

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Máirt, 4 Deireadh Fómhair 2016

Tuesday, 4 October 2016

The Joint Committee met at 5 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Declan Breathnach,*	Senator Paul Coghlan,
Deputy Seán Crowe,	Senator Gerard P. Craughwell,
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	Senator Terry Leyden,
Deputy Seán Haughey,	Senator Neale Richmond.
Deputy Frank O'Rourke,	

* In the absence of Deputy Mattie McGrath.

DEPUTY MICHAEL HEALY-RAE IN THE CHAIR.

Business of Committee

Chairman: We have a quorum so we will proceed. Could members ensure their mobile phones are switched off? Apologies have been received from Deputies Colm Brophy and Mattie McGrath, for whom Deputy Declan Breathnach is substituting.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. We have a number of issues to discuss today but I wanted to make one change to the agenda if that is acceptable to members. I would like to bring forward No. 2, which is the election of Vice Chairman. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Election of Vice Chairman

Chairman: I propose that we commence with the election of Vice Chairman of this committee. Under Standing Orders, the committee may elect a Vice Chairman. I ask for nominations for the position.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I nominate Senator Leyden. He is a former Minister of State and a long-standing Member of the Oireachtas who has served in both the Dáil and Seanad. He has huge experience in European affairs. I also think it is a good idea to have a Senator as Vice Chairman for balance. I know that Senator Leyden would be a very suitable candidate for the position.

Chairman: Are there any other nominations?

Senator Paul Coghlan: I have great pleasure in nominating my learned colleague, Deputy Durkan. He is a very distinguished Member of the Dáil and a man of long service, standing and great respect. I do not think anybody has more experience or would be more fitting to deputise in the Chairman's place as Vice Chairman of this committee.

Chairman: As there is more than one nomination for the position of Vice Chairman, I will deal with the nominations in the order in which I have received them and I will now put the following question: "That Senator Terry Leyden be elected Vice Chairman of the committee." As the full membership of the committee is not present, I am obliged to wait eight minutes or until all members are present before taking the division. Could we ring the bells for four minutes?

Question put.

The Committee divided: Tá; 7; Níl, 3.	
Tá;	Níl;
Breathnach, Declan.	Coghlan, Paul.
Craughwell, Gerard P.	Durkan, Bernard J.
Crowe, Seán.	Richmond, Neale.
Haughey, Seán.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	

Leyden, Terry.	
O'Rourke, Frank.	

Question declared carried.

Chairman: I congratulate Senator Leyden on his election as Vice Chairman of the committee and look forward to working with him. I also thank Deputy Bernard Durkan for making a contest. We are all here to work together.

Senator Terry Leyden: I thank my proposer and the members who voted for me. I thank the Chairman for his remarks. I will be delighted to work with him and all members. Deputy Bernard Durkan and I are long-serving members of this committee. Deputy Durkan has served as Chairman, Vice Chairman and member.

I know Deputy Michael Healy-Rae will be very effective in his role as Chairman because of his vast experience. I am particularly interested in this role because I was appointed by the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey as the negotiator during the negotiations on the Single European Act from 1989 to 1992. I was dealing with those who were negotiating on behalf of the British Government at that time and we worked very well together.

As a Senator I will have more time than most Deputies to devote to this committee. I think that on a joint committee it is a good idea that the Chairman is a Member of the Dáil, which I support, but it is appropriate that the Vice Chairman is a Member of the Seanad. As far as this Oireachtas is concerned, both Houses have equal status and this is a step in the right direction in that regard.

I look forward to working with the very experienced Deputy Durkan. Let me assure members that like the Chairman, I will be totally impartial when called to take the Chair. I know I will not be called too often to take the Chair.

Chairman: I thank Senator Leyden.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I congratulate Senator Terry Leyden. I offer him my full support and co-operation in the course of whatever deliberations he may be called to perform in the course of the period ahead, be it long or short. We hope it will be longer rather than shorter.

Let me point out this is a very important time and we must engage in the process of negotiations on Brexit and the future of the European Union and the European project and the ancillary items that will tumble out of the cupboard as we proceed.

Chairman: I thank Deputy Durkan. I propose we suspend the sitting to allow the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Dara Murphy, to come before us.

Sitting suspended at 5.17 p.m. and resumed at 5.18 p.m.

General Affairs Council: Minister of State at Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Chairman: I welcome the Minister of State with responsibility for European affairs, Deputy Dara Murphy, and his officials to his first meeting of the new joint committee. I know the

Minister of State is very familiar with the work of this committee and knows several members of it. We look forward to working together.

