



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé hAoine, 28 Márta 2014

Friday, 28 March 2014

Chuaigh an Ceann Comhairle i gceannas ar 10.00 a.m.

Paidir.

Prayer.

Seanad Reform Bill 2014: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy Micheál Martin: I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

This Bill has at its core the objective of making the political system more democratic and accountable. Unfortunately, this week it has been shown yet again how badly we need real reform. The Garda Commissioner was pushed aside, following a series of deeply suspicious events. Each element of this story has emerged drip by drip and there is not a person anywhere who believes everything is now out in public. Even the Government’s most craven supporters concede that we are facing a profound crisis which touches on one of our most important institutions. In the face of this crisis we have for months seen a strategy of attacking opponents, false claims left on the record, a reluctance to investigate serious allegations and an absolute refusal to accept even the most basic principles of democratic accountability.

This week the Minister for Justice and Equality went into hiding. Instead of taking responsibility, he limited himself to a couple of carefully scripted appearances in this Chamber. For only the second time in our history, the head of the police force resigned and did so following an approach by a senior official at the request of the Taoiseach. By any definition, this is a major public issue, yet the Minister did not give a single interview. He hid from public sight entirely on Monday and Tuesday. Worst of all, we, as Members of the Oireachtas but not members of the Government, had no powers to force him to be address this fundamental issue. We have met for four days this week and the questions we were allowed to ask about the departure of the Garda Commissioner were limited to two sessions of Leaders’ Questions, with the Taoiseach falling back on his now traditional approach of doing everything possible not to answer questions.

If ever there was proof that we had one of the weakest parliaments in the democratic world it was seen this week. The only reason much of what has happened emerged is the only committees not chaired by Government Members asserted their independence. This is very important. Committees such as the Committee of Public Accounts which is not controlled by the Government is one of the few which are asserting their independence of the Executive. The other com-

mittees are controlled by the Executive through their Chairmen.

Deputy Finian McGrath: Correct. That applies to the justice committee also.

Deputy Micheál Martin: In 2011 the people demanded real reform of their political system. They were promised real reform by every party now represented in Dáil Éireann. Once the election was over, the new Government announced it was determined to push ahead with what it termed a “democratic revolution”. Last year’s referendum on the abolition of the Seanad was intended by the Government as its major political change. It deployed empty populist rhetoric to claim that the Seanad was an elitist, undemocratic, idle and wasteful irrelevance. At the time the referendum proposal was published it enjoyed the support of 80% of the public. Fine Gael conducted the most cynical poster campaign ever held for a referendum. It debased politics.

When Fianna Fáil took its stand against the Government and the opinion polls, our argument was that the Government was proposing to make our system worse, to hand even more power to a dominant Executive and to use the referendum as a way of claiming, rather than delivering, reform. This argument which was also advanced by the main non-party “No” campaign won the referendum. No party or individual who expressed an opinion during the referendum called for the *status quo* to be maintained. The choice was abolition or reform and reform won.

It has become standard practice during Dáil debates on political reform for Government members to talk at length about all of the wonderful reforms they have delivered. This has included the Chief Whip announcing in 2011 that the Government had begun handing back power to the Oireachtas. I implore the Minister not to waste our time today with this nonsense. The Oireachtas meets for longer and has renamed some of its activities, but it decides less and less. Ministers routinely treat the House with disdain. They accept fewer Opposition amendments and proposals than ever. The guillotining of debates on Bills has reached historic highs. Basic courtesies to the Opposition such as proper consultations before European referenda have been abandoned. On the odd occasion such as on this Tuesday when we receive a briefing on a matter of public importance, we learn more from the media than from the Government. When we come here on days like today, we are allowed to propose Bills, but they are not allowed to become law. As we saw with my party’s recent legislation to protect Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, IBRC, mortgage holders, the Government sometimes pretends to support the legislation, but then lets it die quietly on the Order Paper. Nobody believes Government members when they say they have reformed the Dáil and the more they claim it, the more absurd they look.

On the evening when his personal initiative was defeated the Taoiseach said he was a democrat and acknowledged the people’s decision. He and his Government have since done exactly nothing to acknowledge the people’s decision. They propose to leave the Seanad intact, with the slight exception of changing the franchise for the university seats, a measure clearly intended as some form of petty revenge against the successful advocacy of the existing university Senators. The Government’s position is that it believes the Seanad is undemocratic, but it proposes to do nothing to reform it. If no action is taken in the next year, the earliest a more democratic Seanad could be elected is at the end of the next Dáil, possibly seven years from now. That is not acceptable. The right thing to do, which would show a commitment to genuine democratic reform, would be to hold consultations with the Opposition and agree a new referendum proposal to reform the election and powers of the Seanad and reform Dáil Éireann. There is no reason such discussions should take more than a month or two. The Government has rejected

this and said Seanad reform is not a priority and that it will not allow a new referendum to be held. Given this, our only option is to try to find other ways of promoting the reform for which the people voted. While the text of Bunreacht na hÉireann places significant limits on what can be done, we still have great flexibility to enact reform legislation. Most fundamentally, we have the ability to introduce a universal democratic franchise in the election of most Senators. A proposal to do this is at the core of the Bill before the House.

The existing Seanad panels could be opened up to universal suffrage through primary legislation. The idea of a primarily directly elected second Chamber is common in the democratic world. It leads to extra opportunities for conflict and tension within parliament, which would be very good. What many see as the dysfunction of the United States Congress is more a reflection of its federal system and the complete separation of powers between parliament and the executive rather than an argument against second Chambers.

We do not need a second Chamber which duplicates all of the powers of Dáil Éireann. It is reasonable to have one Chamber possess the final word in most disputes. This is provided for in Bunreacht na hÉireann and will not change. We need a more diverse parliament which has a greater opportunity to challenge the Government, review legislation and oversee the wider public service. While debates in the past three years in this House have been full of people stating with absolute certainty that all errors in the past were the responsibility of the Government, the first time the national Parliament discussed the financial system was when it was in the process of imploding. A more democratic, diverse and responsive Seanad could play a vital role in improving the obvious failures of the Oireachtas.

A significant point in this Bill is that it is proposed that the franchise would extend to all citizens, including those not resident in the State. My party will be supporting the proposal to extend the franchise for the election of the President when it comes before the House. Extending it for Seanad elections is possible without a referendum due to the broader wording of Bunreacht na hÉireann concerning the Seanad franchise. We believe this extension of the franchise outside the Twenty-Six Counties is reasonable given that the Dáil will retain the final word on all matters, as well as the only word on taxation and expenditure. There would be a serious issue requiring much deeper debate if it were proposed to give some people the power to dictate policies to which they would not be subject. This does not arise in the context of the Seanad and its existing powers.

The Bill proposes to extend the franchise on the higher education panel to graduates of all recognised universities and colleges. There was once a significant argument for these seats in ensuring diversity in a young State, but this argument no longer applies, and in the context of a constitutional reform of the Seanad, there would be no justification for retaining dedicated seats for higher education graduates. A further section of the Bill provides general principles concerning the manner in which the Taoiseach's nominees would be identified. These obviously could not be binding, but they do make the point that in a reformed Seanad the objective of filling representational gaps should be a concern of the Taoiseach.

A regular occurrence during these Friday sessions is Ministers reading a list of technical issues which officials believe are to be found in the Bill. Often they are entirely right that there are technical flaws. I accept that there are items in this Bill which require detailed scrutiny and amendment before they could be enacted, and that is why we have Committee and Report Stages built into the legislative process. Second Stage is supposed to be about the core principle of the Bill, which in this case is that we should open up the franchise for electing the Seanad.

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There are many specific points within the Bill and I would very much welcome a detailed discussion of them during Committee Stage. There are different ways of approaching practical issues of constructing the electorate for the panels, administering a postal vote and requiring diversity of representation. This principle was supported by the Government at great length and expense last year, and both Fine Gael and Labour indicated that they view the current method of electing Senators to be completely unacceptable. The Bill we are introducing today addresses the most important element of reform that is possible immediately, which is to open up the Seanad to all citizens. By adopting this Bill we could immediately end the elitism which the Government and Sinn Féin were so concerned with during the referendum. We could make our entire Parliament representative of the direct will of the people.

We do not have available to us the level of support staff that the Government can use for legislation, but we have shown quite clearly that it is possible to significantly open the Seanad even if the Government continues to refuse to hold a referendum on real reform. Through a full debate at different stages there are obviously many issues to be addressed and refined in this Bill, but the core point stands; the people demanded reform last year, and we have both the duty and the ability to deliver it. To fail to act - to do the minimum possible and move to other issues - would be an act of political arrogance which would reinforce the growing public disillusionment with the failure to reform Irish politics.

We have seen this Parliament become ever more marginal to vital debates. There have been many small changes, but taken together they have reinforced the idea of a dominant Executive controlling everything of significance. The only way to address this and begin to rebuild a Parliament worthy of public support is to listen to the demand for substantive reform. Listening to the people's decision last year and reforming the Seanad is an essential first step. We need a new referendum on full reform but we cannot wait seven years before there is a reformed Seanad. We should pass this Bill and ensure that the next time we elect a Seanad it reflects the will of the Irish people.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I welcome this debate but I utterly refute the content and tone, as well as the hypocrisy shown by the leader of Fianna Fáil on the other side. I note his sorry ranks today and there is at least one fellow traveller with a red tie who, in times of serious political issues, voted with the party's former leader, Bertie Ahern, and kept him in power during the most appalling ruining of our economy.

The Deputy said the Oireachtas was not relevant, but he is absent from this Chamber more often than he is present. We frequently call attention to the absence of members of Fianna Fáil during debates in this House.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Say it again. It is nonsense.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I represent the Government this morning.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Perhaps we should call a quorum.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I did not interrupt anybody over there. The party is noted for its absence more than its presence. Deputy Martin's attack on Oireachtas committee chairmen is disgraceful and should be withdrawn. He correctly pointed out that some committees are properly chaired by members of different parties, but the Deputy is being partisan in his treatment of committee chairmen who do not have his sanction. Seeing them as less worthy, less hard-

working and less focused or democratic in making Ministers accountable is absolute rubbish, and I refute that view absolutely. The Deputy can throw many low blows. Perhaps there is a history there that we do not know.

Deputy Finian McGrath: He is up for a scrap today.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That was really a low blow.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Is that why the Government wants the d'Hondt system?

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It is my conviction that all the chairmen of the Oireachtas committees, regardless of party membership, are not partisan, but they are fair and objective and hold Ministers to account. The Joint Committee on Health and Children is an example. The Deputy cannot say the Chairman - a Cork colleague - is not absolutely fair and mature in reflecting on very serious issues. That has added to the credibility of democracy in this House. All of the other chairmen are excellent people and hold us to account.

Deputy Barry Cowen: They did not hold Irish Water to account.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I say this as somebody who has repeatedly praised committees such as the Committee of Public Accounts. I have no difficulty with impartial and fair chairing of committees, which is what this House is about. I utterly refute the Deputy's comments in that regard. Notwithstanding his party's new commitment to reform of the Oireachtas, Fianna Fáil has in the past used the support it enjoyed to ensure there was no reform of democracy whatever.

Deputy Barry Cowen: Abolition is Fine Gael's form of democracy.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: It is lame duck politics. The Bill being debated here today is entitled "An Act to reform the method of election of members of Seanad Éireann-----"

Deputy Barry Cowen: The Minister should get back to the script.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: I did not shout down others, although I appreciate that the presence of some of those opposite is rare. They probably want to be recorded on the sound system.

Deputy Robert Troy: Has the Minister of State received a blow to the head lately?

Deputy Barry Cowen: Back to the script.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: That is what I want to do. The next time the Deputies speak they could at least be surrounded by other Members.

Deputy Sean Fleming: Look who is talking.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: In repealing the Seanad electoral acts and replacing certain provisions in those Acts, the Bill, on the face of it, reforms the method of election of Members of the Seanad. However, in the view of the Government, many of the provisions in this Bill are either incomplete or would be unworkable in the form presented. The Government has already settled its approach to Seanad reform following discussions between the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the other parties and groupings in the Oireachtas, and it is advancing legislation to reform the university franchise for the Seanad. We will, therefore, be opposing this Bill.

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Although not specifically identifying them, Deputy Martin acknowledged the weaknesses in the Bill when introducing it in this House on 4 February. He stated:

We do not have available to us the level of support staff the Government can use for legislation but we have shown quite clearly how it is possible to significantly open up the Seanad even if the Government continues to refuse to hold a referendum on real reform. Many issues are to be addressed and refined in the Bill through a full debate on various stages.

I agree there are many issues to be addressed and refined in this Bill and I will draw attention to some of these. I want to address part 5 of the Bill, which proposes a universal franchise for the election of 43 Senators. As stated by the Government Chief Whip, Deputy Paul Kehoe, in a Seanad debate on 29 January 2014, if it was the intention in framing the Constitution, that there would be a universal franchise for Seanad Éireann, then the Constitution would have so provided and the provisions on the election of the Members of Seanad Éireann would have mirrored those for the election of Members of Dáil Éireann.

I will turn to those issues in the Bill that are to be refined. I know it is not necessary and is not the practice in a Second Stage debate-----

Deputy Micheál Martin: Exactly. That is the point.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: -----to analyse a Bill section by section but we want to be helpful to the Fianna Fáil Members who are here. It is important today to identify and highlight some of the incomplete and unworkable provisions in the Bill.

The Constitution stipulates that Members of the Seanad are elected by secret postal ballot. Arising from this provision, ballot papers are issued to voters by registered post. This Seanad Reform Bill does not address the implementation of the constitutional provision on the secret postal ballot. The cost of running Seanad elections on a universal franchise, without a referendum to amend the secret postal ballot provision in the Constitution, would be quite significant. In the 2011 Seanad election, it cost €5.25 to send each ballot paper. That indicates what it might cost to send a ballot paper by registered post to over 3 million voters in Division 1 of the new Seanad register proposed in this Bill, that is, to those persons entitled to vote in Dáil elections, and this does not include those voters proposed by Fianna Fáil to be in Division 2 and Division 3 of a new Seanad register, that is, persons living in Northern Ireland who qualify for Irish citizenship and persons who hold a current and valid Irish passport and who reside outside the State. This estimate does not include the cost of staff to administer the election and count the votes. These are important considerations in introducing, without constitutional amendment, a universal franchise for the election of 43 Senators.

The Bill, in section 18(c), sets down requirements for registration in Division 2 of a new Seanad electoral register. That is the part of the register for persons living in Northern Ireland who qualify for Irish citizenship. Applications for that register are to be accompanied by a document endorsed by the Northern Ireland Electoral Commission. Such a document is to confirm that the applicant is ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland and is registered to vote in Northern Ireland elections. It is not clear that this provision has been given any detailed consideration as regards, for example, the legality of imposing a duty on a State body in another jurisdiction or as regards the legal requirements for the Northern Ireland electoral register.

The Bill provides, in Section 13(3) that, when registering, each eligible person would indicate the constituency in respect of which he or she has opted to cast their vote. I am intrigued

to know how this would work in practice. What will happen if all opt to vote in the cultural and educational constituency? On the other hand, what will happen if no one opts to vote in the administrative constituency?

It is not at all clear how the ‘gender balance’ provisions in section 44 would work in practice. This section requires that a minimum number of men and women candidates be elected in the university constituency; it requires that a minimum number of candidates be elected to represent each panel in the vocational constituency. Provision is not made for the situation where the required number of either gender is not elected by voters. How can the provision be implemented? How will it work?

The Bill, in section 9, requires the Taoiseach’s nominees to be representative of the following groups in this jurisdiction and in Northern Ireland, the elderly, the young, the new Irish community, the Irish diaspora, people with disabilities, sporting organisations, the arts, the Traveller community. Section 44 requires the Taoiseach to “give consideration to ensuring” that the 11 nominated Senators would have sufficient gender balance. If it was intended that this nomination process be regulated by law one would have expected that such provision would have been made originally in drafting the Constitution. The provision in the Constitution, however, gives discretion to the Taoiseach of the day in making these nominations and has been used in this way since the foundation of the State.

Part 6, Nomination of Candidates, provides that a person may be nominated to be a candidate by one or more nominating bodies, by a local authority or by the popular nomination of 500 persons on the Seanad electoral register. There is no further detail. No provision is made for how these nomination processes would be organised or how nominations would be verified or validated. Will it be necessary for a candidate to be nominated by any 500 persons on the Seanad electoral register? Or will a candidate be required to be nominated by voters registered in the particular constituency or panel for which they are standing?

Section 24, headed Qualifications and Experience of Candidates, effectively repeats Article 18.2 of the Constitution in providing that no person who is for the time being disqualified from, or incapable of being elected as a member of Dáil Éireann, shall be a candidate at a Seanad general election. It does not say anything about what experience is required. There are no detailed provisions in the Bill for the counting of votes. There are no detailed provisions for managing a proportional representation-single transferable vote, PR-STV, count in embassies and consulates abroad as proposed in the Bill. Implementation of such a provision would need careful consideration, having regard to practical operational issues around the running of elections and the resource implications for embassies and consulates around the world.

The Bill repeats a number of the constitutional provisions on Seanad membership and elections. It is hardly necessary or appropriate to do this in primary legislation.

When he published this Bill in January, the Fianna Fáil leader Deputy Micheál Martin said the aim of the Bill is to “strengthen the powers of the Upper House to act as a check on Government and scrutinise national and EU legislation”. I do not see a single provision in this Bill to address those aims. Seanad reform has been the subject of considerable debate. Following the October 2013 referendum, the challenge facing the various parties has been to produce proposals for practical, implementable reform of the Second House.

Last month, the Government asked the Leader of the Seanad to submit, on its behalf, a com-

prehensive set of proposals for operational reform, which can be implemented in the life of the current Seanad. These proposals focus on the Seanad's legislative and vocational roles, while acknowledging its role in EU scrutiny. The proposals also suggest ways in which the Seanad can engage with Government, within the parameters of the Constitution, as well as work jointly with the Dáil through the Oireachtas Committee system.

