committees, he accepts that at this point, there is no model, as our reports say. He does say that, although it is not cheap, it can be done; it is just that nobody has been required to deal with a problem of this complexity. He insists that it can be done.

The committee recommendation is so important because the worrying thing is that the Governments currently appear not to be investing in the sort of new technology that will be required. One thing is sure: it is quite right that it is not there at the moment – lots of things can be done but not everything will have to be done – but money is going to have to be spent

on it. There is no contradiction between our committee's and Joan's positions on technology. I endorse Joan's committee's view.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

To address Colin's question, we felt that Wales and Scotland are represented in the talks and so is England. Joint Ministers are discussing the European negotiations and Brexit. We felt that Brexit is probably one of the biggest things ever to hit the UK, Northern Ireland and Ireland. We felt that there was a lack of representation for Northern Ireland.

Let me make it simple. If someone is from Scotland, Wales or the UK, they are going to be looking after their own area. A lot of pressure is being put on the Irish Government in respect of the peace process. I am in the Dáil on a weekly basis. We have been asked by parties in Northern Ireland to help with the situation there and we are helping out but there is only so much that we can do. Everyone who came before the committee felt that there was no voice for Northern Ireland. People have been elected to the Assembly and they are being paid by the taxpayers in Northern Ireland and the UK. Something has to be done. I had my own business for 30 years; if I had a problem, I would call everybody together to sit in a room and get it sorted out. This is one of the biggest things that will ever affect Northern Ireland. It is very important. The committee felt that it is very important, too, and that there was a lack of people to represent Northern Ireland, which is one reason why, of all the challenges, I spoke most about Northern Ireland.

As I said, I come from very close to the border. If I was living in Northern Ireland, I would be very disappointed that I had no representation at these incredibly important meetings. I am just a simple, common TD representing my area, Louth, but I feel that all the political parties in Northern Ireland should be put together and told, "let's put Northern Ireland first and get Northern Ireland back on the map." That is what the committee said. We felt that there is not enough representation for Northern Ireland.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

On Peter's question about just how challenging it would be to build a technological system, the only comparable examples are regions and countries around the world where border relations have broken down. A lot of the examples are in developing areas in Africa and South America. For several years in the 1980s, I lived in east Africa and this kind of situation happened with a break-up of the East African Community and so on. Basically, it would mean putting in some kind of border infrastructure.

Given the length of the border -about 500 km - at the moment people can come and go on all sorts of small roads as well a number of major roads. If we were to have between ten and 50 areas where the rules could be observed – let us not call them customs posts – we would be talking about employing between ten and 30 people on a cycle of three to four per day at each one. We would have to recruit and train those people for whatever kind of observation or compliance we were going to get them to do.

This is a big job. It is doable. However, we would then have to have a very high level of technology. I know that building the tax credits system in the UK, which involved transferring social welfare payments to the tax system through tax credits, has practically broken the British social welfare system and put severe strain on the tax collection system. I have spoken to tax experts in the UK and Ireland. Yes, everything is doable but the timescale

to actually achieve that would be extremely demanding so, politically, one of the principles must be making the transition period as long as is possible because I think some people are talking rather too glibly. I am sure they do not mean that but they are talking as if the UK steps out one day and steps in the next day, like Lanigan's Ball. For members from the UK, that is a well-known Irish party song.

"I stepped out, I stepped in again."

That is what we are talking about. It would be incredibly expensive. I am quite sure big technology could do something. Perhaps satellite surveillance could be used but, again, there are implications for the UK's very important co-operation with the EU relating to security matters. These are complex issues and it would be expensive.

Having as long a transition period as possible is highly desirable. Clearly, we would have to develop independent port capacity in the Republic of Ireland so that the reliance on going through the UK could be reduced. In respect of the implications for the island of Ireland, everybody knows the farms about which Peter spoke, which are just north of Dundalk, where part of the farm is north and the other part south and cattle might be moving three or four times a day. Someone travelling to north Donegal will typically cross the border twice. It is technically feasible but it will be extremely expensive and would take a very long time to bed down.

