BRITISH IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY (BIPA): 48th PLENARY SESSION

Introduction

1. The 48th Plenary Session of the British Irish Parliamentary Association (BIPA) took place in the Great Hall, Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin from Monday 30 March to Tuesday 1 April 2014. The Scottish Parliament was represented at the Dublin Plenary by Deputy Presiding Officer John Scott MSP, Willie Coffey MSP, Michael McMahon MSP, Alison McInnes MSP and Gordon MacDonald MSP.

Themes

2. The Plenary focussed on the theme of ‘The Future of Work’. An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD, provided the keynote address, the full text of which is attached as an Annex to this paper. Other speakers at the plenary included Brian Hayes TD, Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works; Brendan Howlin TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; Michael O’Leary, Chief Executive, Ryanair; Gerry Kindlon, Senior Vice President of Londonderry Chamber of Commerce; Ann Riordan, Chairperson, Science Foundation of Ireland; Frank Ryan, Chair, Industrial Development Authority; Dr Eoin O’Malley, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University and Dr Richard Boyle, Head of Research, Publishing and Corporate Relations, Institute of Public Administration.

Plenary Summary

3. The Plenary began with an address by the Irish Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works, Brian Hayes TD, on the plenary theme of ‘The Future of Work’. The Minister remarked on the economic value of the relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom, noting that it amounts to one billion euros in trade every week. A video of the Minister’s speech, and of all other contributions at the Assembly, including the Taoiseach, can be found on the BIPA website at http://www.britishirish.org/
4. Thereafter, the Chair of BIPA Committee A (Sovereign Matters), Frank Feighan TD, presented the Committee’s report entitled, “The Implementation of the Good Friday/Belfast and St Andrews Agreements”. The report states that while these Agreements have transformed life on the island of Ireland, their full potential has yet to be reached. The Committee also noted the commitments (in the Agreements) that remain unfulfilled and calls on all parties to maintain momentum to ensure that all outstanding provisions are implemented in their totality. The Committee also specifically recommended that:

- A formal public reporting mechanism on the implementation of the Agreements be put in place;
- Every effort be made to bring the Civic Forum back into operation to harness the strength of civic society in Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland parties be encouraged to work together towards a scheme that fosters linguistic diversity, including the Irish language and Ulster Scots;
- The North/South Ministerial Council explore new areas of cooperation that have mutual economic and social benefits; and
- Political parties in Northern Ireland, in cooperation with the British and Irish governments and other partners, forge an approach to human rights that reflects the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and the principles of mutual respect for the identity and ethos of both communities and parity of esteem.

The Committee also recognised the potential for greater cooperation between the BIPA and the British Irish Council. The full Committee A report was adopted by the wider Assembly at the Dublin Plenary. A copy of this report has been placed in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Bib number 54775.

5. Following the presentation of the report by Committee A, the Chair of BIPA Committee C (Economic Affairs), Jack Wall TD, provided the Assembly with an update on the work of that Committee.

6. The Committee C Chair advised that the committee will focus its next inquiry on youth unemployment. Mr Wall confirmed that the Committee is keen to include in its deliberations the EU aspects of efforts to address youth unemployment and disengagement. He confirmed that the Committee has agreed to visit all BIPA jurisdictions as part of this inquiry and that they hope to complete this by the end of the next Irish plenary session in spring 2015.

7. There followed a panel discussion and Q and A with Members on the plenary theme of ‘The Future of Work’. Speakers at this session included Mr Gerry Kindlon, President of the Londonderry Chamber of Commerce; Ms Ann Riordan, Chair of Science Foundation Ireland; and Mr Frank Ryan, Chair of the Industrial Development Authority. The three speakers focussed their remarks on the common strategies that might be forged in equipping citizens with the
necessary skill set required by the digital, high tech enterprises of today and the future.

8. The penultimate session of the day was an address by the Chief Executive of Ryanair, Mr Michael O’Leary. Mr O’Leary opened his remarks by providing Members with an overview of developments within Ryanair. He then focussed his comments on the importance of the tourism industry to stimulating the economy and creating jobs in the UK and Ireland. He specifically commented on the nature of many jobs in the tourism sector, namely that they are quite often entry-level positions and therefore have a positive impact on youth unemployment figures. Mr O’Leary focussed the remainder of his presentation on the issue of Air Passenger Duty (APD), his welcome of the Irish Government’s initial reduction of APD from 10 euros to 3 euros per passenger and its subsequent abolition, and of his wish to see APD abolished in the UK.