We know the importance of the upcoming negotiations for the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union for all member states but especially for Ireland. I am sure members will appreciate an engagement with the Minister on his preparation for the negotiations.

I thank the Minister of State for attending today and we look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Dara Murphy): I thank the Chairman and congratulate him on taking up this very important position, particularly given where we are now going as a nation. The role of this committee will be even more important than it has been in the past. I thank the Chairman and his officials for organising today's meeting. I also congratulate Senator Terry Leyden on his election as Vice Chairman, which was a position I held for a few years and enjoyed very much.

Senator Terry Leyden: That is very encouraging for me.

Deputy Seán Haughey: The Senator's best days are ahead of him.

Deputy Dara Murphy: Yes, the Senator's best days are ahead of him, as they are for all the new committee members. I know some members have been here before, such as Deputies Crowe and Durkan and Senator Paul Coghlan, but to anyone taking up a new position here be assured it is a very interesting committee. I certainly value the opportunity to come here and answer questions and, most importantly, to hear points of view. This is my first time to address this committee of which I was previously a member. I will update the committee on discussions of the September General Affairs Council, GAC, and preview the agenda for the upcoming October GAC. I should note, of course, that the September meeting took place immediately after the Bratislava summit of 27 Heads of State and Government and that the General Affairs Council has also been looking at the preparations for the forthcoming European Affairs Council.

I will start with issues pertaining to the United Kingdom. It is obvious that any discussion now at EU level has to take stock of the UK referendum in June 2016 across the Irish Sea. The decision to leave the EU has profound implications for all the European Union member states and for the broader international community. What exactly these implications will be, we will only know over time. We know it is of particular significance for Ireland and, in this regard, the Government has been assiduously highlighting our concerns to the UK Government and our EU partners with regard to Northern Ireland, the Border, the Common Travel Area, citizenship issues and the interconnectedness of our trade. We have been making these points vociferously. The Taoiseach met Prime Minister May in July. The British Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, David Davis, MP, visited Dublin earlier this month and met the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Charles Flanagan, the Tánaiste and me. I also met my new opposite number, the British Minister of State for Europe, David Jones, MP, in Brussels a couple of weeks ago.

With regard to our broader outreach to our EU partners, since the referendum, the Taoiseach has held meetings with Chancellor Merkel, with President Hollande and with President Tusk. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade has spoken individually with his counterparts and I have met a number of European Ministers. On all these occasions, we have explained our

concerns in detail and the need for them to be treated sensitively in the upcoming negotiations. We have reiterated Ireland's strong commitment to European Union membership and our intention, once withdrawal negotiations commence, to play an active and constructive role in the European EU negotiating team, one of 27. It is fair to say that we have found considerable sympathy and understanding from all the partners with whom we have met but it will be necessary to reinforce these points over the coming months and to ensure that they support practical results for us in the negotiations programme. In this context, I welcome Prime Minister May's comments on Sunday which offered, finally, greater clarity about the triggering of Article 50 and the timeframe for the subsequent negotiations. She also gave some important indications as to the UK's approach, although much remains to be determined. Subsequent to that we need to negotiate.

In the aftermath of the UK referendum, a meeting of the European Council was held in Brussels on 28 June, just three or four days after the vote. This was followed, on 29 June, by a summit involving the 27 remaining Heads of State and Government, obviously without the United Kingdom. This was attended by Presidents Tusk and Juncker. The summit agreed a number of important principles, notably that there can be no negotiations and no pre-negotiations before the UK formally triggers Article 50 and that access to our Single Market requires acceptance of all four freedoms, including the free movement of people. That remains the broad and agreed EU approach. It is important that we now move forward in the most practical and sensible manner and, in this regard, the Government is continuing to intensify our preparations. I am happy to respond to any points Deputies may wish to make.

The Bratislava Summit took place on 29 June in the 27 leader format. This began a process of reflection on the renewal and future of the European Union. As a first step in that process the 27 EU leaders discussed the key challenges and key priorities for the European Union with a focus on migration, internal security, external security and defence, and, importantly, on economic and social development focusing on young people. In his interventions, the Taoiseach highlighted the priority that Ireland, along with many other EU partners, attaches to economic issues and in particular the Single Market and Digital Single Market, that we continue to create jobs and look at issues pertaining to investment and trade, and he stressed the need for a balanced approach in how we deal with the many challenges we face.