It is proposed that the Seanad should be involved in the legislative process at an early stage and should play a key role in improving legislative proposals before enactment. The Government will initiate more Bills in the Seanad, especially ones that deal with interests and topics on which the Seanad vocational panels are based, that is, education, language and culture, agriculture, labour, industry and commerce, and public administration. It is also proposed that the Seanad will have a role in the new pre-legislation stage for non-emergency Bills.

Oireachtas committees will provide copies of their recommendations to both the relevant Minister and the Seanad. The Seanad will be able to then ask the committee chairman to appear before it to discuss the committee's findings and can subsequently submit its own recommendations to the Minister. This process would include an appropriate deadline so as not to delay unnecessarily the introduction of the Bill. Committee Stage of non-emergency Bills would be restructured, to allow better consideration of Seanad amendments. Senators will initially be given time to set out the rationale for the amendments proposed, and to clarify any issues. Following an appropriate period, the Minister will give his or her response to the proposed amendments. This will in practice mean dividing Committee Stage into two distinct parts, with an appropriate short break between them. The Government is also proposing that more Seanad time be given for Private Members' Bills.

In relation to the Seanad's vocational role, recent innovations, such as the Public Consultation Committee, have enabled the Seanad to develop its work in this area. The Government supports the continued enhancement and development of the Seanad's vocational role within the existing constitutional framework. The Seanad should also review and debate reports of public bodies covering matters related to the vocational areas on which the Seanad electoral panels are based.

It is also proposed that the Second House play a more enhanced role in North-South relations, review the work of North-South ministerial councils and the British-Irish Council, and Ministers should make statements to the Seanad after attending such meetings. It is also proposed that the Seanad should review the work of the North-South implementation bodies and continue to engage with minority and other special interest groups. It should also continue to invite high-profile individuals, such as those involved in the Young Senators Initiative to address the House, to enhance its parliamentary and democratic role.

In terms of the Seanad's engagement with the Government, it must be recognised that the Government is responsible to the Dáil, under Article 28 of the Constitution. However, it is appropriate that the Seanad should engage with the Government of the day on policy matters. It is proposed, therefore, that the Government will outline its annual priorities to the Seanad in the same week that it outlines them to the Dáil.

It is also proposed that the Seanad consider the reports of Oireachtas committees and, if it wishes, make recommendations to the relevant Minister. Much of the work done by committees is not subsequently debated in either House. The Houses of the Oireachtas jointly scrutinise EU legislative proposals, on which much of the detailed work is done through joint com-

mittees which are best placed to undertake this task. However, the Seanad could provide a high profile forum for public debate on the work of the joint committees and EU matters generally.

Deputy Finian McGrath: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Seanad Reform Bill 2014. However, before I address the details of the Bill, I nominate the Minister of State, Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, for the brass neck award.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: The Deputy would win it every time.

Deputy Finian McGrath: He came into the House to challenge the Opposition, even though not one member of the Government was in the Chamber while Opposition Members were discussing Seanad reform. It is amusing to hear him speak about democracy and reform in that context. Committees are packed with Government Members to give them an in-built majority and a power of veto, yet he spoke about democracy. For several days his silence was deafening in dealing with the whistleblowers issue and further scandals have emerged this morning. These are the issues that need to be addressed by the House.

I commend Deputy Micheál Martin on bringing the Bill before the House. In the last general election we all promised to reform the political system. We need to develop a modern and inclusive democracy that would put the needs and rights of citizens first, but we also need to break down the barriers in society. That is the purpose of the Bill. The people who answered their doors to us in 2011 asked us to fix the system. I support the Bill because it would play a part in that process.

The campaign to abolish the Seanad was disgraceful, but the people decided to keep it. I am proud that I was involved in that effort. The people also voted for us to reform the Seanad to include all of the people. Independent Deputies and Senators played a crucial role in that campaign and I commend them for their victory against the odds and the negative claims made by certain individuals inside and outside this House. It was a difficult campaign for those of us who wanted to save the Seanad because the negativity and hostility were appalling. The lack of respect shown in the debate for democracy and the rights of citizens and councillors was also a disgrace.

We now have an opportunity to develop a clear vision for the future of the country as a democratic and inclusive state. The Seanad needs to bring new and fresh talent to give a voice to all sections of society. Section 6 of the Bill provides that Seanad Éireann “shall be composed of 60 Members, 11 of whom shall be nominated and 49 elected”. Section 7 provides: “The eleven nominated members of Seanad Éireann shall be nominated, with their prior consent, by the Taoiseach who is appointed next after the re-assembly of Dáil Éireann following the dissolution thereof which occasions the nomination of the said members”. Section 9 provides:

The Taoiseach shall take into consideration the need to ensure representation for the following groups or sectors in this jurisdiction and in Northern Ireland—

- (a) the elderly,
- (b) the young,
- (c) the new Irish community,
- (d) the Irish diaspora,

- (e) people with disabilities,
- (f) sporting organisations,
- (g) the arts,
- (h) the traveller community.

Elderly people are the backbone of this society and have helped to build the country. As such, we should give them a voice in the Seanad.

People with disabilities are often ignored, despite the huge a pool of talent among them. Some of them would make magnificent Senators. A system should be put in place to develop and retain this pool of talent, as we need to involve disabled people in the structures of society. One only needs to consider the CRC and Rehab scandals to realise the need to hear their voices. The Minister of State, Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, is out of touch in this regard. He spoke about democracy and inclusion, but all he did was waffle.

We also have a fantastic pool of talent in the arts community. People are often low key about the arts, but they play an important role in Irish society. We need to draw on the quality exhibited by our actors, musicians and writers.

For many years we have debated ways of involving the Traveller community in society. The Traveller community is marginalised and experiences racism on a daily basis, but it also offers magnificent individuals who are coming through the education system and groups such as Pa-vee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement. Their leaders would make magnificent Senators who could speak against prejudice, racism and exclusion. The sad reality is that there has not been any real improvement in that regard. Racism, discrimination and sectarianism should not be tolerated in any democratic country, but, sadly, we have a long way to go.

Section 23 of the Bill provides for the nomination of candidates as follows:

At a Seanad general election, a person may be nominated to be a candidate in a Seanad general election by one of the following methods--

- (a) by one or more nominating bodies,
- (b) by a local authority,
- (c) by the popular nomination of 500 persons whose names are included in the Seanad general election register.

Some might argue that the requirement to have 500 nominations is too high, but I consider it to be a reasonable figure. I challenge the Minister of State on his negative comments on this section. I was also disappointed by his comments on voters from the North of Ireland. It is important that Irish citizens living in the North are given a vote.

This Bill could make a positive contribution to inclusive politics on the island and contains a number of sensible ideas. I challenge the Government to consider it more carefully. The Minister of State spoke about reform and change; this is an opportunity to do something about it by supporting this legislation.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: Political reform is on the agenda and there has been exten-

sive discussion on the topic in the context of the programme for Government. It also received considerable attention at the Constitutional Convention and there was an appetite among its citizen members for reform. Political reform has to lead to greater democracy, accountability and transparency. However, these principles have been getting a knocking recently.

I acknowledge the work the Seanad has done to date in scrutinising legislation. The perspectives of Senators have added to the legislative process and debates and Senators have produced worthwhile amendments. I also acknowledge that the Seanad has a higher proportion of women than the Lower House. I pay a particular tribute to the work done by Senator David Norris in initiating the first debates on AIDS, introducing the civil partnership legislation, bringing about a change to the law on homosexuality and calling for a committee of inquiry into the use of Shannon Airport for rendition flights. The Seanad introduced resolutions against cluster munitions and its Members challenged the Celtic tiger and the bank guarantee. It was in the Seanad that the bondholders' names were first mentioned.

Governments involving every party have had opportunities to bring about Seanad reform, but nobody took on the task. We must acknowledge how the Seanad has been used by political parties. Without being disparaging to any Member, it was used by political parties as a training ground for prospective Deputies and a retirement ground for those finishing political careers or who had failed to be elected. Much of the Seanad to date has been restrictive and undemocratic. This has been an abuse of the Seanad. I have never seen such a complicated, convoluted system of electing people and counting votes as the current Seanad election system. As a university graduate, I have a vote on the university panel but I cannot see why, in a democracy, some citizens should have an extra right to vote because they happen to have had a third level education. Equally, I cannot see why being a Deputy or a counsellor should bring an additional vote.

I refer to the work of the Oireachtas Library and Research Service on comparing recent Bills, including this and the Government Bill on the Seanad. There are also Bills from Senators Zappone, Quinn and Crown. One point they have in common is widening the electorate of the Seanad, whether to Dáil electors, Irish citizens in Northern Ireland or members of the diaspora, holders of Irish passports. At one of the sessions of the Constitutional Convention, we discussed the diaspora voting in presidential elections. Part of the convention involved a video conference with Irish people from various parts of the world. There was no doubting their Irishness, their commitment to Ireland and their desire to be part of what is going on in Ireland. I support that aspect of everyone having a vote in Seanad elections. Other countries, with greater populations than ours, use this system and it is done through embassies or postal votes. The Minister of State referred to certain complications and costs but, if other countries can do it, we can examine it.

An interesting statistic about the university panel is that there were originally 9,000 eligible voters from NUI and 3,400 from Trinity College, amounting to 12,400 voters. It has increased to 151,000 voters, which is a positive move in terms of people accessing education. By including institutes of education, which I support, the potential is for 800,000 voters. Extending the electorate makes it more comprehensively democratic.

I wonder about the rationale of having nominating bodies. A petition, with 500 signatures, is more progressive and democratic. If anyone of a certain age can stand in a Dáil election, why not for Seanad elections? I do not understand the rationale behind nominating bodies and people choosing a nominating body. Sometimes they have no experience of the area but it makes for an easier way to be elected. Making this change would eliminate some of the elements in

the speech of the Minister of State. There is also the aspect of nominating for presidential elections, which militates against those who are Independent Members.

All of the Bills consider various panels, and some have panels in common, such as labour, workers or the mixed bag of industry, commerce, public administration, professional and civic, as well as university panels. The Bill allows 11 people to be nominated by the Taoiseach. I find the panels strange, especially when people appear on panels without experience in the area. Is there a need for panels? Why can we not have an open Seanad election in the same way that we have an open Dáil election? It does not have to be done through a postal vote.

The categories for Taoiseach's nominees are totally unrepresented in the Dáil and Seanad. If we are looking at panels, these are the ones to examine, with people who have a proven track record in each of those areas. We have plenty of nominees, people who have made real and genuine contributions to life in this country.

I voted against the abolition of the Seanad in the recent referendum but, like so many people, I am in favour of reform. I am not in favour of gender quotas so I do not agree with that aspect of the Bill. There is a vital need to reform the Seanad, with aspects of that in each of the Bills being proposed and the reports to date. Although not with this Bill, there could be a move forward to look at a real and significant reform so that the Seanad is more democratic and open to more people.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I welcome the debate. It is important to discuss the matter and there was no opportunity to do so after the referendum. Members talked about this Bill fixing the system but it is not radical enough. People talked about voters voting for reform in the last election but I do not know that they did. The media interpretation was of a consensus that people wanted to see change but people voted for various reasons. Perhaps people voted against it to send a blow to the Government. Across the House, there is agreement that the system is not working and needs to be fixed. There is a democratic deficit, which many speakers mentioned. There is a deficit in respect of the current system and it must change.

The Fianna Fáil proposal contained in the Bill replicates much of the old system with some amendment, with reference to decreasing the number of Seanad members nominated by the Taoiseach. I welcome the idea of broadening the franchise. There is reference to electing the current Seanad and including graduates from third level institutions. It is wrong that the current system operates with some colleges outside the system. Depending on the college one goes to, one may not be included. It is elitist in that sense.

I note a proposal to include representatives of the broader community groups, including people involved in sports, arts, representatives of the Irish diaspora and Travellers. The reality is that it will still be tokenism and this does not fundamentally address the undemocratic nature of the Seanad as it currently stands. The Government reaction to the rejection of the proposed abolition of the Seanad in the referendum proposes to give all third level graduates a vote in future elections. That was signalled after the result of the referendum. While welcome as an improvement on the current situation, I cannot accept it is a meaningful attempt to genuinely reform the Seanad, nor an attempt to address the commitment in the wake of the rejection of the referendum to radically democratise the Seanad. We have not seen that happen. Since it came back from the referendum, the Seanad has not been inundated with legislation or work. It is the fault of the Government because they are not putting legislation through the House. Plenty of people want to use the House to bring about reform and scrutinise legislation but it is

not happening.

The Taoiseach is on record as having rejected the proposal to extend the franchise to all third level graduates as a farcical response to the demand for the Seanad to be transformed into a democratic institution. That was part of the discussion. His rejection of such piecemeal reform was one of the reasons he put forward for the abolition of the Seanad. Sinn Féin wants to see a truly democratic and republican second Chamber and there have been suggestions about the work it could do. There is consensus across the House about the lack of EU scrutiny. The committee system and the way it operates means we do not have the required scrutiny of European measures.

I can understand why elements of old Fianna Fáil, trying to rebrand themselves, would wish to retain the power of the Taoiseach to nominate Members and thus limit the ability of the Seanad to be a critical voice. I have a difficulty with that nomination process. People will say that through the Taoiseach's nominees, various important voices were added to the Seanad but the reality is that has also been part of the Government holding on to its majority in the Seanad. However, it does not reflect what is needed. Previous governments, Fianna Fáil governments in particular, have used the Seanad to nominate their own individuals and former taoisigh have appointed the party faithful - who have been the loyal supporters of the Seanad over the decades - and awarded them with perks, privileges and elite status at the taxpayers' expense. There are examples of that. At least 11 Fianna Fáil Members and supporters were appointed for periods of only one month in order to give them perks, including free city parking in Leinster House, lifelong access to the Dáil, the Members' bar, restaurant facilities, a full month's salary and the right to speak and vote on legislation, rubber-stamping Bills for the Fianna Fáil Government. We are talking about reform but let us reflect on what this has been all about. It was jobs for the boys. It was not about transforming the House and making it operate better, it was about looking after their own. That undermined the structure of the Seanad. Between 1997 and 2011, Fianna Fáil taoisigh filled 40 seats with political cronies, therefore, it is no wonder that they continue to support the idea of future Government nominees to a so-called reformed Seanad in this Bill.

It has been mentioned that party delegates to the Constitutional Convention have called on the Government and the Oireachtas to empower a second Constitutional Convention with a broader mandate to consider issues related to the strengthening of constitutional protection of human rights and outstanding political and institutional reform issues, including Seanad reform. We believe that rather than the Government, Fianna Fáil, ourselves or any other party coming up with proposals to tinker around with the Seanad, as currently constituted, this issue should be passed over to the Constitutional Convention to deliberate on and come up with genuinely democratic proposals and solutions.

I welcome that we are having this discussion and while there is nothing to prevent any political group from submitting its ideas here and having them debated, we believe that a broader discussion involving societal and community representatives is required. Does anyone have a difficulty with the debate on Seanad reform being broadened? Despite the Taoiseach's contention during the referendum campaign that the Seanad was elitist and now that it requires radical reform, he has blocked any suggestion that the Constitutional Convention would consider this issue. Where is the logic in that? We need to broaden the debate if we are all in common agreement that it is working. Let us get the discussion going.

The Constitutional Convention will publish its report on Monday and I understand one of its

key proposals is that it will be reconvened to consider Seanad reform. Its record to date, as will be reflected in the report, has been thorough on all the matters put before it. Its debates have been well-informed and reasoned and the convention has managed to arrive at conclusions, despite many people having said that it would be a talking shop and that nothing would emerge from it. The Government should accept that has been the case and examine that proposal.

Why would the Taoiseach object to the convention considering Seanad reform? If his interim position is to extend the franchise to another relatively small section of the electorate, then while that would not be sufficient in my view, the Government should go ahead and do it as it is long overdue. It could be done and the franchise should be expanded. However, such limited extension of the franchise is certainly not enough and it is farcical to have a second Chamber that is not directly elected by universal franchise. I believe there would be broad public support for that.

I thought people would have voted in favour of abolishing the Seanad. Regardless of whatever the Government's short-term plans are, the Taoiseach should explain the reason he will not allow the Constitutional Convention to consider, debate and report on this issue and to bring forward a recommendation. It strikes me that if the concern of Members is about a democratic deficit in respect of the Seanad, a democratic remedy would be to allow the convention, in its full sitting, to consider these matters and to broaden the discussion rather than having it confined to the politicians.

I have major difficulties with the scope of the Bill. It is not radical enough. There is a need for radical reform and to remove the elitist elements of the Seanad, many of which still remain. Therefore, on that basis we will be voting against this proposal.

An Ceann Comhairle: The next speaker is Deputy Fleming to be followed by Deputies Feighan, Ross and Catherine Murphy.

Deputy Sean Fleming: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. It is important that we ask why are we here today. We are here because the Government tried to abolish the Seanad. It brought a referendum to the people and the people said "No" because they wanted reform, they did not want abolition.

I recall there was a referendum in 1979 on extending the franchise for the university seats in the Seanad and it was the first time I was old enough to vote in a referendum. On that occasion there were two referenda before the people, one on adoption, which was well passed, and the other to extend the franchise for the university seats. The Constitution currently provides for three from Trinity College and three from the NUI, while all the institutes of technology and other third level colleges have been excluded from the process, even though they also award full degrees. Many years on from that referendum that franchise has not been extended. I have had a particular interest in this issue. That was the first referendum I voted to be passed, and while everyone of us has been in government at different stages, the will of the people has never been implemented. I often wonder why that was the case.

