

## BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

### SIXTIETH PLENARY SESSION

*Monday 22 February 2021*

*The Assembly met at 10.20 a.m.*

#### PLENARY BUSINESS

##### **The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to the 60th plenary session of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, BIPA. My name is Andrew Rosindell MP and I am one of the Co-Chairs of BIPA, together with my colleague, Deputy Brendan Smith. I am broadcasting from the Palace of Westminster in the United Kingdom. I warmly welcome colleagues to this historical occasion, the first time a plenary has taken place virtually.

I will first ask Members, when they are invited to contribute, to clearly state their names and Legislature. To avoid feedback and background noise, I ask Members to keep their microphones muted unless they are invited by either of the Co-Chairs to contribute. All persons accessing this event via Microsoft Teams are reminded that only Members of the Parliamentary Assembly can have their microphones on. If a Member would like to ask a question, I ask him or her to use the “hand raise” function in Teams and he or she will then be called in turn by either of the Co-Chairs.

I also remind colleagues that proceedings of this body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

I welcome all my colleagues here today for our first virtual BIPA plenary. This is an historic occasion. It is the first ever virtual meeting of BIPA. Unfortunately, BIPA was unable to meet during 2020 for two very obvious reasons. There were general elections in both the United Kingdom and Ireland. Those were swiftly followed by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. While it is a great shame that we are unable to meet in person because of the ongoing public health situation, safety and tackling the virus must be the overriding considerations. It is wonderful that technology, when it works, allows us to get together virtually and to conduct the business of BIPA.

I would remind everyone once again to please keep their microphones muted while the Assembly is in session unless they are speaking. There is still quite a lot of background noise coming through. I invite Members to mute their microphones.

It was back in 1990 that the British Irish Parliamentary Body, as it was then known, was established. We have, as all Members know, come a long way in the intervening years. BIPA has been an important mechanism for strengthening interparliamentary relations between the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the other jurisdictions that constitute BIPA. As we move into a new chapter of BIPA’s history, I hope the Assembly can grow from strength to strength and that these ties can be deepened ever further.

Apologies have been received from Senator Frances Black.

It now gives me great pleasure to hand over to my Co-Chair from Ireland, Deputy Brendan Smith. Before I do, may I say what a great pleasure it is to share the Co-Chairmanship of BIPA with Brendan. I have known him for many years. He is a great friend and colleague and I formally welcome him as Co-Chair to this first Parliamentary Assembly meeting since his appointment.

## **PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

### **The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

I thank Andrew for his kind remarks and friendship over many years. I am delighted to join Andrew in welcoming Members here today for the 60th plenary session of BIPA. Members will have received a copy of the programme of business. During this plenary, we will be focusing some of our discussions on the urgent challenges facing us as parliamentarians in 2021 and, indeed, beyond. We will hear from a number of speakers on this issue.

As we meet in early 2021, the work of BIPA is of profound importance for our countries. We need to build on the good work of this body since 1990 in building and deepening bonds between our nations. As Andrew said, we have challenges. They are not as great and prohibitive as they were in 1990 and, working together, we can deal with these challenges and create new opportunities for all.

We are honoured to have An Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, with us this morning. He will give the opening address to our Assembly. There will also be some work programme updates from Committee chairs. Senator Emer Currie will update us on Committee A relating to sovereign matters. Senator Darren Millar will update us on Committee B relating to European affairs. Deputy Brendan Howlin will update us on Committee C relating to economics. Lord Dubs will update us on the work of Committee D relating to environmental and social considerations.

We will later hear from His Excellency, Adrian O'Neill, Ambassador for Ireland to the United Kingdom and His Excellency Paul Johnston, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Ireland. The subject of their addresses will be the impact of a changed environment in 2021.

In a slight change of timing after lunch, we will hear and address from Wendy Morton MP, Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas. Later in the afternoon, on the subject of commemorations and a decade of centenaries, there will be a presentation from Dr. Eamon Phoenix on the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland, 1900-1922.

In the last item on the programme, we will hear from Ms Julie Sinnamon, Chief Executive Officer of Enterprise Ireland. She will address the Assembly on trade, economic growth and global markets in 2021. We will also hear from Mr. Larry Murrin, Chief Executive Officer of Dawn Farms. He will address the Assembly on trade in numerous jurisdictions.

We expect today's session to conclude at approximately 4.50 p.m.

It is very fitting to have a virtual plenary as we discuss the changes and challenges impacting not only on politics but on all our citizens' lives. I will now ask vice-chair, Deputy Alan Farrell, to formally move that the adoption of the proposed programme of business be agreed.

### **The Vice Chairman (Mr. Alan Farrell TD):**

Good morning, Co-Chairs, and thank you very much. I formally move the adoption of our programme of business.

### **The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Is that agreed?

*Programme of Business agreed.*

#### **ADDRESS BY AN TAOISEACH**

##### **The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

It now gives me great pleasure to welcome the Taoiseach. It is a great honour for me to welcome Mr. Micheál Martin, T.D., the Taoiseach of Ireland. I invite him to address the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Good morning, Taoiseach.

##### **The Taoiseach:**

Good morning. May I stand? It might allow me to get into my flow a bit better. Co-Chairs, Andrew Rosindell, M.P. and Deputy Brendan Smith, and Members of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, I am delighted to join you today for our 60th plenary session. It is, of course, disappointing that circumstances do not allow us to welcome you here in person but I hope that you will all have a productive meeting, nonetheless.

The past year has been one of intense disruption. As we have all grappled with this pandemic, the significance of the end of the United Kingdom's period of transition from the European Union has been somewhat overshadowed. However, in this Assembly, it is timely to offer some reflections on the profound significance of this shift in the history of the relationship between these islands.

For many decades, our shared membership of the European Union was an important thread binding us together, framing the agenda and context for much of our co-operation. There are, of course, many other deep threads which bind us together, including a shared history and heritage, rich cultural and family ties, our deeply interconnected economies and joint stewardship of the Good Friday Agreement. As we step through to a new chapter in our relationship with our nearest neighbour, we do so as a committed and engaged member of the European Union and as a country and Government committed to a strong and multifaceted British-Irish relationship.

*10.30 a.m.*

The trade and co-operation agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom concluded late in December, alongside the withdrawal agreement and the protocol, provide an agreed framework and a settled basis on which to found and develop the European Union-UK relationship.

It is in all our interests to see a close and stable EU-UK relationship into the future, built on shared values and strong historical and economic ties. Our commitment to our place at the heart of Europe is unwavering. It is my regret that the United Kingdom is no longer there with us and, in this new context, we will work now to enhance and strengthen our bilateral relationship. While, of course, we cannot replace the daily interaction and shared policy agendas that we naturally enjoyed through the European Union, we need to think afresh about how we can renew and strengthen those connections. We should be ambitious about what we can achieve across these islands in order to deliver real and meaningful benefits to all of our people. I am very pleased that Prime Minister Johnson and I share an ambition to move forward with this new agenda to reset and refresh our co-operation in the post-Brexit context. Let us look at how we can work together to enhance connectivity across these islands, to deepen our co-operation on climate and biodiversity initiatives,

to deliver sustainable economic recovery from the pandemic, as well as co-operating on international issues. We will need to develop structures to underpin this engagement with regular meetings by heads of Government, at ministerial and senior official levels, in order to build relationships and deliver on agreed programmes of work. We have much to learn from each other by sharing best practice on challenging public policy issues and working together to develop solutions where appropriate.

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on us all. It has also underlined the importance and benefit of co-operation to tackle this unprecedented challenge. We have excellent ongoing communication between our Ministers, our Chief Medical Officers and officials right across our systems, working together to understand our respective policy approaches and to co-ordinate to the greatest extent possible. British and Irish citizens live in every part of these islands, enriching our respective communities, our economies and all areas of life. This is underpinned by the common travel area, which continues to be a bedrock of the unique British-Irish relationship. In a Brexit context, both Governments moved quickly to copper-fasten these arrangements in a memorandum of understanding signed in May 2019.

In a strong signal of the continuing importance of the bilateral relationship, the Government is investing in its footprint and relationships right across Great Britain. We will open a new consulate general to the north of England this summer, bringing to four the number of Irish diplomatic missions in Great Britain. The new consulate in Manchester will join the recently opened Enterprise Ireland office there, deepening our collaboration with the Northern Powerhouse and enhancing our engagement with regional and local government.

We are also committed to deepening Ireland's relationships with the devolved administrations. We recently launched a joint review of Ireland-Scotland relations which will enhance our co-operation and collaboration over the coming five years. We look forward to taking forward a similar programme of co-operation with Wales in the near future.

We are seeing changes, since the beginning of this year, on flows and supply chains between Great Britain and Ireland, and indeed between all EU countries and Great Britain. While we will continue to work to minimise disruptions where possible, the reality is that the UK is now outside of the EU's Single Market and customs union, and the flow of goods between the UK and its neighbours is now subject to controls both on the British and EU sides. This brings serious new complexities and challenges but Britain is, and will remain, a key trading partner and an important market for Ireland.

It is in all of our interests to help our businesses manage this change. We all recognise the particular need to support our small and medium-sized enterprises, which provide so much employment across all jurisdictions on these islands.

There is no version of Brexit that does not mean change, and change on this scale, by its very nature, can be difficult and challenging – especially in Northern Ireland where the Executive has been operating for little over a year following a long hiatus, and where there are many other important challenges on the agenda. That is why, as we navigate our way through these changes, I warmly welcome the work between Brussels and London to move forward and to find ways of easing implementation. Critically, this is being done in a context where both sides have underlined their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and the full implementation of the protocol.

There are many benefits and opportunities inherent in the protocol for Northern Ireland and so it is right that we all work closely together to ensure that the protocol works and that disruption is minimised to the greatest extent possible. Members of this Assembly will know only too well the

critical importance of parliamentarians in promoting and nurturing co-operation for the benefit of all the people on these islands. I wish particularly to welcome the new members who have joined since the Irish and UK general elections. As new generations enter the political arena, members of this Assembly should see themselves as champions of this vital Irish-British relationship, encouraging their colleagues to learn more about it and engage with it.

Put simply, we must deepen and strengthen our understanding of each other and our engagement with each other. Once we can travel again safely, I want to see a steady flow of parliamentarians going in both directions from all Chambers, whether this Assembly, the North-South Inter Parliamentary Association, through Committees, informal delegations such as the CHAMP organisation or the All Party Group on Ireland in Westminster. I warmly welcome the creation of a new all-party group, the Ireland-UK Friendship Group, here in the Oireachtas, convened by my party colleague, Senator Lisa Chambers.

I believe there is an opportunity now for this Assembly to play a revitalised role in this new chapter of British-Irish relations and I urge you to take up this challenge. Parliamentary links are a vital strand to our bilateral engagement. Let us be ambitious and use them to the full.

Since the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement, we have witnessed the benefits of working together to build and sustain relationships, North-South and east-west. The shared island initiative is a key priority for my Government in deepening and nurturing relationships at all levels in the years ahead. We have made immense progress through the framework of the Good Friday Agreement since 1998, in politics, in society and economically. However, it is clear that we need to do more, collectively, in order to achieve a full reconciliation between all communities and traditions on this island.

We have seen, in recent times, more of a focus on the issue of constitutional change provided for under the Good Friday Agreement. That is a clear part of the Agreement, recognised and validated by both the Irish and British Governments. However, these constitutional provisions do not stand apart from the rest of the agreement and the dynamic of working together - in Northern Ireland, North-South and east-west - to address common concerns and enhance our connections and mutual understanding. Reconciliation is the core goal of the Good Friday Agreement and it is of fundamental importance for our future on this island.

Our shared island initiative is focused on maximising what we can achieve in partnership through the agreement, working with all communities and traditions on the island to build a consensus around a shared future. This is a whole-of-Government priority, and I have established a shared island unit in my Department to act as a driver and co-ordinator for this work. The Government wants to work with the Executive and the British Government to address the shared strategic challenges that we face on this island. We can achieve far more by working together on the challenges of our time to ensure societal and economic recovery from the pandemic, to address the out-workings of Brexit, to make a just transition to a carbon neutral future and to reverse biodiversity breakdown.

There is more we could do together to maximise the potential of the all-island economy, increased connectivity on the island, and the mutual benefits of deeper co-operation in areas like health and higher education. The Good Friday Agreement provides the North-South and east-west institutions and framework that we need to deliver meaningful progress on these issues together.

In recent months, through the North South Ministerial Council, the Government and Executive have put a focus on progressing long-standing cross-border investments, such as the Ulster Canal and Narrow Water Bridge. We also aim to progress a new generation of cross-border projects, for

example, on research and innovation, climate mitigation and enhanced rail connectivity. I have had constructive engagement with Prime Minister Johnson on the Government's shared island initiative and look forward to working on an east-west basis also as we take its work forward.

In October, the Irish Government established the shared island fund, with €500 million available over the next five years, ring-fenced for cross-border projects. This confirms our readiness and ambition to invest in our shared future on the island.

The PEACE PLUS programme - funded by the European Union, Ireland, the UK Government and the Executive - will also provide essential support for a reconciled future.

As part of the shared island initiative, I have launched the shared island dialogue series to foster inclusive civic discussion on key issues for the future, for instance, on environment, health, education and economy. We are seeking as broad a range of perspectives as possible through the dialogues, ensuring the participation of often under-represented voices in the peace process, including women, younger people and minority communities. The shared island unit is also commissioning research that will be published to inform and to stimulate debate on how we take forward a shared island agenda in the years ahead in areas such as environment, enterprise policy, regional development, tackling poverty and supporting social enterprise. Strengthening social, economic and political links is a key focus and, in this respect, I am fully supportive of seeing our inter-parliamentary institutions and connections that are part of the Good Friday Agreement, including this Assembly, invigorated and focused on the issues that matter most for the people we represent.

Through the shared island initiative, we are championing a holistic, constructive and resolute approach to all aspects of our shared future, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement. It is a broad and inclusive endeavour, to which all communities and traditions on the island of Ireland and in Britain can contribute with confidence. I have been heartened by the positive engagement there has been so far to the initiative, from civil society, business, trade unions, educators and researchers and in communities. I encourage Members of this Assembly to play your role, to contribute your ideas and energies to realising the vision of a shared future founded on the Good Friday Agreement. Ensuring that we harness that interest and goodwill, that we take up the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement framework and that, collectively, we sustain progress on societal reconciliation will remain central priorities for the Irish Government in the years ahead.

The United Kingdom's departure from the European Union is a moment of dramatic and profound change. It requires us to rethink and reinvigorate the British-Irish relationship and while there undoubtedly will be challenging times ahead as we navigate this new environment, I remain ambitious about what we can achieve by working together in a spirit of co-operation and I am convinced that we can move forward with mutual respect in a close partnership. I wish you well in your deliberations today. Thank you very much indeed for this opportunity to address you.

*[Applause]*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, for his insightful contribution this morning. The Taoiseach has outlined many areas that are of great interest to Members of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly. He has also shown his commitment to building a closer bond of friendship between the two nations, the United Kingdom and Ireland, particularly as all of our countries are changing and new challenges are to be faced. I would like to thank the Taoiseach for his contribution this morning. We are greatly honoured that he has taken the time out

to see us today and to speak to us in the way he has done. We thank him and hope that this will not be his last contribution to BIPA.

*10.45 a.m.*

He is always welcome to attend our Assemblies in future. We hope next time we can see him in person. I thank the Taoiseach for his time today. We wish him every success in his work and look forward to seeing him again very soon.

**The Taoiseach:**

Thank you very much indeed.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Ladies and gentlemen, I am now going to hand back to my Co-Chair, Deputy Brendan Smith.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much, Andrew. I wholeheartedly endorse your comments about the Taoiseach's contribution. There were important, strong and positive themes running through his speech. For parliamentarians, it was heartening to hear the emphasis the Taoiseach placed on the work of parliamentary works and other North-South and east-west bodies. We look forward to making sure that this body contributes to the changed circumstances in which we find ourselves. As I said at the outset, when this body was established in 1990, there were particular challenges facing our two countries. There are challenges now but they are not as daunting as those in 1990. You can be assured, Taoiseach, that, as a parliamentary assembly, we will not shy away from the work that needs to be done to foster the new relationship and deepen those bonds between our two countries for the benefit of the people of all nations. Thank you, Taoiseach.

*[Applause]*

## **UPDATES ON THE WORK OF COMMITTEES**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

We will now hear updates from the chairs of our Committees. When each chair is finished, I will invite comments and questions from the floor. I would ask anyone who wishes to comment to indicate by using the raised hand signal on Teams.

I now call on the Chair of Committee A, Senator Emer Currie.

## **COMMITTEE A – SOVEREIGN MATTERS**

**Senator Emer Currie:**

Thank you, Co-Chairs. May I say what an honour it is to be here. I am chair of Committee A, which relates to sovereign matters, the responsibility for which ultimately lies with Westminster and Dublin. I thank the members of the previous Committee for their work on illicit trade and the Border.

As a Committee, we have met and agreed that the focus of our work plan should be around the future of British-Irish relationships. We have the common travel area which predates our membership of the European Union. It gives wide-ranging access to each other's countries but, through the European Union, deep relationships were developed at an official, political and sectoral level. We want to examine those structures post Brexit so we can build the strongest and closest relationships possible, going forward, and to recognise the importance of maintaining, deepening

and reforming various relationships between the UK and Ireland now the UK has left the EU. There is quite a lot of work involved in this, the ministerial relationships and interparliamentary co-operation. Trade, security, the breadth and depth of the common travel area, including awareness of its benefits, all arise. We want to build on the existing structures of the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Committee members agreed that the inquiry should be undertaken in stages, with a series of interim reports, the first of which should include a framing document setting out the main issues the Committee will seek to address through its inquiry. It should request evidence from the Northern Ireland office and the Department of Foreign Affairs, including data on the regularity of meetings between the UK and Irish Ministers before the UK's withdrawal from the EU on 31 January 2020, during the transition period and thereafter. We will call that consolidating the bilateral relationship.

As stated in the Good Friday Agreement, our relationships and institutions are interlocking and interdependent. We must work to continue our economic, social, cultural, historical and familial ties, and establish them on firm ground.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much, Emer. Are there any comments or suggestions for the work of Emer's Committee? I do not think anybody is offering. Thanks again, Emer.

I now call on the chair of Committee B, Mr. Darren Millar, to report.

**COMMITTEE B – EUROPEAN AFFAIRS**

**Mr Darren Millar AM:**

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am delighted to give an update on behalf of Committee B, which looks at European affairs. We met on Friday to discuss our future work programme. We have had some significant change in membership as a result of the two recent elections and, as a result of that, we decided that we wanted to look at some new work rather than to continue with the previous theme of our work, which had been looking at European security co-operation post Brexit.

Before I touch on what the new work will entail, can I thank those members of our Committee who served so diligently in the past but are no longer with us and put on record my thanks to the former Irish Clerk, Eoin Egan, who has gone on to new work and welcome Amy Smith, his replacement.

The remit of the Committee is very clear. At the moment, we are supposed to consider matters arising from Britain and Ireland's common membership of the European Union. Clearly, we no longer have common membership of the European Union so that remit will have to change. The Committee, following discussion on Friday, has decided to recommend to the Steering Committee that its remit change to consider the European dimension to the British-Irish relationship. I am very much hoping the Steering Committee will support that when it discusses our proposal.

With that in vein, we have decided to embark upon a piece of work around vaccine approval and roll-out across the UK and Ireland, with particular emphasis on the Covid-19 vaccination programme. We will consider the different approaches to vaccine roll-out across the EU and in the UK and look individually at each of the nations and jurisdictions within the UK and Ireland where the roll-out of the vaccine programme has been significantly different. We will look at procurement procedures, manufacturing procedures and information sharing both in the EU and Britain. We will also consider the levels of co-operation between Ireland and the UK in relation to healthcare. Interestingly, there



are more than 13,000 Irish citizens working in the National Health Service, NHS, in the UK at every level of the organisation. This is the third largest grouping of non-British NHS employees.

We also want to include within the scope of our inquiry some consideration of the global and moral responsibilities of Britain and Ireland in terms of the vaccine programme which is now underway, not just here but overseas too. We will also want to consider how the new arrangements will be able to bed into the annual vaccination programmes in both the UK and Ireland. With that, we will be taking lots of evidence in the various jurisdictions, from the chief medical officers and from the pharmaceutical companies and others.

I commend our programme of work to the Assembly today and look forward to engaging with other Members as we undertake this important piece of work.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you, Darren. Are there any queries, questions or suggestions for Darren and his committee? If not, I call the Chairman of Committee C – Deputy Brendan Howlin.

**COMMITTEE C – ECONOMIC**

**Mr. Brendan Howlin TD**

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am Brendan Howlin, TD for the constituency of Wexford. I remind colleagues here that my home is closer to Wales than it is to Dublin. Following a reasonably long political career, I am delighted to serve for the first time on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which is at a juncture where its importance has never been greater. I am particularly delighted to have been appointed Chair of Committee C on Economic Affairs. I look forward to developing a work programme with colleagues in that regard.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Joan Burton, a former colleague and friend and outgoing Chair of Committee C and I commend the work of the previous Committee. I welcome back old members of the Committee who, no doubt, will guide us all in our deliberations and I welcome new members.