There was no discussion at Bratislava of the UK's decision to leave the EU, other than a report from European Council President Tusk of his own meeting with Prime Minister May, and a reaffirmation of the principles agreed, which I outlined earlier, that were agreed in June. The Taoiseach took the opportunity to remind his counterparts once again of Ireland's specific concerns in relation to Brexit, particularly regarding Northern Ireland, North-South relations, the Common Travel Area and bilateral trade. A short work programme for the period ahead was agreed at Bratislava. It was decided that the process of reflection should continue in the October meeting of the European Council. Another meeting of the 27 leader format will take place in Malta in early 2017. This coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and the founding document of the European Union. A few days later, on 20 September, the September meeting of the General Affairs Council took place in Brussels. It was a regular meeting and the agenda covered a follow-up to the June European Council, the mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF, the Commission's letter of intent for its legislative programme in 2017 and preparations for the forthcoming European Council.

The need to ensure effective follow-up to European Council decisions has featured in discussions at many levels in the EU for some time now. Building on the work of the previous

Dutch Presidency, the current Slovak Presidency led a discussion at the Council on the basis of two papers produced by the General Secretariat of the Council, which highlighted some advances as well as some areas where more work is needed. Member states' interventions focused on making more progress on the measures that have already been agreed on migration and in particular the EU-Turkey deal, the completion of the banking union and advancing the Digital Single Market. For my part, I welcomed the Commission's emphasis on the development of the Single Market and the Digital Single Market. I also stressed the importance of implementing the services directive was crucial to ensuring growth, particularly for the potential of the SME sectors of our economy which we know are vital for the Irish economy and right across the European Union. We need to see barriers to doing business digitally and across borders as barriers to the very creation of growth, jobs and investment. I recalled that the Capital Markets Union is also essential to support a rich diversity of financing options for businesses, that further measures around investment are welcome and that banking union must also be fully completed.

The European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework spans a seven-year period and is subject to a mid-term review. The review was published on 14 September and presented at the September General Affairs Council meeting. The Commission noted the challenges which had been faced in recent years and the need for the EU budget to be able to react swiftly to unforeseen events. Very limited additional financing is now proposed under the jobs and growth, migration, external relations and security headings. However, the key point to note is that existing spending ceilings will not be changed. I intervened to highlight the added value of the EU budget, pointing to the importance of EU support for areas where we had comparative advantages, in particular the agrifood sector. The review will now be discussed at working group level but will return to the General Affairs Council agenda regularly in the coming period. The Commission is aiming to have the review package completed before the end of the year. Any change made under the review will also impact on how the next multiannual financial framework is prepared. The proposal for the framework is due by 1 January 2018.

The Commission also made a presentation on its general priorities in 2017. There is continued emphasis on being "big on the big things" and concrete delivery of initiatives around President Juncker's ten strategic priorities. Some of the elements on which the Commission intends to focus include the following: expanding the European Fund for Strategic Investments, complemented by an external investment plan aimed at addressing the root causes of migration; completing the Digital Single Market; producing a white paper on Economic and Monetary Union in early 2017; and strengthening trade defence instruments, with particular reference to the steel industry.

As I said at the General Affairs Council, Ireland believes that, rather than focusing on great leaps towards further integration, the focus should be on delivering concrete outcomes in areas which have already been agreed and which directly affect Irish and other EU citizens, particularly in the Single Market and the Digital Single Market. The Commission is due to present a more detailed actual work programme in the coming weeks, taking into account the views of the Council and the Parliament.

The September General Affairs Council also looked at preparations for the October European Council of Heads of State and Government. I will return to that issue shortly, but I would first like to refer to items which will be on the agenda for the General Affairs Council on 18 October. The October General Affairs Council will look further at the review of the Multiannual Financial Framework and hear about the state of play at that point. We will also consider implementation of the inter-institutional agreement on better law-making, an agreement which

was finally concluded in 2015 after very long negotiations. It sets out how the three institutions - the Council, the Commission and the Parliament - will act together to legislate collectively at EU level.

The next General Affairs Council will be the final preparatory meeting before the October European Council. There are three items listed on the agenda: migration, trade and external relations, with specific reference to Russia. The draft conclusions for the European Council will have been circulated by that time and our discussion will be based around the text of the conclusions.