Since the new Government came into office there has been a good deal of talk on its part about political reform but some of the reform has been to give more power to the Government. Essentially, that is the reason the people have said "No" to the Seanad referendum. As Deputy Crowe has made clear, Sinn Féin supported the abolition of the Seanad, the second Chamber, and he was surprised that the people refused to go along with the Sinn Féin, Fine Gael and

Labour approach to abolish the Seanad but if they had been listening to the people they would have known that this was an effort by the Government to close down a form of opposition and of a Chamber that could hold the Government to account. We have seen the Government do that in abolishing town councils, reducing the number of local authority seats and progressively taking more powers and functions from democratically elected members. For example, the Irish Water legislation has taken a central function from local government, which was for the provision of water and wastewater services, yet we are putting a super-quango in place because the Government wants to centralise all power under its control wherever possible.

The Seanad might have been a slight inconvenience for the Government on some occasions and in consequence, it came forward with the proposal to abolish the Seanad. That referendum cost approximately €15 million. As part of the Minister of State's reason for rejecting the proposal before the House he cites the cost of holding elections to the Seanad as one of the reasons he will oppose this Bill. He said the cost involved in conducting the election and the count is significant. He had no problem wasting €15 million of taxpayers' money to put a proposal to them which they rightly rejected. The reason it was rejected was because of the arrogance of the Government. The people saw through that referendum. The Government wants to close down any form of opposition.

The Government should have learned from the Oireachtas inquiries referendum it tried to have passed the previous year. Members are not elected here to be judges, juries or prosecutors but the Government wanted to change the Constitution to turn this Chamber into a forum for Oireachtas inquiries whereby Members of the Oireachtas, who are elected to legislate, would also be judges, juries and prosecutors, all in one process. The Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Alan Shatter, had a key role and made a key intervention in that referendum. His performance as Minister during that referendum was one of the principal reasons it was defeated because the people decided that they did not trust this Government trying to take power onto itself.

11 o'clock

It tried to take power from the Seanad and it failed. It tried to take power from independent inquiries by bringing them under Government control. The people have spoken on these issues and the Government should listen.

I must say to Sinn Féin, which states this legislation is not radical enough, if it were more radical it would be outside the Constitution. It is as radical as the Constitution allows, which is all we can do. Otherwise the legislation could not come before the House as it would be unconstitutional. We believe in working within the Constitution, as it was voted by the people, and the legislation complies with it. I do not accept Sinn Féin's argument for rejecting the Bill. I am surprised Sinn Féin, which wanted to abolish the Seanad, is here today to oppose the legislation because it is not radical enough. I do not know which way it is trying to play it. It was opposed to the decision of the people. It should have listened to the people's decision. They wanted reform not abolition. This is reform which can be delivered under the constitutional framework but Sinn Féin is opposing it.

Deputy Seán Crowe: They did not have the option to vote for reform. It was either one or the other.

Deputy Sean Fleming: The legislation would put a check on Government power through

scrutinising national and EU legislation. It would broaden representation and provide a voice for groups which have not been heard in the Dáil or Seanad. I would like people to understand what the legislation is about. It would provide a vote to all the people of Ireland for the Seanad by breaking down the constituencies according to the panels specifically provided for in the Constitution. We are working within the Constitution to get the maximum amount of change.

Unless we have another referendum the Taoiseach's nominees must be kept. This week I posed a question which falls under the remit of the Minister, Deputy Shatter. The legislation allows for representation from minority groups. These include groups such as people who have come to Ireland from other countries, the Traveller community and the disability sector. Can one imagine the Minister standing over putting children of the Traveller community on PULSE if it had representatives in Seanad Éireann? One reason the Minister and the people under him have been doing this is because they know these people do not have a voice here. If they had a voice here, as they would under this legislation, a Minister would not allow children as young as 16 days of age to be put on the Garda PULSE system. This reflects on the Department of Justice and Equality also.

The legislation provides for a gender quota of 40%. Most people believe this is needed and everybody should subscribe to it. There must be a mechanism whereby people, as opposed to a financial contribution or a nomination by a party, would allow individuals to be nominated to run in the election.

I am disappointed with the Government's response, but it is no surprise. It could not bully the people into the abolition of the Seanad and now it will not accept any reform proposals. Its proposal was clearly contemptuous of the Oireachtas, and now it will not even allow a modicum of reasonable reform to take place.

The legislation has tremendous approaches in it and I support it. We should be able to work with the proposals of Senators Quinn, Zappone and Crown on these issues. They have come forward with very well thought out proposals, many of which could be incorporated into the Bill on Committee Stage.

Often on Second Stage Ministers state they will propose amendments on Committee Stage. This is what we have proposed, but the Government has rejected this approach. It states unless a Bill is perfect on the day it is published it should not be passed at all. This Bill has been rejected. There are matters which could be teased out on Committee Stage, and the Government knows they should be teased out, but it will refuse to allow the legislation go to Committee Stage because it does not want everybody in the Oireachtas to have an input into it in case they feel it was good legislation. When we published the Bill we did not state it was absolutely perfect, we stated it was a damn good shot at political reform and we wanted to work with everybody in the Chamber on Committee and Report Stages and everybody in the Seanad. We also wanted hearings with members of the public invited to come before committees.

The Government is cutting off the Bill at the pass. This is a new form of guillotine. The legislation establishing Irish Water was guillotined on Report Stage, but when the Opposition introduces a Bill to bring about real political reform it is guillotined on Second Stage and it is not allowed go to Committee or Report Stages or to the Seanad. This legislation should be debated through the full and proper mechanisms of the House but we have seen a new guillotine at this early stage. We will not even have a debate and it will not be guillotined later. I am disappointed not only with members of the Government, whom I expect to follow the line. The

Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, took it on the chin and he should have responded and not ignored the people. He should have agreed to a level of political reform. I am also disappointed Sinn Féin opposes political reform allowed under the Constitution and which can be done. I would have welcomed a contribution from its members in which they stated they would discuss, tease out and try to improve the legislation on Committee and Report Stages, but they have sided with the Government because they are afraid of real political reform, just as the Government is.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I am delighted to speak on the Bill on Seanad reform. In 1999 I was elected to Roscommon County Council and I enjoyed working as a councillor. I did not realise as a member of the business community how - I will not say powerful - responsible a councillor and elected official is. I am delighted I was elected because I felt I was a pair of safe hands who would try to do the right thing instead of going on local radio. I took great pride in the fact I tried to do the right thing. I find that sometimes in politics it is not that someone does the right thing but that someone is on local radio, Twitter or Facebook making promises. Perhaps this is what people want but it is not the politician I want to be, and I believe it is not the politician most Members of the House want to be.

My father was on dialysis and we were very thankful for the work done for him by the Irish Kidney Association. It was then I found out the Irish Kidney Association was a nominating body for the administrative panel. It nominated me as a candidate and I was elected. I am very proud I raised issues with regard to the Irish Kidney Association. These issues are still being brought up in the Seanad by Senator Mark Daly, who was nominated by the association. I acted on its behalf and if issues arose I was very happy to articulate them and put them forward.

If I had €10 for every time people stated the Seanad was not fit for purpose, needed change, was an old boys' club, a place from where people got elected to the Dáil or a retirement home I would be a very rich man. We are speaking about the Seanad as though it were fit for purpose. At that time it was not fit for purpose. There have been great contributors, and Deputy Ross certainly livened up the Seanad with his insightful contributions.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Perhaps he will do it again.

Deputy Frank Feighan: When I was in opposition the Order of Business in the Seanad was a great forum to raise issues of the day. It can be very difficult here as a Government back-bencher because the Government has such a majority and the Dáil is more structured. We are speaking about reform, and I can speak in the Dáil on a Bill such as this on a Friday because of reform. There has been reform and anybody who states the Government has done nothing about reform is being misleading.

More than four years ago the Taoiseach rightly stated he would abolish the Seanad. I thought it was very brave and an insightful measure. He put it to the people whether they wanted the Seanad. The people spoke and stated they do, but that they were not happy with how it operates. Sometimes the Leader of the Seanad called on the Seanad to remain open on a Friday because a parliamentary party meeting or golf outing would take place the next day. This was wrong and it represented all that was wrong with the Seanad. If one speaks of political reform, I live in Boyle, which has a town council with four Fine Gael councillors, as well as two from Fianna Fáil, two Independents and one from Sinn Féin. That council, the only town council in my constituency, is being abolished. Moreover, the number of councillors on Roscommon County Council is being reduced from 26 to 18. Similarly, the number of councillors on Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan county councils is being reduced from 25, 22 and 25, respectively, to 18, 18

and 18, respectively. Effectively, the Government of the day is reducing the influence of those regional areas in which Fine Gael is quite strong. While this is a good thing, it will not be appreciated by Members of the Opposition because it is not favourable. I agree it should be fair, in that one should have councillors where the population is, but I wish to highlight this change.

Moreover, the Taoiseach rightly sought to reduce the number of Deputies in the Dáil from 166 to 158. The area in which I live in Roscommon-South Leitrim has been moved out to Galway but I accept that. A proposition was put to the people on the Seanad and they have voted to express their wish to retain that House. However, the Seanad must be reformed. In that context, I believe the most recent appointment of the Taoiseach's nominees to the Seanad was the first time of which I am aware that very few of the aforementioned 11 nominees were political nominees. Most of them came from different aspects of Irish life, ranging from business, the arts, media and sport. It was very welcome that such a balance was given to the Seanad. As to whether they voted for the Government, no, of course they did not. They were not appointed to do so and while I sometimes would have liked them to vote for the Government, they have had their own views. Anyone who suggests the Taoiseach appointed his own cronies to secure a Government majority in the Seanad is simply wrong, as this is not true.

I believe the Seanad has huge potential. I agree that more people from the island of Ireland should be included in the Seanad. Similarly, this certainly is the case in respect of the diaspora in London and New York, as well as locations with Irish associations such as Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. They certainly offer scope in this regard and could bring an international view to the Seanad. I also believe there is great potential for the Seanad with regard to the scrutiny of European Union legislation. I note there has been agreement between the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and many of the party leaders that procedural reforms should proceed immediately and this has taken place. Many proposals have been put forward, some of which can be worked on while more may not make sense. However, today is a good day in that once again, Members can introduce legislation to the Dáil on a Friday, which certainly constitutes reform.

The Constitution provides for 43 elected Members of Seanad Éireann to be elected by Oireachtas Members and by members of city and county councils through the five panels. Once again, through the reform of the local authorities, the Taoiseach and the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Hogan, have made it much more democratic, in that areas with greater populations will have much greater representation in the Seanad. In addition, when there are far fewer councillors representing counties such as Sligo, Roscommon and other areas of lesser population, one then will have far fewer Senators from those areas. The Government has received no acknowledgement for doing this even though - while I would not state it is undermining its own electoral base - it is trying to make it fair, in order that people from other areas can have an input. They certainly can get elected to the local authorities, which provide a huge resource and which work extremely hard, but they also can vote for the Seanad.

I reiterate that I am delighted to speak on this Bill. I had five highly interesting years in the Seanad and enjoyed every minute of it. It sometimes was less combative, especially being in opposition than being in government. However, Government Members have a job to do. The people elected them to do a job and while the easiest thing to do is to run away and resign, as one will receive the same amount of money, one does not have the same influence. One must have a Government that both governs for the people and is stable because the turmoil Ireland has come through in the past three to five years has been unprecedented. I take great pride in

being a member of a Government that is introducing reform and which will save this country from the economic mess into which it was placed.

Deputy Shane Ross: First, I welcome this Bill as an honest and genuine attempt to respond to the referendum that was held last year. I do not agree with everything it contains because everyone has his or her own particular model and solution for Seanad Éireann. However, it is far preferable than the present position and I certainly cannot understand the Government's response to it, which was to dismiss it in such a way that exposes the Government itself to criticism on the grounds that its solution and its response to the referendum are totally and utterly inadequate. I was a Member of the Seanad for a very long time and over a long period I became aware both of what is wrong and what is right with it. One of my most enduring memories is that on my first day there, I tabled a motion for reform of the Seanad, its structures, its methods of election, in respect of the Taoiseach's nominees and various other procedures that were outdated at that time, which was in 1981. However, there was absolutely no reform of the Seanad during the intervening period. Moreover, it suited all political parties to keep it the way it was because it was a House that principally allowed patronage and certainly it was not the House of preferred choice for Members of the Oireachtas. The last place in which Members of this House want to be is Seanad Éireann. Members of this House use it as a consolation prize if they are defeated here and very few of them actually want to be there. One cannot blame them, but that is what the Seanad is.

The question then is what should the Government do about it. The Government may maintain the referendum was a vote of the people to retain the Seanad in its present form but it certainly was not that and no one could possibly interpret it in that way. It was a vote to retain a second Chamber but behind that, there obviously also was a will that it should be changed radically. This position has been rejected utterly by the Government. I attended what I think was the only meeting called by the Taoiseach for representatives of the parties to consider the referendum result and to proceed from that point. It was obvious, both to me and others present, that neither the Taoiseach nor the civil servants accompanying him had any intention of any sort of radical reform. It is absurd to put forward now the reform of the university seats as an adequate response to a referendum of this sort. Nothing is changing, nothing is proposed to be changed and certainly not before the next election. The only defence or shield the Minister of State put forward in his speech was to state that something would be done about those seats. The Government does not intend to change the number of those seats. The constituencies will become larger, which in principle should be welcomed. It is almost certain that a large number of the personnel probably will be the same, although I will not make a judgment on that. The result will be that the next Seanad, in its shape, form and structures, will look remarkably similar to the last one.

The problem with the Seanad is fundamental. It was devised by de Valera very cleverly in order to ensure it reflected his views and that there would always be a Government majority in it. It was also guaranteed to elect almost exclusively party people - bar the six university Senators - who reflected almost identically the Dáil numbers and points of view. Everybody knows there are panels to which individuals are nominated. The panels sound worthy - cultural, educational, etc. - and all of the apparently civil society-driven nominating bodies nominate and have representatives elected to them, but it is the electorate that is the problem, not the panels. The electorate includes county councillors and Members of this and the other House. It is a self-perpetuating body which gives powers to us to put in place cronies, chums and others and ensure party people, whose first loyalty is to their party, not their nominating bodies, are

elected. I do think any non-party person has ever been elected to any of the panels, although I could be corrected on this. However, several people who would be considered experts in their fields were summarily rejected by the electorate because they were not members of political parties. Dr. Ken Whitaker, a former Governor of the Central Bank, received a nomination from a nominating body for one of the panels, but he received a derisory vote. He was subsequently voted Ireland's greatest living Irishman but that was by popular vote. That is an indication of how difficult it is for anybody whose first loyalty is to a nominating body and a discipline, not a party, to be elected under the current system. I am not saying people who are in political parties should be rejected automatically - far from it - but it is mandatory to be a member of a political party to be elected to these panels, which is wrong. The nominating bodies realise they have no chance of getting anybody elected, unless it is someone who is a party hack and wants to get into the Dáil afterwards. The system, therefore, works in favour of maintaining the *status quo*. That is deeply regrettable, but it is something that was opened up in the debate last year and to give Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and the Opposition their due, they recognised that it should not be allowed to continue.

What is so depressing about this debate is not only the rejection by the Government of the Bill which is reformist, but also the fact that the Government has absolutely no proposals whatsoever to reform the Seanad. It will continue with it in its current format, bar the university seats. The rotten system will continue. It is no good the Minister of State reading a list of utterly minor reforms which are meaningless. They are procedural reforms or what it calls subtly operational reforms which mean a few changes to the rules internally but which are of no structural value and which do not represent radical change. What the Bill lacks is constitutional and radical change. When we went to the meeting with the Taoiseach a couple of months ago, the one taboo subject was constitutional reform. The Taoiseach did not want to hold another referendum and there was not going to be another one. That meant that certain no-go areas, in terms of reform, were put down. One cannot change the Taoiseach's nominees, although I accept Deputy Frank Feighan's point that the Taoiseach's nominees in the current Seanad have been outstanding in terms of their independence and contributions, have given the Government a shock and caused certain reversals, which is welcome. However, I think it is the first time that has happened on a meaningful scale. It is fortunate and to the credit of the individuals involved, but that will not continue as long as Taoiseach's nominees are nominated using the current format because the majority of Taoisigh, with one or two exceptions who have nominated people of independence, have nominated individuals because they are useful to the parties and ensure a majority for the Government in the House.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I would like to speak not about the contents of the Bill but about its purpose - Seanad reform. I do not agree with the Bill, but I am not here to rubbish it. It is positive that Members produce legislation and bring it to the Chamber during Friday sittings. I have had the opportunity to do this myself.

Deputy Sean Fleming asked why we were here. In the first instance, we must recognise that we are here because of Government reforms; we have Friday sittings in which we can bring legislation forward, although we are now debating committee reports, which is very important. We have had some very good debates on some reports and later today we will debate the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in promoting Ireland and enhancing and renewing economic links. These are important.

If we want to talk about this Parliament and its role, we must talk about having a responsible Parliament which must recognise the reforms that have taken place. Deputy Micheál Martin

said that in reforming and improving Parliament, the Seanad should be the first step, but I disagree. I think it should be the last step, if it should even be a step at all. Despite the rejection of the referendum proposal last year by the people, I still believe a modern Ireland requires an efficient and modern parliament - in my view, a unicameral Oireachtas which is independent from the Government and has a strong committee system to hold the Government of the day to account. However, I accept that when the Government put the proposition to abolish the Seanad to the people, they rejected it. They said “No,” but others have asked today whether we can take this as a positive declaration or a demand for a reformed Seanad. Strictly, we cannot because that was not the question put to the people - it was a simple question which required a “Yes” or “No” answer. If we step back and look at the totality of the debate, we can infer that people would prefer to have a better or reformed Seanad, but I do not see where the imperative is. When I step back and reflect on the debate we had on abolishing the Seanad, the louder message I received, as I think most people did, was on the real imperative of further and continuing reform of the Dáil.

To talk about reform in a meaningful way, we must first acknowledge what has happened to date under the Government. As I have said before in this Chamber, reform is a process which takes time. We have to constantly bring forward improvements, see how they work, evaluate them, see if we can change them further and what new things we could do. That process has taken place since the Government came to power. It has not happened as quickly as many would have liked, me included. There was a period during which reform of the Parliament seemed to stall, but it came back onto the agenda, rightly so. We are testing the second suite of reforms that were introduced in the last quarter of last year, which is positive. During Friday sittings committee reports, as well as legislation, are debated, which is a further improvement. However, we could go further.