9. The final session of the day was the keynote address by An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The Taoiseach opened his remarks by welcoming the work of the BIPA and the important role it plays in fostering good relations between the UK and Ireland and their elected representatives. Joint UK and Irish trade missions were highlighted, along with the visit by Her Majesty the Queen to Ireland in March 2012 and the return visit by President Michael D Higgins to the UK in April 2014, as examples of this close relationship.

10. Continuing on this theme of close cooperation, the Taoiseach made reference to the second annual summit in Downing Street where he met with Prime Minister David Cameron to discuss progress made in UK-Irish relations over the past twelve months and what might be achieved in the forthcoming year. In addition to a joint trade mission to Singapore, the Taoiseach spoke of a joint economic study and the work currently being undertaken on the introduction of a reciprocal UK/Ireland short-stay common travel area (CTA) visa.

11. The Taoiseach also spoke of the importance of the Good Friday Agreement, the Belfast Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement to the peace process in Northern Ireland. He reaffirmed his government’s commitment to the peace process and to a society, north and south of the island of Ireland, founded on mutual respect, equal rights and opportunities. The Taoiseach concluded by answering a number of questions from Members across the BIPA jurisdictions.

12. The second day of plenary began with an address by Irish Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Mr Brendan Howlin TD, on the Irish government’s reform programme and its desire to see greater efficiency and effectiveness in the public services as a key enabler of economic recovery. The Minister outlined the significant progress in reducing costs, improving productivity, more online delivery of services, development of shared services and putting in place the structures to reform public procurement and property management. The Minister commented that many of these reforms are being implemented at a time of increased demands on public services, particularly across the areas of social welfare, health and education. The Minister also used his address to inform delegates about the Irish government’s second Public Service Reform
Plan, which outlined the key cross-cutting and sectoral reform initiatives that will be implemented over the next three years, as well as addressing their broader ambition for reform up to 2020. The Minister concluded by responding to a variety of questions from BIPA Members.

13. Thereafter, the Chair of Committee B (European Affairs), Robert Walter MP, provided Members with an update on that Committee’s work. He advised that the Committee, as part of its current inquiry into the European Investment Bank (EIB), visited its headquarters in Luxembourg to take evidence on the operation of the bank, the bank’s engagement with the UK and Ireland and the role that the bank has played in response to the economic crisis. Whilst in Luxembourg, Mr Walter advised that the Committee was informed of some EIB projects that have come to fruition. The Committee has subsequently decided to visit one of these projects to see what lessons can be learned from international comparators.

14. Committee B also decided to produce a short, follow-up report to its November 2010 report on the EU concept of a British and Irish regional economic space. In particular, it was announced that the Committee will look at EU cabotage rules and, in particular, the UK’s HGV road user levy within the BIPA jurisdictions. Mr Walters advised that he hoped that a short report will be presented to the next UK plenary in October 2014.

15. Mr Walters also informed plenary that Committee B agreed that its next major inquiry would be into the operation of the two visa systems within the European Union – Schengen and the Common Travel Area. The focus of this inquiry will be the impact of the two systems on trade, tourism, labour and study, and on the practicalities for business.

16. Following on from the Chair of Committee B’s address, and the subsequent question and answers from Members, Lord Alfred Dubs, Chair of Committee D (Environment and Social), provided the Assembly of an update on its current inquiry into Irish Travellers and Roma. Lord Dubs advised that whenever they meet as a committee to take evidence they also visited local travelling sites to hear from the local travelling community. Lord Dubs advised that although they are about half way through the inquiry, that there are clearly negative attitudes and perceptions of both Irish Travellers and Roma, as well as discrimination. The Committee intends to take evidence in London and Edinburgh later in the year.

17. The penultimate item of the Assembly’s business was to move and agree the following motions, lodged by Mr Mattie McGrath TD and Lord Alf Dubs, respectively. They were:

   “That the Assembly examines relationships in relation to the orderly wind up of Bank of Scotland Ireland”; and

   “The British Irish Parliamentary Assembly believes Dementia is a challenge throughout our respective jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland;
Members welcome the progress of Irish in Britain in developing the “Cuimhne” whole-community memory loss strategy to improve the lives of older Irish people and their families affected by dementia; and notes work being done on the ground—engaging families, support services and welfare providers, older people’s forums and pensioners’ groups, enabling them to improve services and keep those with memory loss included.