We are all aware of how the issue of migration continues to dominate debate at EU level. It has been on the agenda for every European Council since last year and continues to be a central feature of discussions at every level, including European ministerial level. The September Council heard an update from the Commission on developments and I expect our discussions in October to also start that way. In the past year Heads of State and Government have set out a comprehensive EU approach to dealing with migration which has been gradually taking effect. This has been continuously reviewed, with both short-term and long-term measures introduced as and when deemed necessary. A recent short-term measure, for example, was introduced at the Bratislava summit on 16 September, when member states offered immediate assistance to strengthen the Bulgarian border with Turkey. Long-term measures include the establishment of a European border and coast guard.

The discussion at the October European Council will again take stock of progress. Along with reviewing the EU-Turkey deal agreed last March, it is expected to cover the plans for co-operation with third countries, known as partnership frameworks or migration compacts. We look forward to hearing how work is progressing.

Ireland, to some extent, is at one remove from the full force of the migration crisis due to our geographical location, our position regarding justice and home affairs measures under the EU treaties and our non-participation in the free travel Schengen area. However, we do, of course, recognise the priority of the migration issue for the EU and its sensitivity for many EU partners, many of which are under significant domestic pressure. We have sought to be constructive and to support and take part in a comprehensive approach, where possible. In this spirit, we have made a number of commitments on a voluntary basis.

The main elements of our response are as follows. First, there is our voluntary opt-in to EU programmes, whereby we have offered to take 4,000 refugees and asylum seekers between relocation and resettlement programmes. To date, 486 people have been admitted from Lebanon for resettlement. With regard to relocation, just 69 people have arrived from Greece so far. However, a further 40 people have been assessed and cleared for arrival, and arrangements for their travel to the State are currently being made. Second, Irish naval vessels have been deployed on search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, where they have rescued over 12,500 individuals, including, I am happy to say, 382 today alone. The work by Naval Service and its men and women in representing our country has been done in very difficult circumstances and is saving real lives. *LE James Joyce* just returned to Ireland last Friday and *LE Samuel Beckett* has now taken her place. I know all of us here in the Oireachtas salute the achievements of the Naval Service and thank its members for their exemplary service. Third, we have also provided significant assistance to key organisations. Between 2012 and 2015, Irish Aid provided more than €42 million in support of those affected by the Syrian crisis, the largest response ever to a single crisis. Fourth, on 19 September, Ireland, along with Jordan, co-facilitated a major UN summit of world leaders on migration and refugees in New York. The summit agreed a new set

of global policy principles - the first of this kind - on migration and refugees. The Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Frances Fitzgerald, represented Ireland at this event.

On trade, the October European Council is due to have a comprehensive discussion on trade matters. This will include the arrangements for concluding CETA, the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which are due to be settled at an extraordinary meeting of Trade Ministers on 18 October. CETA is a broad and deep agreement based on the reality of today's trade patterns. It will remove over 99% of tariffs between the EU and Canada and create sizeable new market access opportunities. This includes ending limitations in access to public contracts, opening up services markets and offering predictable conditions for investors. As I said, these trade agreements are of particular significance for SMEs, which benefit from the recognition of product standards and certification, thus saving on "double testing" on both sides of the Atlantic. There are exciting opportunities, particularly for a small, open economy such as Ireland's and across the European Union, as well as in Canada.

The Commission presented in July its proposals for the signature, conclusion and provisional application of CETA. We support the principle that CETA should proceed as a mixed agreement. This essentially means that the agreement includes matters of national competence and will require participation by national parliaments, obviously including our own, in the ratification process. However, it is also possible for those parts of the agreement that are within the EU's competence to be advanced through provisional application.

CETA is due to be signed at the EU-Canada summit on 27 October and we support its provisional application at the earliest opportunity, following expected approval by the European Parliament later this year. At a time of growing opposition in many developed economies to free trade and new trade agreements, concluding CETA will send a positive signal that the EU remains supportive of the major role of trade in contributing to economic growth.

I hope that the October European Council will continue to give its support to the TTIP negotiations, consistent with the negotiating mandate settled under the Irish Presidency in 2013. A successful TTIP agreement would boost growth and consumer welfare on both sides of the Atlantic, allow the world's two largest trading blocs to show new leadership on international regulatory standards and underpin high levels of environmental, consumer and social protection. This is why our trade Minister, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, joined 11 other trade Ministers in a recent letter to Commissioner Malmström highlighting the need for a strong and positive voice in the ongoing trade discussions. While it seems clear that any final agreement will now have to await a new US Administration, we continue to support pressing ahead to make as much progress as possible this year towards an ambitious, comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement.