The alternative is having a long transition period. The UK negotiating free trade agreements was mentioned. When people talk about free trade agreements, perhaps they are talking about an easy and positive replacement for the current relationship with the EU as a member state in the form of a comparable free trade agreement. However, there is no model within the World Trade Organization with regard to replacing an integrated model between consenting countries with a free trade agreement model other than actually negotiating on a line-by-line and heading-by-heading basis, unless the UK was to say "take whole areas and we will agree those and work them for a long transition period." From the debate in the UK, and perhaps members from the UK would have a clearer sense of that, I do not think that agreement is there. Certainly the difficulty that came across very strongly in Wales and Scotland involved the devolved government arrangements because the UK does not have a written constitution. This can be a big advantage in one way but in another way, it can be a very big disadvantage. What is the power of the devolved governments to input into the UK Government arrangements into which it will decide to enter? Again, this is a piece of extremely difficult politics. At the back of it all, we have industries on both sides of all the borders where people's lives and livelihoods depend on this working correctly.

I think we could talk to revenue authorities and customs authorities in the different jurisdictions about whether they have reviewed in greater detail the implications of this at this point and whether they have thought about any potential road maps. Again, I agree completely with Peter. We need the Northern Ireland Executive to function so that Northern Ireland is represented to the greatest degree possible in the same way as Wales and Scotland.

11.15 a.m.

Mr Neil Hamilton AM:

I would like to make a few observations about both reports with regard to the recommendations in the section on the border in Committee C's report and the section on the EU- UK negotiations on the physical border post-Brexit in Committee A's report.

As a result of the referendum, it is perfectly clear that the UK's continued membership of the Single Market and customs union is incompatible with the decision of the British people. Indeed, a majority of people in Wales voted for Brexit, including the majority of farmers. I understand that the majority of farmers in Northern Ireland voted for Brexit. That is the reality underpinning these reports and our discussions.

Nobody, be they Brexiteers or Remainers, wants to see the return of a physical border. The policy of the British Government is that it will not impose the infrastructure of a physical border. We have already agreed a common travel area between the Republic of Ireland and the UK. The missing piece of this jigsaw is the policy of the European Commission. It is the negotiator with the UK. The Irish Government is a rule taker for these purposes. If we want to ensure there is no physical border post-Brexit, it seems to me that these conclusions should be addressed to the European Commission because if anybody is going to build the physical infrastructure of a hard border, by implication from what has been already announced by the UK Government, it must be the European Commission. The Irish Government can play a very important role in trying to avoid that unwelcome and unnecessary event.

It seems to me that nothing has been done on either side towards trying to negotiate some kind of free trade agreement. Everything has been concentrated on a long implementation period, as Theresa May calls it, post-March next year during which we will effectively remain members of the Single Market but play no part in making the rules by which we are governed. That is not sustainable in the longer term so what we should be working on now is - although the policy of the European Commission has been to avoid this as a negotiating ploy - the long-term future of a free trade agreement which will enable us to carry on much as we are now. That seems to be vital in the context of Ireland because we have the unique situation of a physical land border that exists nowhere else between our islands and the rest of the EU. It is overwhelmingly in the Republic of Ireland's interest and in Northern Ireland's interest that we do not have any impediment to trade between us. That seems to be the unanimous position of everybody around this table and the members of this Assembly. It seems to me, therefore, that we should direct our conclusions towards the body that has the ability to unlock this difficulty, which is the European Commission.

While these negotiations are happening, the Commission is playing hardball and the British Government is floundering in confusion, it is a very unfortunate situation for us all to be in and I think we can criticise both parties in this report. That could mean we have a unanimous approach to this by toughening up the recommendations in these reports and in addition to directing them to the British Government, directing them to the European Commission.

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

I welcome the two reports. I think they are really useful. I do not think they have said anything that we did not all suspect we would see at the end of the day. With regard to what Joan said about the lack of proper discussion with devolved administrations, the Scottish Parliament, with the exception of one honourable party, feels that very strongly. We will wait and see what happens today but the Scottish Parliament has already agreed that we will not give consent for the UK to legislate on our behalf in such matters in respect of these powers that have been taken away from us.