In reflecting on the outcome of the referendum it would be a shame if we were to spend time and resources, including money, on focusing on reform of the Seanad to the detriment of further reform of the Dáil. There are reforms we could make which would then flow to the Seanad. For example, why not give the Dáil the independence it needs to order its business by removing the Whip on the Order of Business? Is it such a dangerous idea that parliamentarians should be able to decide the ordering of business in the Chamber, when legislation is taken and for how long it is debated? This is not about votes of conscience when I refer to the Whip-----

Deputy Peter Mathews: The Deputy better be careful there.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: -----but the independence of the Parliament and the power individual parliamentarians should have, working in tandem with the Government. I do not believe an independent parliament would be an irresponsible one. We have had legislative deadlines to meet in the past due to the programme for Government. A parliament with more powers would be more responsible, arguably, because it would be more conscious of those powers and the work it would need to do in tandem with the Government, so the country could be managed.

Another important reform to the committee system would allow Members to table their own amendments to legislation, as well as voting in support of them. This would loosen the Whip on Committee Stage for those putting down amendments to legislation. Many ideas by Government backbenchers on legislation are dealt with in the back room and brought in through Government amendments. However, if we want to reform people’s ideas of parliament and Deputies, as well as moving away from the clientelist system, Government backbenchers, in particular, should be allowed to do that work in the open. They should be allowed to propose

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amendments on Committee Stage, debate it, seek support for it and vote for it. It does not mean necessarily they would have to support that amendment on a later Stage because they have a responsibility as a Government Deputy to support the legislation. Such a reform on Committee Stage, however, would encourage parliamentarians to legislate and get into the nuts and bolts of Bills. I accept it happens in the background but more of it should happen in the open in committees and this Chamber. As Senators sit on committees too, it would be a reform that would extend to the Seanad as well.

These are two simple reforms, not about removing the Whip but loosening it. They would greatly improve the role and responsibilities of parliamentarians in this Chamber. As a result, those reforms would flow down to the Seanad as well. There are many more reforms we could introduce in such a manner which would impact on the Dáil in the first instance and also improve the Seanad. That is the work we should be doing at the moment. We should focus on how to improve this Chamber further in the context of last year's referendum and knowing that reforms introduced to this Chamber would also impact on the second House of the Oireachtas.

I will not be supporting this Bill.

Debate adjourned.

Visit of Lithuanian Delegation

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Before proceeding with business, I wish on my behalf and on behalf of the Members of Dáil Éireann to offer a céad míle fáilte, a most sincere welcome to Mr. Algimantas Rimkunas, Vice-Minister for Finance of the Republic of Lithuania. I express the hope that you will find your visit enjoyable, successful and to our mutual benefit.

Seanad Reform Bill 2014: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

Question again proposed: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

Deputy Peter Mathews: Before I speak on the Bill, I would like to say, "*Labas rytas*" to our visitors.

I congratulate Fianna Fáil on bringing the Seanad Reform Bill 2014 forward. It is a sign that spring has sprung. Last year's stupid blank proposition to abolish the Seanad was made even more stupid by the imposition of the Whip on both Government parties in the debates on it in both Houses. The evidence was clear that Government Members did not believe that it was right to present such a proposition to the people, yet they voted to support the abolition of the Seanad, a sign that something is very sick in our democracy. Well done to Fianna Fáil for bringing forward a Bill that invites all Members to participate in bringing forward reform proposals. That is intelligent and I commend the party for it.

The political reform that has taken place so far has been cynical and just tinkering but not fundamental. It has been disguised and camouflaged in language that is irrelevant to life today. We are a country that has spent five years in the chains of austerity, trying to deal with the damage and wreckage from the financial collapse which has not been properly measured or articu-

lated by the Government or its advisers. It still remains poorly articulated, leaving our families and smaller indigenous businesses hurting unnecessarily.

Up to €15 million was expended on putting forward that stupid proposition to abolish the Seanad. What a shame. It is also a shame that Sinn Féin has not joined in this opportunity to bring forward this collegial, co-operative and frame-worked proposition from Fianna Fáil. There is some sort of inadequate thinking pattern pervasive here whereby, unless something has the credentials for being a final product, it must be rejected. That is again stupid.

In the debacle with the Minister for Justice and Equality that has been going since early February, I was pleased the other day that Deputy Mick Wallace took only three minutes - 180 seconds - to enumerate succinctly and in ordinary English eight features of what had happened. It was refreshing to hear it compared to a ministerial statement prepared in the bureaucratic style of the old parliamentary choreography and language which was meaningless and one had to fight through. Again, the ministerial statement was a waste of time. No wonder people do not listen. We have an opportunity to power-hose the barnacled hull of the ship that is the Oireachtas and clean it down.

As a newcomer to Oireachtas representation, I have been disappointed as I feel like Gulliver in Lilliput, weighed down by so much rope. One cannot think or converse because of the proprietorial and proud connection people have with what is being discussed, instead of being open-minded, generous-hearted and constructive in attitude. Sometimes, the guard and mask slips, which is refreshing. When people become cement-set in their attitudes and bound by the orders and instructions of the Whip, it is more than depressing - it is demoralising, destructive and wrong.

Last July, with the abortion Bill, to give it its shorter name, and the abolition of the Seanad Bill, there were moments in a millennium watching the imposition of a Whip, unnecessarily, on parties. It was deeply depressing. There was something almost weird in the behaviour of parliamentarians when a Government with the largest majority ever in the history of the State was behaving like it was having its last gasps and could only survive by imposing Whips to steamroll and kill off any sparks of originality, thinking or conscience. Wake up is all I can say.

There is a Private Members' Bill in the lottery drum waiting for providence to draw it out. I hope every one of the 166 Members of this House will subscribe to this Bill, because one of the greatest countries of modern 20th century Europe, Germany, was reduced to rubble and ashes because of an over-concentration of power. After the Second World War and out of the wreckage of that war and the 85 million dead in all theatres, between Asia, Europe and Africa, Article 38.1 of Germany's Bundestag basic law - its basic constitution - states, "The members of the Bundestag shall be representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders or instructions, and responsible only to their conscience."

The Bill in the drum for the draw for Second Stage reading here is identical in wording to that. It proposes that the Members of each House of the Oireachtas shall be representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders or instructions, and responsible only to their conscience. There is nothing to be afraid of in this. Everybody in this House, all 166 Members, should embrace this because it is fundamentally wholesome and the lynchpin protector of the democratic principle. I invite all Members to prepare their minds and hearts to embrace this concept, which has served Germany well. Germany unified two countries separated by and after war with that constitutional insertion. It has had coalition governments with small majorities and with differ-

ent principles and policies, bringing forward a people that had been separated by a horrible war to where it is today. We should think about this type of fundamental structural change.

In a spirit of generosity, I say well done to Fianna Fáil. I hope Sinn Féin can change its course in mid flight. Aeroplanes do it; parties and individuals can do it. However, we must create the fertile conditions for a strong democracy that represents the whole people, where parliamentarians are not bound by orders or instructions and can carry the ideals of a better and more equal society forward into the 21st century.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Fergus O'Dowd): I would like to point out to Deputy Mathews that we have made significant progress, North and South, as a result of actions taken by this Parliament, regardless of government, in bringing peace to our land. Now we have shared Administration in the North and, thank God, after many years of violence, there is no violence on the streets. This is a result of our Government, the British Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland working together. Therefore, we have been very successful at bringing about a democratic resolution of many of the issues.

With regard to electoral reform of the Seanad, last month the Government published for consultation a Bill to implement the 1979 amendment commented on by other speakers in regard to the election of university Members of Seanad Éireann. The main features of the scheme are a single six-Member constituency to replace the current two university constituencies, an extension of the franchise to all holders of a degree or equivalent from an institution of higher education in the State, other technical provisions for the organisation of elections, including, for example, the creation of a register of electors, the appointment of a returning officer and arrangements for taking the poll and counting votes.

An opportunity has been provided for input into the preparation of legislation and the feedback from the consultation process will inform the further development and preparation of the Bill. The general scheme has been circulated to Seanad Éireann and forwarded to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht. Copies were also sent to other stakeholders, including to 81 other institutions of higher education. As part of this process, written submissions have been invited from citizens, elected representatives and any other individuals or groups with views on the matter. Implementation of this constitutional provision could have been done at any point since 1979, but it is the current Government which has now taken this action to implement the will of the people.

While there has been no shortage here today of analysis of the shortcomings of how the Seanad operates, one thing that has been lacking is the willingness to act, but this Government has taken significant initiatives. Earlier, I outlined the Government's proposals for reform which can be implemented in the life of the current Seanad. In addition, we are advancing the overhaul of the arrangements for the election of the six university Senators.

We have instituted real and significant political reform since coming to office. These reforms range from constitutional reform - we have already put six referenda to the people and more are planned - to radical and significant reforms in regard to the financing of the political system. We have legislated to link the payment of State funding to political parties with the achievement of a gender balance in candidate selection at general election. Our reform of local government is the most radical of any reform in the past 100 years. We have introduced Dail reforms and reforms in the operation of the Oireachtas committee system.

There is a lot more to be done and we will continue, over the next two years, to advance the reform of our political system and the Oireachtas within the constitutional parameters to ensure that they operate to the best advantage of the people. I would like to mention also that the Freedom of Information Act was significantly dismembered by the previous Government and we are now restoring it to ensure the more probing and analytical advantage of full and transparent accountancy, which had been removed by the previous Government. In regard to Seanad reform, when Deputy Martin was in government with former Minister John Gormley, a Seanad reform group was set up in 2009. All of the political parties in the House contributed to that group, with the exception of Fianna Fáil which claimed the pressure of parliamentary business did not allow it time to make a submission.

The Fianna Fáil Seanad reform Bill cannot deliver the change nor the reform that is needed. I have outlined the reasons for saying this in my earlier contribution. On behalf of the Government, I oppose this Bill.

Deputy Micheál Martin: I thank Deputy Mathews for his kind comments and his erudite contribution which goes to the heart of much of what is wrong with our Parliament. The Parliament has not moved with the times and is losing its relevance to the public. When I mentioned the Chairpersons of various committees, the Minister of State took umbrage, yet in advance of the Seanad referendum, the Government produced a Dáil reform package. In that package was a proposal that we should have a d'Hondt methodology around the chairmanship of parliamentary committees, meaning there should be a *pro rata* distribution of chairmanships among the various parties in the House. What did the Government do but defer that until after the next general election. It chose not to implement that proposal for the duration of this Parliament, but now the Minister of State has attacked me for making a valid statement that the Executive controls the House and the committees. Yet, in terms of the recent Garda scandal of the penalty points issue, it was the Committee of Public Accounts that managed to get that issue onto the agenda. Strenuous attempts were made to undermine the Chair of that committee and the committee at the time and to prevent it from doing its work. This attitude is very unhealthy.

The unhealthy aspect of the whole issue is that there is no sense of separation between the Executive and the Parliament. Before the last general election, given the enormous economic collapse, both global and domestic, we all said we should change our politics. Every party said this before the election. Now, irrespective of whether the Minister of State likes it, there is huge disillusionment among the public at the lack of change and the lack of any response. For example, the lack of any parliamentary oversight over regulation continues. Fundamentally, nothing has changed in terms of the financial architecture of how the financial world is regulated or, in particular, the parliamentary oversight of that regulation. Who guards the guards remains an ongoing issue that has not been resolved in any way.

The problem with regard to the Seanad is that the Government said during the referendum it was elitist. The basis of the Government's campaign was that it was elitist and a cost issue. Democracy is something I value. Obviously we have to manage our costs, but the Government should stop putting that up front. Every time we have a debate about democracy, it is all about costs.

Deputy Peter Mathews: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: The Government celebrates getting rid of urban councils as the best reform in 100 years. It is not. It is removing a fundamental, low-cost element of our de-

mocracy which gave people a voice and allowed them to try to help their local communities.

Deputy Peter Mathews: Correct. Forty-five million people died in Europe.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): Deputy Martin without interruption.

Deputy Micheál Martin: We now have a situation in Ukraine, Crimea and Russia which should remind us all-----

Deputy Peter Mathews: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----of the absolute imperative of democracy, the importance of democracy and the degree to which we should cherish it. I hope the Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, and his party will never again put up posters exhorting people to vote "Yes" for fewer politicians. What an appalling message to send young people in this country. What appalling cynicism. Some of Deputy O'Dowd's backbenchers knew it too and were saying it privately. Vote "Yes", get fewer politicians. It is more democracy we need, not less.

The one good aspect of the Seanad, imperfect as it is, whether we like it or not, is that it has produced alternative voices in Irish debate and discourse from across the board. I refer to celebrated figures who use the Seanad to raise issues of public importance and have good public debate. That is extremely important in a democracy. It is not all about passing legislation, regulations and so on. It is about a range of voices-----

Deputy Peter Mathews: Parliament.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and the power of debate. I do not know whether Deputy O'Dowd saw Seamus Mallon's excellent programme with John Bowman yesterday. I noted Mr. Mallon's comments about how he enjoyed the House of Commons. What he enjoyed most was the debate, the engagement-----

Deputy Peter Mathews: Ideas.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----and the ideas. I was taken by that contribution because that goes to the heart of what democracy is about - alternative voices, debates, competing opinions.

There is too much uniformity here. We as a political party need to change as well; I am not saying otherwise. Of course we have to change. We go forward in a spirit, in the aftermath of the collapse, of having learned lessons from the crisis. It is a fact that this Parliament did not discuss the financial world after it had set up its regulatory infrastructure eight or nine years ago - the financial authority, the new Central Bank, etc. Parliament did not actually start debating it until it had imploded. In between, there were no debates. When they debated the new financial regulatory authority, the preponderance of the debate was about consumer issues, not prudential risks or other more important issues pertaining to the euro. We desperately need alternative voices.

To cut to the chase, the principle of this Bill is to democratise the franchise. It is to give the citizen a say in electing Senators.

Deputy Peter Mathews: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: This is Second Stage of the Bill. We acknowledge that it can be

improved. The Second Stage speech of the Minister of State, Deputy O'Dowd, was almost like a Committee Stage contribution, going through the technical issues, the problems and so on.

Apparently, it is impossible for us to allow our citizens to vote in embassies overseas, yet for many other countries there is no difficulty in allowing their citizens to come to vote in their national elections in their embassies in Dublin. For some reason, it is beyond our capacity to ever countenance organising it, and that is the proposition that is coming back. It is wrong.

I urge the Minister of State to give consideration to the principle of this Bill and allow it through to Committee Stage-----

Deputy Peter Mathews: Hear, hear.

Deputy Micheál Martin: -----so that we can have a meaningful discussion with Members of the House. Some of his own party's members, even in their later contributions this morning, indicated they wanted that kind of debate.

Deputy Peter Mathews: Deputy Murphy.

Deputy Micheál Martin: Deputy Murphy stated earlier that he would welcome an opportunity to contribute. Therefore, I ask the Minister of State to allow this Bill to proceed to Committee Stage so that we can have discussions on it.

Deputy Peter Mathews: Be brave.

Deputy Micheál Martin: It is depressing that the Taoiseach is ruling out any further referendum and ruling out any legislation to allow for direct franchise, which would get rid of the elitism on which the Minister of State rounded so agitatedly during the referendum campaign.

Question put.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy): In accordance with Standing Order 117A(4), the division is postponed until immediately after the Order of Business on Tuesday, 1 April 2014.

Report on the Contribution of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to Economic Recovery: Statements

Deputy Pat Breen: I thank the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Gilmore, for being with us this afternoon to hear the report and to make his own remarks. I am delighted that he has taken time off his busy schedule to be here for this report.

I am pleased to present the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade on the contribution of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to economic recovery.

From the start of our economic and fiscal crisis, the overriding task of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been the contribution that it can make to the country's recovery. In turn, the joint committee, by extension, was required in its report to assess the way in which the Department rose to the challenge, and whether its structures were adequate for the task in hand.

Specifically, we wanted to be sure that the unique resource offered by the embassy network was used to best effect, in association with the relevant State agencies, in trade and tourism promotion and attracting foreign investment, as well as restoring Ireland's reputation. We wanted to be sure also that the organisational structures at the Department's headquarters provided the necessary support for this task and were adequate to the Department's new responsibilities.

Over the course of about a year and a half, the joint committee engaged with a wide range of actors from the Department itself, the State agencies, chambers of commerce, employers' and exporters' organisations, and farmers' representatives. Given the importance of the United States as a source of investment, the joint committee examined the operation of the consulates there. The task has given the members of the joint committee an excellent insight into the process of economic promotion. It has also impressed on us the importance of reputation, for which our embassies have a special responsibility. We have also come to appreciate the role of the Global Irish Network in fostering the international dimension of Ireland's recovery.

The Government and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade adopted a number of strategies in response to the economic crisis and to the programme for Government, and the joint committee sought to explore the implementation of these strategies and their contribution to recovery. These strategies included the conferring of a trade promotion function on what had been the Department of Foreign Affairs; the establishment of the Export Trade Council; the programme of trade missions; the establishment of the Global Irish Network and the Global Irish Economic Forum; a strategic approach to St. Patrick's Day activities; a more streamlined structuring of diplomatic missions and their further orientation towards the promotion of foreign earnings; the identification, in co-operation with State agencies, of priority markets; departmental restructuring, including the closure of certain diplomatic missions; and the impact of the "first 100 days" ambassadorial conference.

Given the importance of the United States as a trading partner and source of investment, the joint committee's examination involved at the outset a visit which focused on three Irish consulates, as well as business networks and industry representatives in the related consular areas. This visit yielded valuable information supplementing that gathered in meetings of the joint committee.