The Assembly further notes that Irish in Britain staff have established links with a well-known hotel group and a number of companies recognising the business case for expanding their market by becoming more dementia friendly; and welcomes the partnerships that have been built with The Alzheimer’s Society (UK), the All Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia and the Prime Minister’s Dementia Task Groups, tackling the cultural factors that prevent older Irish people from accessing mainstream support.

Members of the Assembly understand the difficulties that arise in keeping those with early stage dementia engaged in normal and active family life. We note that for those living overseas, visits back to Ireland provide a vital link with families. For carers and those affected by dementia, travel can be an uncertain experience and may very quickly become impossible.

The Assembly urges travel and transport companies to pay special attention to the needs of those experiencing memory loss and to assist families and carers maintaining their connection with home. Members believe there is a compelling business case for companies to take appropriate steps to become dementia friendly and enable families to remain part of the travel market.”

18. The final item on the agenda at the 48th plenary was a panel discussion on the reform of the public sector. Speakers at this session were Dr Eoin O’Malley, Dublin City University and Dr Richard Boyle, Institute of Public Administration. Dr O’Malley and Dr Boyle addressed the Assembly on the future of work and what that future might look like in the public sector and of the challenges faced in reforming the public sector.

Further Information

19. The next plenary of the BIPA will be held in Ashford, Kent from 20 October – 21 October 2014 (inclusive). Given the plenary will take place in the First World War centenary year, there will be a focus on commemoration and remembrance and the Assembly will dedicate the first day of plenary to a visit to Flanders, Belgium.

UK and International Relations Office
May 2014
ADDRESS BY AN TAOISEACH, ENDA KENNY TD

BIPA PLENARY, DUBLIN, 31 MARCH 2014

Thanks very much. Joe said to me, “When you come here speak to them in Irish”, so tá mé chun caint as Gaeilge an t-am ar fad agus tuigfidh sibh céard atá á rá agam. That means we will conduct this entirely as Gaeilge, and you are all very welcome. [Laughter.]

Co-Chairmen, distinguished Members, fellow parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Royal Hospital in Kilmainham. I thank Joe and Laurence for their diligence and the commitment they are showing in the co-chairing of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I know the Members have had a fairly busy time since we met last in Letterkenny and that they had their 47th Plenary in London in October. I recall the first Plenary in London many years ago when the advice from a well-known former Leas-Cheann Comhairle of the Dáil was to engage with the British, show them we do not have horns and that it is well worthwhile negotiating with and talking to the Irish. We went there and they came here, and that continued for a number of years. There were outings on the golf course, long discussions afterwards and things began to work very well. That has evolved to become a very strong point.

My own experience of being a Member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly when it was first set up, and all the years in between, has given me an insight into British politics and the way the mother of Parliament works. That relates also to the understanding I have with the British Prime Minister in the context of what we do, both at the European Council and in respect of the bilateral arrangements between Ireland and Britain. The Members are building new relationships with different politicians, new politicians and people in the different communities. It is great for this BIPA, with its new Members, to get to know other new Members from the Commons and across the different parties in the sense of what we all stand for and how we can work together in the common interests of our two countries.

Twenty years ago, imagination only would have led us to believe that Her Majesty, the Queen of England, would come here on a royal visit and that the President of our country, President Michael D. Higgins, would go on a return formal state visit to Britain. Not only is Her Majesty able to speak our language, and it was very well spoken with a fluency—the Irish word for that is blas—I understand the British Monarchy are tweeting in Irish. They learned this from Commander Hadfield in the space station and last Friday, Buckingham Palace sent its tweets as gaeilge - that means in Irish—about the visit of our President to Britain next week.
The last time I was in Windsor Castle was as a tourist in the 1970s. I have the privilege to go there next week to accompany the President and his good wife to a state occasion in Windsor Castle. A celebration of our Irish spirit and culture will be demonstrated at the Albert Hall also.

If we think about it, the Members have helped bring about an understanding and a negotiation either way that allowed these events to happen. Her Majesty, the Queen, was able to come here on a royal visit, and our President will be able to return that formally.