External relations will be discussed, in particular pertaining to Russia. These will touch upon the situation in Ukraine which, because of Russian actions, has led to the imposition of EU sanctions. Sanctions are linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements where there has been a lack of progress in implementing security and political provisions. After a tense August with heavy exchanges between the two sides, a local ceasefire took effect on 1 September and seems to be holding. It is too early to say if the question of easing the sanctions will be on the table at the European Council. Ireland supports the long-term view that a strong and stable relationship between the EU and Russia is desirable as a strategic goal. However, we must take account of the current situation in Ukraine, which would make progress in this direction welcome.

That concludes my statement. I acknowledge that it was long and I thank members for their patience. Given the summer timelines and the number of meetings, several issues had to be covered. I look forward to continuing a high quality of engagement with the committee in the months ahead on all matters pertaining to the EU. I thank members for their attention.

Chairman: I thank the Minister of State for that comprehensive overview. We all appreciated it.

Senator Terry Leyden: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his words of congratulation. I welcome his officials and the ambassadorial representatives. Embassies are of course interested in this matter. It is the most significant issue facing Europe. It is regrettable that we have reached this stage, given that the UK will undoubtedly be a loss to Europe and to us. I say that as a former trade Minister who worked closely with the British on issues that affected our islands. That said, we must face reality. A dedicated Minister for Brexit is needed, be it the Minister of State, Deputy Dara Murphy, or someone else. We must have someone to whom we can relate. This is the Committee on European Union Affairs and we will play an important role in discussing the matter with fellow parliamentarians in the other 26 member states. There is a case to be made for inviting representatives of those countries' European affairs committees to Ireland in order that they might see at first hand what the border between the UK and Europe means as it applies to Ireland and realise that it is a porous border. It was not of our making and we would rather that the Border was not there, but it is there. Seeing it would show them the seriousness of this matter.

Ireland should have a representative on the negotiating body. The Government should insist. No other country is more affected than we are. We and the UK are hand in glove as regards trade. It is €1 billion in trade per week. Will the Minister of State indicate his views on this? Will he indicate whether Ireland should insist on having representatives on the negotiating body to keep abreast of what is happening day by day and week by week and how it will affect our country? The EU owes us no more and no less. We have sacrificed by joining the EU and being dedicated and loyal members. We are in a critical situation because of the UK's decision to opt out under the Lisbon treaty.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive report on recent events in the EU and elsewhere generally. We are told that the Bratislava summit, which took place following the Brexit vote, allowed for political reflection and consideration of further reforms. The Brexit vote was a wake-up call for all the EU. The referendum highlighted the rise of intolerance and fundamental nationalism, not just in the UK, but throughout Europe as a whole. We are all aware that eurosceptic parties are gaining support. As the Minister of State mentioned, the EU is facing many challenges - irregular migration, security and terrorism, poor economic growth and youth unemployment. There is a feeling that the EU is not delivering for its citizens. We speak of the disconnect between the EU institutions and its citizens. There are issues of poor communication, institutions are perceived as remote, Commissioners come across as high handed and autocratic, and citizens believe that they are being talked down to. Following the Brexit vote, does the Minister of State get any sense that the EU institutions, including the Council and the Commissioners, appreciate the major challenges facing the Union and the need to address these problems?

My second question is on Irish neutrality. At the summit, there was a discussion about the future deepening of the EU's common defence and security co-operation. EU leaders agreed to step up co-ordination in security measures and pool defence resources. I understand that there was also agreement that there would be further EU-NATO co-operation. Proposals are to be

brought forward in December in that regard. Will the Minister of State assure the committee that Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality is not being undermined in this process?

The Taoiseach informed the Dáil today of his various meetings with his counterparts throughout Europe and the presidents of the various institutions. The Minister of State did likewise in his speech. The Minister of State meets his counterparts regularly. Do they understand Ireland's unique position arising from the Brexit vote? He outlined concerns about the common travel area, the erection of barriers to trade, the erection of a hard Border and the threat to our peace process. A major diplomatic effort is needed to highlight the special position of Ireland. Certainly from my experience of being in Brussels, it is only when one talks about the threats to the Northern Ireland peace process that they engage with the issues of human rights and so forth. I would be interested in hearing if we have a good deal more work to do in that regard, or is our message getting through?