I had the opportunity to meet the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Stephen Doughty MP, on Friday. When I say “meet”, obviously it is meet in the socially-distance sense of what is allowed nowadays. We have agreed to convene a virtual meeting of the committee on Friday, 5 March, where we will discuss and, hopefully, determine our future work programme. I hope that date suits all Committee members.

The Vice-Chairman and I proposed that when we would meet on Friday, 5 March, our work programme would include considering the economic impact of the changed environment on UK-Ireland trade post-Brexit, the outworking of the trade and co-operation agreement and the protocol. I have no doubt that this will provide a very useful work programme in relation to our ongoing shared experience of a changing environment, including the views of the devolved Administrations.

This morning, the Taoiseach referenced the importance of personal relationships. In particular, he commented upon the importance of interparliamentary relationships and our understanding and comprehension of difficulties that will arise and our capacity, perhaps, to address those before they become matters that fester and harm our interpersonal relationships and, more important, our interparliamentary relationships.

We will, of course, be open to hearing the views of all Committee members on what should constitute our Committee work into the future. Hopefully, before too long we will be in a position to

sit down and develop real personal relationships over a cup of coffee or, perhaps, something stronger into the future.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much, Brendan, for that report. Are there comments, queries or questions for Brendan and his committee and its proposed programme of work? If not, I will proceed to Lord Dubs, Chairman of Committee D, for his report.

**COMMITTEE D – ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL**

**The Lord Dubs:**

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am delighted and honoured to have been asked to continue as Chair of Committee D. Let me start by thanking those members who have served on Committee D in the past but for various reasons, including elections and moves to other committees, are no longer with us. They did a lot of good work and I thank them for what they have done. I, therefore, welcome all the new members to the Committee. We had a meeting of the Committee to consider our work programme.

Before the pandemic hit us, Committee D had already started looking at indigenous minority languages. We thought there were only a few of those, but we have been surprised by how many there are. We took evidence in Cardiff, which is quite detailed evidence. We are planning to go to Edinburgh before going to Ireland.

Committee D, at its meeting, felt that so much work had already been started on this that we should continue with that and we would hopefully move on to other projects in the future. Members would be surprised to learn how many minority languages there are. I had no idea. To give a flavour of it, there is Manx, there is Cornwall and the Channel Islands. Of course, there is Ulster Scots as well. We have also been asked to look at sign language and the possible use of sign language in these languages. We will proceed with all haste to take evidence virtually in Edinburgh. Into the future, we will consider the possibility of looking at either some aspect of energy policy or health policy. Those are the suggestions made by members of the Committee when we had our meeting the other day.

We will go full speed ahead and we are already making plans for the virtual sessions in Edinburgh.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much Lord Dubs. Senator Victor Boyhan wishes to make a comment.

**Senator Victor Boyhan:**

Thank you, Co-Chair. I particularly want to welcome Lord Dubs. He is a wonderful friend of Ireland. He is no stranger to this House, both the political interface in this House and the hospitality of this House. I worked on the environment committee with him before and I am delighted he has been reappointed as Chairman.

Earlier, the Taoiseach spoke about building interparliamentary relationships, friendships and fellowships. That is critical and that is what Lord Dubs epitomises. We dealt with an awful lot of health issues, as Lord Dubs will know, on Committee D.

*11 a.m.*

I am reminded that Covid-19 knows no boundaries and, therefore, it is one of the major challenges facing us.

I would like to acknowledge what the Taoiseach said about addressing the complexities and the challenges and new relationships post-Brexit. I do not believe they are damaged to any great extent but this presents an opportunity for us on BIPA to rebuild and redevelop our personal relationships. I refer to the great old expression: "You win their hearts, you win their minds." I look forward to working with Lord Dubs and all the other members on the Committee.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you, Victor. Are there any comments in regard to Lord Dubs' report? If not, I thank Lord Dubs for his report.

I commend the Chairs and members of all of the Committees on the valuable work they do on behalf of our parliamentary Assembly. I wish also to acknowledge the work and support of the committee Clerks and the secretariat. There is an ambitious programme of work ahead for all of the Committees. It is extremely important, as the Taoiseach and each of the contributors emphasised, to ensure that the Committees are active and undertake work relevant to the new changed circumstances in which we find ourselves, building on the progress, particularly since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

We have a new way of working in this Chamber due to the Covid pandemic. Those of us here must now take a break to allow for sanitization of the Chamber. Please do not exit or leave your Teams meeting during this break. You may leave your microphones muted and switch off your cameras for privacy, please.

The support staff have emphasised to me that Members should not exit or leave the Teams meeting link.

*The sitting suspended at 11.02 a.m.*

*The sitting resumed at 11.32 a.m.*

## **IMPACT OF A CHANGED ENVIRONMENT**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Ladies and gentlemen, we are experiencing technical issues. If you could bear with us, we hope to be able to recommence proceedings very shortly.

Colleagues, thank you very much for your patience. I apologise for the slight delay in recommencing proceedings, which was due to technical problems, but we are back in action. Welcome back everybody. I hope you had a refreshing break.

We are starting again with the remainder of our morning session of BIPA. I am pleased to welcome His Excellency, Adrian O'Neill, Ambassador of Ireland to the United Kingdom and His Excellency Paul Johnston, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Ireland. They are both here today and they are very welcome. Adrian is a great friend of BIPA. I think he has spoken at every BIPA session since I have been a Co-Chair. Paul is our new ambassador in Dublin. We have not met before. It is great to have you with us Paul. Thank you very much for joining your first BIPA session this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to welcome our two ambassadors. We will begin with the presentation by His Excellency Adrian O'Neill, Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Is the ambassador with us?

**The Ambassador of Ireland to the United Kingdom (His Excellency Adrian O'Neill):**

I am. My apologies I did not realise I had to unmute and turn on my camera, which I am attempting to do now. For some reason, my camera appears to be stuck. I seem to be having some difficulty with my camera, but I think you can hear me at least.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Shall we ask Ambassador Johnston to go first while you sort out your technical problems?

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

Yes, that is fine.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you, Adrian. As Ambassador O'Neill is having some technical issues, can I, therefore, call His Excellency Paul Johnston, who is the British ambassador to Dublin.

**The Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Ireland (His Excellency Paul Johnston):**

Thank you very much Co-Chair and Co-Chair, Brendan Smith. It is a great pleasure to be here addressing this session of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly. My hope would only be that circumstances would have permitted me to be welcoming you all to Dublin or welcoming the British delegation to Dublin. I hope to be able to do so in short order, but we are in the hands of forces outside of our control, are we not?

I was looking forward to following Adrian. We discussed what we would say in general terms so I am equally happy to go first. I would like to start with a couple of general observations. The first is to say how important these parliamentary occasions are, particularly in the context, as the Taoiseach mentioned, of Britain's departure from the European Union. One of my focuses, which I will speak to in more detail later, is about strengthening the bilateral relationship not just in big policy terms, although that is clearly important, but in trying to develop an ever-stronger network of connections across government, politics, academia, science, business. The parliamentary dimension to that is absolutely crucial because I think parliamentarians have an important job not only in terms of challenging and holding to account their own Governments but their debates with each other are tremendously important to bringing new ideas and perspectives into the debate between Governments as well.

I am fantastically honoured to be here at my first meeting of the Assembly and I look forward very much to contributing whenever and where ever I can. The embassy's services are at your disposal Co-Chairs in terms of what we can do to support the crucial work of BIPA. Listening to the accounts of the four Committee Chairs this morning as they are redeveloping their agendas, there is a tremendous amount we can all do together.

I want to pay tribute to Adrian and to thank him. One of the first things I did when I found out, not only that I had got this job, for which I was absolutely delighted, but also that Her Majesty had given her approval and we were, therefore, free to approach the Irish Government to seek *agrément* in the diplomatic jargon, was to make contact with Adrian in London to let him know that I had got this

job and he invited me around for a drink. That was in January 2020, which seems a long time ago in all sorts of ways. I realised then and even more as I prepared for my posting what a potentially important year 2020 was going to be for the UK-Irish relationship. As part of my preparation I read Roy Foster's books on Irish history, including *Modern Ireland*, which he concluded in 1972. The reason he did that was he thought 1972 was a turning point or an inflection point for Ireland's modern history and for Ireland's relations with the UK. That was the year at the end of which, of course, Ireland and Britain both joined the European Economic Community. It was also the year when Stormont, the then Parliament and Government, collapsed and the year when Ireland voted to change its Constitution to reduce the special role of the Catholic Church in the Irish Constitution. Foster thought that in all those ways this was a sort of seminal moment for modern Ireland. If you think of what happened in the early months of 2020, Britain leaving the European Union, the elections in Ireland which led to the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-Green Party historic coalition Government, the restoration of devolved Administration out of the Assembly in Northern Ireland through the New Decade, New Approach agreement, in the early months of 2020 we were already witnessing-----

11.45 a.m.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We appear to have lost the ambassador. We will wait a minute to see if we can get him back.

**H.E. Paul Johnston:**

Can anyone hear me?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We can hear you Paul. We cannot see you now, but we can hear you. Would you like to continue? Oh dear, we have lost the ambassador. Is Ambassador O'Neill able to speak now?

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

Yes. Can you hear me?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We can hear you, but we cannot see you.

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

I do not know what the problem is. I am on Teams and I can see you all, but for some reason my camera will not switch on. If you can hear me, perhaps, with the agreement of the Assembly I will make my presentation.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Yes, we can hear you Adrian. It looks like we have lost Paul, so I guess you can start now. If Paul comes back we will do a mix and match, if you like.

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

Okay, very good. I will proceed, but with audio only.

I wish to convey my congratulations to Deputy Brendan Smith. I also pay tribute to Deputy Seán Crowe for his contribution as previous Co-Chair, where I know he worked very effectively alongside you, Co-Chair, Mr. Rosindell, in recent years. With two very experienced parliamentarians in Mr.

Andrew Rosindell MP and Mr. Brendan Smith, TD, the Assembly is in very good hands for the critical years ahead.

As Co-Chair, Mr. Rosindell, said this is my third time speaking at the Assembly, but the first since general elections took place in the UK and Ireland. While more elections are to follow this May for other Assemblies and Parliaments represented here, I want to welcome all the new Members of BIPA who have joined in the past year. My door, and that of the embassy in London, are always open to you and we, in London, look forward to getting to know the new Members from Westminster just as Ambassador Paul Johnston is no doubt keen to get to know the new Oireachtas Members in Dublin.

I am delighted to share this virtual platform with Paul. As he was saying, we have worked very well together since he was nominated as UK Ambassador to Ireland last year and met a few times in London before he and his wife, Nicola, moved to Dublin in the autumn. I am confident that our friendship is secure, at least until 14 March when Ireland is at Murrayfield. Commencing a diplomatic posting during lockdown is not easy but Paul is rising to the challenge. We all wish him well for the duration of his posting.

The theme for both of us today concerns the impact of a changed environment. As you have heard the Irish Government's key messages from the Taoiseach this morning, it makes sense for me not to seek to cover the same ground in my remarks but, perhaps, instead to offer a view from London as seen by the Irish ambassador and the embassy.

How has the environment changed? There are two very short answers to that, one, Brexit is now a fact on the ground and, two, Covid has profoundly altered how we live, work and communicate with each other. While these are the key current engines of change, the operating environment for embassies is always changing to some degree in any event - democratic representation and governmental policy changes, with elections, of which we have had two in the UK and Ireland since 2019. Happily, we also saw the return of the devolved institutions in Belfast in early 2020, with the New Decade, New Approach agreement. We have also seen the National Assembly for Wales become Senedd Cymru, or Welsh Parliament, and the emergence of additional devolution within England too. The global context has also changed, not least the advent of a new US Administration with a very different approach to how it engages with the world. These political and institutional changes have come alongside other developments, including relentless changes in media and communications. As a consequence of Covid, many of us are working and communicating from home, as I am today. In many cases, home has become an extension of the workplace, one that does not always respect boundaries between work and private life. Restoring some work-life balance post-Covid will not, I suspect, be easy or straightforward.

As an embassy, we must adapt our work to every one of the changes I have mentioned. We cannot sit back and admire problems. We must take action to help with solutions or mitigations. We also cannot sit back and miss opportunities when they arise. We must try to grasp them.

Brexit inevitably has taken, and still takes up, a lot of my time, but not just my time. We set up a dedicated Brexit team within the embassy in 2017, at first focused on the negotiations and developments in Parliament, but now focused on implementation of the two Brexit deals now ratified and in force. Seven weeks after the end of the transition period, it is very evident that Brexit has a long tail and implementing the withdrawal agreement and the trade and co-operation agreement will require sustained effort and commitment by the EU and the UK, as well as a positive spirit of collaboration and partnership. That work of implementation is not just about addressing the trading issues that have arisen since the start of the year, it is also about ensuring our citizens'

rights in terms of the smooth operation of the Common Travel Area between Ireland and the UK. I expect both our embassies in London and Dublin will be kept busy in supporting this overall task of implementation.

The Irish embassy has also been growing to take account of a point often made at this Assembly about the loss of contact between British and Irish Ministers and officials, who previously would routinely meet and work together in Brussels. The Taoiseach said something about this in his remarks this morning and in terms of the new structures that he wishes to put in place to ensure that continued connectivity. To keep these channels fresh and active between Dublin and London, we have now additional senior officials from a number of Government Departments in Dublin represented at the embassy, including from three Departments focused on the economic relationship between Ireland and the UK.

In short, we are evolving and resourcing Ireland's representation in the UK to face the changed environment. Crucially, we are growing the Irish presence outside of London. We reopened our consulate in Cardiff in 2019. Enterprise Ireland also opened a new office in Manchester in 2019 and, as the Taoiseach said, late last year our Government announced a new consulate general for the north of England. Based in Manchester, it will serve three regions with a combined population of 15 million people and a number of cities that have significant Irish communities. There has also been serious engagement with Scotland and Wales. In January, a joint bilateral review of relations between Ireland and Scotland was published, while work is well advanced on a similar exercise with Wales, in both cases driven by our consulate generals in Cardiff and Edinburgh.

All of this, added to what the Taoiseach told us this morning in terms of his vision for British-Irish relations, amounts to a determined effort by the Irish Government and its diplomatic missions in Britain to renew and reinvigorate relations across these islands.

As we look forward to the second century of the relationship between the UK and an independent Ireland, there is plenty of work for our embassy to do. I am thinking, for example, of the upcoming census in Britain, which will tell us more about the scale and nature of the Irish community here, as it is today versus the census in 2011. Building on the Government's new diaspora strategy and the substantial financial resources it allocates to Great Britain under the Emigrant Support Programme we will look in depth at the community in Britain in the light of what the results of the census tell us and consider how best we can meet the evolving needs of the Irish diaspora here.

There is also the subject the Assembly will be discussing following the break for lunch, namely, the centenaries of 1921 and 1922. How do we commemorate them in a way that reflects the complexity of these seminal events and is sensitive to the diversity of perspectives that surround them? In the embassy, we are hoping to make a modest but, hopefully, constructive contribution to these commemorations.

In December, we hosted a conversation among a panel of historians of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. Tomorrow evening, we are hosting a Zoom conversation with historians focused on a recent book that documents all of the fatalities, civilian and combatant, that took place during the Irish War of Independence. Later in the year, we plan to host events to mark the centenary of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which brought that war to an end and was, of course, negotiated and signed in London.

In the immediate future, we will grapple with how we co-exist with the residual presence and legacy of Covid-19, which, of course, is still with us. Our respective professions, as politicians and diplomats, are not helped by current circumstances. We both thrive on personal contacts; that is

where good working relationships are formed and sustained. While technology has provided a welcome way of engaging virtually, as we are this morning, it is not an adequate substitute for direct personal contact. Let us hope we can get back to such direct personal interaction in the not too distant future.

Responding to Covid-19 has revealed the complexities of Government and governance across Britain and Ireland and has been challenging for all Administrations. The virus, that has no respect for borders, especially between close neighbours, has also made clear the degree to which Ireland and Britain are mutually entwined and interdependent. Therefore, it has made eminent sense to work together on repatriating our citizens from distant third countries and co-operating as best we can on travel arrangements and public health regimes within the Common Travel Area. As we, hopefully, move to the unlocking phase of the crisis, I expect that intergovernmental collaboration across these islands will continue.

The Covid crisis has given every one of us a renewed sense of admiration for the care and compassion of our health services. As someone who has been a direct beneficiary of the National Health Service in the UK, I am very proud that some 14,000 Irish citizens are working in the NHS. What the experience of Covid has again made abundantly clear is the geographic proximity between our two islands. We have been reminded that we are neighbours and partners. This includes in the area of trade and business, with Ireland being the UK's fifth largest export destination in the world and the seventh largest source of imports. Ireland is the trading partner with which the UK has its second largest trade surplus in the world. While Ireland has diversified its trade dramatically since the 1970s, the UK remains a very important market for us, especially for the food and drinks sector and for our small and medium enterprises, SMEs, taking first steps exporting their goods and services to a proximate and accessible market. It is very much a two-way trading relationship, significant for both the UK and Ireland and supporting thousands of jobs on both sides of the Irish Sea.

You will be hearing later from Julie Sinnamon, chief executive officer, CEO, of Enterprise Ireland on its important work, along with the leader from our dynamic food sector. The embassy and the Government's economic state agencies in Britain are committed to working closely as part of a team Ireland effort to support economic recovery following the shock of Covid-19.

Members of the Assembly, I have attempted to briefly sketch out from my perspective how the environment has changed since you last met in plenary session and what that means for our embassy work programme in the period ahead. The challenges are considerable but so are the resources of goodwill and collaboration that characterise relations across the Irish Sea.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to hearing your contributions and I hope, through you Chair, that we can now reconnect with Paul.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you very much Adrian for your reports and comments this morning. I do hope we can go back to Ambassador Johnston now so he can conclude his remarks. Has Paul been able to rejoin us?

**H.E. Paul Johnston:**

I am back. I hope you can hear me now Co-Chair.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**



We can hear you. Ambassador O'Neill took over and made his remarks. It is now back to you. Please continue.

*12 noon*

**H.E. Paul Johnston:**

Thank you very much Andrew. My apologies. I like to think that this has at least illustrated, as Adrian and I have been trying to do in our talks, some of the challenges of operating in this changed environment.

I think I was saying that the year of 2020 had been a dramatic and historic one in the context of the UK-Ireland relationship with the restoration of power sharing in Northern Ireland, Britain's departure from the European Union and, of course, the election of a historic coalition Government in Ireland. That was even before the pandemic swept across our countries.

I first met Adrian in his lovely residence in January 2020. The next time we were to meet up was in July of last year in a brief hiatus between lockdowns. It was the first time I had been more than 2 miles away from my home in the intervening three months because Covid changed the way we all lived and worked. It impacted on my preparations for taking up my job in Dublin because I spent three months working on the crisis in the foreign office in London, although, I am here today, working from my spare bedroom.

The crisis did not change the ongoing work the two Governments were doing in regard to the future. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach met at Hillsborough in August and talked about the need to reframe, reboot and reset the relationship for the post-Brexit era, as the Taoiseach talked about in his excellent contribution this morning. We in the embassy, as well as trying to adjust to living with Covid in the sense of diplomatic activity, have also been adjusting our own priorities and preparations for this new phase. Once I finish this discussion with you this morning, I am going on to a meeting this afternoon with a range of people from about a dozen Whitehall departments to talk about the embassy's priorities for the next few years. They cover, as you would expect, the same breadth of issue and interest that Adrian covered in his talk. We have some big work to do on the prosperity agenda, to take forward the new UK-Ireland trading relationship on the basis of the trade and co-operation agreement that was struck with the European Union. We do this in the context of this major economic crisis that both countries are working their way through. The theme, building back better, and building new resilience and connectivity into our societies and relationships, will be a big feature of the work we are doing together.

There are some exciting new opportunities. For example, tomorrow I will speak at a seminar that we have organised on offshore wind. When the foreign Minister had an excellent conversation with our foreign secretary last week, mainly on the UN Security Council agenda, he also touched on the tremendous opportunity to build the offshore wind sector off the west of Ireland and the role that British technology and expertise can play in that.

There is a big prosperity agenda and a big security agenda. As British parliamentarians will know, we will be bringing forward our integrated review of diplomacy, defence, development and security in the next few weeks. We look forward very much to working with Irish colleagues on some of those

new security threats and many of the existing ones. We are doing tremendous work together in fighting organised crime, extremism, online harm, fraud, the cyber challenge and there is scope to do a lot more together. One of the ways our embassy has expanded in recent years has been through bringing in colleagues from across Government, from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to the National Crime Agency in order to boost that sort of multi-stranded co-operation with Ireland on the breadths of the security challenges.

Our shared interest in Northern Ireland, including as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement, means that we have a big interest in working together. There are extensive contacts between the Governments, both North-South and east-west. That is fantastically important.