To follow on from what Colin McGrath said, one of the things that struck me about Committee A, the conclusions and the regrettable fact that the Northern Ireland Assembly is not sitting at the moment, I wonder what effect that has on the joint areas of co-operation and

the cross-border agencies that are noted in annex C of the report because I cannot see much mention of that in the body of the report. There are some cross-border functions between Scotland and the rest of the UK. I would be interested in any discussion about this that took place and how that would work between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

I thank Neil for his remarks. There are two difficulties. One is that the European Union is a voluntary union. The various states joined it with the agreement of their citizens. As Neil said, the UK has voted to leave the EU. However, it is because the UK is leaving that the onus is on the UK to set out what it wants to achieve. From what I have heard from various people in the UK, the UK has been very clear that it wants to replace the previous relationship with the EU with a continuing friendly and positive relationship which uses free trade agreements as its model.

Free trade agreements and free trade agreements which are not unions are heavily influenced on a global scale by the rules of the World Trade Organization. The rules of the World Trade Organization with regard to many products about which we are talking this morning allow for tariffs of up to around 50%. We know they do not have to be 50%. They can be. They can be much lower. Neil is representing Wales. If any sheep farmer in Ireland, Scotland or Wales was to face tariffs of even 5% to 10%, they might be put out of business. This is how competitive the modern agri-food industry is. I certainly hope that nobody is talking about tariffs of 46% and above on any agricultural product because it would certainly wipe out a huge number of rural operators collectively over a period of time.

The Republic of Ireland is a full and equal member of the EU, which is why Ireland wants to see this resolved as amicably as possible. When we joined the EU in 1973, we became an equal in terms of our former colonial power, the UK, and this has continued in a really positive way for all of the years of our collective and joint membership of the EU and there is profound regret all over Ireland that this relationship should change. We accept the will of the UK but we wish to stay in the EU. As it is the UK that is leaving, I would respectfully say that the UK has to play a full role in how it executes that leave taking.

In fairness to M. Barnier, who has come and walked the Border, I think the next time Neil meets Boris Johnson, he should kindly tell him that he has an open invitation to come and actually see the border. From the way Boris Johnson speaks, I sometimes feel he does not actually appreciate the issue. I know he has visited Dublin and probably Belfast lots of times but he has not gone up and walked the different parts of the border, as many leading Europeans and people from the US have done.

All I can say is that we will work as hard as possible but the onus is on the UK to set out what it wants to do. There have been reasonable calls for papers to give us details of the UK's thinking. Everything said by Neil could be applied equally to Scotland, yet Scotland is an inherent part of what one might call the broader UK mainland. Scotland voted to stay in the EU and will now have to suck it up. If diplomacy is to work, we must sit down, work this out and give it as much time as it requires to meet the somewhat conflicting ambitions of the different peoples in the different BIPA regions.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Neil asked about the UK. As far as I am concerned the UK Government has guaranteed avoiding a hard border. I said earlier that it is the UK's decision to leave the EU. We do not want the UK to leave the EU but it is the UK's decision. In fairness, the letter that was presented last week is a step in the right direction. The bottom line is that M. Barnier is happy with progress. I just hope that things will be sorted out before October.

I live in Dundalk in a border area. The last thing we want is a hard border. Nobody wants a hard border so let us hope we keep making progress. There are too many families involved in this on both sides. People keep talking about the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Look at the connection we have with Scotland. Scotland is basically the same size as Ireland. Look at our history over the past number of years. The Republic of Ireland, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland have all got on so well. Nobody wants to be in this position.

Linda mentioned the Northern Ireland Assembly. How would she fancy Scotland not having a voice? How would she fancy all these meetings taking place with no voice for Scotland? Scotland fought hard for what it has.

Ms Linda Fabiani MSP:

We do have half a voice.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

Half a voice is better than no voice. As part of the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish Government is trying very hard to ensure that Northern Ireland gets a fair crack of the whip. I am not just saying this because I am a member of the Irish Government. We are all doing our best. However, we still believe that these are the people who actually represent the people in Northern Ireland in the same way that people like Linda represent the people of Scotland, England or Wales. They are there.