The joint committee, at the outset, took careful note of the task set for his Department by the Tánaiste in his strategy statement, in which he stated that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade "will have the leading role, in close cooperation with the State Agencies, Irish business and the Global Irish Network, in fostering the international dimension of Ireland's economic growth." It also had regard to the Department's own strategy statement, in which the Secretary General, Mr. David Cooney, stressed that Ireland's embassies and consulates were "a resource for the whole of Government ... and will be seen to deliver a significant contribution to the objectives shared across Government". He stated that over the next three years the co-operation with State agencies and with other Departments at home and abroad, and with non-governmental agencies and interest groups, would intensify, and structures would be put in place to maximise the benefits to Ireland from all the resources that the Department employed abroad.

The joint committee recognises that Ireland has a range of national interests to promote and protect, as well as a range of responsibilities to fulfil as a member of the European Union, the United Nations and other international organisations and of the international community generally. According to its mission statement, the purpose of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is "to promote and protect abroad the values, interests and economic well-being of

Ireland and its people". The vigorous and competent attention to Ireland's interests and responsibilities, for which the Department has long been known, cannot be separated easily from the promotion of economic interests abroad, which the embassy network has always pursued.

Nonetheless, at present it is more important than ever that the Department and the embassy network are focused on Ireland's trade, investment and tourism interests. This is reflected in the enhanced role in trade promotion conferred by the present Government, although, as stated by the Tánaiste in his address at the ambassadors' conference in 2011, this role was in part recognition of the valuable contribution the embassy network had been making to economic recovery.

12 o'clock

As a committee we recognised the role and in particular the revised role the Department has in our economic recovery. I will not repeat verbatim the full report but will instead concentrate on some of its key aspects before emphasising the recommendations in my second contribution later today. These key aspects are the new Department structures; the Export Trade Council and co-operation with State agencies; the Global Irish Network and Global Irish Economic Forum; St. Patrick's Day; diplomatic representation; and trade promotion in co-operation with State agencies.

The Secretary General at the beginning of 2012 implemented a restructuring aimed at sharpening the Department's focus on trade promotion in key country and regional markets. This involved the establishment of a trade and promotion division, divided into two parts. The first part is concerned primarily with trade promotion, including servicing the Export Trade Council, co-ordination and liaison with other State agencies, Government Departments and the private sector on trade, tourism and investment promotion and joint economic commissions.

The second part concentrates on economic messaging, ensuring that accurate, up-to-date and comprehensive information about Ireland is disseminated through the embassy network and made available to foreign media, economic actors and Governments. The division is also responsible for ensuring that its trade, tourism and investment promotion efforts are coherently integrated into the work of all units of the Department and the entire embassy network. The Department is also guided by the Government report *Trading and Investing in a Smart Economy: A Strategy and Action Plan for Irish Trade, Tourism and Investment to 2015*.

There is now a single point of contact at headquarters for each of our embassies across the range of sectors in which they are active, with new regional entities established to cover all aspects of relations with individual countries, including trade promotion. These entities are the Europe division, the Middle East and north Africa unit, the Asia-Latin America unit, the Africa section within the development co-operation division, and the UK and North America units within the Anglo-Irish division. The trade and promotion division liaises with the State agencies and works closely with the geographic units and other units, including the Irish abroad unit and the press section. The joint committee welcomes these arrangements which not only provide for an integrated treatment of economic, political and other issues but also responds better to current resource pressures.

The Export Trade Council, chaired by the Tánaiste and serviced by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, oversees implementation of the strategy and meets twice a year at high level, with the involvement of the relevant Ministers, senior officials, the CEOs of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Bórd Bia, Tourism Ireland, Culture Ireland and Science Foundation Ire-

land, as well as a number of private sector representatives including from IBEC and the Irish Exporters Association. Preparatory meetings at official level take place in between the high-level sessions. The council ensures high-level overview of the targets of the State agencies and the extent to which they are achieved.

Under the trade strategy, priority markets have been identified in mature economies as well as in emerging economies such as the BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India and China. Local market teams have been established drawn from embassies and State agency offices abroad to lead and co-ordinate activity, under the chairmanship of the Irish ambassador. These teams draw up annual market plans and report on them to the Export Trade Council through the trade and promotion division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The principal focus of these market plans is on areas where a co-ordinated embassy and State agency approach is likely to yield best results.

The Department's enhanced responsibilities in respect of trade promotion require it to work even more closely with Enterprise Ireland on its annual programme of ministerial trade missions and other trade events. Some 18 trade missions were mounted in 2013 and a comparable number are planned for 2014. These missions are led at political level, by the Tánaiste, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for trade and development, Deputy Costello, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton and other Ministers. The joint committee particularly welcomes the fact that it has become normal practice to include a strong trade, tourism and investment promotion element in all bilateral visits led by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Ministers of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs with responsibility for trade and development, Deputy Costello, and for European affairs, Deputy Donohoe, and that they are often accompanied by representatives of Irish companies.

The Global Irish Network now has about 350 members, and the Global Irish Economic Forum has met three times. The Export Trade Council in February 2012 decided to involve members of the Global Irish Network, as appropriate, in trade missions and ministerial visits, and notes that members of the network are engaged with Enterprise Ireland client companies and that many of them have agreed to be advocates in a wide range of sectors in the export and investment areas, as well as for last year's major tourism initiative, The Gathering, which we all know was very successful.

We are still in the month of March. The St. Patrick's Day period has long offered an opportunity for reputational and economic benefit, and is being used to the full. The tradition of Ministers travelling to priority centres worldwide has over the years proved a highly valuable means of exploiting the unique profile of Ireland's national day and, more important, of energising the Irish diaspora and the Global Irish Network. Especially noteworthy is the extent to which the celebration of St. Patrick's Day has in recent years become an event in city calendars in many countries, enlivened by Irish-related cultural and promotional events, and is no longer confined to the historic centres of the Irish diaspora. The present approach to St. Patrick's Day should therefore continue, with targeted preparation by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the embassies, in close co-operation with the State agencies and their offices abroad, including with Culture Ireland. For the past couple of years I have been fortunate enough to travel to the US at the same time as the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste to see at first hand the very valuable work undertaken by them in terms of both Ireland's political and commercial interests.

The joint committee recognises that the effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in promoting Ireland's economic interests cannot be measured in the same way as

that of the State agencies, which have precise targets to meet. Rather, it provides a platform that assists the State agencies in achieving their targets. The joint committee notes the good relations that exist between the Department and the State agencies, as reported by witnesses, and encourages them to foster and develop these relations even further.

The joint committee in its report is conscious of the fact that Ireland's diplomatic representation, comprising 58 embassies and ten consulates, in addition to the seven multilateral missions, is thin in comparison to that of other countries of comparable size and economic interests, and also that diplomatic missions in general are lightly staffed. It recognises that current resource constraints make this difficult to address, but there are countries that have emerged as powerful economies in recent years. In the United States, which is by far the most important source of foreign investment as well as an enormous market, there have been significant changes in regional economic weight. The latter has been recognised by the establishment of a consulate general in Atlanta and I am also pleased to see that the committee's suggestion that a consulate be opened in Texas, the second most populous state and an increasingly important market and source of investment, has been acted upon. I am also pleased to note the Government decision in January to open embassies in Zagreb, Nairobi, Jakarta and Bangkok, the last two of which were specifically referred to by the committee in its report. I look forward to seeing our embassy reopen in Tehran when resources and circumstances permit.

The network of honorary consuls also performs a very valuable role worldwide, providing the benefits of local representation in a very cost-effective way, at little or no cost. Consideration should be given to expanding it, particularly in the United States where there are nine honorary consuls but where there are cities where we have no representation which are important centres of Irish-American population as well as significant economic centres.

Given the transfer of specific trade promotion functions to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, co-operation with Enterprise Ireland, EI, is essential, given EI's mission which is to partner with Irish businesses and the research and investment communities in developing Ireland's trade and fostering innovation, leadership and competitiveness. EI's client companies, the so-called "indigenous sector", directly employ 165,000 people and indirectly support more than 300,000 jobs. Despite the economic difficulties of recent years, exports from this sector have continued to increase. Engineering and construction were particularly affected by the recession and EI has been engaged in helping companies in this sector to internationalise their operations. Also, EI has been working with companies to develop their capacities, including by offering access to the latest research in their sectors, and to enhance their competitiveness to make them better able to compete in the international marketplace. As a result, more indigenous companies than ever before are exporting from Ireland.

EI has a network of 30 overseas offices located in key target international markets, which provide a range of services to companies, including market knowledge on a sectoral basis, introductions to buyers, suppliers and potential partners, and market intelligence including competitor analysis, identification of suitable suppliers of professional services and information on regulation.

The chief executive of Enterprise Ireland attends meetings of the Export Trade Council which is charged with ensuring a collaborative approach to building Ireland's trade base. Working with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade and of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, it mounts trade missions led at political level. A trade mission programme is discussed with the relevant Departments and State agencies before the beginning of each year and agreed to at

the council. Enterprise Ireland also participates actively in the Global Irish Economic Forum which exploits the global Irish network to maximise benefits to the economy.

The joint committee was pleased to hear evidence that the working relationship between Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was strong at all levels and in overseas markets, as it should be. In Ireland the two organisations interact on a regular basis in a wide range of areas, including trade missions and trade events, joint economic commissions, economic messaging, compiling annual plans for each priority market and in other areas as need arises. Overseas, Enterprise Ireland is co-located with Irish embassies or consulates in 24 out of 30 office locations. There is strong collaboration in individual territories between the Enterprise Ireland team and the relevant embassy or consular office in areas such as information sharing, the establishment of priorities and the appropriate focus of activities in particular markets, the co-ordination of trade promotion activities, leveraging the Global Irish Network or other networks, establishing priorities for the joint economic commissions which Ireland has with four countries, organising ministerial visits and trade missions and seeking to influence the direction of local policy discussions where there are real barriers to growth in bilateral trade. Collaboration on messaging and reputational issues in markets such as China is particularly important in the promotion of services such as education.

In short, Enterprise Ireland collaborates closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and considers this essential for the achievement of Ireland's full potential in international markets and to sustain and support new jobs in Ireland. As I stated, I am pleased to debate the report of the joint committee and will listen with interest to other Members before replying to their points in my second contribution.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I thank the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade for the work done in preparing the report which has been presented to the House by the Chairman, Deputy Pat Breen. The report provides a clear analysis of the important contribution the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has made and continues to make towards economic recovery and makes a number of excellent recommendations. These recommendations will form a very worthwhile input into the ongoing enhancement of the Department's strategic approach to the promotion of Ireland's economic interests overseas.

Economic diplomacy - the use of diplomatic tools and approaches in promoting Ireland's economic interests abroad - has always been an important part of the work of the Department and Ireland's network of embassies and consulates abroad. The central importance of economic diplomacy was recognised explicitly by the Government in 2011 when the Department was given an expanded responsibility in the area of trade with the transfer of certain trade promotion functions from the then Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The Government's decision acknowledged the importance of economic diplomacy to Ireland's economic well-being and development.

Ireland has one of the most open economies in the world. Since 2010 the value of our exports has consistently exceeded our overall GDP. Foreign direct investment sustains more than 160,000 jobs in Ireland directly and many more indirectly. Indigenous exporting companies supported by Enterprise Ireland employ 175,000 people and support a total of 300,000 jobs in the economy, or some 16% of the workforce. The 8 million tourists who visited the island of Ireland last year helped to sustain 240,000 jobs in communities across the island. These figures demonstrate very clearly how central the promotion of Ireland's economic interests overseas is

to the recovery and development of the domestic economy.

The promotion of our economic interests abroad is a major priority across government and the implementation of a co-ordinated and strategic approach to this work is fundamental to the success of our efforts. The Government has put in place effective co-ordination structures which recognise the central role played by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as the role of our ambassadors and embassies abroad in leading the co-ordination of work in overseas markets.

The Export Trade Council, established by the Government in 2011, works to strengthen co-operation and co-ordination across all Departments and State agencies involved in the promotion of trade, tourism and investment. The council, which I chair, brings together relevant Ministers and representatives of Departments, as well as the chief executives of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Bord Bia, Tourism Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and representatives of the private sector, including, for example, IBEC and the Irish Exporters Association. The trade and promotion division of my Department provides the council's secretariat. I am pleased to note the finding of the joint committee that the Export Trade Council has proved to be an effective instrument in identifying priorities and ensuring high level oversight of the performance of State agencies.

The Export Trade Council oversees the implementation of the Government's strategy for trade, tourism and investment which guides our overseas economic work. A key task for my Department in the last year has been the co-ordination of a short, focused review of the strategy to ensure the resources of the State, both the embassy network and State agencies, are positioned to deliver maximum overall benefit for the economy, meaning good jobs for people at home. The outcome of the review was presented to the Export Trade Council on 6 February and has since been published. A particularly notable element of the review is the explicit alignment of the strategy with the framework set out in An Action Plan for Jobs. Notable, too, is the introduction of a "new market approach" which provides enhanced guidance for Ireland's international trade, tourism, investment and education promotion efforts, not only for the 27 priority markets identified originally but also for an additional seven exploratory and high potential markets.

The Export Trade Council also oversees the work of local market teams which have been established in Ireland's 27 priority markets. These teams are chaired by our ambassadors on the ground and consist of representatives of the embassy and State agencies. Each team is responsible for developing an annual local market plan and the implementation of these plans is reviewed by the council. I welcome the finding of the joint committee that industry and employer representatives consulted in the preparation of the report indicated a very positive experience of the work of the diplomatic service. The work of the embassy network has been an essential part of efforts to restore Ireland's international reputation and drive economic recovery.

The scale of these efforts is notable. In 2013 the embassy network supported a total of 136 high level visits, with a significant economic or promotional dimension across 52 countries. These included, for example, a trade mission I led to Turkey in April, organised by Enterprise Ireland in close co-operation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Embassy of Ireland in Ankara, during which contracts worth over €30 million to Irish businesses were agreed. The embassy network also undertook more than 730 engagements in the course of 2013 to facilitate trade and investment supporting Irish jobs, as well as more than 660 specific engagements to promote Ireland's economic position to officeholders worldwide. Ambassa-

dors and embassy staff engaged with over 1,150 representatives of the international media to promote Ireland's profile and global reputation and key messages on Ireland's economic recovery and its strengths as a location for foreign investment were promoted in opinion articles and interviews in the international media, reaching, at a very conservative estimate, more than 53 million people.

Speeches and public presentations by embassy staff promoted Ireland's interests directly to audiences of over 778,000 around the world. This engagement by the embassy network, co-ordinated with the excellent work being done by the State agencies abroad, leads to real economic benefits for Ireland. It has helped to achieve the export growth which has driven economic recovery, with export levels now significantly higher than the pre-crisis peak in 2007. It helped to get us to the position we reached in 2013 when Enterprise Ireland saw the highest net gain in employment for a decade in the Irish exporting companies it supported, when IDA Ireland achieved the highest level of net job creation from foreign direct investment in more than a decade and when agrifood exports promoted by Bord Bia reached an all time high. The economic and promotional work of our embassies has made a major contribution to these achievements.

The report of the joint committee notes the limited scale of Ireland's diplomatic presence abroad relative to other countries of comparable size and economic interest, recommending that consideration be given to the strengthening of our network of diplomatic missions. The Government is convinced that the rewards we reap from our investment in economic diplomacy far outweigh its costs. Following the publication of the joint committee's report, I announced the opening of eight new diplomatic missions. The selection of locations for these new missions was well aligned with the recommendations set out in the report: embassies will open in Bangkok, Jakarta, Nairobi and Zagreb, along with the reopening of the Embassy to the Holy See, and consulates will be established in Hong Kong, São Paulo and Austin. The opening of these new missions will expand the global reach of our economic diplomacy efforts and strengthen our capacity to advance key national interests in trade, tourism and investment promotion as well as building our broader diplomatic relationship with the countries concerned.

The programme for Government affirmed a determination to "restore Ireland's standing as a respected and influential member of the European Union and as part of the wider international community". In furthering this objective, our embassy network has undertaken a sustained campaign of outreach to international political and economic leaders, investors, media and opinion formers, to counter inaccurate coverage of Ireland and spread positive messages about the prospects of the Irish economy. Our representatives abroad are engaging across the board, with political office-holders, key parliamentary figures, senior officials, newspaper editorial boards, central bankers and industry leaders to put Ireland's case. These efforts are supported by the trade and promotion division of the Department, which works to ensure that the embassy network is provided with the most up-to-date information and guidance on developments in the Irish economy and economic policy.

These efforts have made a significant contribution to the improvement in international sentiment towards the Irish economy. Ireland's position is now better understood by those who make and influence decisions which affect our economic prospects. This work has helped to build renewed international confidence in Ireland's economic future. It has created the conditions in which the Government has been able to achieve progress at European and international levels on key policy objectives relating to economic recovery, including our successful efforts to deal with the promissory note.

One of the key opportunities to spread positive messages about Ireland across the globe is provided by St. Patrick's Day, which the report recognises as a unique and ever growing opportunity for reputational and economic benefit, which should continue to be used to the full. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the embassy network have been extremely active in taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by St. Patrick's Day in 2014, supporting visits by 27 Ministers to more than 35 cities in 23 countries across the world for a series of trade, tourism and investment-focused programmes. Embassies were, in many cases, instrumental in securing the "greening" of major landmarks across the globe, including the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Giza as part of the "global greening" campaign coordinated by Tourism Ireland. Embassies promoted an innovative video, produced by the Department in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland with input from the State agencies, which presented positive messages about Ireland to international audiences and has been viewed online more than 1.1 million times. They supported parades, cultural performances and business events which provided invaluable platforms for the celebration of Ireland and the promotion of our economic interests.

The Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Breen, remarks in his foreword to the report that the joint committee's investigations confirmed that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is well equipped for its task and that embassies are regarded as effective partners by the State agencies and the private sector in economic promotion.