In terms of the wider agenda, we have lessons to learn from the recent pandemic crisis and from previous economic and other crises to see how we can build back better this time. I know from the contacts I have had with Irish Ministers and officials of the interest there is in working together and learning from each other as we fashion new policies on everything from education to energy, transport to trade, to build our co-operation and to build better futures for all our people. Talking about all our people, there are about 100,000 British nationals living in Ireland and probably four times as many Irish nationals living in the UK. The Common Travel Area, as Adrian mentioned and the Taoiseach mentioned, gives them tremendous opportunities. A big part of our agenda is the provision of consular assistance and wider supports to the British national community in Ireland.

We have a particular intersection with Ireland this year and next year being an elected member of the UN Security Council. That was a large part of the discussion that Dominic Raab and Simon Coveney had a couple of weeks ago, looking at the areas where we can co-operate, including in the work we are doing to try to bring Iran back into compliance with the nuclear agreement and to bring America back into the nuclear agreement. The return of an America Administration strongly committed to the UN and to multilateralism is a great boost for all our efforts.

Last year, the turn of the year was defined by sets of numbers in terms of C19, and in the British Government system, D20, which was the name we gave to the preparations for the end of the transition period at the end of December 2020. This year, we have COP26, Britain's chairmanship of the crucial UN climate conference in Glasgow in November. Tomorrow, the Prime Minister will chair a meeting of the UN Security Council looking at climate and security, which is the agenda Britain began back in 2007. The Taoiseach is taking part in that debate, just as Minister Coveney took part in the debate we had on the international dimension of Covid and access to vaccination for conflict countries and for other vulnerable countries, which the foreign secretary chaired in New York, virtually, last week.

COP26 is a huge diplomatic priority for us across the whole of Government, perhaps the most important conference the UK will chair and, perhaps, the most important conference that will take place this year or even this decade given the enormous issues at stake in addressing and seeking to reverse uncontrollable climate change.

We are also chairing the G7 this year. The Prime Minister had a virtual G7 Leaders call last Friday. We are using that presidency both to encourage the promotion of open societies, but particularly to work on issues like the recovery from the economic crisis occasioned by the pandemic, ensuring global equitable access to vaccinations. We put £500 million plus into the UN COVAX facility. The Irish Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe, TD, in his capacity as chairman of the Eurogroup is working closely with us on that G7 agenda.

For those of you who are interested, I have an article appearing in *The Business Post* today setting out some of our priorities for our presidency of the UN Security Council in the course of this month, which includes conflict prevention as well as climate change and the Covid vaccines agenda.

In that sense, there is a tremendous amount going on. As Adrian talked about in the case of the Irish embassy in London, the Covid pandemic has changed the context in which we are operating here. I have spent a lot of my time over the past five months since I arrived here sitting in front of this small screen talking to a mixture of Irish interlocutors. I have been fortunate enough to have met most of the Irish Cabinet by now. I almost met with the Taoiseach. I was due to meet him one Friday before Christmas and I got as far as Government Buildings, up to the top floor and into his waiting room when one of his officials came out and told me that because it had just been announced that President Macron has tested positive and was self-isolating the Taoiseach thought he should also restrict his movements and meetings so I did not get the chance to meet him. I look forward to doing so. I have met the Tánaiste and the leader of the Green Party and many other Irish Ministers, secretaries general, senior officials and TDs and Senators, including some of those here with us today. I look forward to doing more, both virtually and in person as the weeks and months unfold. I look forward very much to getting out and about to see more of Dublin than the 5 km around the residence, which has been the limit of my ambitions for almost all of the time I have been here.

We have been very active as an embassy, with a range of programmes. I mentioned the conference we are holding on offshore wind. We have some big trade and economic priorities, including construction, pharma, IT, the range of services and, obviously, the big offshore wind priority both for commercial reasons and, in many ways, primarily for climate reasons.

We have an agenda started by my predecessor, Robin Barnett, who I know was a great supporter of the Assembly as well, called "Joining the Dots", which is about trying to spread the relationship in both countries outside of just the hubs of London and Dublin. To complement what Adrian and the Taoiseach said about opening a consulate in the northwest of England, later this year we hope to host not just a trade mission but a relationship mission from the greater Liverpool and greater Manchester areas. We hope to be taking that not only to Dublin but also to elsewhere in Ireland to build connections between the two countries. We are also keen to do more in the areas of science, academia and research. We are proud and happy to host the offices of the Scottish and Welsh Governments on the British embassy platform.

There is also an important retrospective aspect to all this. Ambassador O'Neill mentioned the sensitive points that will come up in the next year or so, during the decade of centenaries, starting with the Great War and continuing through to the end of the Irish Civil War. We will be working with colleagues across Government on ways to mark those occasions.

I want to end on a note that looks to the future, with apologies again for the not particularly future-looking aspects of the technology. There is a wide agenda of things that we can do together. We are not always going to agree on everything but we can have honest and open discussions. Each of us has a great deal to learn from the other and there is a tremendous amount that we can do together. We have big shared responsibilities and interests. It is a great pleasure and privilege to be doing this job, even in rather constrained circumstances at the moment.

To end where I began before the interruption, I will express how much I enjoy working with Ambassador O'Neill and the team in London and how much I look forward to working with Mr. Rosindell, Deputy Brendan Smith and all the Members of the Assembly to take forward this important dialogue and the work we are doing together. I look forward to responding to questions and comments from Members. Thank you very much.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you very much, Ambassadors Johnston and O'Neill. I extend a particular welcome to Ambassador Johnston. Members of BIPA are a friendly bunch. We work together closely, build and strengthen our friendships and relationships and it is great to have Ambassador Johnston as part of our plan, if you like. We look forward to working with you in the years to come.

We now have a great opportunity to put questions to both ambassadors. A few people have already asked to speak. I will begin by calling Lord Empey.

**The Lord Empey:**

Good morning, Co-Chairs, and Your Excellencies. I will refer to an issue that has already been referred to by the Taoiseach and in the addresses from both ambassadors. We were told that before the EU referendum and Brexit, 43 meetings occurred a week. That illustrated the very substantial interconnection between representatives of both Governments. Everybody, including the Chair of Committee A, Senator Currie, has mentioned that we will look at this issue. The practical question is how to ensure that there is actual, meaningful engagement. This Assembly has discussed the matter before. I wonder do the ambassadors have a vision of what it might look like in practice. We can undertake and promise to do it, but what practical mechanisms for engagement will achieve that aim? What role can this Assembly play in substituting for some of the lost engagement as a result of the departure of the UK from the European Union?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Would Ambassador O'Neill like to go first on that question?

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

As Ambassador Johnston mentioned, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister had a good discussion on this matter the one and only time they had an opportunity to meet face to face in August 2020, when they met in Northern Ireland. I think both are at one in accepting the need to develop an alternative framework on a British-Irish basis that provides for connection now that we, and especially Ministers, are not meeting routinely in Brussels and elsewhere.

*12.15 p.m.*

A lot of reflection and discussion is going on within our respective systems in London and Dublin about what that interaction might look like, process-wise. I expect that when the Taoiseach and Prime Minister next have an opportunity to have a full meeting in person, hopefully sooner rather than later, they will have before them some specific proposals around what the interaction might look like. It is not for me to pre-empt that, or ultimately to say what will commend itself to the Taoiseach and Prime Minister at a political level. However, I can point out that there are certain precedents for intergovernmental structures that already exist, for example, between the UK and France, the UK and Germany, the UK and Poland. Those relationships involve very regular, day-long summit meetings between Prime Ministers and involve the attendance of other key Ministers. Between such meetings, there is ongoing intergovernmental contact either at ministerial or senior official levels. That is a precedent that is at our disposal.

The existing machinery of the Good Friday Agreement is also at our disposal and it already provides for intergovernmental machinery on an east-west basis both in terms of the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. We should, clearly, make sure we are using that machinery to the full.

There is also a structure in existence which goes back to its establishment in 2012 by former Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, and then Prime Minister David Cameron, that is, a meeting every year of the permanent Under-Secretaries and Secretaries General in our systems. That has fallen into abeyance a little over the past couple of years and its reactivation will certainly be a part of the plan.

A number of ideas and concepts are in gestation and I suspect that the Taoiseach and Prime Minister will be considering some combination of those, sooner rather than later.

I have been focusing on intergovernmental matters because that is what I am closest to but, as the Taoiseach said in his comments, the interparliamentary aspect is also of crucial significance. BIPA does very fine work but the reality of the limitations on its size means that it only affords an opportunity to a relatively small number of Members, particularly of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, to be involved in interparliamentary links with the Oireachtas in Ireland. Perhaps we should be thinking more creatively about how to forge other interparliamentary links, alongside BIPA. Links between specific Committees, for example the respective foreign affairs Committees in the Oireachtas and Westminster, should be encouraged. Those Committee members could be encouraged to meet on a pretty regular basis. We should find other ways of supplementing the fantastic work that BIPA does. Thank you, Chair.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

There were some great ideas there from Adrian, thank you very much. Does Ambassador Johnston want to comment on any of that?

**H.E. Paul Johnston:** I agree with everything that Adrian said. In a previous job, I was one of our ambassadors to the European Union and we would see British Ministers coming to Brussels every month and using those opportunities for regular contacts with their Irish counterparts. Officials did the same. One of the themes that I have noted in my conversations with Ministers here is that they want to keep those contacts going in the new circumstances in which we find ourselves.

As I was listening to Lord Empey's question, I was noting some of the ministerial contacts we have had in the past few weeks. The Prime Minister has spoken to the Taoiseach. The finance Ministers have spoken. The health Secretary has spoken to his Irish counterpart, as have the transport Secretary and the foreign Secretary. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has spoken to Members of the Irish Government. The Northern Ireland Secretary has been contacted on a regular basis. The Home Secretary has spoken to the Minister for Justice. There has been a lot of direct contacts, many of them on short-term issues, but what Adrian says is right, we need to reflect on what are the best structures for ensuring ongoing dialogue and co-operation, not just reactively but in a way that looks at forward-looking themes together.

The same applies to Parliament. It is quite exciting to listen to some of the themes being proposed by the Chairs of the sectoral Committees in BIPA because, as I said at the start of my remarks, those dimensions of parliamentary exchange, challenge and consultation are important to the two Governments. I thank Lord Empey for the question and we will certainly be reflecting hard on those matters in the weeks ahead.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We have a number of Members wishing to ask questions. I intend to take three questions at a time and then allow each ambassador to come back on the questions posed. I will now call Brendan Howlin, Delyth Jewell and Karin Smyth.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

Thank you indeed, Co-Chair, and I thank both ambassadors for mapping out the extraordinary breadth of our interconnectivity.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

If you could umute, please, Brendan.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

I have no control over that, I am afraid. Are we unmuted?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We will come back to you Brendan, do not worry. Ms Delyth Jewell, please.

**Ms Delyth Jewell MS:**

Thank you to both ambassadors. I will pick up on what has been said about climate change and climate emergency. We have seen many radical changes in the past year, including the fact that we are meeting like this. What do the ambassadors think different Governments can do to use the window of opportunity to be radical and to do things to address the climate emergency in ways that perhaps may not have been thought possible before the pandemic?

Do the ambassadors think that the window of opportunity to be radical is something that Governments will be able to take advantage of or do they worry that we might miss some chances because of a fear of being too radical?

**Ms Karin Smyth MP:**

Thank you, Chair. I welcome all the new Members of BIPA. I am sorry that we cannot meet in person.

I agree with what Lord Empey has said. It is really important that we have all those groups. I have said that between the protocol, the Good Friday Agreement and the existing structures, we are not short of Committees to attend but we may be short of understanding where and how things are best decided and how those groups interact with each other. Ambassador O'Neill talked about meetings between officials as a valuable addition to some of those meetings and an opportunity for greater links and to forge relationships below parliamentary level, as well as at parliamentary level.

I really want to pick up on the common travel area. It was great to have the Taoiseach speak to us and deliver an excellent speech about our historic ties and the threads that bind us. One of those threads, of course, is the common travel area. We have seen all our borders shrink as a result of the pandemic and I wonder if either ambassador could address whether there are things that we, in BIPA, could or should be doing, not only through the Committees, to enhance the common travel area? It is critical to preserve those historic family and commercial threads and ties in a very changed world and to make sure that we do not lose any aspect of the common travel area. Thank you, Co-Chair.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We will go back to Brendan Howlin. Have you got your sound back?

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

I am not sure; can you hear me? The screen above me says that I am muted.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

It does not look like we have Brendan.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

I am afraid not.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Perhaps someone can try to help Brendan with his sound problem. Let us have the answers to those two questions from our ambassadors. Would Ambassador Johnston like to go first?

**H.E. Paul Johnston:**

On the question about the climate emergency, it is clearly one of the most important issues that both Governments have to address and I think it is an agenda on which we have a lot in common. I talked to Green Party leader and Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, and Transport, Deputy Eamon Ryan soon after I arrived here. The two foreign Ministers talked about the important role that can be played in the United Nations. That applies to the Security Council, where we have been taking forward the climate security agenda, but there is also the crucial 26th UN Climate Change Conference, COP26. One of the themes that Ireland promoted in its campaign for membership of the UN Security Council was looking at a broader range of issues than just security issues. The Irish campaigners talked about accountability and other issues such as conflict prevention. Tackling climate change is intimately linked to stability and conflict prevention. There is a very broad agenda that we can work on together and we certainly see Ireland as a key partner. Irish representatives were invited to the Prime Minister's climate ambition summit just before Christmas in recognition of the important commitments that the coalition Government in Ireland has made to domestic decarbonisation and to the international effort to tackle climate change. That will be a big part of our collaboration in the run-up to COP26 in November but also beyond that.

We are looking to get at issues such as climate finance and adaptation, how we can help give money to developing countries to help them deal with the complex adjustments in trying to decarbonise their economies. There is no fear of being too radical for us. The scale of the challenge demonstrates that we need big thinking and ideas. We need to involve a broad range of stakeholders, including industry, academia and science on that agenda.

Karin Smyth MP made a comment about the common travel area. I think both Governments acknowledge how fundamental it is to the relationship between the two countries and islands. As the Taoiseach mentioned, we adopted a memorandum of understanding in the midst of the Brexit negotiations to underpin the common travel area relationship. As a result of the changes that are being forced upon us by the pandemic, we may see less international travel because for environmental or other reasons, people will realise that they can do a great deal more business virtually. I have a number of colleagues who, although they are working in the embassy in Dublin, are physically in the UK at the moment for various reasons. Through the virtual medium, they are fully-fledged and fully-active members of the embassy. I think the nature of travel across the islands will evolve in the years to come but the common travel area will be a crucial practical and political underpinning to the unique nature of the relationship. I do not have any instant answers as to what BIPA can do to help it develop but a shared commitment to preserving and making the most of its advantages is essential, going forward.

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

I do not have a lot to add to what Paul has said. On the issue of climate change and being radical and so forth, I mentioned earlier that a lot of consideration is going into what the structures of a reinvigorated bilateral relationship would look like. There is, equally, a lot of thought going on about the policy content of that relationship and what should be the priority areas on which both Governments should collaborate to yield mutual benefit. There is a general feeling that rather than spreading ourselves too thinly, we should adopt a targeted, strategic approach to areas that offer genuine opportunities for collaboration and can yield benefit. In that regard, I have no doubt that climate considerations will figure largely. When the Taoiseach and Prime Minister have spoken about these issues in person and on the phone, they keep coming back to climate and connectivity as the two areas in which they see great scope for co-operation.

*12.30 p.m.*

I think we will see substantial proposals in that regard.

Karin Smyth MP asked about the common travel area. During Brexit, we discovered the common travel area, in a sense. We did not really know it was there until Brexit and when Brexit arose and we had to define the common travel area, we found that it was much more multifaceted and complex than many of us thought because, of course, it is not only about travel and the right to travel between Britain and Ireland for our respective citizens, but it also applies to their access to public services, including education, social security services and health services. It is about their right to work in our respective labour markets. We found that as a result of having to safeguard the common travel area, we had, for the first time, to codify some of those things and fully understand what they meant. We have had a memorandum of understanding on social security and another such memorandum is being developed around access to education. If BIPA wishes to, I would certainly welcome it taking a greater interest in these matters and perhaps reviewing some of the detail around these arrangements. The common travel area is a key enabler of co-operation and good relations between our two countries. Thanks, Chair.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

I thank the ambassadors. We have several more questions now. I am going to call Lord Dubs, followed by Senator Victor Boyhan and Stephen Doughty MP.

**The Lord Dubs:**

Thank you, Co-Chair. I have two quick comments and one question. I am sure that Members of Committee D will have heard the discussion that has just taken place about energy and climate change. I dare say it will influence us in deciding where we go next after we have done the present investigation into indigenous minority languages.

My other comment is to Aidan. If any politicians from Dublin think that the Irish embassy in London is too costly, I assure them that is not the case. Ireland gets fantastic benefit from the embassy in London. We certainly get the benefit of political and cultural events. Please make sure that you are generous to the Irish embassy in London because it is doing an excellent job for Ireland.

May I ask a more difficult question to Paul, please? What is the ambassador saying to the Irish Government about the failure at the moment to have any inquiry into the murder of Patrick Finucane?

**Senator Victor Boyhan:**



I have two brief comments but I will first thank Ambassadors O'Neill and Johnston for their presentations. The common thread running through the presentations is co-operation. Ambassador O'Neill made the profound statement that we are neighbours and trading partners. Let us never forget that. We are also friends. That is the reality of the matter and we have to be pragmatic.

I think there are three areas on which we need to focus in the very short term. The first is agri-food in the context of the all-island approach that we have here and as it applies to the trade we do between the islands. The second is health, which is clearly very demanding with Covid-19. The third is economic matters, which are always important.

The one question I would like to pose relates to something that has become very obvious, that is, our strong relationships with the Scottish people, its Parliament and parliamentarians. That also applies to the Welsh Parliament and parliamentarians and, of course, to Northern Ireland. We have close working relationships with representatives in Northern Ireland at all times. There are great possibilities and opportunities there and it is something we must never forget.

I would like to hear from both ambassadors about the bilateral discussions that are going on now with the Welsh and Scottish Parliaments. The ambassadors might share with us some of the work that Ambassador O'Neill referenced in his presentation to us today. Thank you.

**Mr Stephen Doughty MP:**

Thanks, Chair. I am Stephen Doughty, MP for Cardiff South and Penarth. I am delighted to be Vice Chair, under Brendan Howlin, on the economic Committee. I wanted to ask more about the common travel area and the Covid-19 situation more generally. Vaccination programmes are being rolled out and different lockdown measures may start to be released. There was a statement today from the UK Prime Minister and there was a statement from the Welsh First Minister on Friday. Will the ambassadors say a little about what conversations are going on regarding travel, vaccinations and whether there will be quarantines or not? I appreciate that the situation is different for those who are travelling between Northern Ireland and the Republic. We need to ensure that the many Irish in Great Britain, for example, are able to see family members in the most easy and accessible way as we move into the situation where there is more vaccination and, hopefully, reduced case rates and risk.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

If the ambassadors would like to reply to those questions, we will then move on to the next set of questions.

**H.E. Adrian O'Neill:**

I thank Lord Dubs for his kind remarks about embassy hospitality. Public diplomacy and the ability to host events and welcome people to the embassy are key aspects of the relationship and friendship that we are trying to underscore. One of the things that I have certainly missed over the past year is the fact that we have not been able to host such events and I look forward to being able to do so openly as soon as that is permissible.

Senator Boyhan asked about Scotland and Wales. One issue of which we are very conscious is that the UK-Ireland relationship is not a relationship exclusively between London and Dublin. We are engaging with the modern UK which is characterised by devolution. There is increased devolution within England, including metropolitan mayors and so on with increased powers. Our patterns of representation and engagement need to take account of that. That is why we have discrete bilateral relations with Scotland and Wales. We are also further engaging with the north of England through

the establishment of our consulate there. That is all about recognising a multipolar UK and we need to be engaging with all aspects of it.

A joint bilateral review by Scotland and Ireland was recently published and sets out an agenda of work and programme of co-operation focused on areas that are within the competence of the Scottish Government and we are involved in a similar exercise in Wales at the moment. I hope that we will be able to launch a similar document within the next few weeks, setting out our shared and joint ambitions for co-operation between Wales and the Irish Government.

Mr. Doughty MP asked about travel and related public health arrangements between Ireland and Britain. There is a lot of contact and co-operation between our administrations on these issues. They are not easy because we are dealing with different jurisdictions with different political pressures so the public health profile and pinch points in public health may not always align. It is not always possible, in those circumstances, for us to fully align our arrangements. We seek to do so where it is possible and, where it is not, the Governments should at least try to understand our different difficulties and challenges, and mitigate them to the greatest possible extent.

Paul and I participate in ongoing calls with officials from London, Dublin and Belfast, looking at these issues on a very regular basis and trying to make sure that the people who are considering the key options in our respective capitals at least fully understand the situation in the neighbouring jurisdictions.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you to both ambassadors. We have three more questions. I am going to return to Deputy Brendan Howlin, first of all, who I hope has got his sound back.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Brendan is there. We are then going to have Deputy Neale Richmond.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

I hope the Co-Chair can hear me now. It is a case of third time lucky. I am in the Dáil Chamber so I have no personal control over sound or vision.