Professor Alan Barrett contended at the recent European Symposium on European Union Affairs that a UK withdrawal from the European Union would hasten a shifting of the centre of gravity in the Union, with Germany gaining even greater influence. Mr. Dan O'Brien said something similar. Is this a worry for a small member state like Ireland and do we need to build new alliances in the European Union, with Britain exiting, to ensure our interests are protected?

With the Chairman's indulgence, I have one further question. It relates to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, which the Minister of State mentioned. He did not mention, however, that there were concerns about the agreement with respect to the possibility of corporations suing states. The fear is that there will be a decline in standards and regulation. There is a need for parliamentary scrutiny of the areas within the competence of nation states. As a political committee, we need to address these concerns.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: I was delighted to hear the Minister of State's presentation. As a substitute, I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Without taking from all of the other issues on the agenda, I want to focus on Brexit and its implications for these islands and the European project. As a Deputy who represents the Border constituency of Louth, I want to focus on the currency fluctuation issue which is of immediate concern. We are all aware of the impact it is already having on the agricultural trade and tourism in terms of currency differentials and that is only the start. The immediate issue this raises for the European Union, which with others I have raised at the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, concerns the €1.6 billion in EU funding that will be and should be available both in the North and the South over the period of the PEACE and INTERREG programmes and the danger that there will be a reduction in these moneys. Following the last meeting of the joint committee, it came to my attention that 17 projects proposed to be undertaken in Border constituencies to a total figure of €120 million were at the stage where letters of offer were to be issued but that they were being withheld in the Department on the basis of concerns about what the position would be post-Brexit. Part of the agreement is that letters of offer are conditional on their being available only up to 2017. This is leading to uncertainty and causing worry among local authorities, community groups and in the education and health sectors about the myriad of projects at the planning stage and those at the stage where letters of offer are to be issued. There is an urgent need to address this issue. As Deputy Seán Haughey said, the dangers to the peace process need to be recognised in the context of the importance of these moneys, both North and South. I ask the Minister of State for his opinion on the giving of a commitment, by the Government and the European Union, to a continuation of both programmes.

Additionally, I argue that those who hold sway on the island, both North and South, regardless of a Brexit, should remain committed to the peace process. The Chancellor of the Exchequer in Britain needs to see beyond 2017. What is the Minister of State's view on how the European Union, as an organisational body, can give its total commitment to the continuation of that funding, regardless of whether projects are planned for the North or the South, by getting the British Government to sign up to what is effectively a solemn agreement in the Good Friday Agreement and commit to providing its portion of the funding to enable the bodies to which I referred that are planning projects to continue with them? That is a matter of immediate importance that extends beyond any negotiations over the next number of months. There needs to be a statement of clarity, both from the Government and from the Minister of State's Department, and a commitment from the EU to honour those projects. I ask the Minister of State to comment on those matters.

Senator Neale Richmond: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his contribution. Unlike colleagues, I will not focus on the detail of Brexit, as it has been raised by the other members. The Taoiseach spoke about it in the Seanad last week and the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, will be in the Seanad tomorrow for statements on the issue. We have a fair idea what Ireland's key aims are going into the negotiations process. What are the initial collective aims of the other 26 member states? What issues were discussed perhaps not necessarily formally but on the margins of the EU summit in Bratislava? Politically within the European People's Party, EPP, has there been any discussion of a co-ordinated response by governments where the EPP is in control, as it is here?

As the Minister of State mentioned, Brexit has led to a new discussion on the future of Europe, where is it going and how to reconnect with the citizens, which Deputy Haughey mentioned at some length. The Minister of State commented on the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker's emphasis on being big on the big things. That is crucial in bringing the EU back to the people in terms of re-awakening their interest, commitment and enthusiasm for the European Union, an enthusiasm that is waning rapidly on the Continent, if less so here. I am very much convinced that there is a need for a major EU investment plan, as was mentioned in President Juncker's ten-point plan. We need to see big European projects similar to those we saw here in the 1980s with the investment of infrastructural funds and the road building projects which are clearly European and have been funded by the EU without them being claimed as Government projects.

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, is the subject of a Seanad Private Members' motion to be taken tomorrow evening and we have had a few briefings on it. I agree with the Minister of State that it is beneficial, as is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, but it is facing considerable opposition from the labour movement here and especially on the Continent. I am concerned the argument highlighting the benefits of CETA and TTIP is not being made well enough by the European Union and, more importantly, by the people who will benefit most from them, ordinary European citizens, the business and agricultural leaders. All the sectors could point to the big things that being part of the European Union would allow us to do and to champion. I fear an information vacuum has developed and that vacuum is being filled by the hard left and by people who are opposing it and giving misinformation, although others may disagree on that, and focusing on elements that are detrimental.