I do not think any other country in the world would get away with what is happening in Northern Ireland at the moment. For the past 18 months, politicians there are basically getting paid to do nothing. In response to Colin McGrath, I do not mean that in a bad way. The Dáil was in recess last week. People think that TDs and Senators are on their holidays. We actually work harder when we are not in Parliament. People do not realise the amount of work we do in our constituencies. We spoke about that last night.

11.30 am

We all want what is good for our own areas. I am disappointed that Northern Ireland does not have a voice in Brexit negotiations. It is depending on the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the EU to fight its corner. It is very important. Leaving this meeting today, we should go out there and say "listen, get into a room, get yourselves sorted out." I said yesterday that if Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley could get on, I do not see any reason the Northern Ireland Assembly cannot get back up and running in Northern Ireland.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

That is an interesting comparison. I will take the last three speakers together because there are only three remaining speakers.

Mr David Ford MLA:

I start off by declaring an interest and by agreeing with what John Scott and Dai Lloyd said at the very beginning. The level of dependency on CAP funding in agriculture in Northern Ireland is very similar to that in Wales. The disadvantaged areas for agriculture are very similar. In particular, Northern Ireland currently receives 10% of agricultural support paid across the UK. Under the Barnett formula, it will be 2.9%. There are serious issues that need to be addressed.

On a technical point, which I did not pick up earlier as a member of Committee C, we appear to have given the Cabinet Secretary in Wales a gender reassignment. We should perhaps spell “Lesley” in a way that is appropriate for a female and not for a male.

I want to talk specifically about technology because there are references, as has been highlighted by Lord Bew, in both reports to the use of technology to deal with border issues. This is clearly an issue that needs to be worked on but to suggest that it is going to be in any way easy is unrealistic. We all know there are a small number of people with very malicious intent who are making a sizeable living out of merely the excise differences in fuel and tobacco. Peter will be pleased to know that not all of them live in County Louth but a sizeable proportion of them do live on the Louth-Armagh border and there are real challenges.

We know that legitimate businesses will fill in their ecommerce declarations and that automatic number-plate recognition can pick up the details of vehicles travelling around the M50 to ensure that people pay for it. We do not yet have a technological solution that says what is in vehicles that cross the border and there is no likelihood that we will have that in the near future. From the justice angle, I am particularly concerned about ensuring we have a way of dealing with that. We cannot deal with that unless we have either an incredibly hard and utterly unacceptable border or a completely open border on the basis of remaining in the Single Market and customs union for as long as is necessary. The points from both committees are relevant but there is a major issue as to how we move forward on that.

Mr Brendan Smith TD:

More than anything else, this is a comment on the Committee C report. I agree with Peter, who gave an excellent presentation from our committee’s point of view. In her introductory remarks, Joan mentioned the interdependence of the agri-food sector North and South. I do not think we can emphasise that enough. Thankfully, in the past 25 to 30 years, particularly since the Good Friday Agreement, the industry has grown north and south. We now have all-Ireland enterprises and we have raw materials- be they milk, beef, sheepmeat, pigmeat or poultry products - that travel north and south. Some of the processing plants are dependent on sourcing raw material from the other jurisdiction. Any impediments to trade will cause huge difficulties for the agri-food sector.

Professor Edgar Morgenroth referred yesterday to the fact that it is the rural economy that is most dependent naturally on the agri-food sector and this goes for both north and south of the border. I am very familiar with it in my own area. We need recognition of the interdependence of the sector both north and south.

The development of some of our enterprises on an all-Ireland basis has given them the scale to trade globally as well. It has assisted. We know there has been a huge internationalisation of the agri-food industry in the past 25 years. Some of our major home-grown companies that started with one or two employees are now major international corporations. Thankfully, this helps us in so many respects. Joan referred to the need for research and development. Even in

the most challenging economic times, our companies assisted by Governments invested in research and development, which was critically important in order to bring the products the consumer wanted to the marketplace.

It was mentioned that standards might go down. I do not believe that farmers will accept the dumbing down of standards. Farmers will give out about the EU imposing this and that regulation. At the same time, they will implement and adhere to those regulations because they fully realise that if they are to sell products to 161 countries, as our agri-food sector does, they must abide by very high, exacting and demanding standards. I firmly believe that the farmers in Northern Ireland I know will not want any dumbing down of standards.