I thank both ambassadors for a comprehensive overview of our very elaborate interconnectivity on these islands. I would like to pose a question to Ambassador Johnston. We have heard from Ambassador O'Neill about the elaborate outreach programmes and so on to the Irish diaspora across Britain. There is a growing number of UK citizens resident in Ireland, many of whom are in my own constituency and some of whom have no familial ties to Ireland. I am wondering, in the context of the commemoration events, some of which may require some finessing in the coming year or two, is there an outreach programme to the UK citizens living in Ireland so that they can fully participate and be in no way discommoded or excluded from some of the issues that we are going to face in the coming years?

My second question has already been touched on and relates to the important issue of climate change. That is an area on which we can have very strong co-operation. The issue of offshore wind is certainly one such issue. I was a little jarred when I heard Ambassador Johnston talk about the

west coast because, of course, the first focus will be on the east coast and shallower water. There is extensive potential for co-operation between our jurisdictions in the coming years in that area.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We are running out of time so I propose that we take all the final questions from other colleagues who have asked to speak and let both ambassadors do a final round-up. We are now going to go to Deputy Richmond, who will be followed by John Scott, MSP, Willie Coffey, MSP and Pauline McNeill, MSP. I ask everybody to keep their contributions fairly short. Thank you.

**Mr Neale Richmond TD:**

Chair, in the interests of time, the vast majority of my questions have already been answered so I am happy to cede the floor. Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

You can put a question if you like, Neale, there is no problem. Okay, that is fair enough. We will go to John Scott.

**Mr. John Scott MSP:**

I also thank the ambassadors for their presentations. I know there is a lot of work going on in this area. Do the ambassadors see a role for BIPA in helping to resolve the current and growing trading difficulties between Northern Ireland and Scotland?

**Mr. Willie Coffey MSP:**

I am the SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament for Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley. Good afternoon.

The Taoiseach mentioned the new relationship between Scotland and Ireland. One of the priorities of that relationship is to develop a new trade task force. Ambassador O'Neill said that Ireland's trade diversified dramatically since the 1970s and it now has much more of an international outlook.

*12.45 p.m.*

Ambassador Johnston talked about the wide range of new project possibilities and mentioned offshore wind. Do the ambassadors see further opportunities for Scotland to diversify and develop its trading potential, even in this post-Brexit climate, which is clearly presenting a number of challenges, to say the least. I would be obliged to receive a comment from both ambassadors, if possible.

**Ms Pauline McNeill MSP:**

We are getting a round of questions from the Scots. It is great to see everyone and thanks for the presentations so far and to those who have put this together.

I would like to ask the ambassadors how we can build back better. There is a lot of discussion in Scotland about how we can build back better after the crisis of the pandemic. Do the ambassadors think any particular areas should be prioritised in that respect? We are seeing rising energy prices in Scotland and the UK. The housing rental sector is a real issue in Scotland.

There has also been a lot of discussion, as always, about a low-carbon economy. This is a critical question. How can we work together to ensure that we do not leave ordinary people behind? Electric vehicles are always a good example that I use in this context. Many wealthy people are already buying electric vehicles but, because they are expensive, a lot of middle income and poorer

people will not have that choice. There needs to be more discussion about what they call a just transition. There needs to be more done to address how we can avoid leaving ordinary people behind in this debate. That is a central question for all nations here.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We will go to Ambassador Johnston and then to Ambassador O'Neill.

**H.E. Paul Johnston:**

Thank you very much. I did not have the opportunity to come in on the previous round of questions but I agree with everything that Ambassador O'Neill said in response to the questions of Senator Boyhan and Mr. Doughty. I would not want the question from Lord Dubs about the Finucane case to go unanswered. The answer is a relatively easy one. What I discuss with Irish colleagues on the Finucane case is exactly what the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said in his statement to the House on 30 November. We are committed to meeting our international obligations in respect of the case. If that means that there is an ongoing requirement for further work, we will do that. A review by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is going on now. We have not excluded the possibility of doing a public inquiry. It is not on the table at this stage but it has also not been excluded. The overriding consideration is that we will meet our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Deputy Howlin asked an interesting question about UK nationals living in Ireland and how we can reach out to them. We have done a great deal of outreach to them, as one would expect, during the period running up to the end of our EU membership and then the end of the transition period to inform them about some of the changes that were coming to which they would need to adjust. There were fewer changes than there would have been otherwise because of the common travel area but there were, nevertheless, some important changes of which people needed to be aware. The question about how we can associate those communities with some of the commemorations that will be going on over the next year or so is something I will take away and upon which I will reflect. Those people are involved with the commemorations we have every year for Remembrance Day and things like that but there are other dimensions about which we need to think.

I apologise for privileging the west coast over the east coast when I was talking about offshore wind. As someone from the east coast of Scotland, that was remiss of me and I would like to correct myself there.

John Scott asked about the situation in Northern Ireland. As one might imagine, it is one of the highest priorities for both Governments and a lot of consultation goes on the whole time. We both have a big shared interest in the east-west and North-South dimensions of the Good Friday Agreement, and the need to find workable solutions to some of the issues that have arisen on the operation of the Northern Ireland protocol, as Michael Gove and the Vice President of the European Commission stated in their most recent statement. There will be further work going on between the UK and the Commission on that in the course of the next few days.

Mr. Coffey asked about trade potential. One of the exciting things about this moment is that we will be seeing both countries emerge from the pandemic over the next few months with the vaccine programmes and all the rest of it and perhaps we will be seeing a new economic landscape. There will be some sectors that have suffered very heavily in the past year. There will be other opportunities that the experience of the past year will create. This also comes back to the question asked by Pauline McNeill about tackling inequality. One of the features of both countries has been a lot of concentration of wealth and activity in a relatively small number of cities. If the past year has

shown us anything – my IT problems notwithstanding – it is that, at least in certain occupations, quite a lot can be done virtually. The whole idea of commuting, urban-rural balance and those sorts of issues will come up and will lead to important economic opportunities in terms of the trading relationship between Ireland and Scotland, as well as policy learning from each other. We in the embassy want to look at the new economic landscape and see where our own priorities for activity need to develop. That will also be the case for the Scottish Government and its representatives.

**H.E. Adrian O’Neill:**

John Scott asked about the role for BIPA in solving current trading difficulties. Paul mentioned two important words in speaking about “workable solutions” and we should be focused on those. The UK Government and the EU should work together to find workable solutions to these problems and use the processes that are there, under the protocol, including the specialised Committee on Northern Ireland and the joint Committee. It is through those we can find workable solutions. If there is one specific thing that BIPA could do, it would be to support that work and try to keep the temperature of these issues down. It is easy for these issues to become quickly politicised and emotive.

I was very encouraged by the meeting that Vice President Maroš Šefčovič had with Michael Gove in London on 11 February and the joint statement they issued afterwards, setting out their approach to how they would seek to address these issues. There were constructive meetings last week involving both Vice President Šefčovič and Michael Gove with representatives of business in Northern Ireland and civic society. We need to maintain that spirit of collaboration and working together, trust the processes that have been established in the protocol and focus on pragmatic, workable solutions. If BIPA can encourage that kind of atmosphere and approach, it would be very helpful.

To respond to the question that Willie Coffey asked, I know that in autumn 2019, our then Minister for trade led a trade mission to Scotland. It was the largest ever trade mission to Scotland and reflected considerable interest in the Scottish market. Assembly Members will have an opportunity this afternoon to address those issues further with Julie Sinnamon.

I mentioned that Ireland’s trade has diversified significantly from when we joined the European Union in 1973. At that time, something like 70% of all our exports went to the UK. That figure is now of the order of 15%. That does not underestimate the significance of the UK market. It is still a significant market and more than 30% of all our agricultural exports still goes to Britain. As I said, Britain is a particularly important market for our small and medium-sized enterprises that are finding their feet in export markets. I would not for a moment minimise the significance of the UK market for Ireland. Notwithstanding the transitional issues related to the outworking of Brexit that we may be experiencing, the UK will remain a very important market for Ireland in the years ahead.

I think that Paul has responded well to the question asked by Pauline McNeill. I have nothing further to add in that respect.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

On behalf of the Members of the Assembly, I thank both ambassadors for their comments today. They have given a comprehensive round-up of some of the current issues and answered many of our questions. It is great to have two ambassadors who are committed to the work of BIPA and I hope we will see both Adrian and Paul regularly at our meetings in the future. I thank them both for their time today and hope they will stay with us for the session this afternoon. Thanks to you both.

That ends the session with the ambassadors. I would now like to hand over to my Co-Chair, Deputy Brendan Smith, to formally close the morning session.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

I also want to thank sincerely both ambassadors for the generous offer of the services of both embassies for the work of this Assembly and to support the work of its Members. That is an offer that will be taken up and it is great to have that support available to us.

I now suspend the Assembly session until 2 p.m. Please do not exit or leave the Microsoft Teams meeting during this break. Assembly Members can keep their microphones muted and switch off their cameras for privacy. I emphasise that they should not exit or leave the Teams meeting. We will resume at 2 p.m. Thank you all, colleagues.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.56 p.m.*

*The sitting resumed at 2.06 p.m.*

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD AND THE AMERICAS in the  
FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Colleagues, we are returning to session. I understand the Minister is with us.

**Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Ms Wendy Morton MP):**

I am indeed.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much. I would like to invite the Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Ms Wendy Morton MP to make her address to the Assembly. You are very welcome, Minister.

**Ms Wendy Morton MP:**

Thank you. It is an absolute pleasure to be here with you today at the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I am Wendy Morton MP, Minister for the European Neighbourhood and the Americas in the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. It is an absolute honour to be the Minister with responsibility for Ireland too.

I would like to start by thanking the Co-Chairs, Brendan Smith TD and Andrew Rosindell MP. For their sterling work in promoting co-operation between British and Irish parliamentary representatives and between delegates of the representative Assemblies of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. I also congratulate the new Members of delegations on their appointments and I welcome back returning delegates too. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the team who organised today's event, particularly our virtual hosts in the Oireachtas.

Ireland and the UK have a close and special relationship forged through history, family, society, trade, culture and sport. BIPA makes an invaluable contribution to that relationship by developing close and productive bonds between Irish and British parliamentarians. Through its specialised committees and plenary sessions, BIPA has helped parliamentarians from all our nations think through specific policy challenges and how to bolster productive co-operation.

The UK and Ireland have a shared commitment to the uniquely close relationship between our Governments and people, which underpins peace, prosperity and security across the UK and the island of Ireland. Ireland is the UK's sixth largest trading partner and both economies are deeply intertwined. Having successfully concluded the trade co-operation agreement with the EU before Christmas we can now focus on the future of our shared interests. This, of course, includes the Ireland-Northern Ireland protocol, which guarantees that there will be no hard border on the island of Ireland and that there will be as little impact as possible on the everyday life of communities in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

I welcome Ireland's measured response to the EU's triggering of Article 16. As you are aware, this sparked great concern across all parties and in northern Irish civil society. I look forward to working with the EU to resolve the outstanding issues with the protocol, described in the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's letter to Vice-President Šefčovič. Throughout this process, we remain fully committed to the Belfast Good Friday Agreement and protecting the gains of the peace process. It is always pleasing to see the multiple high-level visits between our countries, from Ministers, the President to Members of the Royal Family, which strengthen the people-to-people relationships, the cornerstones of the friendship between the UK and Ireland. Although we have not been able to hold any visits in either direction recently, we look forward to welcoming you in person to the UK again soon.

Ireland is a strong presence on the international stage and we welcome its return to the UN Security Council after 20 years. Ireland has close relations with a broad group of countries so the impact of its membership will be widely felt. We are looking forward to working together on shared priorities, building peace, strengthening conflict prevention and ensuring accountability for war crimes. The Foreign Secretary spoke to Simon Coveney last week about how we can work more closely on these shared priorities. We welcome Ireland's role as facilitator and Co-Chair on many issues of great importance to the UK, including the Iran nuclear deal and women, peace and security. Irish and UK officials in Dublin, London and New York are already working closely on these issues and on the global challenges of climate change and climate security, geopolitical threats and Covid-19. This year, the UK will host COP26 in Glasgow, a critical international opportunity to bring together nations to accelerate action towards the Paris Agreement goals and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The UK is committed to working with Ireland and all countries to join forces with civil society, businesses and people on the front-line of climate change to inspire action ahead of COP26. Climate change and climate security are two of the world's greatest contemporary challenges. We can see this with our own eyes, with smog, changing weather patterns and extreme weather conditions. The Taoiseach spoke about this global challenge at the Climate Action Summit and outlined Ireland's vision - doubling the proportion of development aid spent on climate finance by 2030, halving carbon emissions this decade and its ambition to reach net zero by 2050. We warmly welcome this ambition.

If COP26 is working to build a better future then we must also acknowledge the past. 2021 marks the centenary of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the creation of Northern Ireland and other significant dates in Irish history as part of the decade of centenaries commemorations. We approach these commemorations in a spirit of reconciliation, sensitivity, respect, inclusiveness and friendship, building on the past while looking towards the future.

Another global challenge, and the reason I am with you virtually rather than in person, is, of course, Covid-19. This is a global pandemic, something the world has not experienced for over a century. Every crisis shows the ingenuity and goodwill of people. International scientists, including Irish and

UK scientists, have helped develop vaccines in record time. Ireland has exceptional expertise in science and research. There has been excellent and frequent contact between Irish and UK Ministers, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, and senior officials. This will ensure that we share information and expertise on tackling the pandemic. Together we will fight the pandemic and we will build back better. The UK and Ireland relationship, which is a relationship with our closest neighbour and sixth largest trade partner and friend, is not solely built on working together on the global challenges of the day. Our relationship, friendship and closeness are built through our people from conversations in pubs in normal times to enjoying culture and sport together.

Looking ahead to Euro 2021, the England captain Harry Kane has an Irish father. I know the Irish ambassador is a Liverpool fan. Liverpool is a city with a huge Irish diaspora. In the city of Liverpool's great rivals a new Irish consulate will open in Manchester in the near future. This unique bond between the UK and Ireland, working together to shape a brighter future and building on our shared interests and expertise, is vitally important.

I welcome the commitment and support of BIPA and others in bringing our countries closer. We, in the UK Government, will continue to give every support to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Thank you all.

*2.15 p.m.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

On behalf of my Co-Chair, Andrew, and all colleagues in the Assembly, I thank you for your very interesting contribution. You spoke about the opportunities to deepen co-operation on a bilateral basis and the opportunities for our two countries to work together in international fora on mutual interests. I think your speech also referred to many of the issues that were covered by An Taoiseach earlier today and, respectively, by our ambassadors.

Minister, again a sincere thanks for your contribution this afternoon. We look forward as an Assembly to further engagement with you and your department in the years to come. Thank you very much Minister Morton.

**Ms Wendy Morton MP:**

Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

I think Dr. Eamon Phoenix is present.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Yes, thank you Brendan. My thanks to Minister, Wendy Morton, for her presentation this afternoon. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

**COMMEMORATIONS – A DECADE OF CENTENARIES**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We now move to our next session. I am pleased to welcome Dr. Eamon Phoenix, who together with Ann Donnelly of Northern Ireland Screen are here today to address the Assembly. Over the past decade, the people of the island of Ireland, North and South, have been, as we all know, marking that critical, formative period in our shared history, spanning the third Home Rule crisis, the Easter Rising, the Battle of the Somme and the Irish Revolution. This afternoon, Dr. Phoenix will recall a



landmark event in that decade, the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland 100 years ago this year. He will be assisted by Ann Donnelly from Northern Ireland Screen in drawing on historical news reel footage from that period.

I thank Eamon and Ann for their attendance today and I look forward to their presentation this afternoon. Dr. Phoenix, over to you.

**Dr. Eamon Phoenix:**

Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to address the Members of Westminster and the Oireachtas on this occasion. I am joined by Ann, who is going to screen old film footage from the period which, hopefully, will illuminate the events of the period.

We start with a rare picture of Belfast from a tram car in the Edwardian years. We are going back now to 1904. The new City Hall is being built in the centre of the city. This was, of course, Ireland's only industrial city, a city hardwired to the British Empire and sitting on a tripod of linen, ship building and engineering. Sixty thousand women in Belfast and the surrounding towns are engaged in the linen industry because linenopolis, as they called Belfast, is the linen capital of the world. It also has the biggest shipyard, the biggest engineering works, the biggest tobacco rolling works – it seems, the biggest everything. It has emerged from the detritus of the Great Famine, drawing people from the northern half of Ireland, mainly from the province of Ulster. This largely Presbyterian town at the beginning of the the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the fastest growing city in either the British Isles or Ireland. It grew from 20,000 people to 350,000 by 1901.

As shown on the screen, we have just passed the new City Hall which is being built behind hoardings and we are heading down Donegall Place-Royal Avenue. Belfast has a hint of prosperity on this, perhaps, spring or autumn day in 1904. The horse tram is about to give way to the new electric trams, which serve the suburbs of Ormeau Road and Antrim Road because Belfast has a growing middle class, not just the ship brokers and the linen barons but, of course, the middle classes. It is a largely Protestant city. The Catholic population had arrived largely recently from rural Ulster and the west of Ireland and they are about 25% of the city by this stage. Belfast has had a fractious history of sectarian division and rioting from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on against the background of that struggle between Home Rule-Irish independence and the Act of Union. If someone had stopped any of these individuals in 1904—05 and said, "Within ten or 15 years Ireland will be divided, you will have two separate jurisdictions, a Parliament for Northern Ireland, a virtually independent Irish Free State", they would have thought you were mad. They would have pointed to the police officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary, trained in Dublin, drawn from rural Ireland, 80% of them from a Catholic, nationalist background who were serving in Belfast, Ballymena and Lisburn and other towns. They would have pointed to the all-Ireland legal system, with the judges coming from Dublin being greeted by an RIC band and guard of honour as they made their way to the courthouse on Belfast Crumlin Road. They would have pointed to the fact that before 1914 nobody spoke about Fermanagh and Tyrone. Fermanagh and Monaghan was the assize area. Armagh and Louth was the assize area. In Derry, you had Londonderry, No. 2 council, which administered a large part, mainly Protestant part, of County Donegal. The idea of dividing Ireland, now governed from Dublin Castle, as it had been since the Middle Ages, would have seemed amazing to someone, whether unionist or nationalist, whether in Belfast or Dublin at this time.

We are moving forward now into a period of political tumult. Lloyd George's budget is rejected by the Tory dominated Lords in 1909, the Liberal Party is coming to the end of its mandate in government and Herbert Henry Asquith is the Prime Minister and Home Rule was somewhere down his agenda, inherited from Mr. Gladstone in the days of the Parnell-Gladstonian alliance. We are

about to see a picture of John Redmond and his northern deputy, Joseph Devlin MP, just around this time, 1910. The Nationalist Party enter the political high stakes around 1910 because by that stage the liberals have lost two general elections – the two elections of 1910 – for the kind of hung Parliament that we had just a few years ago with Theresa May - a young Parliament situation. You can see Joseph Devlin, I hope, because I cannot – this is a problem sometimes on Teams – and John Redmond at a railway station in America. John Redmond was a British imperialist, as well as being an Irish Home Rule politician. He talked from his election as chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party in 1900 of Home Rule with imperial strength. He was a barrister, but his most important career was as a clerk in the House of Commons. He saw the British Parliament as a kind of zenith of parliamentary democracy. He had a lot in common with his political antagonist, but friend from the Four Courts legal days, Edward Carson. Beside him is wee Joe Devlin, a small man. They were both brilliant orators in an age of great orators. Devlin represented the Catholics of Ulster. They were 45% of the population in the historic province. Devlin had galvanised them into a solid mass, voting for Home Rule. Home Rule to most Irish people it seems really spelled independence, although it was very much restricted powers of peace, order and good government, with Westminster holding the whip hand in finance, defence and the British Army still in Ireland.

It is worth remembering that when John Redmond or Joe Devlin spoke in any part of Ireland before the First World War they stood under two flags, the Union flag – the Union Jack as it was then known – and the Irish national flag, which was the green flag with the harp. As you will know, the Union Jack had not been arrogated to any particular political movement in Ireland by that stage and it represented what Home Rule moderate nationalism was really about. This crisis of 1909-1910 gave Redmond and his 80 or so nationalist MPs their opportunity. They could now bargain with Asquith and the liberals to put Home Rule back on the agenda, where it had not been from the early 1890s. So, Asquith agreed to table a third Home Rule Bill for all-Ireland in exchange for nationalist support for liberal reforming legislation. This is the age between the old age pensions, national insurance, education Acts, which benefit, of course, all parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland at that time. But, of course, it is the response of unionism, which had been increasingly militant from the 1880s, which becomes important here. Ann is now going to show you a meeting at Dulwich in London in 1910. It is a critical meeting because it reminds us of the bonds of a marriage which had been solemnised in the 1880s between the British Conservative Party, which renamed itself the Unionist Party down to the 1920s, and the Ulster Unionist Party. I am trusting Ann because, again, I cannot see the slide, which, as I said, is a problem sometimes with Teams. I will try my camera on and off – no luck.

As I say, you can see on the common at Dulwich two emerging political figures approaching the camera. Ann will freeze the screen as they get close to the camera. On the one hand, we see Sir Edward Carson, later Lord Carson of Duncairn and on the other we have James Craig, who rejoiced in the rank of Captain James Craig. Craig, of course, was to become the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, later Lord Craigavon, a man whose finger was very much on the Orange pulse in these kind of crisis years between 1910 and 1922 when Ireland is divided and political revolution is under way.