I have to say, and Irish Members will know it, that when the Queen came here she made an exceptional effort to engage with the Irish people. There was a reticence in the beginning as to whether people should turn out in numbers to see the Queen passing by but by the time she got to Cork, there was a homely, warm atmosphere, epitomised by Pat O’Connell’s demonstration to her of a mother in law fish in the English Market. He is a gregarious character, with great experience. The people charged with protocol went to Cork and asked him how he thought he would be able to greet the Queen. He said, “Well, first of all, you should not have the counter between me and her. She is a very welcome visitor”. He showed her an exceptionally ugly fish with its mouth wide open. She asked the name of the fish and he said, “It is a monkfish, but here we call it mother in law fish”. That was the point of laughter between the two of them. The picture of the Queen of England engaging with an Irish fishmonger, whom she received in Buckingham Palace last week, went around the world.

The state visit highlights the warmth now generated between our two peoples. The age we are now in is one where there is a very strong relationship between the two islands that will bring prosperity to peoples North and South on this island and on both sides of the Irish Sea. That is why, Joe and Laurence, I am pleased to see the twin themes of work and jobs dominate your plenary programme. Our Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, spoke to the Members this morning, and tomorrow they will hear from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Brendan Howlin, who has carried out a very difficult job here given the very difficult economic circumstances in recent years in putting a programme of reform into the public service and dealing with the difficulties in expenditure ceilings in this country.

On these islands our economies are open. Obviously, we are not immune to the vagaries of the world in which we conduct our trade, export our goods and do more and better business. Increasingly, we have to rely on each other.

It is important to note that only two months ago the first troika, so to speak, travelled to Singapore on a comprehensive trade mission, and Secretary of State Villiers will understand this, with participation from Northern Ireland, Britain and ourselves.
Clearly, there are niche areas each can cover comprehensively, and it was a triumvirate that travelled to Singapore.

In March of 2012, Prime Minister Cameron and I concluded our joint statement, which we entitled British-Irish relations—the next decade. That set out a vision of closer co-operation between Britain and Ireland and identified a range of areas where we could advance that.

We know there are 50,000 Irish people on the boards of British companies who have made a significant contribution over the years to the British economy and the infrastructure of Britain.

Obviously, there is a great deal of work to be done in an extensive programme through the annual summit meetings, and I must say there is a great deal of interaction between senior officials on many of these areas.

The second annual summit took place recently in Downing Street where the Prime Minister and I discussed the progress made in the past 12 months and looked at what we might achieve in the next 12 months. In fact, in the past 12 months we have achieved a great deal. We published our joint economic study. We had the joint trade mission to Singapore to which I referred. We are continuing work on the introduction of a reciprocal short-stay common travel area, CTA, visa. There is a real energy, from a hospitality and tourism perspective, to be able to market Britain and Ireland with a common visa, particularly with interest now from China and India from where huge numbers of people are beginning to travel on an annual basis. That is a real demonstration of commitment to economic engagement and expansion by two countries on a common visa in an area about which there is very little difficulty.

Last year, I was privileged to be able to go to Flanders Fields with Prime Minister David Cameron. An Irish Taoiseach and a British Prime Minister stood there under the Peace Tower in Messines and visited the grave of Willie Redmond from County Clare, who was an MP in the Commons for 32 years. He joined the British Army in the Great War, the centenary of which we commemorate this year, and urged others to do so on the basis of the freedom of small nations and the hope that were Britain to win that war, Home Rule would apply for Ireland. These were difficult times for our people afterwards, having lost 50,000 people.

Members should believe me, if they have not been there, that it is an emotional experience to go to Flanders and see the craters made by the greatest man-made non-nuclear explosion in history, which took place on the Messines ridge, and the Menin Gate, with the more than 50,000 names, including three brothers from Dublin who died over two days with the Fusiliers. The Last Post is played at that gate every Friday by local buglers. It is a powerful evocation of what war was about, and for young people it has a striking impact.
The day we visited, Laurence, was very cold. The local school children came down and sang “Stille Nacht” in the place where the Germans played the British in the famous match during the truce on Christmas Day. Believe me, cold or not, it is a poignant moment to pass by all those little graveyards and headstones of unknown soldiers who were nothing more than young lads and young men fighting in that war.

When Queen Elizabeth came here and recognised the contribution they had made at the Memorial in Islandbridge, that, too, was a significant moment because when the survivors from Ireland came back here after the Great War they were not recognised by the Governments for many years. It was only many years afterwards that an amnesty was given to them, and they had a right and a belief to fight for the freedom of small nations or for King and country, whichever was their issue.