When, as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I relaxed some of the criteria with regard to the brucellosis scheme, some farmers along the border, people who I would know well in the representative organisations, visited me and asked me whether I was happy I could relax the scheme to that extent. Even though it imposed a burden on them, they were still conservative and cautious about change. We talk about the farming community north and south and I am sure it is similar in England, Scotland and Wales. The farming community gives out about demanding standards but it will work hard to adhere to them because it realises those standards are the benchmark for it to sell its products to the international markets.

Mr Declan Breathnach TD:

I left Louth on Sunday morning and travelled through seven counties, two of which were in Northern Ireland. I travelled through Louth, Armagh, Monaghan, Cavan, Fermanagh, Leitrim and Sligo. I read recently about how the now-defunct Great Northern Railway between Clones and Sligo had eight crossings when the railway line existed. Taking up Neil's point, we have all said that if we can solve the problem on the border, we can solve it for many of the issues that centre around Brexit. We need reminding that the Irish border is like a sieve. In fact, it has far more crossings than any of the eastern boundaries of Europe. It is in that context that I want to talk about the word "unique" because from day one, Michel Barnier and people in the EU indicated the need for a unique solution. That could be found between the Good Friday Agreement and solving the problems on the island of Ireland relative to our industry.

I refer in particular to the report on the agri-food sector, having been a member of the sovereign affairs committee. We have short memories. Do I need to remind people of BSE and foot-and-mouth disease not to mention the horsemeat scandal, which was a particular issue from a southern perspective, and the dangers that created for our agricultural industry? I do not know what is a unique solution but I do believe it has to be found on the island of Ireland. The Committee C report on the agri-food sector clearly referred to the security and integrity of our agricultural produce, be it north or south; supports through Europe for agricultural production and how that can be resolved in the context of Brexit; and more importantly, sustaining rural development. I cannot see any solution to this other than approaching it in terms of special status for the island of Ireland even if it is only talking about agriculture this morning.

People here yesterday who may not have had an interest in agriculture talked about how our rivers flow freely and do not know borders. Animals do not know borders. We cannot have any divergence. I said this from the outset and was scoffed at during a very early stage in the civic forum when I told the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine that one piece of

meat arriving in Newry and finding its way to Dundalk could bring the integrity of our food chain into question - not just North or South but in terms of the interdependence of the two islands.

We are not focusing on finding that unique solution because of political problems. These problems will bedevil us in this country unless we begin to recognise that it is the people on the ground in rural and urban communities who are looking for leadership with regard to finding solutions. I do not believe that has been happening to date and yet we are getting to within 290 days of an exit. I do have hope that reality will dawn, namely, that this uniqueness needs to be focused on over the next number of days and weeks.

Mr Peter Fitzpatrick TD:

There are 36 border crossings between Omeath and Cullaville. Someone going from Omeath as far as Donegal would find more than 200 border crossings. It is nearly impossible to man these crossings. As we said in the report, if the UK withdrawal from the EU results in new customs arrangements, they will be nearly impossible to manage no matter what technology we have. I do not know how we are going to cover this area. This is the problem we face.

There is a goodwill factor in the EU, UK and Ireland that there will be no border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. That is the way we go forward. Perhaps that is something we could look at over the next few months. If that is the only stumbling block we have, I would be happy enough to get it sorted out.

Ms Joan Burton TD:

David spoke as a former justice Minister and Brendan spoke as a former agriculture Minister. The comments are very practical and reflective of what must be taken into account when the parties sit down over a period of time to hammer out a final agreement. In hammering out that final agreement, we must bear in mind the uniqueness of the position of the island of Ireland. Following closely behind this is the uniqueness of the position of Wales; the fact that Wales hosts a huge amount of the transit traffic to and from the island of Ireland, not just the Republic of Ireland; and the fact that Scotland has a particular relationship with the rest of the UK.