Let us look at Carson for a moment. He was an unlikely leader of Ulster unionism. He was a Dubliner and the son of a modestly successful architect born in 1854, reared in the centre of Dublin in Harcourt Street - his house now preserved. He went to a Church of Ireland school at Portarlinton in County Laois where he met his friends, the future vicars, doctors, lawyers from that 10% or 12% minority in the South, the Anglican minority, closely tied to the landed gentry. Carson emerges as a barrister in the 1870s, becoming MP for Trinity College Dublin. Carson's world view was inherited from his mother, Isabella Lambert. She was from the bad lands of the west of Ireland, from a big

house at Castle Ellen in County Galway. The house still stands. It was there Carson, as a boy and young man, spent his holidays, a retinue of servants. From Isabella Lambert he inherited his respect for the landed interest in Ireland, from whom he was partly sprung and his, if you like, support for the union between this island, Ireland and Great Britain and, of course, his upholding of the empire. It is as a liberal until 1886 Carson enters politics but he breaks with Gladstone over Home Rule. He may have had regrets later on. He talked about maybe he should have gone with a grand old man to dinner on his first day as a law lord in 1922, but he set his course in 1886. As an eminent barrister - the man who destroyed Oscar Wilde, for example, in the London courts, as the MP for his old university, Trinity College, as a former Solicitor General for England and Ireland, as the lawyer with a Dublin accent, Carson was hoping to use Ulster, with its Protestant majority, not huge at about 55% but dominant in northeast Ulster, and its industrial might, as a weapon. As he told Lady Londonderry, one of his political confidants, he wanted to use Ulster to kill Home Rule stone dead and maintain what he believed were the blessings of Britain and the Empire for all the people on this island, nationalist and unionist.

To show that he was slightly different from Craig, his Ulster unionist deputy in these early years of unionism, we have to bear in mind that Carson's first cousin invented the name Sinn Féin - there is a surprise for some people in the audience. From a big house background like himself, she joined the Gaelic league which was changing the atmosphere in Ireland in the generation before 1916 and leading to the rise of a much more ardent kind of nationalism. Mary Butler, who Gaelicised her name to Máire de Buitléir, was in a smoke-filled room in Dublin - where else to be in those days - with Arthur Griffith, who is known as the father of Sinn Féin. He wanted a name for his new, radical Nationalist Party, which would abstain from Westminster and she said: "We'll call ourselves something that means self-reliance, standing on your own feet; we'll call ourselves Sinn Féin." I know I do not have much time for jokes in this Assembly today, but I will crack one. Mary Butler said she was very fond of her cousin, Ned Carson. There was only one thing she could not stand about him - no you have not guessed it - his terrible Dublin accent. That is what she could not stand about him. Carson is a unique figure and he is a prophet from another land who is playing like a virtuoso on these mass audiences in Belfast and Coleraine in the years 1912-14.

Now let us look at James Craig, as they advance towards the platform. He is the son of a wealthy distiller. He earned his spurs in the Boer War as an officer in the Royal Irish Rifles. He has a flair for meticulous organisation. He will organise Ulster resistance, the covenant, and the Ulster Volunteers in the years to come. He is described by the historian, Johnathan Bardon - a historian of Ulster - as signally uncharismatic. He saw his own weakness. He was the organiser. Carson was the virtuoso display front-of-house man who would lead unionism and who was hardwired to the British establishment.

As we move into that group at Dulwich on that common in 1912 on the eve of great challenges and changes in Britain and Ireland, we can see Tory politician, Austin Chamberlain - a reminder that his father, Joseph, had broken with Gladstone over Home Rule, had become a conservative ultimately and that the Conservative Party saw Home Rule as the first chink in the armour of the British Empire.

*2.30 p.m.*

If Ireland got home Home Rule it would become independent and that domino effect would rob Britain of her empire in India, Canada, Africa and the rest. Home Rule becomes important to the men of the shires, a very important element in British politics right down to partition in 1921.

We move on to see what Craig and Carson actually conspire to produce by way of resistance to the third Home Rule Bill, introduced in the House of Commons in April 1912. We can see here the Ulster

Volunteers and shortly, I hope, the Larne gun running in 1914. [I am turning my camera to see if I can see it] What we can see is the importation of 35,000 German rifles and 3 million rounds of ammunition, for those interested in the detail, masterminded by the Ulster unionist fanatic, I suppose, opponent of Home Rule, Fred Crawford, who was a Belfast businessman who had hoped to kidnap Gladstone on an early occasion. They run these guns into Larne, considered to be a safer bet, which would have less checks, perhaps, than Belfast. The checks at Larne are now a matter of political dispute, as you probably know. These guns are brought into Larne and they are circulated around the Six Counties. Suddenly, the Ulster Volunteers, who had been drilling with broom handles in the shipyards in Orange Hall, become Carson's army, determined to prevent Home Rule becoming law in Ulster. At a meeting in Newry at this time, Carson tells his supporters, "Don't be frightened of illegalities, everything I ask you to do today will be illegal." In other words, join your local unit of the UVF, acquire a rifle and drill for the protection of the Constitution, which was a code word for defending the *status quo* of the Union Jack against Home Rule.

But, of course, nothing in Ireland happens in a vacuum. Carson's initiative at Larne cost him dearly. Carson was a lawyer and being a rebel created an inner tension which played on his long history of, as doctors have said, manic depression. From a boy he had been plagued by neurotic anxieties. The great speech followed by a dissent into the trough of despond, writing to Craig, "You must carry on, I am doomed", at crisis moments and then Craig eventually realising he would be okay, perhaps, if he keeps taking the tablets and Carson is back on the platform again. He gives unionism this importance. He faces down liberal cries that this is treacherous, that it is endangering the British Constitution. I will make two points on that. One is that David Dutton, an historian of British conservatism has argued that the support of the Conservative Party at this time for anti-Home Rule or broke in many ways strains the bonds of the British Constitution. He would say this was the breaking point, but certainly things are fractious at Westminster, where Home Rule is guaranteed to become law. The real tensions are outside of Parliament; they are extra-parliamentary.

The other thing is historian Michael Laffan 30 years ago made a very important point. In identifying himself with this illegal army which dominates the nine counties of Ulster from Antrim to Cavan, Carson reignites the Fenian flame of militant, violent nationalism. It was always there; it was, if you like, always in the background – the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood founded simultaneously in New York and Dublin 50 years before. But now, it is given a new breath of life. Eoin MacNeill, who was a cultural nationalist of the period wrote an article in a Gaelic league journal, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, praising Carson's army. It was the greatest step towards Irish independence since 1798, he said, calling for nationalists to regard the UVF, the Protestant private army with a comradely eye in these years. He was immediately approached by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and asked if he would form a rival nationalist army and so within eight months of the UVF being formed in 1913, the Irish Volunteers were formed. They soon seek the hedgerows in nationalist Ireland as young men rush to join the volunteers. This is not controlled by Redmond. He had no time for gunmen; he was a House of Commons man, where he worked as a clerk and upheld its traditions. He is being out-flanked by unionism on one flank and by militant nationalism using this exuberance of nationalist feeling on the other.

Carson, one could say, was the unwilling progenitor of two Irish States, Northern Ireland as it came into existence in 1921 – partition was not something he wanted; he talked about saving his own people in Galway and Dublin – and the Irish Free State. In a famous speech as a law lord, which was his last and most important speech in the House of Lords on 14 December 1921, as he denounced the treaty between Michael Collins and the British Government he said: "What a fool I was; I was only a puppet and so was Ulster in the game that was to bring the Conservative Party into power."

Carson is not that happy with the settlement he had got, as a lawyer, perhaps, getting the best deal for his Northern unionist clients.

That brings us to attempts to resolve the crisis as these private armies risk coming into conflict between 1914 and 1916. A negligent discharge or a stray shot could have triggered civil war in Dungannon, Ballycastle or somewhere in the province of Ulster. In the end, the compromise county option is rejected by Carson. It is very interesting that Bonar Law, who lends conservative support to the Ulster revolt at this time very much thought as an Ulster unionist. His father was a Presbyterian Minister from the North of Ireland. He was a Glasgow MP and, of course, he saw Home Rule as a threat to the empire and saw Protestants in danger in those days when, for example, the McCann *Ne Temere* case had just made headlines in the British and Irish press - involving a mixed marriage couple in Belfast, allegedly broken up and the children disappeared as a result of the *Ne Temere* decree. With this all happening at that time, by the summer of 1914 as the two volunteer armies are gearing up, we have the Larne gunrunning, which makes the UVF incomparably the most important military force on the island of Ireland, apart from the British Army with its base in the Curragh in County Kildare.

What is going to happen? There is a final conference. The King calls a peace conference in the last days of peace at Buckingham Palace in July 1914. We have to namecheck King George V, who plays a key role in bringing the conflict to an end in 1921 and in ushering in negotiations between London and Sinn Féin. Nonetheless, the talks fail. Carson meets Redmond. They look at maps of the North. Bonar Law has privately said to Carson that if Redmond demanded a four county partition with Newry and Derry-Londonderry given plebiscites then you would have a three-and-a-half county excluded area, which might become known as Northern Ireland, and the Tories would have to run with that. Later, Lloyd George was to say, "Men will fight for Crown and Empire but nobody is going to fight for Fermanagh and Tyrone." You may have your own views on that but that was Lloyd George's view in 1922. Because Redmond would not contemplate partition – it was an abomination, he said – he rejected the two nations theory. He did not get involved in bartering. That gave unionism and British conservatism an advantage in these years.

We move very quickly now. Ireland becomes the one bright spot by the 3 August 1914. Britain is about to commit to war on the side of France and for gallant, little Belgium and Redmond and Carson urge their volunteers to enter the Great War. We see some images of this. It is the Ulster Volunteers in particular – the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster division – that fight gloriously and sustain massive losses at the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 and long after. This is Ulster Protestantism blood sacrifice and it becomes important in political reckoning later on. Members will hear in the next screening the voice of one of the officers from the Ulster landed gentry, Sir Norman Strong, sadly murdered during the Troubles in 1981. We hear his voice from 50 years ago recalling the Battle of the Somme. Ann may be running that now, but, again I cannot see or hear it but she might let me know when it ends.

**Ms Ann Donnelly:**

I am cuing it now.

**Dr. Eamon Phoenix:**

This is Sir Norman Strong, who later became Speaker. He was a man who liked to know people, nationalist and unionist MPs. He was popular as Speaker in the 1950s Stormont but he would be an IRA victim during the Hunger Strike. We will hear his voice now.

*Voice of Sir Norman Strong*

*Their strength was worse than ours because the result was that we attacked and went right through the German frontline and support line too and captured the Schwaben Redoubt. That Schwaben Redoubt was not captured again til, I think, the end of the year, if it was the end of the year. Several months before it was taken. It was a very, very strong position and our people won't step over it. We lost an awful lot of people in it, of course, and then once you got a thing like that and we were an assailant, our people were. You had the Germans on both sides of you and it was quite impossible to hold it and eventually we had to withdraw.*

**Dr Eamon Phoenix:**

Of course, nationalists and unionists fought in the First World War. Some 200,000 men from the island of Ireland joined, regardless of political or religious background. Perhaps 40,00 died. John Redmond's Irish Brigade did not quite have the status of the Ulster Division, which was a pals division, under officers from the big houses of Ulster at that time, such as Sir Norman Strong, a border landlord on the border of Armagh and Monaghan.

We will now here the voice of an Irish officer, one of Redmond's men, talking in 1966 about the camaraderie and his take on the Battle of the Somme. Remember that John Redmond and Joe Devlin actively campaigned for recruitment throughout Ireland during the First World War, particularly up to 1916.

*What can you recall of the Battle of the Somme?*

*Well, of course, I was not in the 36th Ulster Division and, therefore, wasn't in the battle on the 1st of July. But I was in the 16th Irish Division and we went into the battle at the beginning of September 1916 and we were involved in as heavy fighting as they had had at Thiepval, at Guillemont and Ginchy in the first week of September 1916.*

**Dr Eamon Phoenix:**

We are going to move now to see an event in Armagh that seems unbelievable today. This is Cardinal Logue, the cardinal Primate of All Ireland. He was a very moderate Home Ruler. He described the Sinn Féin movement, as it emerged, as utopian, childish and wild. He was not a republican and feared revolution in Ireland. In this footage, he is welcoming the men of the Royal Canadian Irish Rangers, a Canadian regiment on route to the battlefields of Europe, composed largely of Irish officers and men. Perhaps we can see that meeting on the steps of Armagh Catholic Cathedral. This happened early in 1917, which is surprising. After the rising, an Irish bishop was still prepared to support the war effort.

Here these men, most of whom were probably Irish Catholics, are meeting the old, womanly Cardinal Logue, an Irish speaker from Donegal, who was a long time in Armagh. Here we see the officers and we will see hundreds of troops entering the cathedral in a moment. This was an amazing conjunction of Commonwealth troops entering the war via Ireland. We can see them coming up the steps.

We can say two things about this amazing piece of footage, which I do not think has been seen very often. It reminds us of two things. After the Somme, Carson made a speech in Belfast. He said bluntly that Home Rule was killed and buried on the battlefield of the Somme. He was going to hold any British Government to account for the sacrifice of young men from the Shankill and mid-Ulster in that titanic struggle on the Somme. The Irish nationalists who fought in the Great War would be largely forgotten. They would be, more or less, airbrushed out of history because of the rise of Sinn Féin and the Irish revolution. We can see Armagh Cathedral in the footage. Those men returned

bewildered from the war to an Ireland once more on the brink and they were the forgotten legion of this whole period.

That brings us now to that other gigantic event born of the First World War. The Irish Republican Brotherhood said that England's difficulty would be Ireland's opportunity. We are now going to see scenes from the Easter Rising of 1916. The newspapers and cinematographers called this period the fallen pride of stately Sackville Street. Sackville Street, of course, was not officially renamed as O'Connell Street until 1924. You can see the ruined city in the footage. This was a bolt from the blue, planned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which was reorganised first in Belfast around 1894 or 1895 by a group of Young Turks who eventually joined up with Tom Clarke, a veteran Fenian brought up in Tyrone. Clarke fled to America after 15 years in British prisons. He wanted to see a strike for freedom before he died. He was an incandescent physical force republican and he gathered around him these Young Turks, men such as, for example, Bulmer Hobson, a Belfast Quaker and Seán Mac Diarmada from the west of Ireland.

*2.45 p.m.*

They planned the rising. Hobson said that Ulster had opened a revolutionary door.

The 1916 rising was planned as an all-island revolt but because of the interception of the arms brought to Ireland by Sir Roger Casement at Easter 1916 and a countermanding order by the commander-in-chief, trying to stop a rising he thought would be a disaster, the rising was narrowed to Dublin. It was the policy of the British Government to send in General Sir John Maxwell with a strong hand and plenipotentiary powers. Maxwell held summary court-martials and executed 15 of the leaders. Asquith had to intervene to prevent the executions because something like 90 names were on the list for execution.

Churchill, as a member of the Cabinet of a Liberal-Conservative coalition British Government, wrote around this time that grass grows quickly over a battlefield but never over a scaffold. Martyrs had been created for the first time since the 18th century in an Irish revolution. Not only that, an aristocratic Irishwoman in her castle in County Meath, Lady Fingall, summed up the rapid effect of the executions on the nationalist mind. She said that from the point of view of Irish nationalists, the executions after brief court-martials were like watching blood flowing from under a closed door. It changed attitudes and a whole generation of nationalists were radicalised almost right away. The Home Rule party found its continuing support among the older generation and the older churchmen. A movement began to emerge from the 3,000 young men returning from prison. Some of those men, such as Éamon de Valera, were sentenced to penal servitude for life. By mid-1917, the younger prisoners were coming back, headed by Countess Markievicz, the so-called rebel countess. They became the natural leaders of Sinn Féin, followed by Éamon de Valera. We will see Éamon de Valera on a platform in County Clare in the following footage with the words of the soon-to-be Irish national anthem on the platform with him. De Valera was then 37 years of age. He was half Cuban-Spanish and half-Irish. He was a mathematics professor. He had a great and lifelong friend in an Ulster Presbyterian minister for County Antrim, the Reverend James Irwin. Irwin and de Valera were both intellectuals and spent a lot of their time, in their old age, sending taxis in the dead of night with mathematical formulae to be cracked. De Valera was a man of eclectic friendships. He had a fine mathematical mind and was soon to become President of the Irish Republic. We can see him in County Clare in this footage.

Sinn Féin emerged from the slogans that were used on newsstands – “The Sinn Féin Rebellion”. The RIC talked about Sinn Féin insurgents. Soon an old party that had died away by 1912 in Ireland, the old Sinn Féin party, gave way to a new republican party, dedicated to abstention from Westminster,

to reaffirming the republic declared in arms by Patrick Pearse in 1916 and encompassing the whole island. This was to be an all-island republic.

Of course, there was an election to be fought first. The war finally ended on 11 November 1918 in that railway carriage at Compiègne. Within a year, the men were returning home to find Ireland in total political disarray and the post-war slump beginning to bite, affecting political tempers, North and South. By this stage, of course, the 1918 election had been held. It was important in Britain and saw the return of a coalition Government, Conservative dominated but headed by David Lloyd George - the man who won the war, they said, must win the peace. His first challenge would be Ireland. In Ireland, the election saw a Sinn Féin landslide. Twenty-five seats were unopposed. Leading Sinn Féin candidates, such as de Valera, Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith returned and were dedicated to a sovereign Irish republic and the establishment of Dáil Éireann, an independent Parliament and Government in Dublin after the election.

In the North, unionism consolidated. We can see Dáil Éireann in the footage. Ireland is still an undivided island, governed from Dublin Castle under the Crown. In the six counties, unionism was able to consolidate its position because of a redistribution of seats. Belfast went from four seats to ten, which gave unionism a massive hold in the industrial capital of Northern Ireland, as it was to become. It meant a safe majority in six counties for a unionist Parliament. Most importantly, from the points of view of Carson and Craig, the two co-Prime Ministers, if you like, Lloyd George and Andrew Bonar Law, dedicated themselves in their manifesto to the question of partition and said that the six counties of north-east Ulster cannot be subjected to an Irish Parliament against their will. That allowed Carson, Craig and the unionists to back the Government. Sinn Féin was abstaining so, when Parliament met at Westminster in January 1919, the largest unionist party was the Ulster Unionist Party. It would have been inconceivable that any British Government could have partitioned Ireland in the teeth of an all-Ireland nationalist or Sinn Féin party, but Sinn Féin abstained. Churchill talked about peering from the gallery, alarmed by a nightmare the night before. As he saw Carson and Craig dominate the Irish Benches and only a handful of nationalists, Churchill said he rejoiced in the blessed abstentionism of Sinn Féin.

That shift in the balance of power in London assisted the unionists who could now dictate terms, to a large extent. James Craig became a junior Minister, one of three, who was able to, if you like, listen at the keyholes and ensure that the evolving partition scheme, the Government of Ireland Act, was to his liking and that of his party.

Let us think about what was happening in Dublin, because that would dictate what was happening on the island of Ireland. Dáil Éireann met in the Mansion House under the watchful eyes of the RIC, now in its last flush. Many resignations of the War of Independence began. There was a small gathering of 27 TDs. The footage we are watching shows the slightly larger Dáil that met later but gives the impression. Most of the main people, such as de Valera and Collins, were in jail but they passed a Constitution, declared a republic and established a Cabinet and Government. De Valera would become *príomh aire*, First Minister - as Arlene Foster is in Northern Ireland today - and his Cabinet Ministers would include Michael Collins as Minister for Finance and Cathal Bruagh as Minister for Defence. They were following the policy of Arthur Griffith, which was based on the Austro-Hungarian *ausgleich* of 1867, when the Austrians established their own Parliament under dual monarchy.

The Dáil met in full. By April, de Valera had escaped from jail and the Cabinet was set up. Dáil Éireann, the assembly of Ireland, met as an all-Ireland body and included a handful of northern TDs, as the Members of Parliament called themselves, meaning Teachta Dála, which is still a phrase used



today. Most importantly, on that very same day, the first shots ring out in a war of independence which would escalate for two and a half years. We can see in the footage Dan Breen, an IRA leader and former railway worker in County Tipperary. He and his colleagues in the South Tipperary Brigade led an attack on two RIC men, both Catholic, escorting a load of gelignite to a quarry. The men were shot dead and their arms were taken. By the end of the year, 18 policemen, mainly Irish Catholics, had been shot dead. The War of Independence was hotting up, barracks were being attacked, and Ulster was beginning to be impacted by the end of 1920.

The Irish Volunteers had survived the rising. They were not actually involved as there was no fighting in the North. The Volunteers became the IRA in Belfast, Tyrone and other areas. There were attacks on trains. That would lead to a British response because the British policy swung from hard cop to soft cop under the coalition. Draconian laws were introduced in 1920. An auxiliary force, the Auxiliaries, who were ex-officers, were the paramilitary unit of the RIC. The Black and Tans were ex-soldiers who were pretty restless in British cities and were diverted to Ireland to reinforce a collapsing police force. The British Government authorised a policy of reprisals in retaliation for IRA attacks on Crown forces and so 42 creameries were burned within two years and innocent civilians were shot dead. That led to the escalation at the end of the year. The IRA was resurgent with its flying columns. Michael Collins was waging an intelligence war in Dublin.