There are peace parks springing up throughout our country where those from every county, Protestant and Catholic, who fought in all the wars are commemorated in various ways. Members would be surprised at the numbers who travel from abroad to see the place from where long-lost relatives came. Prime Minister Cameron was able to locate the final resting place of a number of his ancestors who fought in the Great War. In many ways, that was for me a powerful moment of connection between our two countries.

I understand, Joe, that a committee of the Assembly has been undertaking an analysis of the progress to date on the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, the Belfast Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement, with a view to identifying outstanding issues and bringing forward recommendations for further action. I know that is difficult, but I very much welcome this work and look forward to any findings or recommendations that are brought forward here.

Through the Good Friday Agreement the people on all parts of this island, North and South, have made clear their commitment to peace and to a society founded on mutual respect, equal rights and opportunities.

The Good Friday Agreement has opened up not just economic opportunities. It opened up hearts and minds and a great sense of a future where all the communities dwell deep in each other’s shelter and never in each other’s shadow, in other words, connection and interdependence are very important. It is vital that the parties work to develop and enrich this sense across our land.

The peace process shows that politics really does matter, and that politics can make a difference.
The political situation in Northern Ireland remains more fragile than we would have wished but all parties must stay focused on the prize of enduring peace, and the solidity of peace. That is why I welcome the recommencement of party leader talks. I met with Dr. Haass in New York recently during the St Patrick’s week celebrations and had a reflection with him on the outcome of the talks he had on the parades, past activities and so on. It is a difficult journey, but our destination of peace and prosperity is very well worthwhile.

As Taoiseach I met groups from both sides of the community in Northern Ireland who have a raw emotion inside them that has never been concluded. That is difficult, whether it be the families of the so-called disappeared or the relative of the single survivor of the Kingsmill massacre. I talked to them. I brought them down to Government Buildings and spent three hours listening to the reservoir of unmended hurt that these issues were never concluded. I met also the people of Ballymurphy, who lost so many loved ones over a two or three day period. While that happened many years ago, that emotion is as raw as it was very shortly afterwards.

I mentioned this to the Prime Minister when I was in Downing Street because these issues are powerful but at the same time it is very important for people to be able to speak to the political process about what might be done, and I know we have to inch forward in a slow but sure fashion.

What we have said, following the invitation from the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, is that both Governments are very supportive of what has to be done by the parties in Northern Ireland. I noted President Clinton’s words in Derry: finish the job. We started this process 20 years ago and we have moved a very long way. There are a number of issues that need to be dealt with, and dealt with they must be, but they cannot be dealt with from outside, as many might assume. It must come from the inside, with encouragement from the outside, because essentially this is about the peoples of the North.

I genuinely do not want to see a type of blockage by the political process clinging to the past when so many young people want to get around that and open up the adventure of the future. The world we live in is changing rapidly and the digital frontiers, and the opportunities that present, are global in reach and available at the touch of a button. We must be able to build on the confidence levels in Northern Ireland, and we are happy to support our colleagues in this regard, be it cross-Border activities in health, education or infrastructure. We are not flush with money ourselves but we want people to understand we can do that with the co-operation we have, and we get co-operation from the United States and the European Union. That is why, during the Presidency last year, we were in a position to get extra moneys for the peace dividend, which is to be used for sensitive communities where young men in particular are often driven down the wrong road to criminality and who see no hope or way out. In that sense we must really commit to working with
communities all the time. I spoke to President Obama about this in the White House during the St Patrick’s week celebrations in the US and a number of Senators, Congressmen and others.

Joe and Laurence, I want to give recognition here to the steps that have been taken by First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness in continuing on the journey to a more united and reconciled Northern Ireland. These issues are important and while we can have differences of opinion, it is important that people see the First Minister and Deputy First Minister working in the interests of the Northern Ireland economy and therefore its people. When they travelled to China we were able to make available to them the facilities of our ambassador, who was a fluent Chinese speaker. The same applied in Japan and other places around the world where trade missions might be taking place in parallel or might cross their paths. In that sense, we are very happy to continue to work with our colleagues in the interests of demonstrating what peace can bring in terms of jobs and opportunities.