Given that we are talking about really complex issues, all I can say is that we have evidence here from people who have spoken from all of the different areas about the strong sense of determination not to allow existing good relationships to be in some way disturbed by the new arrangements that are coming down the road. However, we also must be very clear-eyed. The new arrangements could be both costly and disruptive. Sometimes people talk about disruptive effects as though disruption in itself is a modern and good thing. Disruption can get people to think about new ways of doing things but it can also destroy arrangements, particularly with regard to smaller communities in border areas and rural regions in each of our different jurisdictions that we must seek to try to protect and develop as much as possible. This is why our report emphasised the need for freedom of movement and the needs of students.

The university sector in the UK is a powerhouse while there is a significant third-level sector in the Republic of Ireland. A huge amount of research is being carried out between the UK and Ireland through the various EU funds. We have not even touched on that but, clearly, a

lot of that research ultimately relates to agriculture and food and to a huge number of other areas. It really is a high-stakes matter.

All I can offer in conclusion is that we offer the report of Committee C as what people said to us and how, notwithstanding the fact that we are extremely apprehensive and uncertain, there was also that resilience that we know is there in people to make the best of it and preserve the best of the relationships but I would not like to be unrealistic about how difficult it will be to climb that hill.

It would be very helpful if the UK could show us examples of the kind about which Neil spoke and how these arrangements would actually work out. Would they be under World Trade Organization rules? Would they be under special standalone arrangements? If so, does it not make sense in terms of the size of the European market to take the best of the current arrangement that is already there in terms of the Single Market and the customs union?

11.45 am.

We do not really need to reinvent the wheel because the UK has understandable ambitions to trade with India and other former dependencies of the Crown. I do not think anybody wants to interfere in any way with that ambition on the part of the UK but we actually have a very good example of a trading market that is tremendously powerful. Many people would just say they would like to retain the best of that and do it in a way that is as simple and as straightforward as possible.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I thank all speakers for a well-informed, timely, relevant and fascinating debate. Nine members have taken part in it.

I ask whether the Assembly adopts the report of Committee C.

Report agreed.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I ask whether the Assembly adopts the report of Committee A.

Report agreed.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I commend the members of both committees for the enormous amount of work they have put into these reports. The Joint Clerks will now arrange to send the reports to the British Government, the Irish Government and the European Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Our business is now concluded. On behalf of members, I thank our speakers, our secretariat, the staff of the Sligo Park Hotel and all those who helped to make this fifty-sixth Plenary session such a successful event.

The Vice-Chairperson (Lord Murphy of Torfaen):

I echo that. It has been a great couple of days. The emphasis on women in politics has been very good, very timely and fascinating. It has been also a very challenging time because of the two great issues we have discussed. Obviously, Brexit overwhelms and overshadows everything. The other issue is the restoration of the institutions in Northern Ireland. It is possible, I hope, that by the next time we meet, we can resolve at least one of those issues.

The Co-Chairperson (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I now call on Deputy John Le Fondré to move the adjournment.

Deputy John Le Fondré:

In proposing the adjournment, I would like to say a few words. As a politician, one should never use a few words when many will do, I guess. I again thank our hosts. It has been wonderful to visit Sligo. It has been very well-organised and the meal at Markree Castle last night was a treat. I particularly want to mention all the officials who ensure everything goes smoothly and who all support us in the way they do.

As most members will be aware, this is my last BIPA for the foreseeable future. I started in the London Plenary in 2013 taking over from our late colleague, Constable Daniel Murphy, who some members will remember. Everyone has always made me very welcome and I am sure they will make my successors equally welcome. I also pay tribute to all the members of Committee C – past and present – with whom I have served.

BIPA has been a fantastic experience for me and I have made many friendships. Among many things, I will always remember the visit to the World War I battlefields and the Menin Gate. With the 100 years culminating at the end of this year, this is something that cuts across all the jurisdictions represented in this Assembly.

The Crown Dependencies have a very particular and special constitutional relationship with the UK and I hope those members I have spoken to or presented to have a better awareness and understanding of this. We are all united in seeking the best outcomes from Brexit. I now move on as newly elected Chief Minister of Jersey to the British-Irish Council but I am sure our paths will cross at some point. Should the steering committee ever wish to consider holding the Plenary in Jersey, members would all be most welcome. On that note, the next Plenary will be in London towards the end of this year. I move that this Assembly now adjourn.

Adjourned at 11.50 am.