I wish to raise the issue of Russia. The situation in Ukraine has led to the current situation and the sanctions, about which there will not be any change. While the Ukrainian situation is being discussed, we cannot neglect to focus on the current activities of Russia in Syria, espe-

cially in Aleppo. It was raised by Senator Bacik on the Order of Business today in the Seanad. As much as we need to discuss the Ukraine, and the European Union has been firm in that and I commend the actions relating to sanctions, with the harrowing pictures that we are seeing and the impact of the airstrikes, we cannot lose sight of the situation in Syria.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his presentation. This is my first time to address him and it is a pleasure to do so. Listening to the soundings around Europe, I detect a hardening of positions towards the UK which concerns me greatly. Ireland continually talks about the relationship we have with the UK and about how precious it is to this island, which nobody can deny. However, that relationship is not precious to France, Germany, Holland or to any of the 26 member states. Senator Richmond touched on the discontent, as did Deputy Haughey, among ordinary European citizens. Senator Richmond referred to the rise of the hard left. I am somewhat concerned in respect of the European Community and even Mr. Juncker's recent speeches are negative by nature and deal only with problems. I do not deny that there are problems in holding the European Community together apart from anything else. I am not so sure that a major investment plan will buy anybody right now. We need a major marketing job by Europe to sell or bring home to the individual citizen on the ground the benefits of Europe. Many motorways and office blocks around the country have signs stating that such a project was funded by the European Union. However, people's interest in that has waned and they do not really care any more. There is a rising call within this country for an Irish exit from Europe which would be detrimental to our economy. Regardless of our relationship with Britain, we need to hold that together.

It is time that we were honest with the citizens on both sides of this island and informed them that there will be a Border. There are only two options open if the other 26 member states dig their heels in. The two options are a border around the island of Ireland or a border between the North of Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That then opens the possibility - I have said this on a number of occasions - of an Ellis Island developing in Belfast or Drogheda, depending on which is easier to get into. That would create serious problems for this country with people migrating towards this country, as the only place with a land border with the UK. That is a concern.

UK Ministers and its Prime Minister are now admitting openly that the Brexit plan will be a shock to its economy; it will get worse before it gets better. We have already seen that the exchange rate has passed the 85 pence to the euro mark - it is up at 87.5 pence today. If it hits 90 pence, we are in serious trouble with respect to our trade with the UK. What plans does the Government have to support trade between the two islands?

Returning to the Border issue, 30,000 people cross the Border every day. I believe approximately 1 million gallons of milk cross the Border on a daily basis. These are serious issues. Someone last night suggested building a dual carriageway between Mullingar and Letterkenny in order to get over the problem of having to cross the Border. I sincerely hope this is not the way we are going. I have a problem with that.

Returning to what some of my colleagues have already said, I would like what are the sidebar chats between the Minister of State and his colleagues at European ministerial level. Is there a real acceptance that Ireland's community, North and South, voted by way of referendum on both parts of this island to have open borders and co-operate together? Do they really understand what that means? We simply cannot allow them to derail something that took 35 years to put together. I am really worried about that.

I will not be embracing CETA or TTIP right now. There are serious concerns about these trade agreements. I understand the United States is not so enamoured by TTIP now. We will not have time today to debate these but perhaps at some stage in the future we might set aside an entire meeting for them. We are pretty tight on time given that the first one will be signed on 18 October.

I see a rise of protectionism and nationalism. The migration issue has caused countries to consider closing borders and many have already done so. We have successfully traded off for a couple of billion euro the refugee crisis to Turkey, but we all know that will not last. At some stage these refugees will want to get out of Turkey.

The British have a view of European legislation, in particular workers' rights and human rights. I heard the British Prime Minister, Mrs. May, say that as far as possible UK legislation would encompass European law as it stands. However, I understand there is some concern, particularly in the area of human rights, that it may not be as encompassing as we might like it to be.

I apologise for asking the Minister of State so many questions; it will keep him going for a while.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his presentation. We should all welcome the clarity provided by the British Prime Minister on Brexit. We might need to be patient for a little longer. Does the Minister of State think this is the British Prime Minister's opening position and that she does not mean to be as hard as she might sound? I think there is agreement between Britain and Ireland in opposition to a hard Border. Given that we had so many long-standing agreements covering free movement, trade and so on prior to the EEC, not to mind the EU, this is something when the negotiations start in March of next year, about which the EU should show tolerance.