Both Governments are making every effort to speed recovery and economic cohesion throughout the island. We have had discussions about that as part of our programme in Downing Street. With the Northern Ireland Executive we are looking to see how best public funds can be used in the delivery of the services people need to make their lives and their communities work better. We want to see good results this year, and we hope to see those good results.

The Members of this Assembly know better than most the importance of political engagement at all levels to provide the leadership that drives that reconciliation because politics on its own is not good enough. It will not deal with all the issues. Civil society is crucial in shaping a genuinely reconciled society. There must be that sense of trust and belief from one community to the next.

It is not enough to forgive. I believe we have to fore give as well. That means that each of us give a little bit in advance, like a down payment of trust or a step to a better future. We have to look beyond the curve and consider where we want Northern Ireland to be in six months, two years, five years or ten years. What is our picture, and what can those of us who have some measure of responsibility do to assist that?

Co-Chairmen and Members, we will support every move we can that helps this process. Each year, our Reconciliation and Anti-Sectarianism Funds provide almost €3 million to hundreds of groups, large and small, in the community and voluntary sector working to create understanding of the different traditions in this island.

I was in the Short Strand some years ago and they had children from both sides of the community in the jerseys of the different sporting clubs, which showed them that the game is played irrespective of traditions, beliefs or backgrounds.
I often say that for the sake of coming generations the only “other” we should think of has to be “each other” because a wall between people does not differentiate from the fact that we have a shared humanity and a shared island. We should work, therefore, in every way we can to make that possible. That is why young people are key, and we focus on them to give them hope, a shared and prosperous future, and a sense of understanding that they have an opportunity to play their part. The groups we support demonstrate the will of the majority to forge and nurture reconciliation throughout the island.

We can be sure that relationships were forged and nurtured across that divide in Flanders, and on the fields and the farms of the Somme. When Willie Redmond was shot and very badly wounded on the Messines ridge, he was carried by a Protestant, on his back, for half a mile to the convent where he received treatment. He died there. The convent was moved later but the grave remains in the middle of a ploughed field. For the first time, as a result of that Great War to end all wars, where Protestant and Catholic fought in the interests of the Allies and the British Army north and south—the first time it ever happened—the opportunity to harness that type of connection is an unstoppable force, if we get it right in peacetime, for the good of the economy and jobs.

As Members know, we are starting the decade of commemorations encompassing the Ulster Covenant, the Great War, the Easter Rising and through to Independence and partition. We set up a committee here, with the assistance of professional historians, to ensure these events are done sensitively and comprehensively, with understanding on all sides of what is involved. We take the opportunity of new relationships on and across the islands to build understanding and trust over this decade of commemorations.

The period 2012 to 2022 sees a range of centenaries and other milestones in the history of the island of Ireland. We have to use them to reflect not just on what we have done but what we have yet to consider doing for, with and on behalf of each other for years to come.

This Assembly has done important work in considering these issues. I am pleased that the Irish Government is supporting a number of commemorative projects through the Reconciliation Funds. The events of this period shaped relations between Britain and Ireland for the century that followed. British-Irish partnership on significant commemorative events is therefore an important aspect of the commemorative programme. That is why the exhibitions have taken place in the Great Hall in the Commons and in Dublin, Belfast, and North and South. The Tánaiste laid a wreath in the North on Armistice Day. I was in Enniskillen. It was poignant to be there but also to see the co-operation in the laying of a laurel wreath.
among all the poppies, showing the singularity of peoples and their wish to live in peace.

Certain historical events will call for joint co-operation and attendance and with plans taking shape for the centenary commemoration of the 1916 Rising, it is the hope that representatives of the Royal Family and the British Government will be hosted in Dublin when those commemoration ceremonies take place.

Ceremonial events around the First World War, including the commemoration of the outbreak of war, the Battle of the Somme, and the Armistice, are also opportunities to reflect on and better understand our shared experiences through that war. The lamps may have gone out all over Europe, but with the Good Friday Agreement the flame of hope was lit, and the partnership we celebrate allows us to strengthen that hope and light.

The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has been a light for a very long time. Its Members have been at the forefront of the development of British-Irish relations for many years. I would like to thank them for what they have done and wish Joe, Laurence and all the Members continued success with their efforts into the future.

This is a time for confidence. This is a time for courage. This is a time for steadfastness and understanding that if the peoples and the Governments work together, the opportunity for prosperity and peace for the future for millions of people is at hand. Thank you.