BRITISH IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (BIPA): 47th PLENARY SESSION

Introduction

1. The 47th Plenary Session of the British Irish Parliamentary Association (BIPA) took place in the Church House Conference Centre, Westminster, London from Monday 21 October to Tuesday 22 October 2013. The Scottish Parliament was represented at the London Plenary by Deputy Presiding Officer John Scott MSP, Willie Coffey MSP, Michael McMahon MSP and James Dornan MSP.

Themes

2. The Plenary focussed on the theme of securing peace and prosperity for Northern Ireland and the role of Britain and Ireland in shaping an evolving European Union. Speakers at plenary included the UK Government’s Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, and the Irish Minister for EU Affairs, Paschal Donohoe TD. Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Judith Gillespie OBE, the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourism Board, Dr Howard Hastings, and Mr Simon Gregory, Director of Markets at Tourism Ireland also addressed Assembly Members.

Plenary Summary

3. The Plenary began with an address by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP, on the economic and community relations issues still to be resolved in Northern Ireland and the opportunities to be promoted. The Secretary of State concluded that economic prosperity and social cohesion in Northern Ireland were “totally interlinked”. The Secretary of State also updated plenary on current UK-Irish trade links and the joint goal of the UK and Irish Governments to broaden and deepen cooperation with one another. The Secretary of State concluded her remarks by taking questions from the Assembly on these, and a wide range of other, economic and security related issues. A transcript of the Secretary of State’s speech can be found on the BIPA website at: http://www.britishirish.org/speech-by-secretary-of-state-theresa-villiers-mp-to-the-british-irish-parliamentary-assembly-in-london/
4. Thereafter, Members debated a Motion lodged by Northern Ireland Assembly Member, Barry McElduff MLA, which read, “In this, the fifteenth anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, this 47th plenary of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly reaffirms its support for the underlying principles of the Good Friday Agreement, including equality, mutual respect and parity of esteem, and calls for a renewed focus, on the basis of the above principles, by the two governments and the parties to the Executive on the need to give effect to the GFA provisions with respect to the establishment of a Bill of Rights for the north of Ireland and the creation of a charter, open to signature by all democratic political parties, reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of the fundamental rights of everyone living in the island of Ireland.” The Assembly agreed to further examine the case for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and referred this to the BIPA Committee on Sovereign Matters (Committee A).

5. The Chair of BIPA Committee B (European Affairs), Robert Walters MP, presented the Committee’s report entitled, “Report on the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union January – June 2013”. The report commends the effort of the Irish Government during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which helped to secure major agreements in high profile areas. The report states that the Presidency priorities of ‘Stability, Jobs and Growth’ were also well focussed as they had significance at both European and domestic level. These priorities, the report argues, informed all aspects of the work of the Presidency and the Committee welcomed how this strategy resulted in significant decisions. A copy of this report has been placed in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Bib number 54775.

6. Thereafter, Pascal Donohoe TD, Irish Minister for EU Affairs, addressed plenary on the outcomes and successes from Ireland’s recent Presidency of the Council of the EU, including helping to secure major agreements in areas such as the EU’s long term budget to 2020. The Minister also used his address to emphasis “the uniqueness of the Ireland-UK-EU relationship”. The Minister and Committee B Chair, Robert Walters MP, then jointly responded to questions from the Assembly. A copy of the Minister’s speech can be found on the BIPA website at: http://www.britishirish.org/speech-by-irish-minister-for-european-affairs-paschal-donohoe-td-to-the-british-irish-parliamentary-assembly/

7. The final session of the day was an address by Dr Howard Hastings, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Mr Simon Gregory, Director of Markets of Tourism Ireland, on the opportunities that tourism presents to both the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland economies.

8. The second day of plenary began with an address by Judith Gillespie OBE, Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI, on the security challenges facing Northern Ireland, fifteen years on from the Good Friday Agreement. Her address to the Assembly focused on three broad themes: recent security developments; some broader reflections on the achievements of the past
fifteen years and the challenges for the future policing of Northern Ireland. Following her speech, the Deputy Chief Constable answered questions from Assembly Members. A full transcript of her speech can be found on the BIPA website at: http://www.britishirish.org/speech-by-deputy-chief-constable-of-the-psni-judith-gillespie/

9. Thereafter, the Chair of Committee C (Economic Affairs), Jack Wall TD, presented the Committee’s report entitled, ‘Report on Renewable Wave and Tidal Energy’. The report calls for an intensified effort to encourage greater commercial participation in the marine energy sector, particularly in affording easier grid access, increased funding for research and development and technological measures to curb the impact of intermittent supply. Copies of this report have been placed in SPICe, Bib No. 54775

10. Finally, Lord Alfred Dubs, Chair of Committee D (Environment and Social), presented the Committee’s report entitled, “Inquiry Into Human Trafficking”. The report calls on greater cooperation across the jurisdictions of the UK and Ireland; greater awareness among the public and those in frontline roles, including the police, likely to engage with the victims and perpetrators of trafficking; improved data collection to give a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem and to assist with the identification of trends; and greater conviction rates for trafficking. Copies of this report have also been placed in SPICe, Bib No. 54775

Further Information

11. The next plenary of the BIPA will be held in Dublin from 30 March – 1 April 2014. The theme of the Dublin plenary will be “The Future of Work”.

UK and International Relations Office
November 2013