We can now see footage of the funerals of the dead officers to give Members of the Assembly a sense of the darkest hour of the War of Independence, the Anglo-Irish war. The Dáil had been suppressed. Partition was underway. In the footage, we can see that 15 officers were shot in Dublin on a Sunday morning in November. Most of those officers were passing themselves off as civil servants or journalists but were British intelligence agents. Collins had great intelligence from Dublin Castle through sources in the police and post office. We can see the funerals of those officers in the footage. That afternoon, the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans responded with the mass shootings at Croke Park, in which 12 people were killed, including a player at a football match. The whole crisis escalated again.

Joe Devlin, MP for west Belfast and one of the few nationalists returned, took his seat and became the voice of nationalist Ireland in that period. He protested partition, demanded nationalist safeguards and condemned the reprisals. Asquith, the Labour Party and the Archbishop of Canterbury in the House of Lords also condemned reprisals. Exactly 100 years ago today, the Archbishop of Canterbury said he was most uneasy at the policy of militarism in Ireland. Clearly, there was going to have to be a settlement.

We will now move to what was happening in north-east Ulster in this period, that is, the establishment of partition. James Craig becomes critical in that context. We are now looking at a picture of the man who became the midwife of the new Northern Irish state. The photograph we are looking at is of the prolific Walter Long, with a handlebar moustache. He was a key figure, a Conservative MP and former Chief Secretary for Ireland. He had close ties with the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and with unionism on the island, North and South. Walter Long was appointed to chair a committee to draw up a blueprint for the settlement of Ireland in 1919. Lloyd George had been busy redrawing the map of Europe. By that stage, there was a joint committee of Liberals and Tories. What were they going to do? They proposed establishing Parliaments North and South with limited powers. They would have a bond of union and a Council of Ireland. Unionism did not want a strong, all-Ireland body. They did not want that in the 1870s or 1920. Craig did not want any link with the South at all but Lloyd George was mindful of American public opinion, which had been escalating during that period as a result of de Valera's visit and so on.

The result of all of this was that it was given notable powers over railways, fisheries and agricultural diseases. There was nothing very major, but the point was made by Government Ministers that it could evolve, by consent, into an all-Ireland Parliament. Remember this is a Home Rule Parliament *à la* that in Scotland. They were not talking about independence at all.

The other question was what the acreage of the new Northern Ireland would be. Would it be four counties which were indisputably Protestant, in the main? Would it be six counties, as had been mooted during the First World War? Would it be the old nine-county province? The Long Committee went for nine counties. We will now see displayed a cartoon of Lloyd George which appeared in *Punch*. He is here depicted as a Welsh conjuror, a Welsh wizard. I am sorry to any Welsh MPs in the meeting. Lloyd George is conjuring a trick. Assembly Members will notice that the map of Ulster in the cartoon is very different from the Northern Ireland they are used to today. It represents the nine counties, including Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. There were 80,000 loyalists in those counties but an overwhelming Catholic majority. In those days, as Lord Chief Justice Sir Denis Henry, a Catholic unionist, put it in the court in Omagh in 1916, to be a Catholic was invariably to be a nationalist; to be a Protestant was invariably to be a unionist. Nobody disputed those facts in the 1920s and 1930s, although things have perhaps changed since.

The cartoon of Lloyd George at which we are looking is captioned:

*I now proceed to cut this map into two parts and place them in the hat [labelled "Irish Council"]. After a suitable interval, they will be found to have come together of their own accord – (aside) – at least let's hope so; I've never done this trick before.*

That line would harden into permanency.

The question was would Northern Ireland comprise six or nine counties. The committee opted for nine counties. They felt it would provide better safeguards for nationalists, who would have a 45% majority. The Liberals, who were Gladstonian, the children of Gladstone, thought it would provide a quicker route to Irish unity. However, Craig intervened and, in fact, on 30 November 1919, the minutes record that Craig intervened and expressed himself against the inclusion of the whole of Ulster and thought six counties preferable.

We are now seeing the sectarian head count. The reason given was that Protestant representation would be strengthened and six counties would be a unit easier to govern. How did Joe Devlin, leading six MPs at Westminster, the voice of nationalist Ireland with Sinn Féin resisting, see things? He was not a republican. He had compromised in 1916 and accepted that the six counties would be excluded, he hoped temporarily, from Home Rule. What did he say? Writing to his friend, the Bishop of Raphoe, he said that as far as he could see, it meant a Parliament would be set up in the North of Ireland, as everybody called it then, and not for the whole of Ulster but for six counties. He said it would mean the worst form of permanent partition. He was afraid that once the North had its own Parliament, infrastructure and machinery of government, anything like subsequent unity would be impossible.

Devlin was far-seeing. He knew that once a separate Judiciary and Civil Service were set up, the two islands would drift apart in the wake of bloody revolutionary Éire. The South had a customs barrier by 1923.

That is what was proposed but the committee insisted on nine counties until finally that suggestion was overturned by the full Cabinet, headed by Lloyd George, in March.

3 p.m.

A six-county Northern Ireland partition scheme was piloted through Parliament. Devlin proposed amendments. He wanted proportional representation, PR, as a safeguard for the northern Catholics under the new dispensation. He wanted a weighted presence in the Senate. Each Parliament, North and South, was to have two Chambers. The southern unionists, on Carson's arguments, were to be given a specialised 50% place in the Senate. They were 12% of the population. That continued until the mid-1930s. They were chaired by a former unionist MP, Lord Glenavy, and scrutinised 2,500 pieces of legislation.

Devlin wanted the same thing in Belfast. The nationalists would have a scrutinising role which would involve them in a system of checks and balances. All of these demands were serially and overwhelmingly voted down by the coalition majority and particularly by the Ulster unionists. Carson said he saw no need for nationalist safeguards but did see a need for safeguarding the Protestant minority in the South.

While this was going on, that violence we talked about was beginning to impact the North. Let us see how events in Cork, at the other end of Ireland, could impact events in Belfast and the north east. This became the bloodiest period in Belfast's history. Almost 500 people died in two years. In the years from the summer of 1920, 30, 40 or 70 people were killed in the city in the space of a fortnight. I hope that Members of the Assembly can see on the screen coverage of the murder of Tomás Mac Curtain, Lord Mayor of Cork and prominent republican figure. His murder was ascribed to the Royal Irish Constabulary, the police force, if you like, by a coroner's inquest. We can see a photograph of Mac Curtain. He was a leader of the Volunteers, that is, the IRA. He was also Lord Mayor of Cork. He was murdered in his home in the watches of the night in March 1920 by unknown uniformed men. It was the beginning of the reprisals policy. A doctor, from his window, saw the assassins. Mac Curtain's funeral was a big republican event. It was a set-piece propaganda event of the sort that became important in republicanism then and now. It sent shock waves throughout Ireland.

The district inspector involved was a man called Oswald Swansea, a northern Protestant. He was district inspector in that part of Cork. He was ferreted north for his own safety on what was still an unpartitioned island. He was sent to Lisburn, a mainly unionist town in County Antrim. On the orders of Michael Collins, he was tracked down to Lisburn. We are seeing coverage of Mac Curtain's funeral in Cork on the screens. Swansea was shot dead in an assassination demanded by Collins and involving both the Cork and Belfast IRA.

We do not have any films of the area but there was a massive reaction in Lisburn, which contained a 20% Catholic minority. It was a prosperous mill and market town. Almost within two days, the entire Catholic business stock in the town was burned out. The parochial house beside the chapel was burned out. An attempt was made to burn down the chapel. Rows and rows of houses were also burned out. Many people who had ancestors with pubs in the area have contacted me to say those pubs were burned out.

One man who went to Lisburn was Major Fred Crawford, the gunrunner, who was then a major figure in the Ulster Special Constabulary, the part-time police force. He described Lisburn in his diary as reminding him of a French town after it was bombarded by the Germans, as he saw in France in 1916.

This was a massive shock to the body politic in north-east Ulster where a lid had been kept on sectarian passions for so long. It was to set the scene for other violence.

We move now to the city of Derry/Londonderry. PR had been introduced at this time, which led to a greening of the west, a phrase we used 20 years ago when people such as Martin McGuinness began to win Westminster constituencies west of the River Bann. It was in the city of Derry where an almost 300-year-old Protestant stranglehold was broken in 1920 with the election of a nationalist mayor and an anti-partitionist co-operation. Derry was the second city in the six counties which became Northern Ireland, a city of shipbuilding, shirt factories and all of that. It had close links to Donegal and was the capital of north-west Ireland. It was the railway centre and entrepot to Donegal and had a link with the United States through the Anchor Line, the liner docking in Lough Foyle. In the footage we are watching, Assembly Members can see the grim scenes in Derry. It was a very brutal trial of strength between the UVF - which was reviving after the war and would soon become the Ulster Special Constabulary, armed and paid for by the British Government - and the IRA, reinforced from Donegal. Forty people died in what was a very sectarian conflict in what had been a very soft place. Everybody in Derry was from Donegal, whether unionist or nationalist, and to this day there are very close links between the counties. It was the centre of administration and poor law for, largely, north Donegal.

I will move on to events in Belfast in the footage on screen. This was Edward Carson's last important speech as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. The events of 12 July were large set pieces and Carson is speaking, in the footage, to the Orangemen in what is now Andersonstown in Catholic west Belfast but was then a country field. Carson can be seen receiving the umpteenth walking stick from his admirers. Here he is as the grand old man on the platform. He was, at that time, aware of the IRA attacks in the North. Barracks were being attacked. He said unionists would stand no Sinn Féin in Ulster. Remember, Sinn Féin did well in the local elections in Fermanagh, Tyrone and the city of Londonderry. Carson said he would call out the Ulster Volunteers. That led almost immediately after the holiday of 12 July to serious sectarian conflict in Belfast.

That was not the only factor. The IRA assassinated an Ulster-born police officer, Lieutenant Colonel GB Smyth in Cork. That fed into matters. Tensions had been building up and all of those events conspired to bring about, by late July 1920, a situation whereby Catholic workers were driven out of the shipyards, engineering firms and the mills of Belfast by men armed with hatchets and hammers. That happened to approximately 8,000 or 9,000 Catholic workers, who became known as the "expelled workers". It was a *cause célèbre* for Irish nationalism for the following three years because despite the best efforts of Collins and Craig, they were never reinstated. The special Irish correspondent of *The Times* of London at the time, as the state was being set up, reported that if Craig and the unionists could not ensure the reinstatement of a single Catholic workman, the Catholics of the North would have no confidence in the new unionist regime.

Police talked about the intense poverty in nationalist areas at that time. Many became refugees in Dublin and elsewhere. The reaction of the Dáil compounded the situation because the republican Government in Dublin, under pressure from Northern nationalists, adopted a boycott of Belfast firms. Anything coming out of a shipyard or match factory in Belfast was boycotted in southern Ireland. It really meant that an iron border was established around the North, even before partition was legislatively created at that time. The boycott was opposed by certain TDs but, as Churchill said afterwards, it was a blind contribution to the general hate. One can imagine the tensions that were rising at that time. That violence continued, involving the IRA in Belfast, supported by Michael Collins. There were high-level assassinations all over Ireland, organised by Collins as director of intelligence of the IRA. He was on the run in Dublin. There were also loyalist paramilitaries.

Craig was very much involved in that period. Very astute, he had learned a lot from his father's boardroom at Dunville & Co. distillery. Craig realised that if he did not establish the groundwork of a

new regime, it would not be established and would become a part of the flotsam and jetsam of negotiations and concessions involving Lloyd George.

We will now move to a picture of the midwife of Northern Ireland, Sir Ernest Clark. Craig wanted a civil servant not attached to Dublin Castle, which unionism distrusted. He wanted a civil servant in Belfast, an assistant Under Secretary for Ireland, who would establish the appointed days, under the legislation, for elections, the establishment of a Cabinet and a new special constabulary. That man was Sir Ernest Clark. He had worked in the Inland Revenue in Britain. Allegedly, when Craig met him, he said, "The word 'Ulster' must be written on your heart" and Clark replied, "But, Sir, there is no room. The words 'England' and 'Empire' are already written on my heart." Clark was a key factor, with only a chair, desk and Act of Parliament, he established a new regime. Craig also secured the establishment of the Ulster Special Constabulary, an exclusively Protestant police force, recruited in the Orange lodges and factories, and based on the pre-war UVF. There were three sections of the constabulary. Without that 32,000-strong force, massed in places such as Crossmaglen and the Bogside, the border could not have been drawn because 90% of the border ran through overwhelmingly nationalist areas in those years. For the nationalist population, the Specials were an unwelcome prospect, but Craig saw them as essential to countering the IRA patrols in rural areas.

By 1921, as violence continued, Lloyd George was under pressure from Church of England bishops, liberal consensus and America to find some kind of a compromise. He began to sue for peace – something along the lines of dominion status with partition. There were various envoys involved, including James Craig. The interaction enabled the Act to become law. Elections were held in the North in May 1921 and in June 1921 in the South. Sinn Féin ignored the new Parliament and simply used the elections for a new Dáil. In the North, while the nationalists and Sinn Féin abstained and had a pact against this partition Parliament, Craig was able to sweep the polls with 40 of the 52 MPs, and established his new Parliament. We can now see a picture of Craig establishing his new Parliament.

The Parliament met for ten years in the Presbyterian college attached to Queen's University in south Belfast, not at Stormont, which opened in 1932. The irony is that nationalists talked about a Parliament in College Green, Dublin, some day while unionists got a Parliament in College Green in Belfast, beside Queen's University, in 1921. Craig, his Cabinet and Ministers were there. JM Andrews, a wealthy linen magnate, became Minister of Labour. Lord Londonderry, a broad-minded figure, became Minister of Education, bent on integrated schools, which he was thwarted in trying to achieve. The hard-line Dawson Bates was Minister of Home Affairs. He regarded all Catholics as nationalists and all nationalists as enemies.

During this time, Clark came under pressure. He was told he was not there to mediate between the two communities but to establish a state on unionist lines. Disloyal civil servants were to be dismissed or transferred. Certain police officers were to be promoted. The Specials were to be absolutely reliable and so the state developed.

We move now to the King's visit because George V had a vested interest in Irish peace. He had been designated to deliver a speech to set the seal on partition in Belfast City Hall. It was a day people remember because it was 22 June and there will be various celebrations on that date this year in Northern Ireland. The King had come for a dual purpose. He was opening Craig's unionist Parliament. Carson had retired by this stage. He presided over the ruins of his own policy and retired to the House of Lords. Craig assembled his MPs and Cabinet. The King arrived in state, tracing the route of Queen Victoria in 1849. She had mottos above her head – "Céad míle fáilte" as

Gaeilge, meaning 100,000 welcomes. George V did not quite get that reaction but he got to the City Hall where he was greeted by Lord Craigavon, Viscount Fitzalan, the new viceroy, and first Catholic in that position. The King's speech was heavily overwritten by himself, Lloyd George and General Smuts, the South African nationalist who was a member of the British war Cabinet. The general had been urging de Valera to see all-Ireland unity as a gradual and peaceful project and suggested it would hasten slowly towards a republic.

The King used his words to call on Irishmen to forgive and forget and to seek for the land that they love a new era of peace, contentment and goodwill. He stretched out the hand of friendship. He was not speaking to a Northern audience but to the Sinn Féin leadership in the South – de Valera and Michael Collins. Within hours, Lloyd George was able to act in the spirit of the King's words by inviting de Valera to London. There began a stop-start process that resulted in the Treaty of 1921.

Violence did not end. There was a truce in Ireland but violence did not end in the North, where sectarian and political violence continued for another year or more. We can look at footage of events in south Armagh at that stage. We will see a train wreck. Trains used to be held up close to Kilnasaggart Bridge. As a student, I remember often getting off there in the cold and snow and having to get a bus to Dublin. We can see in the footage Frank Aiken's Fourth Northern Division on the border. He was a hard-line IRA leader who did not want partition. The King's honour guard, coming from Belfast towards the Curragh camp, was blown up there. Soldiers and horses were killed. It was a reminder that partition would remain unfinished business.

The Treaty was signed in 1921 but that did not stop the problems. Ireland was inclined to civil war and the Treaty was only narrowly accepted by the Dáil. The IRA split, as did the Dáil and, in the end, Collins was embroiled in a fight with his former comrades, who were associated with Éamon de Valera, in the Irish Civil War.

There was border violence in the North. We will now see a clip of the Battle of Pettigo and Belleek on the Fermanagh-Donnegal border in May and June 1922. The IRA had massed there. There were two sections of the IRA.

*3.15 p.m.*

They were hoping to use border trouble to reunite the IRA and wage a war against the North for Irish independence. Collins was playing a twin-track policy. The Specials were a key force. In this footage, we can see British troops moving up to the Donegal border, reclaiming Pettigo from Michael Collins's pro-Treaty forces. This is when Lloyd George warned Churchill not to get bogged down in the swamps of Lough Erne, where Angela Merkel and the G7 held their meeting a decade ago. Lloyd George told Churchill to stay to the high plateau of Crown and Empire. He said men will fight for Crown and Empire but never for Fermanagh and Tyrone. Belleek Irish pottery is famous.

We can see here the British artillery sent into action. They advanced into Donegal and captured the village of Pettigo. They ran up the Union Jack and were there for another three years. It was like a scene from the Western Front. This border violence led to a hard border.

We can now see Sir Basil Brooke, future Northern Ireland Prime Minister, leading up the rear in the footage. He was a Naval Education and Training Service, NETS, officer in the Great War and head of the B-Specials. He was to become a hard-line Prime Minister.

This is how the Border emerged by 1922. As the two parts of Ireland settled down, as the Boundary Commission collapsed, the North and South settled into a hardened partition. The first North-South

meeting was not to happen until 1965 when Captain Terence O'Neill, a Liberal unionist, met Sean Lemass, a pragmatic Taoiseach.

That is the story of partition. Thank you very much.

*[Applause]*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Dr. Phoenix, I would like to thank you for that incredible presentation. It was certainly engrossing and I have learnt a huge amount during the past hour. I know that everyone else will appreciate the amount of effort and passion you have put into that presentation. I only wish we had more time to talk about it and to hear more from you. I really do appreciate all the effort you have put into this. I know that Members of all the Parliaments and Assemblies gathered today will appreciate what Dr. Phoenix has told us about the history of Ireland and putting it into context today helps us to understand some of the situations we face now. We are a product of history and what you have outlined today shows that in great detail.

I wish we had more time for questions but, unfortunately, we have practically run out of time and only have a few minutes for questions. I will take a couple of questions, if there are any, but we do not really have more than two or three minutes before we must have a short adjournment. I see that Viscount Bridgman has a question.

**The Viscount Bridgeman:**

Four years ago, BIPA had a meeting in Ypres, near the battlefield, which was an event in itself. That evening, we came back to the Holiday Inn in Ashford and a group of us, over a Guinness or three, discussed, almost hour by hour, the Easter Rising. There were people from both countries in that discussion and it was the most remarkable, dispassionate, academic discussion and, looking back on it, that is the soft power the BIPA carries now.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you, Robin, for that statement. I think that Deputy Neale Richmond had a question. Is Neale there?

**Mr. Neale Richmond TD:**

Thank you, Chairman. I felt guilty watching that presentation because it was fascinating and, as an historian, it brought me back some very fond memories from college and school. It is probably a bit unfair to put this question to a historian, but I would value Dr. Phoenix's opinion on the matter. A couple of years ago, we commemorated the centenary of the first Dáil here in Dublin. It was a powerful and important event. I was struck at the time that only one unionist MLA came down for that commemorative event and I felt his presence there was extremely important. Now that we are going to look at the centenary of the first Northern Irish Parliament, what is Dr. Phoenix's opinion on the need for or appropriateness of representatives of Dublin to attend events in the North?

**Dr Eamon Phoenix:**

I am on the Taoiseach's advisory group and, certainly, we were looking at a couple of key events, Mr. Richmond, in terms of joint North-South and east-west remembrance of these key dates. The City Hall works very well on 22 June in the sense that it was not just the birth of Northern Ireland, which was boycotted by nationalism at the time – partition means national suicide is what the nationalist leader, Joe Devlin, the more moderate nationalist leader, said the time – but the fact that the King

set in train a process that would see a truce, an end to conflict between Britain and Ireland and, indeed, the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, which included Northern Ireland legally at the beginning but she was able to opt-out under clause 12. As somebody who has been very much involved in public history, we rolled out the principles ten years ago, realising as historians within the community sector, that this could be very fraught and could drive us back to where we do not want to go, pre-1998. We need to stick to the facts and reflect different perspectives. If you want to create an exhibition in your area, say the Shankill Road, it must be able to travel to the Falls and *vice versa* and take cognisance of a different point of view. We have worked on these principles that carried us so far. We coupled the Rising and the Somme in 2016. That is what made it easier to deal with here. I discovered a UVF man who had gone to Dublin to join the British Army and watched the Rising from the Gresham Hotel, looking over at the GPO and kept a diary that enabled me to speak about the Rising in the loyalist and unionist communities. I think that is the way forward. I think there is an opportunity on the 22nd of June, maybe virtually, for people to acknowledge the events of that day, which transformed this island whether we like it or not.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Thank you very much. Do we have one final question from anybody? I note Lord Jonathan Caine and Mr. Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD are indicating.