I very much welcome this conclusion, and can assure the House that the Department is determined to do all it can to further Ireland's economic interests abroad. Across the globe, our ambassadors and embassy staff are working constantly towards this objective, and making a significant contribution to the success of our broader national efforts. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will continue to work with determination and resolve to play its crucial role in supporting Ireland's economic recovery.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I welcome this report. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has responded positively to the Chairman's introduction of the report and to the detailed work of the committee members, the stakeholders and interest groups that participated in its preparation. Fianna Fáil agrees that the promotion of trade by our diplomatic network in the Department is essential and links well with our foreign affairs priorities.

The patent cliff in the pharmaceutical sector is of major concern and resulted in the value of exports in 2013 falling by 5% to almost €86.9 billion. Our banking sector is also of concern because the outstanding issues to be addressed, as Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, stated, are a drag on exports, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises, SMEs. The Government must ensure that any threats to our export-driven economy are identified now and policies put in place to ensure that important exporting sectors remain on a sustainable growth path. Renewed efforts must be made to identify and support home-grown exporting companies. I am glad that over the past decade SMEs have had better access to higher education institutions, research centres and innovation. Many of the institutes of technology play a leading role in supporting existing companies to maintain and grow employment.

We need to continue to identify products we can produce at a competitive advantage and for which there will be a high international demand, in order to ensure the future prosperity of our people. Earlier this morning, I met a visiting vice minister and delegation of the international department of the central committee of the Communist Party of China. They represent

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the world's second largest economy. They outlined the development of relations between our countries, particularly with the establishment of the Irish embassy in 1979 and of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China here in 1980. They spoke about the development of links between our two peoples and business development, particularly exports from Ireland. They are anxious that we continue to build and strengthen those developments, and outlined the opportunities for us to grow trade between our two countries.

One element missing from conversations about exports is the need for currency stability. In the last quarter of 2008 sterling depreciated by over 20%, which hit our exporters very hard because they had set their prices when the two currencies were at different exchange rates. International stability in currency is critically important to us.

According to an article by Geoff Percival in *The Irish Examiner* of 15 February 2014:

CSO data published yesterday showed that the value of exports in 2013 fell 5% to nearly €86.9bn. Import value grew 1% to €49.6bn.

The US, Britain, Belgium, and Germany qualified as our main trading partners during the year, with an 8% increase in the export of food and live animals noted. [The Minister referred to the successful continuous growth of food and drink exports.]

However, the so-called patent cliff was again noted, with the export of medical and pharma products decreasing by nearly €3bn, or 12%.

Alan McQuaid, chief economist with Merrion Stockbrokers, said: "The pharmaceutical sector accounts for approximately a quarter of total Irish exports and half of merchandise exports. According to a research paper published by the Department of Finance last year, Ireland will continue to feel the negative impact of the patent cliff for some time to come, though the magnitude is unlikely to be as great as was felt in 2012. Furthermore, the headline impact should be offset to some extent by reduced imports through royalty payments."

Mr McQuaid said exports will remain the main driver of Irish economic activity and that a pick-up in global demand this year should result in a recovery . . .

This is needed and it is very important for the country. The need for exports to double the European Union average shows how dependent we are on the good health of the international economy. The general pick-up in global demand will assist us and give us the opportunity to recover what has been lost through those circumstances.

Our Chairman, Deputy Breen, has addressed the recommendations contained in the committee's report. I refer in particular to the Ireland House concept, which goes back to 1987. In a reply to a recent parliamentary question, the Tánaiste outlined the value and success of the concept to date, with consulates or embassies in 19 locations overseas. His own Department is represented alongside various statutory agencies. I am sure we can do more in that regard, however. When I visited the Ireland House in New York several years ago, I was heartened to see how Irish officials from different State agencies were working closely together. Savings can be achieved through sharing services and reducing overheads. I acknowledge this is not a straightforward concept because a country's political capital may not be its industrial or business capital but we should attempt to progress it further.

Recently I spoke to an individual with business interests in Malaysia, who pointed out that

we have a very small footprint in that country in terms of our embassy and State agencies. The population of Malaysia is almost 30 million and this business person made the claim - I do not know if it is correct - that agency officials are not available to do the follow-up legwork required after trade missions. We know the value to be gained from having a Minister lead a trade delegation but the follow-up work is also important.

I recognise that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and other statutory bodies are challenged by reduced numbers and the moratorium on recruitment. Within the overall public service, however, it is still possible to transfer personnel to key areas that support our economic development and trade interests. Given advances in technology, there are bound to be divisions within the overall public service that could operate with fewer personnel. These individuals could be transferred to trade promotion areas. We could thereby align personnel to emerging needs without increasing the numbers employed in the public service. Ministerial delegations are important to the industries and businesses that participate in them but the follow-up work is equally important.

Perhaps the committee should discuss further the division of responsibility for trade between his Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. I fail to understand why responsibility for WTO negotiations does not rest with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In regard to international development, which is the responsibility of the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Costello, if we are ever going to achieve justice in world trade or offer the support the developing world needs in regard to removing tariff supports, trade and international development Ministers should be participating in WTO talks. This is an area that deserves further consideration and I hope responsibility can be transferred.

Similarly, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation participates in meetings of European Union Trade Council. I do not know if it is wise to allocate responsibility in that manner. Responsibility for trade should rest with one Minister to the greatest extent possible. The Tánaiste referred to the strategy on trade, tourism and investment. At the launch of the strategy in September 2010, reference was made to an earlier strategy on trading and investing in the smart economy. That earlier strategy noted clearly that implementation of the measures and actions it proposed would require the concentrated and co-ordinated efforts of all key Departments and agencies, including our embassies and consulates abroad. This concept has, therefore, been around for quite some time and the more impetus we can give to consolidating responsibility for trade with one Minister, the better. Everybody could argue differently about the allocation of responsibilities between Departments but this is an area that should be revisited. Departments are good at defending their realms because they do not want to lose responsibilities.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Among the shake ups and changes that occurred when this Government came to power was the addition of a trade promotion division to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the inclusion of “Trade” in the Department’s title. While legitimate concerns were expressed about this new direction, I welcome a whole of Government approach to trade promotion and recognise that Irish embassies and consulates are in a unique position to promote trade and investment.

However it is worth reminding the House about Ireland’s long-standing foreign policy goals and primary focus on human rights, development, the rule of law, peace and democracy. It is vital that our current economic crisis is not used as a smoke screen to override these long held and important strategic principles. When the Taoiseach and the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise

and Innovation travelled to Saudi Arabia recently on a trade mission, they praised the unelected Saudi monarchy for its moderation and commitment to peace in the region. This is the same regime which is fundamentally opposed to democracy and abhors human rights so much that women are banned from driving or even leaving their home without being accompanied by a male relative. It is also the same regime which has been known to train and finance radical and violent Sunni Muslim armed groups to destabilise other countries in the region which challenge their negative and backward role in the Middle East. It is also the regime that allowed its armed forces to support the sectarian dictatorship in Bahrain and facilitated its crack down on democratic protests. The Arab spring and push for democracy were welcomed as long they were not in its own backyard. When challenged on their comments and asked by the media whether they had raised human rights concerns with the Saudi regime, the Taoiseach and the Minister, Deputy Bruton, stated that they were on a trade mission and that it was not appropriate to raise these concerns. One wonders why they attempted to raise any political issues or why they needed to praise the regime in the first place.

As the committee's report states, Ireland's focus on the increased need for trade should not come at the expense of our long-standing contribution to international peace, security and human rights. I would compare the Taoiseach's approach with that of the committee when it sent a delegation, of which I was a member, on a trade mission to Iran shortly after the aforementioned visit to Saudi Arabia. We were able to easily and openly discuss trade issues alongside human rights and other important concerns. This begs the question of why the Taoiseach was unable to do likewise in Saudi Arabia, which is one of the world's worst human rights abusers.

This leads me to the area of policy coherence for development debate. We cannot continue to agree to trade deals which undermine our foreign policy and development goals. For example, the Government supports the development of a free trade agreement with Colombia. Even though the Colombian Government is a notorious human rights abuser and Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist, the Government wants to sign an agreement which rewards the regime and the economic elite of Colombia. Surely, trade agreements should only be signed when they are mutually beneficial, promote development and sustainable economic growth and focus on eradicating poverty but with a caveat to ensure the protection of human rights. The same goes for the fishing agreement signed with Morocco which allows EU ships to plunder the fishing stocks of the occupied western Saharan people who were not consulted in any way and will not benefit. We should be strongly opposed to the deal. It is vitally important that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade focus on improving Ireland's trade in developing and emerging markets.

There is general agreement that the State is still far too dependent on the British and US markets. While these relationships need to be nourished and sustained, we must continually review and widen our focus on new trade and investment opportunities in new and emerging markets. With this in mind, I welcome, as does the report, the Ireland House approach, essentially the co-location of our embassies and State agency offices. This not only reduces costs but also helps to facilitate a united approach to trade policies and allows a pooling of resources. I hope it will also lead to better outcomes. It is vitally important that these trade policies place a focus on the all-Ireland economy. While fiscal powers have still not been devolved from Westminster to the North - something the Government needs to push for and challenge - investments in the North will not only benefit society but also have positive spin-offs for the Border economy and the economy of this state.

As the report notes, St. Patrick's Day offers Ireland a unique opportunity to access the cor-

ridors of power and speak directly to world leaders. It is worth noting and welcoming, as the report does, the hard work the Department has done to help to spread the St. Patrick's Day celebrations beyond the historical diaspora centres. The spread around the world is unique to Ireland and can be developed and encouraged.

I refer to the section of the report that deals with Britain and the European Union. It rightly states the concerns we should have about the proposed referendum on Britain leaving the Union. Trade between Ireland and Britain is worth €14 billion a year and should Britain go ahead with the referendum and remove itself from the European Union, it could have not only a very serious impact on Irish-British trade but also on the development of an all-Ireland economy. The option is being pushed by elements in London and British society. The Irish Government must be proactive in its plans on the issue and prepare to meet all scenarios.

I welcome the report which is positive and wish the Department well in its future role. I look forward to working collectively at the committee and in this Chamber. We want to see this process develop, as well as Ireland's connection with other countries. We must have a view of the world. Our past means that we have a unique view of the world and the world looks differently at us. What is different about Ireland is that we have no hidden agenda in our trade with other countries, whereas one can argue that former colonial countries do. We are, therefore, in a unique position. In most places around the world there is warmth towards Irish people and a warm welcome. We have many doors open to us. There is also great potential to grow the economy. I genuinely believe we must look at who we trade with and how we trade with them. Is it beneficial and does it promote human rights? That is not to say we should not try to involve companies and bring them along on trade missions and visits. In recent years we have started to get our act together, which is a positive development.

I thank the committee for bringing forward the report and giving us the opportunity to speak about it.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I acknowledge the work of the secretariat to the committee, its professionalism and efficiency. I also acknowledge the work of the Chairman, Deputy Pat Breen, and committee members, some of whom are in the Chamber. I acknowledge the frequent attendance of the Minister at committee meetings, which is very positive. In the last Dáil I was a member of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs which was chaired by former Deputy Michael Woods. It was dominated by two members - I mean that in the positive sense - Senator David Norris and President Michael D. Higgins. Its remit did not include the aspect of trade, rather it focused on human rights. It was a privilege to be a member of the committee with these two men because, no matter what human rights issue arose, they were knowledgeable and experienced in dealing with issues ranging from Tibet to Colombia. Today, the committee also encompasses the aspect of trade, which brings in a range of other issues.

The terms of reference for the report dealt with how the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade contributed to Ireland's recovery, as opposed to linking it with the recovery of countries in the developing world. Recovery is not just about economic recovery; it is also about reputational recovery. The task of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade does not just involve overseeing the work of the Department but also global development and human rights issues. It was strange to have trade tagged on to foreign affairs because another Department had primacy in the area of trade. This is indicative of the changing nature of our relationship with countries in the developing world. We have a positive and strong reputation when it comes to development aid which came initially from the selfless work and commitment of Irish

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missionaries and lay people and that work continues today. I visited Ghana with a committee delegation and we saw a project that included work not being done by others. It was a leprosy mission - I had thought leprosy had been eradicated - in which a group of Irish people, aided by students from the University of Limerick, were working with survivors and children with special needs. This work is replicated thousands of times and contributes to our reputation. It continues through our development aid programme which has gained a strong reputation because it is lacking in self-interest. It was alarming to read the words of the Minister, Deputy Richard Bruton, that trade missions were not the place to raise human rights issues.

At one of our committee meetings to review foreign affairs policy we discussed this matter with a panel of speakers and considered the role of human rights when talking about trade. The question behind it is about our recovery which cannot be bought on the basis of very poor wages and appalling working conditions for those in the developing world. We must be proactive on this point. We must take on board ethical and sustainable economics in trade policy and they should not be ignored by the Government and the Department. It is not enough to say we are a member of the Human Rights Council or that we have a human rights unit, as if to say they will deal with human rights and that they do not fall into other areas of the Government's work. That is paying lip service to the concept of human rights. Why would we accept for citizens in other countries with which we trade a more diluted form of human rights than we would accept for Irish citizens? The rights we enjoy must be recognised in the countries with which we trade. What is wrong with integrating stable, sustainable and responsible policies on the rights of workers, women and children into trade policies and our approach to trade? It can be done in a non-confrontational and non-offensive way, as we saw in Iran.

Around the world we are seeing an explosion, with 3 billion people in the new global working class. Some \$1.25 a day is considered average and, in some cases, above average. People are told they are fortunate to have this sum, but we have seen the reality and the death toll in Bangladesh and Qatar. It includes an 80 hour working week and conditions worse than what was seen during the Industrial Revolution. A World Bank economist recently admitted that most people needed a minimum of \$10 daily to rise above the poverty level. We cannot ignore this when we are trading with other countries, especially where workers are not being treated fairly. In terms of what is being delivered for Ireland because of the trade missions, the Chairman and the Minister outlined the range of those missions. There is a claim that additional jobs will be and have been delivered for Ireland, and we got figures in the Minister's report, but where are they located? What is their sustainability? Who is being employed, and who is gaining from these trade missions? I believe many of them are private, profit-driven export companies and I wonder how much of that is being infiltrated back into our main economy. Are the jobs sustainable or are they dependent on international economic activity? Is there enough focus on domestic industry? Small and medium enterprises in this country complain of a persistent refusal by banks to grant loans that would make a difference to them. How much revenue is going to multinational companies and their elite shareholders, and how much is coming in to help our domestic recovery? There is a need for hard evidence in the report.

We talk about policy coherence. We have contributed very significantly to eliminating hunger. On one hand, Irish Aid is doing a fantastic job in eliminating hunger but, on the other hand, as a country we are not progressive enough when it comes to the issue of biofuels. We are seeing land being taken from people - land on which they would have grown food - to satisfy the biofuel needs of the developed world.

I want to acknowledge the reputation of Irish Aid in promoting human rights, but that must

be upheld through demanding standards in all Irish business carried out overseas, including the trade missions, because it is a retrograde step and it undermines our reputation if we support human rights and business through separate avenues. Through being a member of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and through chairing the Irish section of UEPA, I have been able to visit a number of African countries, and there is no doubt about the esteem in which Ireland is held and the desire of people in those areas to do business with Ireland. That is mutually beneficial. There are serious concerns about the way in which other countries are doing business with developing countries in Africa - countries that do not have a human rights record and that exploit African countries. There is a positive role for Ireland to play because those countries in Africa would prefer to do business with us. We could explore fewer corporate-led trade policies, because there are trade relations that could deliver lower profits but greater benefits and more long-term partnerships with more sustainable jobs. There is huge potential for Irish uptake of public tenders for services and utilities.

Our third level institutions were mentioned. These institutions continue to produce innovative ideas for sustainable partnerships in areas such as health, energy and technology, as well as start-up companies that are serious contenders, but I would like to see more hard facts on how we are supporting them.

Including trade under the remit of the Department of Foreign Affairs is an opportunity for human rights to be promoted through our trade missions, and it is not inappropriate that human rights would be discussed in trade missions to establish the importance of decent work, a decent living wage, safe working conditions and a voice for workers also, which we have in this country. We know that the global south is going through rapid industrialisation, and there are opportunities for our economy in that, but that rapid industrialisation has seen thousands employed in precarious and exploitative conditions, especially in the extractive industries. We have a moral duty to ensure workers' rights in those areas.

When we were in Ghana we visited the two ports. There is no doubt that ports, and the business conducted there, are driving forces in developing economies. I launched the other side of the trade programme in Dublin Port this week and there were port managers there from Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria and Ghana. In my speech there I made the same points I am making now. There is an economic answer also, because workers who are being paid well and working in proper conditions that comply with health and safety regulations make for a much more contented workforce. That contributes to the economy also. Nobody disagreed with me on the points that I made there.

There is also the area of illicit capital flight. We must be a much stronger voice for country-by-country auditing to ensure profits are not totally in the hands of the multinationals. I listened to what was said by the stakeholders who were engaged in the report and on the Export Trade Council. Part of the One World, One Future document is a commitment to inclusive economic growth, but what we see at those meetings are the profit-making companies - I am not against profit - and their focus is on whether there a scenario there for them. We see the big businesses there but we do not see the other side. I say "Yes" to trade with the outside world and to trade that will benefit our economy, but we cannot compartmentalise and separate human rights issues from that.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this report and to affirm the efforts of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in selling Ireland. The key task facing this Government when we came to office was to try to put people back to work and, in

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this endeavour, every public servant, Department and agency have had to put their shoulder to the wheel. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was given a key role and specifically tasked with trade promotion. At the outset of this drive, I was privileged to witness at first hand the efforts of two embassies, one - in the company of the Ceann Comhairle - in Europe and the other in Africa. I cannot overstate how impressed I was with the professionalism and the enthusiasm they brought to their new task of selling Ireland. I am surprised that the potential to promote trade by utilising the unique skills and on-the-spot presence of our diplomats was not fully recognised prior to this, although I accept that perhaps in a less focused way the job of our missions abroad has always been to sell Ireland and it is only a logical and natural step that they should also participate in selling our goods and our services.