**Mr. Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD:**

I thank Eamon for his presentation and the background screening. Well done. A lot of us are losing coverage every now and again so it would be great if the presentation could be made available to share with those who are here but also the people who have not been able to come along because it helps with the context of a lot of the work that will be in front of us over the next number of years. I have been involved in the ministerial all-party group on commemorations. It has been vital that different voices have been heard to show the context of that time but also the complexities that were beforehand, which Dr. Phoenix has shown, and the complexities thereafter. Thank you again for the presentation. I think it would be a useful piece of work if Dr. Phoenix could make it available. I accept he might not be able to make available all of the videolinks but it would be useful.

**Dr. Eamon Phoenix:**

Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

I call Lord Jonathan Caine.

**Lord Jonathan Caine:**

Thank you Dr. Phoenix for a brilliant presentation. I really appreciate it. I was fascinated by the photographs from Dulwich Common, which is about half a mile from my flat in London. I will resist the temptation driving from Westminster this evening to convene a unionist rally, for now.

I was involved in the exhibition at Westminster in 2012, which then went to the Oireachtas, on the third Home Rule Bill. I have often wondered, at the time of partition, whether history might have been very different had Northern Ireland continued to be governed from Westminster, which was obviously the original aim of Ulster unionism, as set out in the covenant, without a Parliament of its own. Is the history of the Stormont years not a great lesson when it comes to Northern Ireland of the dangers of devolve and forget?

**Dr. Eamon Phoenix:**



Absolutely. The original exclusion schemes of 1914 and 1916, when the Home Rule party were negotiating with Carson and the British Government, were predicated on the idea that the excluded area, whether nine counties or six or whatever, would remain like Yorkshire, under Westminster rule. This was seen by the nationalists as a safeguard against an abuse of power by people. The Irish populations had never really been integrated historically so people talk on both sides about their hereditary enemies and nobody wanted to be subjected to single party rule. That was certainly true. Carson, as an arch-Irish unionist was never keen on the devolved parliament at Stormont. Up to the end of his career in 1921 in Irish politics, he continually returned to this issue – was it really necessary; it was foisted on them. But, the Ulster unionist, Craig, and his brother, Captain Charles Craig MP, stressed the idea that they could not trust Mr. Asquith, who might make a comeback as a liberal Prime Minister. They could not trust the Labour Party who were the growing force and within a couple of years were the first Labour Government of 1923-24. At the end of the day, they said that the only thing that would guard against being forced by an unscrupulous British Government – that distrust again of British politicians that someone mentioned – would be a parliament in Belfast with all the paraphernalia of a separate Government. That is exactly why Craig and others wanted their own parliament. When it came to 1972 – as I well remember and some in the room will remember – there was a massive unionist outcry against the removal of their parliament because in local terms in Northern Ireland a unionist dominated parliament at Stormont was seen as more important and the ultimate safeguard than the overriding of Westminster Parliament, which had brought the riches of the welfare state and so much else.

Carson was not keen on it. Craig saw it as essential and the Northern nationalists always feared it. Lord Rankeillour, who was a Scottish Tory peer, wrote to Craig in the early 1930s. He had read various exposés of gerrymandering and so on and he said: “I think looking back on it, devolved Government for the North was a bad idea and excluded a third of the population.

**Lord Jonathan Caine MP:**

Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosdinell MP):**

I thank Dr. Phoenix and also Ann for attending today, particularly Dr. Phoenix for his incredible presentation. I found it absolutely fascinating. We are all very grateful to you for your time. We hope we can hear from you again. I am sure there is so much more you can tell us and so much more we can learn. It really is very much appreciated. Dr. Phoenix, thank you very much.

**Dr. Eamon Phoenix:**

Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

We have to move swiftly on because time is against us, but we will take a very short break now. I ask everyone to back in 15 minutes, so we will resume at 3.40, although that is not quite 15 minutes. Is 12 minutes enough for everybody or do we need a bit longer? Can Brendan indicate if the Oireachtas needs the full 20 minutes or can we shorten the break?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Andrew, we need 15 minutes for sanitisation of the Chamber.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

Okay, let us start again at 3.50 p.m.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

We can resume at 3.45 p.m.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Andrew Rosindell MP):**

That is fine.

*Sitting suspended at 3.28 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 3.45 p.m.*

## **TRADE, ECONOMIC GROWTH and GLOBAL MARKETS IN 2021**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Colleagues, we will resume now. It has been a time of change and challenge for the overwhelming majority of our citizens and businesses across these islands. With our next speakers we are going to explore these issues as they affect trade, economic growth and global markets.

I welcome Julie Sinnamon, chief executive officer, Enterprise Ireland. Enterprise Ireland is our State agency responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets.

Enterprise Ireland works in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovative and win exports sales in global markets. In this way, it supports sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment.

I now invite Julie to address the Assembly.

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

Good afternoon everybody. I am delighted to have this opportunity to address you this afternoon. As stated by the Co-Chair, Brendan Smith TD, the key focus of Enterprise Ireland is to help Irish companies to start and scale in global markets.

Enterprise Ireland was established just over 20 years ago and we look after about 3,500 companies each year in the manufacturing and international traded sectors. We invest in about 150 new start-up companies and we are the largest seed investor in Europe in terms of deal-flow. All of our money in start-up companies is equity investment, which we go into on a risk basis.

With regard to our scaling agenda, we provide funding to our companies and we develop the leadership and management capability and we also support the internationalisation agenda, with a strong focus on innovation. We have 40 offices throughout the world, the aim of which is to help Irish companies grow their international sales. If one wants to start a company of scale in Ireland, given the size of the domestic market, that internationalisation agenda is critical.

With regard to the leadership capability, this is an activity which, for us, is important. We run leadership programmes and our flagship programme is known as Leadership for Growth. We work each year with about 25 to 30 companies. Since 2017, we have invited Northern Ireland companies to participate in these leadership programmes, with companies from the Republic. These have been transformational in terms of both growing the ambition of companies and the capability of them to grow global companies of scale. It has been fantastic. To date, 16 companies from Northern Ireland have participated in these programmes. We are using best providers globally in terms of delivering the content of these three-week deep emerging programmes for our companies.

With regard to innovation, in addition to working with companies in Ireland on a one-to-one basis on their innovation agenda and on common problems through group initiatives, we also are the national support network for Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. Once again, in this regard, we have a strong collaboration with Invest Northern Ireland and InterTradeIreland. Approximately €108 million of the awards thus far for Horizon 2020 for our companies has involved consortia from Northern Ireland and the Republic working together and this, hopefully, will continue.

Two other responsibilities are foreign direct investment in food and bringing international students into Ireland. Before I get into speaking about the UK-Irish relationship, it is probably worth saying that there are extremely strong relationships developed over many years between Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland and InterTradeIreland. We have developed a lot of experience in working to grow companies of scale. We are not competing with each other, we are doing the same job in different geographies and the *modus operandi* is to share our experience with a view to ensuring companies on both sides of the Border are benefiting from the expertise that we have developed. We are a metric driven organisation, with 220,000 plus people employed directly and an additional 350,000 indirectly. We have seen strong growth in exports each year for the last decade, with year-on-year growth.

In terms of the UK market specifically, the UK is the number one market for Irish exporters. It is a strategic market of critical importance given its proximity and 66 million consumers on our doorstep in such a large economy. It has special advantages with which everybody in this meeting will be familiar in terms of proximity, common language, familiar systems and deeply integrated networks. For many Irish companies, it is the first market they export into. As mentioned by others earlier, there is hardly a person on either side of the Irish Sea that does not have relations in one or other jurisdiction.

Enterprise Ireland has an office in London and in 2019 we opened a second office in the UK, based in Manchester and comprised of 18 staff, to cover the north of England region. Exports into the UK account for 31% of total exports from this country. Food is the largest sector of Irish enterprise and the largest export from our companies into the UK, accounting for 47% of exports. This afternoon, Larry Murrin, who heads up one of our leading food companies, will share his experience with the Assembly.

For the past number of years, market diversification has been a key focus in Enterprise Ireland. While our exports over that ten years have grown by €2.4 billion to €7.9 billion, approximately 50% growth, the overall level of exports from Irish companies into the UK has reduced from 42% to 31%. This happened as a result of us growing the rest of the world at a faster rate and a specific focus of policy within Enterprise Ireland to try to have a better balance of export across the globe from Irish companies. However, the importance of the UK market in terms of providing scale for Irish companies is important. While the overall export level has dropped in percentage terms, the UK is and will be our number one market for the foreseeable future.

In the last two weeks, we ran a survey within our companies and an event in which there were about 500 companies involved. Some 89% of those companies said they see opportunity in the UK going forward and 83% said they expect their exports to the UK to continue to grow. This is our clients telling us what we already knew, namely, the UK will continue to be a key market. Enterprise Ireland has been working with companies to make sure that in the aftermath of Brexit they have all the capability they need to continue to export into the UK, develop the capabilities to handle all the customs issues and remain competitive in the UK through that innovation agenda. There are extra costs associated with moving goods from one country to the other at this stage. However, we

believe the UK has significant opportunities, some of which Members heard in terms of the green agenda last week when we had the Mayors of greater Manchester and Liverpool engaging with our clients, with a lot of specific areas in life sciences and clean tech talked about in construction, where we believe there is a lot of continued opportunity.

Many issues have been documented over the past two months in terms of teething problems with regard to companies getting into the UK. Trading levels were probably at 50% of normal in the early part of January because companies on both sides of the Irish Sea had been stockpiling. In much of these issues entrepreneurs, by their nature, are innovative and will find solutions to problems.

The food sector is the largest sector, with, as I mentioned earlier, 47% of total exports from companies. Construction is also a very strong sector, one that has increased by about 70% from Irish companies in the past five years. This is about high-tech construction in terms of precast concrete, adoption of building information modelling systems etc., and going after specific clean tech operations and opportunities within the UK market.

There is a high level of interconnectedness between the UK and Ireland. Ireland is one of the UK's largest export markets, as well as being our key export market from Ireland. Irish companies with which I am dealing are bringing in a large amount of their sub-supply from engineering companies within the UK. Enterprise Ireland companies scale their exports to the UK, they put down more permanent roots and create a local presence. We will be working with Irish companies to encourage them to create a presence in the UK market. At this stage, there are 100,000 people employed in the UK by Enterprise Ireland clients and so it is a very important market for many reasons.

Readying Irish companies for Brexit has been a major focus for Enterprise Ireland since June 2016, but it is not the only challenge. One of the real issues with Brexit, in my view, is that it has taken up so much energy on both sides of the Irish Sea to the disadvantage of such other issues that are coming down the tracks for companies, for example, the pace of transition to industry. These are major technological changes and companies need to ensure they are ready for them.

There has been mention a couple of times today, including from the Taoiseach and other speakers, of the transition to a low carbon economy. Again, this provides great opportunities for companies in Ireland and the UK. One of the issues we are dealing with on both sides of the Irish Sea is that of regional imbalance and the need for better balance between the location of companies with regard to spreading that wealth. Irish companies need to adapt and transform in response to these challenges and they need to become more resilient. One of the key supports for many companies trying to build their resilience is building their innovation. It is not just innovation in terms of product development, it is innovation in terms of business models and how they operate; developing new products is important. We are seeing really strong correlation between the companies that are investing in research, development and innovation and those succeeding globally. In terms of our client base, the companies that are investing have 67% more global sales than the companies not investing in R&D. Why would anybody buy from the other side of the world if they can get problems solved closer to home? It is important companies ensure they have products that are fit for purpose.

Over the past nine to 12 months, with Covid, we have seen fantastic examples of Irish innovation. Companies such as Aerogen have developed aerosol drug delivery systems, which have been critical in accident and emergency rooms across the world and other companies pivoting young technology companies into tracing Apps, etc.. Companies will see an opportunity and will pivot and go for that opportunity.

As we face into 2021, the key priority for Enterprise Ireland as an organisation is to continue to help companies to build a resilience to be able to deal with the dual shocks of Covid and Brexit, to help them with that transformational agenda, to accelerate their pace of innovation to be able to deal with digitalisation and the transition to low carbon economies globally, which brings with it many opportunity but will require many traditional sectors to change how they operate.

Scale is one of the challenges we continue to put a lot of focus on in Ireland. We have great, young companies that start-up every year. For us, the big challenge is to ensure they grow and maximise their scale in global markets. We are working to build the resilience of Irish companies to drive their competitiveness, to foster innovation and to support greater market diversification.

*4 p.m.*

We continue to see the UK as our most valued market and we will continue to operate with customers that have been built up over many years in the UK and to meet the business challenges ahead together.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you, Julie. As we know here in this country and, indeed, much further afield, Julie is a highly regarded public servant. She has given great leadership to Enterprise Ireland over many years.

I welcome Mr. Larry Murrin, chief executive officer, Dawn Farms, to speak to us on trade, economic growth and global markets.

Dawn Farms was established in 1985 and it is Europe's leading dedicated multi-species cooked and fermented protein ingredient company. It is a family company with a global reach, exporting to over 44 international markets. The group has two production facilities in Ireland and its facility in Northampton, which opened in 1995, is the largest cooked bacon facility in the UK. Two years ago, Dawn Farms acquired a cooked meats specialist facility in Germany.

I now invite Larry to give his address.

**Mr. Larry Murrin:**

Thank you very much Co-Chair, Brendan Smith, and Co-Chair, Andrew Rosindell and Members of the Assembly.

First, I would like to generally thank you all for the opportunity to appear before you to present my views on the trade and co-operation agreement recently agreed between Britain and the European Union.

In my opening remarks, I would like to give you some background on our company as Co-Chair, Brendan Smith, has briefly touched on and to provide you with feedback on our practical day-to-day experiences as a food company with manufacturing facilities in both jurisdictions of the first two months of the agreement, to highlight some issues that have arisen and to make recommendations on measures we believe are needed to minimise the disruption caused to what up to now could be considered a seamless, just-in-time supply chain in both directions for more than 40 years.

The trade in agri-food between both countries is rooted in geography, culture and tradition. Today, we export over €5 million in fresh products to the UK and we would be considered as an integral component of a UK supply chain, which is not self-sufficient when it comes to, for example, dairy, beef and pork products. Similarly, Britain exports over €4 billion worth of some of the finest grocery

brands in the world that Irish consumers expect to see on their supermarket shelves. The trade is complementary and a valuable contributor to both economies.

Established in 1985, Dawn Farms is a family-owned business. We have carved out a niche as the single largest producer of customised cooked meat and plant-based ingredients in the UK and Europe, supplying some of the world's most loved food brands, operating in more than 50 countries worldwide. To add some zest to what Julie alluded to about the UK's importance, the UK is our number one largest and most important market in scale despite the fact that we reach 49 other markets.

We are based in the town of Naas in County Kildare, which is about 40 km south of Dublin and there we have two world-class manufacturing facilities, expert in the production of cooked and fermented meat and plant-based ingredients. In Northampton, our company, TMI Foods, is the largest cooked bacon and meat snack facility in Britain. In 2019, we bought a cooked meats business company, Haas, in Saarland in Germany, to expand our manufacturing footprint in Europe. Our science and innovation centre is based in County Kildare and we have satellite facilities in Northampton and Germany. Our focus on food science and innovation together with our unique food-plus, food-safety regime and our brand protection culture are central to our business success.

We are a business-to-business brand with no retail-ready products. However, you can purchase dozens of products containing our ingredients in most supermarkets in the UK. We supply customers in two primary food channels, large food manufacturers and fast, casual, high street restaurants, and we focus on three, maybe four, core categories, namely, pizza, sandwich and a very wide variety of recipe dishes and ready meals. We are the food equivalent of intel inside as, although you may not know our products, it is likely you have consumed them if you have ever enjoyed a pizza, a sandwich, a recipe dish or a ready meal from your favourite grocer or food service provider.

I should mention here that we also formed Dawn Farm Distribution more than 30 years ago in 1988 to take control of our own destiny in terms of logistics and supply chain, such is the importance of a secure and consistent supply chain to the brands we serve.

We took up the challenge of Brexit early and seriously and invested significant time, money and resources to be as well prepared as we could be for all eventualities. It was with a sense of relief that a trade deal was agreed, but it was tempered by the realisation that while tariffs have been largely avoided we still find ourselves dealing with the challenge of managing a much more complex and bureaucratic supply chain, which has the potential to add significant costs and hidden barriers and delays to what up to now has been a largely frictionless relationship. These relate to customs, sanitary and phytosanitary controls – otherwise known as SPS – and other food safety and regulatory requirements. This, at a time, when the sector on both sides of the Irish Sea also faced the challenge and disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I am sure you all know, today's supply chains are more modern, agile, evolving and they move quickly to meet consumers' demands, so reverting to this slow, bureaucratic and paper-dependent system designed for old world type supply chains was always going to be a challenge, to say the least. In that context, after teething problems in the initial periods, export to Great Britain from Ireland had been working reasonably well more recently, although this was greatly assisted by the build-up of stocks in the UK in the pre-January deadline and the light touch approach adopted at UK ports. Many custom agents and exporters availed of the facility to defer import declarations for up to six months. My colleagues in logistics decided to proceed with declarations and report working with the HMRC chief system as challenging, with incorrect paperwork supplied by many ill-prepared

customers resulting in a substantial amount of the behind-the-scenes invisible hours being invested to solve issues arising.

After two months, some good progress has been made but more work is required. It is important that the learnings from this initial period – this is the essence of my point – are brought to bear in relation to preparations in advance of 1 April, when the UK moves to the next phase of its border regime. One major issue that did arise in terms of east-west trade flows was difficulties with backloads from Great Britain, leading to a shortage of trailers, delays and increasing costs of transport as many trucks returned empty to Ireland and those in the logistics business will tell you that is not financially feasible. This has somewhat improved in recent weeks as UK traders have become familiar with the paperwork required and imports from the UK are beginning to flow more freely again.

Movement of shipments through the ports in both directions continues to improve but there are still teething problems, with both SPS and customs controls. Our industry communicates these problems to the authorities via Food and Drink Industry Ireland and other bodies as they arise and they are dealt with accordingly. As stockpiles decline and we move into traditionally higher volume months, there is the potential for more delays. I cannot stress enough the need to quickly resolve the teething problems and for business to continue to adapt fast to the new administrative arrangements.

A big concern with Brexit for Irish exporters is our reliance on the UK as a land bridge for trade with continental Europe. There is one mortal sin in the food business no matter where you are, namely, failure to deliver on time. The risk of delay serving EU customers is too great as the system beds in, so we, along with many other exporters, shifted to direct routes to the Continent at considerable cost per vehicle, per shipment to northern Europe. Capacity and frequency of direct sailings to the Continent has been increased. Further capacity is needed, however, as the new capacity is well below the volume of traffic that has been traditionally using the land bridge.

Some exporters are still using the UK land bridge by necessity, focusing in the early weeks on transit through the UK to Holland and some exporters are back testing the Dover-Calais route. However, shipments of products of animal origin are minimal as additional certification requirements and processes are incumbent upon shippers. Delays are still being experienced and additional costs associated with paperwork and transit guarantee facilities are being incurred. In our view, long-term, the land bridge will continue to be an important route to market for Irish food and drink exporters, for costs reasons alone, but the system needs to settle in to remove uncertainty and delay.

Our food exports and the sophistication and resultant complexity of products to our neighbours in the UK and continental Europe have flourished because of common standards, regulation of processing at source and seamless movement of goods across borders. The inescapable requirement for certificates for products of animal origin requires streamlined systems and veterinary resources available, but in addition, the physical loading of vehicles creates an enormous logistical challenge to have enough resources in the right places at any one time. For many, the challenge of groupage, whereby we consolidate foodstuffs in a load, has been already felt, where many individual consignments need to be marshalled on to one vehicle through multiple pick-ups and dropped at different delivery locations. These loads form the day-to-day nuts and bolts of deliveries to smaller customers and from smaller producers as well as just-in-time deliveries from all sizes of producer. I want to emphasise in particular the smaller producers because as Julie

mentioned in her presentation, in many cases the UK was the first external market Irish companies had. In that regard, we need to be especially cognisant.

Without a solution, these deliveries will cease and the market and the value-add to both our economies will be lost. Clarity is required as to how such standard arrangements vital to the competitiveness of many small companies will be handled or certified by the authorities in terms of at the point of dispatch from the processors' cold stores and at the consolidation of these shipments with other shipments at the consolidators' premises. If it comes to pass that veterinary resources are required to witness every consignment onto every vehicle across the country, then the drag on resources will be immense. Given that the consignments are all from EU approved and supervised facilities, it would seem that the existing controls already provide the robust and legislative basis for the transfer of products between our two sophisticated markets.

Most companies are now focused on the forthcoming challenges for their exports to Britain as the second phase of the UK's border operating model takes effect from 1 April. On that date, Irish and EU exporters to the UK will face a new SPS regime for products of animal origin, such as meat and dairy, with veterinary health certification requirements, additional administration requirements and additional costs.

4.15 p.m.

Phase 3 of the controls comes into place on 1 July when agri-food export consignments will have to enter the UK through ports with border control post facilities and will be open to SPS controls, to include ID and documentary checks and physical examinations. This step presents further potential for significant disruption to logistics, with concern being expressed that the necessary infrastructure will not be in place on time. In addition, there is a large number of new and inexperienced personnel coming on board and it is accepted that there will be a learning curve bedding in period. Companies like Dawn Farms thrive on consistency and we ask for a level of discretion at ports in relation to the need for inspection on the basis of minimum and maximum levels of non-conformance.

As mentioned earlier, we need to learn from and take on board the experiences of importers since the start of the year. All importers and exporters must be ready for a new administration and paperwork regime on 1 April and the resources of the State, including veterinary certification, must deliver the support needed to maintain the 24-7 supply chain that underpins trade between our two countries.

Proximity is the first rule of business and proffers great advantage on those who can avail of it. Britain is Ireland's closest and most culturally similar market and *vice versa*. This is reflected in the staggering level of two-way trade in goods and services. We must look for solutions to avoid trade friction and the accompanying costs in relation to customs and SPS. These are difficult for large companies to absorb and even more so for small and medium enterprises, SMEs. Ultimately, they will impact on consumer prices.

A priority of this body should be to help to maintain the valuable two-way trade and cultural interaction, by adhering to the new realities, but investing in supporting a hi-tech, light-touch approach to maintain as best as we can a frictionless and seamless supply chain in both directions. Apart from Brexit, there are other challenges to address. Covid-19 will have long-lasting effects on our industry, but these are still a work in progress in relation to food trends and consumption patterns and behaviours. We are proactively addressing the sustainability imperative, which will be a main driver of change for many years to come at trade and consumer levels.



The UK, as I have already said, is a most valued market for Dawn Farms and for Ireland, one we have never and will never take for granted. We are committed to the UK for the long term and will continue to invest in long-standing relationships, developed over many decades, in tandem with a market diversification strategy which we began long before Brexit became the change agent that it is today.

Thank you Co-Chairs and Members for your time. I wish you continued success in your broader endeavours.

*[Applause]*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr. Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much Larry. It is obvious from your comments in regard to Dawn Farms how progressive and innovative the company has been in growing and developing in a number of countries. You also touched on the current teething problems in the new trading circumstances. You give clear messages for public authorities and the political systems as well to address those issues without delay.

We have time now for some comments and questions for Julie and Larry. I note Lord Bruce has indicated.

**Lord Bruce of Bennachie:**

Thank you very much. Thanks for both of the presentations. They were really interesting. One can see that there is a real commitment to try to ensure that in a post-Brexit situation we get over these teething problems. To what extent are we talking about teething problems in the sense that we have to make adjustments which people have not prepared for and to what extent are there some significant changes? A lot of small businesses in particular, with no disrespect to Larry who has a big business and can probably find his way through these, are saying that the costs and the bureaucracy are making cross-border trade uncompetitive and uneconomic and they are pulling out. That is more than teething problems; it is a loss of business which, perhaps, other people will pick up. My question is to what extent does Mr. Murrin think we need to see whether it will be more than a matter of getting over them, but perhaps negotiating some way through them and trying to find a better accommodation. Frankly, a lot of the bureaucracy appears to be a little unnecessary and perhaps when the dust settles and people get a little calmer, it might be possible to get a more efficient way of managing things.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thanks, Lord Bruce. Larry and Julie, do you want to respond?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

Larry, do you want to go first?

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

To take the question broadly, it is in no one's interest that any company, of any size, should be incurring extra cost to reach its markets. We particularly do not want this and would strongly advocate a very short-term review of how systems have worked to date and look for the simpler

routes before we reach the really difficult implementation phases in April and July when, if we layer bureaucracy on at that point in time, it will have only a further negative effect.

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

I might come in there. There are certainly teething problems that are a result of a lack of familiarity, on both sides of the Irish Sea on behalf of companies, of people who are dealing with a market which, for 40 years, was like an extension of the domestic market in both directions. Those are things which will add cost, there is no doubt about that, because once one is having to do declarations, etc., it will add cost and delay. Those are things at which we will improve but there are certainly additional costs of trade in both directions. Brexit does mean a permanent change in that relationship and there are issues associated with that, which is why we would be encouraging companies on that innovation and competitiveness agenda to drive as much cost out of their systems as they possibly can because additional costs are being incurred by companies and that will continue to be the case.

**Mr Brendan Howlin TD:**

I was very interested in both presentations. I want to ask two questions to Larry. I detected a sense of concern, shall I say, at reaching the timelines for derogations and that we have not yet seen the worst of the impact of Brexit. Where can we address that? Is it for us to focus on the companies that are not prepared, or is it for us to focus on State agents who need to work differently because their systems are simply not up to it?

My second question relates to the point Larry made about direct connectivity between Ireland and continental Europe. From a constituency perspective, I am very aware that the direct links from Rosslare have gone from three a week to 16 a week since 1 January. What level of capacity needs to be put in place to meet demand, in Larry's estimation?

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

On the preparedness of companies, large and small, much work was certainly done by the larger companies on both sides of the Irish Sea on their approach to Brexit. We are not on our own in that regard. Perhaps many companies gambled on the fact not only that there would be a trade deal but that there would be a trade deal without the complexities with which we are left today. I feel that was a factor for people on both sides of the sea. They were disinclined to put their resources into preparing for something that they were not sure was ever going to happen and, if it did, how it would impact them and that went on for nearly four and a half years.

Notwithstanding that, and in order to get over it, everybody needs to tweak the models a little. Industry and businesses of all sizes need to pick up and get with the programme whilst Governments on both sides and other regulators, especially in Ireland and their counterparts in the UK, need to look at how we can make that trade as seamless as possible while acknowledging all the complexities with which we are left, as will be the case for many years to come.

The Deputy also asked capacity and this is an issue for all the Members of the Assembly. All the traffic that went through Great Britain from Ireland to reach into continental Europe spent money on fuel, goods, tyres, services, accommodation, ferries and all the things about which we tend not to think. The bureaucracy now in place means that there are now significant obstacles in that path.

To come back to the question about the direct route, there is a simple answer. However, there is the issue of significant cost and that will be a big challenge because the costs are now an extra €600 and €800 per vehicle to go the direct route into continental Europe. That is significant when it is

spread across a 24-palette or 32-palette container. The customer or consumer will end up having to pay that cost.

The question about volume requires looking at the amount of product that flowed through Britain into continental Europe. We, the industry, have been saying to the Irish Government for some time that we need more guarantees of volume at a competitive rate.

**The Lord Empey:**

I want to ask our two guests about costs. We will not hold them to estimates at this early stage of the process, but could they offer a guesstimate in percentages? Ultimately, the consumer will pay for this. Larry quoted an additional cost of €600 to €800 for trailer or lorry loads. What is the overall percentage of total cost the consumer might face? This has a huge impact on competitiveness. What would our guests estimate, or guesstimate at this stage, the cost is likely to be?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

The figure that many of the companies with which I am dealing have put on that cost is in the region of 8% to 10%. If one is going to continue to trade in lower-margin products, cost must be taken out of the system somewhere to make up for it. That is the estimate I have been given by many companies at this stage.

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

It is important to reinforce or add to what Julie has said. Thank you for your question, Lord Empey. The incremental cost to a product depends, ultimately, on the value of the product itself. In many of the more valuable products, the incremental cost may be a lower percentage so it could be 5% in the case of higher value meat and dairy items or, as Julie has said, 7%, 8% or 10% in the case of lower value items. It is costing an extra €600 or €800 to get produce to continental Europe without going through the UK. That cost needs to be looked at. We need to look at ways to address that in Ireland and Britain.

*4.30 p.m.*

Britain is exporting to Ireland €4 billion worth of commonly known brands that are very popular with Irish consumers, as I touched on. We also want to keep those costs competitive, so it is in all our interests to find ways to solve those access problems, not only in terms of bureaucracy but also in terms of the transport.

**Mr Éamon Ó Cuív TD:**

Do our guests think it is sustainable in the long term not to use the land bridge? In other words, is it imperative that we re-establish the land bridge by dealing with the bureaucratic problems? How many of those problems can be solved by much better IT systems on all sides?

Groupage was mentioned. I understand that for products coming from Britain into Ireland – I do not know if it works the other way – one has to give 24 hours' notice. If one is picking up goods across England and Wales, one does not have 24 hours to give the notification to Dublin. I understand that is causing significant problems for people involved in groupage.

It is not sustainable that we cannot trade easily, over and back. This is a huge issue with which we must deal. Are we still facing a backload problem, in other words, more trucks going out than coming in? As Larry said, that is totally unsustainable in the long term

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

Thanks, Éamon, for your question. I will start with the question about more trucks going out than coming in. What many logistics and haulage vehicles have done over the years is to make deliveries in the UK and if they did not pick up a backload from the UK itself, they might go further into continental Europe with empty vehicles and bring back fruit or other produce into Ireland. That is now much more difficult to do, so the whole job of transport providers, logistics and the associated costs have become significantly more difficult in that regard.

The Deputy asked about IT and potentially it has a significant role to play. Like many other companies, we underwent the trusted trader programme with the Irish Revenue and I would like to see that become much more widespread. I would also like to see it commonly accepted on both sides of the Irish Sea in order to smooth out the path of getting the job done at the most cost-effective rate. Groupage has been hardest hit in this respect. We bring many mixed loads of products in from the UK and ship out many mixed loads of products. It has turned into a bureaucratic nightmare for our people, the supplier and the customer in every respect. All the stakeholders need to work on that issue quite sharply. We need a big pick-up in progress and speed in that space.

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

I will add to something that Larry said earlier about delays. An exporter cannot have delays and unpredictability. That is why many companies have decided that the land bridge is not an option at present. I hope that will settle down and people will have options, but the unpredictability has driven many of the companies to direct routes to Europe.

Larry's point about mixed loads has consequences for smaller companies if there is an issue with a load that one's produce is caught up in. These problems are particularly difficult for small companies.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

John O'Dowd MLA has indicated. Is John still with us?

**John O'Dowd, MLA:**

My point has been covered, so thank you very much.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you, John. David Johnson of Jersey.

**Deputy David Johnson:**

My screen froze, so it may well be that my point has already been answered. Jersey is a Crown dependency and is not itself a party to the recent trade agreement. In fact, only last week the Brexit review panel, which I chair, submitted support to the state, stating that we wished to confirm our position with it. In the context of that review, comments were made by those who export fish from the island about the additional costs. Within that equation was the question of direct export not only to French ports but also to other ports. From the comments made by Larry originally, I take it that while he referred to his hope that these are teething problems, he is very much concentrating on alternative ports. I take it he believes the problems are probably more permanent than teething and I would like him to confirm that.

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

I would like to think that they are not permanent problems and will be resolved and are resolvable. Unless these issues are brought to the attention of the stakeholders, in particular those in government or those close to government who can guide and advise, nothing will happen. I am more of an optimist in that regard but, as Julie already said, an exporter cannot be late with deliveries or let down customers. Reputations hinge on that.

When we were starting our business, 36 years ago, my first export order was half a palette of a particular product that was going to a customer in France. In those days, one had to go to a place called Rungis to customs clear the goods before they were delivered to the customer. The haulier, as it was at the time, lost the order. It disappeared into thin air in Rungis. I did not even speak French then and I do not speak that much now, but explaining that to a customer, with the reputational damage associated with it when one is starting a business, is not tenable. That was why we started our own logistics business and the rest, as they say, is history.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Does Julie want to add anything?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

I do not think any of us could survive if we did not have an optimistic streak. Looking at the situation this week, compared to eight or ten weeks ago, there has been progress in addressing some of the issues around people getting used to systems, being able to address problems and becoming more familiar with things. However, that does not mean that the world will go back to where it was, because it will not. Brexit is about change. There was so much discussion about the trade agreement that many companies believed that if there was to be a deal, life would continue as usual. There is a big learning curve. Many representatives of transport and logistics companies talk about the delays caused by a lack of familiarity on the part of people who are introducing products to Ireland. Full loads going out are coming back empty because companies have neither the necessary preparation nor resources to deal with all of the issues. I think many of those issues will resolve themselves but there is additional cost which impacts on the long-term sustainability of businesses in both directions for low-margin products.

**Mr Seán Crowe TD:**

Can you hear me?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

Yes.

**Mr Seán Crowe TD:**

I thank Larry and Julie for their contributions. They spoke about teething problems. Do we have at this stage any sense of how much these so-called teething problems are costing in percentage terms? I would say, at this stage, most companies have a fair idea. I am most concerned about smaller SMEs and the impact on them. We are hearing all the time about more and more people looking to go directly to France and I am wondering if our guests have a rough idea of the percentage that it is costing companies at the moment?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

Companies have indicated to me that the cost of extra bureaucracy, systems and processes they must put into place is an additional 8% to 10%.

**Mr Seán Crowe TD:**

Is there any way of reducing those costs? Is there anything we, as legislators across all the jurisdictions, can do?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

It is possible to look at what paperwork can be taken out of the system. We are in a partly unreal situation because there was a lot of stockpiling in both directions in the early part of the year, so the levels of trade between Ireland and the UK have not fully returned to normal. I am not sure whether those levels have been restored this week, but they had not, to date. Familiarity will help some of that but there are extra costs. Every piece of paper requires to be produced and there are delays in getting issues checked. As people get used to the system, it will get better.

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

I agree with Julie. I think technology can offer a way forward and help to reduce incremental cost. I have one last point to make, unless there are other questions. The food industry in Ireland, Great Britain and elsewhere traditionally operates on single-digit profit before tax. The really good companies in that sector might make 7%, 8% or 9%. Most are hoping to make 5% profit and many struggle between 0% and 3%. There are some that do not make any money at all.

The point I want to make is that why transport and these bureaucratic costs are so critical is that the ability of the industry on either side of the Irish Sea to absorb that is almost non-existent because the margins are so thin to start with. This is not a technology business where the margins might be 90%. We are talking about single-digit profit before tax in the vast majority of cases. That is the only point I would like to make.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thanks, Larry. We have a final question now from John Scott, MSP.

**Mr John Scott MLP:**

When I raised the issue of trade with the ambassadors, Adrian O'Neill said that BIPA politicians could help by keeping the temperature down. BIPA has a huge number of influential politicians who can speak to and lobby many stakeholders. Where are the pinch points and who needs to be lobbied? Even if our guests do not want to name names, they could join up the dots. Most of the politicians here today would be happy to help and to lobby the stakeholders to get this matter resolved. Can our guest help in that regard?

*4.45 p.m.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Is Mr. Scott speaking about regulatory authorities in the different jurisdictions?

**Mr John Scott MLP:**

Where are the pinch points? These matters need to be resolved. Is it the regulatory authorities, politicians or what?

**Ms Julie Sinnamon:**

I did not hear the earlier conversation so I do not know to what the ambassador was referring when he spoke about keeping the temperature down. At the end of the day, resolving some of these issues would be a matter of sitting down with the authorities on both sides of the Irish Sea and talking about the specifics of the problems that are causing delays and seeing if they can be sorted out. It will be resolved around the table with representatives from Ireland, the UK and the EU talking about these specific issues to see if there is any way to streamline these matters.

Larry has spoken about the low profit margin in the food sector. Some 47% of the exports from Enterprise Ireland clients are food. Food is a critical product. The fact that the UK regulations will be phased in over a period of time, including changes in April and July, means that there is a lot of concern from companies as to what will happen. The real impact, in both directions, will not be felt until all the regulations are implemented. The transport companies are dealing with the specifics of these matters every day of the week. Some of the issues have been addressed and certainly some of the issues during the first couple of weeks related to a complete lack of familiarity and people not realising that they were required to pay duties in advance. There were many things which probably have been sorted out at this stage, but it is a matter of trying to streamline every aspect of it, to take as much cost, time and pain out of the system as possible.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thanks, Julie. Would Larry have one final message for the people who make decisions?

**Mr Larry Murrin:**

As I said earlier in my presentation to the Assembly, there is no one thing; it is a combination of small to medium-sized things which, added together, represent significant obstacles. That is what we are talking about here and I think it was to that the question related.

From an Irish perspective, we tend to channel those issues through our industry representative body, Food and Drink Industry Ireland, a subset of IBEC. We are focused on giving concise, clear situation reports to the authorities here and we have good, open lines of communication with the authorities. I would also like to say that the authorities here do their very best to listen. I dearly hope for the same situation in the UK because I know that there are open lines between parallel bodies, including the Confederation of British Industry, CBI, and others with bodies here. That is a great way to try to clear some of the logjam but the one thing I have learned about logjams over years of growing a business is that there must be listeners on the other side of the table. That is important in these circumstances because businesses, big and small, burn if people take too long to get the message. I think that is a really important thing to say in the context of today.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you, Larry. On behalf of the Co-Chair, Andrew, and all Members of our Assembly, I sincerely thank Julie and Larry for their excellent contributions both in their initial addresses and in answering the questions. The topic is fascinating and important. The challenges and changes discussed and the developments in trade are common across our islands. It is very important and a clear message from our guests is that we address the items discussed to ensure the benefits of strong economies are felt across all regions and benefit all citizens despite the many challenges that face us all in the context of a new trading situation and the pandemic. My sincere thanks to Julie and Larry for their excellent contributions to our deliberations this afternoon.

We have come to the adjournment of this plenary meeting. Our business is now concluded. On behalf of all Members, I would like to thank our speakers, our joint secretariat and co-clerks.

On this occasion, I want to mention the support from across the Houses of the Oireachtas service, including ICT, sound and broadcasting for this virtual session and for the support staff in the other Legislatures. When we were appointed, towards the end of last year, both Andrew and myself, along with other members of the Steering Committee, decided that we needed to have a plenary session despite the challenges it would pose to have one involving so many Legislatures over so many countries. We were determined to have that plenary session as early as possible in 2021 and today's event has been very beneficial. A strong programme of work is laid out for our Committees to do before we meet again in full plenary session in the autumn of this year.

Perhaps Andrew would like to say a few words before we call on the Rt Hon Sir Peter Bottomley to move the formal adjournment.

**The Co-Chairman (Andrew Rosindell MP):**

I thank Brendan and all the staff of the Oireachtas who have worked so hard to make today possible. This is the first time we have had a virtual plenary session. It will not be the last because the next session, later this year, will also be virtual. I will say a few words about that in a moment. I thank the staff for all they have done. It has been a really great day. We have learned much, had some excellent speakers and covered topics such as trade, co-operation and a whole range of areas that all of us know are very important, not only to our individual nations, but also our bilateral friendship and links. It has been a productive day and I thank everyone for taking part.

I would like to say a few brief words about the next plenary. It is the British turn to host the next plenary and the plan was to hold it in Jersey, as was mentioned earlier. However, a decision has been made by the Steering Committee that it is better to allow Jersey to prepare more definitely for 2022 because of the uncertainty about where we are going to be and what is going to be possible in the rest of this year. As David mentioned earlier, Jersey is a magnificent place, as many of us will know, so it is important that we go at a time of year when we can most enjoy the daylight. We hope that there will be greater certainty and no restrictions next year, so next September would be a good time to go to Jersey. That is what we have proposed to the Chief Minister.

If we do not go to Jersey this year, it means that later this year, the plenary will be held virtually, as we are doing today, but from London. It will be very similar to today's session but organised by the London team. That is the plan and it means that our work can continue and we look forward to that meeting in the autumn and then, hopefully, getting back to normal in 2022 when it will no longer be necessary to have plenary sessions virtually but instead can have them face to face. That is going to be great and we look forward to it.

We can now move to the British representative who is going to move the adjournment. That will be the Rt Hon. Sir Peter Bottomley MP, who is the father of the House of Commons.

**Rt Hon Sir Peter Bottomley MP:**

I thank both Co-Chairs. I may have been in the House of Commons for longer than anybody else continuously, but I am the shortest serving person on this Parliamentary Assembly and it is one of the greatest honours of my parliamentary life to be with you. Coming to terms with history and making history, sharing lives, is one of the things that this Assembly does best. The right kind of people want to join the Assembly and contribute well. I think it was the Irish Ambassador, Adrian O'Neill, who said that we have our relations. For my part, one of my great-great-uncles died at the Somme in the 16th Irish Division of the Connacht Rangers and my son-in-law and daughter-in-law are both from south of Dublin. I am not only the father of the House but also grandfather of people who support London Irish.



I would like to formally propose the adjournment of this plenary session.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Brendan Smith TD):**

Thank you very much, Peter. London Irish were involved in a very exciting finish to their game at the weekend; I watched some of it.

As Andrew did, I want to reiterate our sincere thanks to the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas for taking on the big task of organising this plenary virtually. It was done very well, and we are grateful for being able to hold this plenary at this time. I also acknowledge the work of the staff in the other Legislatures

I now declare the 60th plenary session of the Assembly closed, and we will meet in plenary session in the autumn. Thank you all very much, colleagues.

*Adjourned at 4.56 p.m.*