I do not believe anybody could fail to be impressed by the new professional and integrated approach to trade missions, led by Ministers and Ministers of State, that we have witnessed in recent times. They have taken a cross-Government approach and utilised all State agencies, including our embassies and local Irish businesses, often with the help of the global Irish network abroad. We have seen the proof that this has paid dividends in terms of both inward investment and contracts for Irish business. These missions are of vital importance to a small country that is utterly unsustainable unless it trades. This success has also been recognised and appreciated by Irish business, as confirmed in the report.

The Chairman, in his foreword to the report, mentions the importance of not downgrading the traditional role of the Department in showcasing Ireland in the best possible light not only as an economic unit but as a country concerned with development, human rights - Deputy O'Sullivan also referred to this - and the rule of law and as a country with a distinct culture, historic links with other countries and established national and international interests. These are not directly trade issues but they certainly influence trade. Countries, like people, want to do business with people; they know people and they trust people in whom they have confidence. The financial collapse damaged our reputation not only in the bond market but in all markets. Our embassies have been in the vanguard in trying to reverse that damage, spearheading a positive onslaught of good news stories from Ireland, because without trust, a good reputation and the traditional friendships we have abroad, our trade delegations would be ploughing very infertile land.

I refer to the point Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan made about trading with countries with human rights issues. All those countries that abuse human rights get away and persist with it because they are closed, but trade opens up countries - they are not mutually exclusive. We should trade with them. We should force them to realise what is going on in the rest of the world, and the more dependent they become on trade, the more likely they are to look into their own hearts and what they are doing to their own people.

Our embassies have been key in restoring our reputation and international confidence as a nation with which to trade. The St. Patrick's Day offensive, as I call it, is also an important part of this, not only as a way of putting us back on the international stage and promoting us in a positive light but in promoting that other vital foreign currency earner, tourism. I thought it was a pity that some politicians criticised Ministers who were travelling to reach out to our diaspora on St. Patrick's Day, because even the media recognise the value of these missions. They generate unbuyable goodwill and publicity for Ireland, our business and our tourism trade.

1 o'clock

From the Department's perspective, it is a combination of the hard sell and the soft - the goodwill which is paying off for us in terms of increased tourism, inward investment and trade. This two-pronged approach is reflected in the two divisions established in the Department, with one section dealing with promoting trade directly, supporting the Export Trade Council and working with our trade agencies, while the other concentrates on communicating to all foreign actors a very positive and coherent but accurate economic message. Recently I was at a conference in Greece which had nothing to do with trade, business or economics. Nevertheless the Greek Government ensured all of us who attended were given a good news message about the economy of Greece by the Minister for the press. This highlights the importance for countries, particularly countries which have suffered a difficult financial collapse, of restoring their reputation and economic diplomacy.

There has been much talk about emerging markets and I will not dwell on this because we are aware of where the potential is. Deputy Smith and the Chairman of the committee, Deputy Breen, spoke about the importance of an Ireland House-type approach when we are trying to expand our outreach. This is a very valid point. I understand we will shortly withdraw our ambassador from Lesotho. The Minister spoke about other missions which will open. It is important to capitalise on the potential to co-locate. It is not suitable for every country, but where it is it will give us better bang for our buck and will be a hall door into Ireland so we not only reduce our costs but gain synergies by concentrating our efforts in a single building.

I wish to issue a little warning, not only about how we sell but what we sell. We have all heard about the huge potential for agricultural products, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN, FAO, tells us that by 2050 demand for food will have increased by 70%, not only to feed the extra 2 billion people who will be on the planet but to feed them different foods. Since 1980 world average incomes *per capita* have been growing at 1.5% and it is expected that by 2050 they will be growing by 2.5% annually. It is growing more in some areas than others; we hear about Asia and China and we all want a bit of that. In Africa growth rates which were unimaginable ten years ago have come out of nowhere. Nigeria is growing by 6%, and we now have trade missions to such countries which we would not have thought of in the past.

As countries get richer they want different foods. They move from a reliance on staples to more luxury foods, by which I mean meat and dairy products. For a food producing country such as Ireland, which specialises in meat and dairy, this change in world demand is a beguiling prospect. Our farmers are already capitalising and embracing the potential it offers. They should continue to do so, and I do not suggest they should not, but as a country we must be careful not to exploit the undoubtedly hugely attractive potential of agriculture to the detriment of other sectors. We need to keep all sectors going and not allow ourselves become overdependent on one sector. This must be the message of the collapse of the building industry on which we had become totally dependent.

I do not know what the future is, but I know that as an industry agriculture is as fragile as any other. Overnight we could lose our competitiveness and our comparative advantages through a range of changes. Any factor could influence it, such as climate change. Only a few weeks ago we were practically under water. If this continues our potential to produce will change. It could also be influenced by technological advances. Heaven knows, we could all be eating with a pill instead of dairy products in a few years. It is just a word of caution. There is room to exploit the wonderful opportunities of which our farmers can avail but we must be a little bit careful. The recent Amárach report referred to a worrying reduction in graduates for the IT sector. We must be wary of this. I know it is outside the scope of the report but it is

important to remember if one does not produce it one cannot sell it.

I very much welcome the opportunity to endorse the report and commend the work of the Department and its embassies in their highly professional approach to trade and supporting our efforts.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I thank the Chairman of the committee, Deputy Pat Breen, for bringing the report to the Dáil and for the opportunity to debate and discuss it today. Like others I acknowledge and thank all of the committee members who have made a contribution to the report and will comment on it during this debate, including Deputies Byrne, Crowe, Mitchell, O’Sullivan and Smith.

I will make observations on the report, which I have read, and respond to some of the points raised on the content of it and to the observations of colleagues on our foreign policy and the integration of trade into it. I wish to put the report and the debate into context and quote from an excellent book, which is part of a series entitled *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy* published by the Royal Irish Academy and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is a superb series which publishes the archives of the Department. To date, eight or nine volumes have been published and they are released every few years.

One of the first documents in Volume 1 is entitled *Message to the Free Nations of the World*. It was one of the main messages from the first Dáil, published on 21 January 1919. The third paragraph states:

Internationally, Ireland is the gateway to the Atlantic; Ireland is the last outpost of Europe towards the West; Ireland is the point upon which great trade routes between East and West converge; her independence is demanded by the Freedom of the Seas; her great harbours must be open to all nations

Even at the very start of our foreign policy as we began to understand what and how we wanted to communicate to the outside world upon establishing our sovereignty, there was awareness of where we are in the world, our location and the opportunities this would create at some point for trade and communication with the outside world. The themes in it are consistent with some of the other discussions we have had. One of the earliest communications back to the Department of Foreign Affairs was from Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, who represented Ireland at the conference in Paris in 1919. In his communication of 7 March, amid all the great responsibilities he was managing, and they were great, awesome and so demanding, he stated:

The work I have in hands is I would like to remind you of the highest importance at the moment and it cannot possibly be done to best advantage if I don’t get help. It is inhuman to ask one man to carry it on all alone. I am working every day from early morning till late at night but I cannot divide myself into six parts

He goes through the costs and demands of the work, including the cost of living and communicating in Paris. The concluding line of his letter back to Dublin is, “Let me have some money as soon as you can manage it”.

I do not say this for flippant reasons. In the letter he communicates the huge practical difficulty he has in doing his work, which was so important to his country, and the cost of doing it. These are the main themes on which we have been touching during this discussion. While in

some way the execution and articulation is contemporary, these have been themes throughout our foreign policy since the foundation of the State. A number of particular points in the report introduced by Deputy Breen touch on this. First, it is important that the report welcomes the restructuring that took place in the then Department of Foreign Affairs to include within it the role of trade promotion. I wish to return to comments made in this regard by Deputies Maureen Sullivan and Olivia Mitchell. The second valuable point is that the report acknowledges the feedback this restructuring has received from persons involved in industry and those who are trying to sell Irish goods and services abroad to the effect that they thought it was of help. The third point which I think is of value is that while the report establishes and notes the role of embassies, it makes particular reference to the role of consulates general, their number, location and the kind of work they do. I have had direct experience in this regard in respect of Ireland's consul general in Edinburgh and the report refers to the role of such persons in other parts of the world and the work they will do. While it is correct to highlight the work of Ireland's ambassadors and embassies and the lead role they play, the specific reference to consuls general is very welcome. The report goes on to touch on an issue referred to by both Deputies Maureen O'Sullivan and Olivia Mitchell, that is, the need to continue to emphasise the role of human rights as a vital strand in Ireland's foreign policy, as well as the need for both of these themes to coexist, as they must and can do.

That leads me to some of the points made in this debate thus far. Having read the report, three observations that I wish to emphasise struck me. The first is that it makes the point that Ireland has deepened and strengthened integration between its embassies, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and State agencies. In my work abroad I witness this regularly. I have seen it in Poland and Belgium in the past two or three weeks. However, one should not take what we have as a given. One should always be open to evaluating it to ascertain how it can be strengthened. In particular, I note that Deputy Brendan Smith made the point that the Ireland House concept was not new. He is correct in that regard. During my time in my current role I have seen how the concept has been deployed in more places and how the Government seeks to make such collaboration more successful. I saw such an example recently at the Irish Embassy in Warsaw, where all of the State agencies and the embassy were literally right beside one another, using the same facilities and meeting rooms and working together in such an integrated fashion.

The second point I wish to emphasise pertains to the work being done within the European Union, in particular. The Government must continue to be aware that as important and vital are the strong multilateral relations Ireland has with countries or, in other words, the relationships it has with countries through bodies such as the European Union, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, they must never be a substitute for strong bilateral relations with these countries. That is the reason Ireland's embassies are so important, even though I meet representatives of the other 27 member states of the European Union virtually everything third week in the different bodies of which I am a member. These relations can only reach the levels the Government seeks to have them reach for the benefit of the people of Ireland if such meetings are accompanied by continued contact between the two countries in question at ministerial level and through the embassies. This is a theme of which the Government has been aware in its foreign and European policy in recent years and it should not be lost sight of.

My final observation in response to the report is that, as the Tánaiste said, it makes reference to Ireland's opening up of new embassies and new consulates general, which is to be welcomed,

as other European Union countries are closing them. However, it is necessary to put this in context. The Government should always consider the likely sources of political and economic gravity in the coming years and ask itself whether it will be well placed to represent itself and the country in the world of 20 and 30 years. It should then consider how to go about planning to do this. While progress has been made in that respect in recent years, the Government must continue to do this.

In response to some specific points made in the debate, I agree with Deputy Brendan Smith on the value of the Ireland House concept and the practical benefits it can bring. While I have touched on some of the points made by Deputy Seán Crowe in his contribution, I wish to say what I thought was of particular interest because it is the first time I have heard a member of Sinn Féin say it. He was speaking about the referendum in the United Kingdom and how important he believed it to be that the United Kingdom should remain within the European Union. What I find striking about this is that this is the European Union that constitutes all of the treaties against which Sinn Féin has campaigned in the Republic of Ireland. In other words, the Deputy is looking for the United Kingdom to remain within the European Union - as I strongly believe it should - under the auspices, for example, of the Treaty of Lisbon, the implementation of which Sinn Féin was against.

While I would love to have an opportunity to respond at another time to some of the points made by Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan because there was so much in her contribution I would like to debate, I wish to respond to one specific point. Having participated in a lot of trade promotion activity within my role, I have been struck by how nearly all of the companies represented in such activity are small to medium-sized. I can understand completely how such an image might develop, but I refer to the idea that the economy is divided into large companies that are exporting and others that are small and which do not. In my personal experience I have found that the companies that make the greatest use of such missions are actually those companies to which the Deputy refers. This point perhaps should be better articulated and more information shared in this regard. I will conclude with an example. I participated and spoke at a dinner in the Irish Embassy in London a few months ago to support Irish companies in gaining business within the United Kingdom. Virtually all of the company representatives at that dinner - approximately 150 people attended the event - were from very small Irish companies. As the Deputy noted, it would be to the Government's benefit were it to find a way of communicating this point in order that people understood the role of such missions.

An Ceann Comhairle: Apart from Deputy Frank Feighan, also due to speak are Deputies Eric Byrne, Eoghan Murphy and Dan Neville, as well as the Minister of State, Deputy Joe Costello. As the Chairman, Deputy Pat Breen, is to reply, we are tight on time.

Deputy Frank Feighan: I will give up some time and speak for five minutes.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about this report and thank the Chairman of the joint committee, Deputy Pat Breen, for compiling it. I also thank the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Eamon Gilmore, for the work he has done in recent years, effectively to raise the country's profile and bring jobs into Ireland. Similarly, I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, for his work.

The context for the report is that three years ago the country effectively fell off a cliff, both financially and because its standing in the United Kingdom, across Europe and the world was badly damaged. We took our eyes off the ball because despite having indigenous industries

such as agriculture which was export led and the pharmaceutical sector, many farmers were told there was no future in farming or food production, that the real future lay in banking. One can see where that got us. Effectively, it was necessary to consider again all of the industries on which we had turned our backs. We had opted for banking and building and forgotten about small to medium-sized enterprises and the agriculture sector in an export-led economy.

The forthcoming State visit by the President to the United Kingdom will highlight how important is the role with our nearest neighbour. I have visited Australia and seen the work undertaken by the embassy there to try to link small and medium-sized enterprises with the State agencies. People think that when Ministers travel all over the world for St. Patrick's Day, it is a junket. I am well able to afford to pay for my own holidays and if I go away for a few days, the last thing I want to do is to attend meetings. If I want food, I might go to a McDonald's or somewhere else. I do not want to sit around. Therefore, I pay tribute to Ministers and Ministers of State travelling around the world promoting our country. It is no coincidence that foreign direct investment sustains more than 160,000 jobs in Ireland. However, we must punch above our weight and box clever. I have seen first-hand in Northern Ireland, Australia and in other countries what is happening.

The IFA and various companies say there are issues in regard to live exports. We must ensure these markets are opened up. I very much welcome that Ministers, through State agencies and Departments, have secured access to nine international markets, including China, Japan, Australia and countries in the Gulf region, which have a combined population of 1.5 billion. We must think outside the box at all times.

I also welcome the fact that in 2014 we will open eight new embassies and consulates, including in Bangkok in Thailand, Jakarta in Malaysia, Nairobi in Kenya, Zagreb in Croatia, Hong Kong, the Holy See, Austin in Texas and São Paulo in Brazil. A friend of mine, who is very highly skilled and has a wife and four children, worked for a major construction company in Ireland. However, he is now working for a construction company in Nigeria in order to support his wife and children. He is bringing his expertise to Nigeria. We all think people are coming into our country and taking our jobs, but he has gone away, bringing with him his expertise, and we need to support people like him and firms doing that, which is why I welcome the opening of these embassies and consulates.

I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Costello, for the work he has done and I welcome this report.

Deputy Eric Byrne: Most of my talking is done at committee meetings, and I had not intended to make a contribution today because I am sure the Minister of State is fed up listening to me repeat myself. However, I note the contributions from speakers and I support the report, because it has been moulded by those of us on the committee. I suppose it is a bit self-congratulatory if one starts to recognise the wonderful report before Members of the House who are not on the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, but I would like to think the 166 Members of the Dáil will read and absorb the report.

To my amazement, the Leader of Fianna Fáil, in a very interesting contribution on Tuesday, spoke about our committee eloquently and suggested that it was a very hard-working one but that it did not get the publicity it deserved. In a break with tradition, he went on to applaud myself, Deputy Durkan and the hard-working Fianna Fáil representative, Deputy Smith, on the work we did in tackling the Russian ambassador who attempted to exonerate his position on

Ukraine. In fairness to the leader of Fianna Fáil, he recognised the contribution of the members of the committee in not being cowed or intimidated by the Russian ambassador. I thought that was noteworthy.

The more I hear in this debate on foreign affairs and trade, the more I think there seems to be a warm and almost all-party approach to the work of the committee and a recognition of the progress being made by it. I said “almost all-party” because of the Sinn Féin position as outlined by Deputy Crowe. I refer to the issue of whether we should send trade delegations to countries while condemning their human rights records. We have been to Iran and are very conscious of the human rights abuses there. We had the opportunity, through the Iranian human rights council, which is headed up by a very senior and well-known politician, to explain our feelings on public executions of gay people in gyms and the stoning to death of women allegedly engaged in adultery and so on. We had the door to a specific Minister opened to us to highlight human rights. If one was to carry the Sinn Féin position to its logical conclusion, then I think we would have to stop trading with the BRIC countries.

I spent a very productive hour and a half, as did Deputy Smith, with the representative of the international affairs section of the Chinese Communist Party. Of course people will say “Look at human rights in China and at what the Chinese are doing to the Falun Gong, the Uyghurs and others,” but, as politicians, we must be very clear with ourselves and in our policies.

We are doing much work in Uganda but it has just passed atrocious legislation criminalising homosexuality which, I think, can result in a death sentence. As politicians, how do we balance our feelings about such laws with our desire to engage in serious trade relations with countries which are not at all like ours? I think Deputy Crowe projected a sort of semi-elitism in his attitude that this is a liberal democracy and, therefore, we have all the correct attributes in respect of human rights, as though this were the perfect society. He mentioned Saudi Arabia and there is also Iran. Naturally, there are huge differences between the policies and structures in an Islamic republic and those in a liberal democracy. It is time we respected each other’s positions.

I congratulate the Saudis on the King Abdullah scholarships. Very serious academics are being sent all over the world, including to UCD, on scholarships funded by King Abdullah. I believe the king is attempting to institute reforms. When one looks at Saudi Arabia, one must look at the tribal networks, the desert tribes and the conservatism in certain districts which dominate political dialogue about Islam and Western standards.

We have huge trade links with Russia, but what sort of democracy is it, given its involvement in Crimea and Ukraine? We deal with various societies which are at various levels and stages of development. We hear the term “developing countries” all the time. Should we pull out of Uganda because of the outrageous abuse of human rights by way of the legislation it has passed? I would say we should not but, in any case, we have a lot to learn and we are learning all the time. As the Ceann Comhairle is probably aware, we did not realise there were female members of the Knesset whose hands we should not shake. Culturally, I assumed that was an Islamic thing and that one did not shake the hands of certain women of the Islamic faith. However, it also applies to conservative Jewish people. We must learn about the different cultures and then develop trade links.

I would argue that there is nothing as wonderful as having large numbers of Saudi and Iranian students attending colleges and universities here, because they cannot but benefit from the cultural experiences they have. They can translate them and bring them back to their own

countries. For example, I know a Saudi Arabian woman resident in Ireland who I have assisted in taking driving lessons and who has learned to drive a car. The Saudi woman I helped learn to drive will be very disappointed that she will not be allowed drive a car when she goes home. At the same time, over 60% of students in third level institutions in Iran are women. Its students are extremely bright and it is important they are exposed to new concepts. There are cultural differences with which we have to come to terms.

When the committee was visiting Iran, it was rather low of RTE to concentrate on the issue of our Iranian counterparts not shaking hands with female members of our delegation. What kind of position is that from an interviewer in RTE who sees the development of links between Ireland depending on shaking hands? We are a multicultural society and it is time RTE caught up with that fact.

I compliment the committee chairman, Deputy Pat Breen, on developing a procedure in which we can examine long-standing conflicts in the world. He has taken the decision to engage with the Cypriots, members of the European Union, to address the long-standing division of the island of Cyprus between the north with the Turks and the south with the Greeks. It was important for the committee to debate this matter in-depth with a view to understanding the conflict and using our good offices to assist the talks process that might bring about the island's reunification.

I congratulate the chairman for addressing another similar long-standing dispute in the Tindouf province in the Western Sahara, one that has gone on for over 40 years like Cyprus. The committee has all the time been lobbied by the Moroccans, the Algerians and the Polisario Front on this matter and we tended to refer them to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The chairman will now allow the committee to undertake an in-depth analysis of this conflict which might lead us to discover that the Department's policy, decided 40 years ago, has outlived its position. Such an examination may allow us to offer our services to the Algerians and other parties involved and to intervene in creating better conditions for those unfortunates stuck in Tindouf. If one knew its conditions, one would not like to spend a night there, let alone 40 years.

I congratulate the chairman on the work he has done so far with the committee.

Deputy Eoghan Murphy: I congratulate the committee on the work it has done, as well as the Government and our diplomatic service, in restoring our reputation abroad. I used to work abroad and there were several low points concerning our reputation over the past several years before I was elected to this House. I have learned from my contacts abroad that this has changed for the good.

This is an excellent and welcome report. However, we have to be careful that we do not open ourselves to accusations of hypocrisy on the point of which states we trade with. We have abused human rights ourselves in the past. There are those who claim we are still abusing them, whether it is regarding the issue of a woman diagnosed with a fatal foetal abnormality not being allowed to have a termination or how we treat asylum seekers in direct provision. We must be careful when we speak about other countries and their human rights records that we do not come in on our high horse.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell is correct that trade opens up countries. There is a long history in international relations of countries using soft power, namely their economic power, to bring in-

fluence and change attitudes in other countries. Our diplomats and the Government in its trade missions are good at this aspect of diplomacy.

The report highlights the work done by our diplomatic corps in rebuilding our economy and opening up new trade links. However, we should not reduce the work of our ambassadors and staff just to dealing with trade promotion issues. One cannot quantify what it means to a citizen distressed abroad when an embassy comes to his or her aid. One cannot quantify what it feels like when a giant shamrock is projected on the Burj Al Arab in Dubai on St. Patrick's Day.

The Royal Irish Academy is holding a conference on disarmament issues, one on which Ireland has been to the forefront. One cannot quantify the importance of Ireland's initiative in the 1950s and 1960s in developing the non-proliferation treaty and what it means to the world today. I accept the report does not try to elevate trade over other aspects of foreign affairs policy. It is important, however, to marry our foreign and domestic policy, particularly when it comes to financial investments. Disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons are incredibly important. That and peacekeeping were our two pillars when we first entered the United Nations. Today, however, the State invests in companies which produce nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles through the National Pensions Reserve Fund with funds of up to €10 million. While it is not a huge amount, it is significant because it is completely at odds with our foreign policy and our reputation in the area of non-proliferation. As we move to establish a new strategic State investment fund, we should divest from these companies to ensure we have an ethical investment policy that matches our foreign policy aims. It is important we speak on these issues and others, including human rights, but do not open ourselves to accusations of hypocrisy on how we spend our State moneys.

Deputy Dan Neville: I recognise the work the committee chairman, Deputy Breen, has done and the amount of time he puts into his role. It is one of the more demanding chairmanships which just does not involve a weekly meeting or two but also involves meeting various foreign delegations and travelling to various conferences around the world. Maybe we should help him out a bit more in his constituency.

Deputy Pat Breen: I am more in my constituency than the Deputy thinks.

Deputy Eric Byrne: Deputy Michael McNamara is taking care of it.

Deputy Dan Neville: The mission of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is to promote and protect the value, interests and economic well-being of Ireland abroad. It works towards the strategic goal of using its full resources at its headquarters and across its embassy network to promote Ireland's economic and trading interests, cultural profile and international reputation. The work of our embassies and diplomatic corps is not recognised as much as it should be. While many in the Civil Service see it as a glamorous posting, it can be a day-to-day hard grind dealing with, for example, our European affairs in trying to solve our economic problems. Their role needs to be recognised in promoting trade and good will for the State. Economic diplomacy has long been an important aspect of the Department's work and its embassy network. Embassies and consulates work to support the development of Ireland's exports, attract foreign direct investment, promote Ireland as a tourism destination and enhance its profile and reputation. While we have recognised the embassies, we should recognise the work done by the consulates, much of which is voluntary, is also extremely important. On various trips abroad we have seen the excellent work being done by the consulate service and should recognise that most of it is done on a voluntary basis.

The central role of economic diplomacy in the work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade was recognised explicitly in 2011 when responsibility for certain trade promotion functions was transferred to the Department from the then Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. This was a new departure for the State in terms of the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We must recognise how successful this move has been and the opportunities it presents for the future.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak about the report on the contribution of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to economic recovery. I congratulate the Chairman of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Pat Breen, and all members of the committee on producing a very fine report. It is important that reports of this nature produced by hard-working committees which have worked on them week after week and month after month, which have met delegations and travelled abroad are dealt with in plenary session in the Dáil. We should see more work of this nature as often the public never has the benefit of seeing the great work done by committees.

I am extremely disappointed that there has been no contribution to the debate from People before Profit, the Socialist Party or many of the Independents. They were very vocal in our earlier debate on Seanad reform but on this issue which is central to the well-being of the State, they are silent. It was only through our international trade that the reputation of the country was rebuilt. In the dark days when there was reduced domestic consumer consumption, we were able to sell our goods abroad and diversify our markets. They should remember that approximately 85% to 90% of everything we produce is sold in international markets. This is a huge issue for debate, yet those who are so vocal on all sorts of other issues are not prepared to come into the House and express an opinion on the importance of the work being done in the recovery of the economy. I firmly believe that without the strength and robustness of our engagement in international trade, without this boost and the record numbers of trade missions abroad led by Ministers, we could not have managed to walk the tightrope to keep the country afloat. We have had an annual increase in international trade of 6% every year until this year when, unfortunately, the patent cliff affected trade figures. Nevertheless, jobs have been maintained at a high level. I pay tribute to all those involved in the good work done in this regard and deplore the fact that the purveyors of negativity on the other side of the House have not seen fit to come into the Chamber to even give an opinion on all of the good work that has been done.

Deputies Eric Byrne and Eoghan Murphy have responded admirably to the issues raised by Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan. I compliment the good work she is doing on the committee, particularly on development issues and the interaction between trade and human rights. I will not go into that issue now but will come back to it on another occasion. However, every country with which we trade is a signatory to the United Nations Charter on Human Rights and has signed up to most of the conventions in place. We have not signed up to all of them either, as we have yet to deal with the convention on people with disabilities.

I have asked the expert advisory committee, chaired by Mrs. Nora Owen, to visit my Department to examine the interchange and interface between trade and development and between aid and trade. The committee is engaged in an exercise and has visited the United Kingdom to see how the Department for International Development deals with the matter. It has also visited Sierra Leone and will visit South Africa before producing a report which will be made available at the Irish Economic Forum in the autumn when there will be a module on how we deal with the relationship between aid and trade. This is an important issue and everybody knows that

trade alone will not bring prosperity or economic development. We must examine how we engage with the private and corporate sectors and how this issue will feed into the post-2015 millennium development goals. The committee will produce recommendations which will mark the first time something of this nature will have been done.

As Minister of State with responsibility for trade and development, I have been closely involved in the work done by the Department in leading and co-ordinating efforts across government to promote trade and investment. I have seen the results of these efforts and the work done by our embassy network across the globe. Our embassies and consulates play a fundamental role in working to advance Ireland's economic interests in overseas markets, in providing a platform for the work of the State agencies and in supporting Irish enterprises seeking to expand their business overseas. The decision taken by the Government in January to expand Ireland's embassy network, opening new diplomatic missions in key markets across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, was a very welcome step in ensuring Ireland was equipped to take advantage of new economic opportunities in the years ahead. The global economy is evolving rapidly and it is in Ireland's vital national interests that we put in place solid foundations to support growing trade and investment links with emerging economies and new centres of international business, while maintaining a balance in our focus on key existing markets.

In 2013 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade increased its efforts to strengthen links with emerging economies. With the embassy network, it supported no fewer than six high level visits to China, including the largest ever tourism sales mission to that country, an investment-focused trade mission to India and a major push to attract international scholarship students from Brazil which resulted in ten times more Brazilian students coming to Ireland in 2013 than in 2010. The Brazilian Minister for Education and I signed a memorandum of understanding in 2012, providing for 5,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students from Brazil to study in Ireland. People in Dublin will now notice these students arriving. They are also attending universities and institutes of technology throughout the country.

In November I led a major trade mission to South Africa and Nigeria, two of the key emerging markets in Africa. The mission which was supported by our embassies in Pretoria and Abuja involved 37 Irish companies and secured new contracts worth €7 million and resulted in significant business alliances. The trade mission to Nigeria was the first such mission ever to west Africa and another will follow in the autumn. In South Africa I had the privilege of pulling the switch to turn Table Mountain, an iconic landmark in Cape Town, green on St. Patrick's Day. It was part of the wonderful branding work Tourism Ireland was doing to promote Ireland on St. Patrick's Day throughout the world. As I was pulling the switch in Cape Town, somebody else was doing so in Egypt to turn the pyramids green, which meant we witnessed the greening of Africa from Cape Town to Cairo.

The importance of a strengthened focus on emerging markets was clearly recognised in the review of the Government's strategy for trade, tourism and investment, led by the trade and promotion division of the Department in recent months. The outcome of the review, presented to the Export Trade Council on 6 February this year, had a number of major elements. Among these was the inclusion for the first time of a 2015 target of €900 million for the direct contribution of the international education sector to the Irish economy - this will certainly increase dramatically in the years to come - and also the maintenance of existing targets for the creation of 150,000 new jobs directly associated with exporting enterprises, a 33% increase in exports by State-agency-assisted companies and 780 new inward investment projects through IDA Ireland by the end of 2015. It is an enormously ambitious programme on international trade and

investment.

A key element of the review outcome was the formulation of a new market approach which disaggregates the list of our priority markets and includes additional high-potential and exploratory markets, to ensure that Ireland engages effectively with high-growth markets in Asia, South America and Africa without lessening our focus on vital markets such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe. The review identified an additional seven exploratory high-potential markets - Turkey, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico, Vietnam, Thailand and Chile - for particular focus in our trade, tourism and investment promotion efforts.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am afraid I have to-----

Deputy Joe Costello: In conclusion, there is a huge amount that could be said. I did not get around to talking about the Africa strategy and the work that is being done in that respect.

The work that has been carried out on the international front on international trade and investment has been tremendous and I compliment the Department and all the officials who have been involved in it, and all the staff in the embassies abroad who have turned our embassies into engine rooms of trade and economic activity, as well as the other diplomatic work they do. I compliment the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and its Chairman and members on the excellent work they have done in producing this report.

Deputy Pat Breen: I thank all those who contributed to today's debate. It was interesting to hear all the contributions because everybody was speaking with the one voice. I particularly thank the three Ministers. It is not often one gets three Ministers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade here on a Friday afternoon, because foreign affairs takes one abroad. I note the heavy schedule of the three Ministers - the Tánaiste and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister of State, Deputy Donohoe, and the Minister of State with responsibility for trade, Deputy Costello - in their work and I am delighted that they are here.

The fact that the debate has gone right up to 2 o'clock shows the interest in the report among the various committee members and also those non-members of the committee who attended the debate this afternoon. I particularly thank those who contributed to the report, not only the Teachtaí Dála but also the Seanadóirí. The committee is a very good one. It is a focused committee with an attendance of at least ten to 15 members at every meeting. I also thank those in the secretariat, without whom we could not have put this report together. They assist us with meetings and our visits abroad. Throughout the time this report was being prepared, we have had a number of clerks to the committee, including the present clerk, Mr. Brian Hickey. I also thank our policy advisers. I thank the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and his staff and also the Secretary General of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Trade, the various groups the committee met in preparing this report, and the committee members for asking pertinent questions which were of assistance in preparing the report.

The contributions this afternoon were constructive. It was interesting to hear highlighted in the Tánaiste's report the various engagements of the embassies abroad over the past 12 months. They supported 136 high-level visits across 52 countries, undertook 730 engagements in 2013, including 660 specific engagements to promote Ireland's economic position, and engaged with 1,150 representatives of the international media, and speeches and public presentations by embassy staff promoted Ireland's interests directly to an audience of nearly 1 million people. That in itself speaks volumes about the work done by the Department on Ireland's economic

recovery. That is why this report has been important. I am delighted to see that the Department supported all of the suggestions we put into this report.

Deputy Smith spoke about the Ireland House concept. We have seen how important the Ireland House concept is, especially in New York. I pay tribute to the consul general, Mr. Noel Kilkenny, and his team, who do fantastic work there because all the agencies work together on one floor of Ireland House. The same can be said of Tokyo, as well as various other cities throughout the world. Because our network is so small, we and our agencies all need to work together to ensure we get the best for Ireland. One is competing with countries such as Denmark, with a similar population to Ireland, which has a considerable network and many staff working in its embassies. The Danes have special trade units. They have specialists dealing with all foreign agencies and with foreign companies. Our embassies are small but they do Trojan work. I am delighted that we are extending them into areas in Asia such as Jakarta and Bangkok, and I hope we will do so in the Philippines as well. I note the Minister of State, Deputy Costello, has just come back from the Philippines, where he has not only seen the devastation caused by last year's typhoon but also done some work on trade. It is extremely important to have those embassies working so closely together with all our agencies abroad.

St. Patrick's Day was highlighted by all who spoke this afternoon. I visited Washington and New York with the Taoiseach for St. Patrick's Day. We had a lot of meetings in places such as Capitol Hill, particularly on immigration reform, which in itself has much to do with trade, but we also met the US Chamber of Commerce, where the Taoiseach had access to top industrialists and others all over the United States. That important access is something one would never get anywhere else and that no other country can get, as is the access to the White House.

In addition, other Ministers, 27 of them, were all over the world promoting Ireland. That was evident in the tweets. Some Ministers are good at tweeting their schedule and, as the Minister of State, Deputy Costello, stated, the greening of Africa. I wanted to focus on that as well.

Some Members referred to the Taoiseach's visit to the Middle East after Christmas and mentioned that when we were in Iran the issue of human rights was not raised. The Taoiseach and the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Bruton, were visiting those countries on an important trade mission. They were invited by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland to promote Ireland and trade. We have various agencies that can raise trade and human rights. The committee is strong on human rights. As Deputies Eric Byrne and Maureen O'Sullivan stated, we raised those issues, but our visit to Iran was a bilateral parliamentary visit and we were able to do those things. Ireland is a member of the Human Rights Council in Geneva and these issues of human rights are raised constantly by our ambassadors at the Human Rights Council. Deputy Eric Byrne referred to China. If we were not doing business with China, with which there is €8 billion worth of trade, and various other countries as well, we would be isolated. There is a balance to be struck. The countries are aware that we have to raise those issues, and we will raise them, as we have done in the past, at the correct forum.

The Minister of State, Deputy Costello, did not mention the Africa strategy, but I read his speech. He has done fantastic work in trade and aid. Africa's economies are growing and improving, and we need to focus in on it. Although Ireland does not link aid and trade, there is a benefit for Ireland in focusing in on trade with African countries because of the high regard in which Irish Aid and Ministers are held abroad. We have, as Deputy Costello's speech states, ten embassies on the African continent and they all have a mandate to promote trade, as well as their development work.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell, in her contribution, referred to Nigeria. I note that the Minister of State, Deputy Costello, has visited Nigeria.

2 o'clock

There is great potential for Ireland there, and there is great potential in Iran, given that there are significant resources there. I hope we will open an embassy there when circumstances permit.

I admired the contribution of the Minister of State, Deputy Donohoe. He looked back at the archives in his document on Irish foreign policy. He has done some great work in his short time in the Department. Like me, he has been away a lot. It is good to have three Members from Dublin Central here in the Chamber all working closely together. We appreciate the work the Minister of State has done on that. My time is nearly up-----

An Ceann Comhairle: It is up, actually.

Deputy Pat Breen: I could go on and on, as the Minister of State, Deputy Costello, said-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I am well aware of the fact that you could go on and on. That is not to say you may.

Deputy Pat Breen: Parliamentary level is extremely important to trade promotion and the work we do. I am delighted there has been so much interest in this report today, with a full house. I thank all Members for their contributions and we look forward to working closely with the Department and producing various other reports in the coming year.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Chairman of the committee and its members for the work they are doing. It was very worthwhile for this report to come to the main Chamber for discussion and debate and not be hidden away gathering dust. I am very pleased with this development and the interest that has been shown in the report.

The Dáil adjourned at 2 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Tuesday, 1 April 2014.