How will our net contribution to the EU change post-Brexit? It is obvious that the UK had no plan and the best it can hope for at the moment is to start negotiations with all sorts of other countries. Perhaps it thought it could have - as was put by a colleague earlier - side-bar negotiations prior to the formal invoking of Article 50.

We are part of the EU and the Minister of State might confirm that we will be fully engaged and fully apprised on the EU side on the negotiations that will take place. Today I met a German delegation of parliamentarians from Bavaria visiting the House. They seem to be very concerned, as we are. They see their own position and, so to speak, dominance in Europe diminishing as a result of this move. I could not get into it in great detail with them. I took a note, but I cannot read my own writing at this stage. They think there are too many factors and it is too early for a co-ordinated response at a European level. I mention that because someone else here mentioned it already.

We might need to continue with much uncertainty and volatility. We know what we want with regard to the Single Market or as near as possible to that. We need Britain to be flexible and they also need to compromise a bit. That will take a bit of time with regard to the North and the common travel area.

I very much welcome the all-island civic dialogue on Brexit, which the Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade have initiated, and which is to take place in Dublin on 2 November, involving representatives of civic society, trade unions, business groups and non-

governmental organisations, as well as representatives from all political parties on the island of Ireland. I also welcome the appointment by the EU of Michel Barnier as its chief Brexit negotiator. I understand he will be in Dublin shortly. I ask the Minister of State to comment on that.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I welcome the Minister of State. The backdrop to today's meeting is the decision made by the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, in her recent comments on Brexit that Britain would trigger Article 50 by the end of March 2017. The Minister of State stated there is clearly sympathy and understanding. What does that mean? Is that there to reassure us that there will be sympathy and understanding about Ireland's unique situation? What does the Minister of State believe this sympathy and understanding will deliver? Will it, as some members have suggested, mean a hardening of positions with regard to Britain? What impact will that have on Ireland?

From the British Prime Minister's statement, it seems to be going for a hard Brexit. If that is the situation it will greatly impact on Ireland. People have talked about not only the Border, customs etc., but also the impact it will have on people's daily lives and the impact it will have on the Good Friday Agreement. People are taking a case in court today over the fact that the Brits are clearly reneging on the Good Friday Agreement. The tea and sympathy will not go down particularly well. Alex Salmond was here during the week. Scotland is unique in that it voted overwhelmingly to stay in the EU. Will this be part of the discussions the Irish Government will have regarding the unique situation in the North, where the majority voted in favour of staying in the EU? Does the Minister see it being a significant part of negotiations? Does he see it as a positive?

We discussed migration at a number of our meetings. The last time we discussed it here, I said the migration system was broken. The Minister of State said it was experiencing difficulties. I am paraphrasing. The EU agreed a two-year plan, which was launched in September 2015. We talked about, as an act of solidarity, allowing 150,000 refugees to travel from Greece and Italy to other EU states. I see no impact from the plan, given that 1,000 people have left Italy and 3,493 have left Greece. Austria, Hungary and Poland have yet to relocate anybody. The Minister of State gave figures for relocation to Ireland. Although we promised to take 4,000, the Minister of State said 69 people had arrived from Greece and 40 have been cleared for arrival.

Something is wrong in the system and we cannot seem to get answers. Maybe we do not have the answers. When one talks privately to people they say there is a difficulty and many people do not want to travel to Ireland or they do not know about Ireland. A huge number of unaccompanied minors are there, and they are clearly in a dangerous situation. Is Ireland prioritising bringing them into the country? There is something wrong. The system is broken. The complete lack of solidarity on the part of some member states with the front-line states suggests that even the minimum figure of 160,000 refugees will not happen.

The Minister of State referred to Turkey and the impact it would have. However, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, not a single Syrian who has returned from Greece has been granted temporary protection status, despite the formal guarantees. Turkey is supposed to allow UN agencies access to facilities where returning Syrians are temporarily sheltered. Again, it has not happened. While the Minister of State says we will push on with the Turkish agreement, this is another indication that the system is not working. This is my major worry.

Other members have asked about the defence situation and I have concerns about it. The

Minister of State mentioned the positives of CETA and TTIP. Would he not accept that there are also negatives? While the Irish Government is pushing ahead with them, other governments are saying they have failed. The German economics minister is saying talks have de facto failed. The French Prime Minister has announced a clear halt. Belgian and Austrian ministers have said the same. Although we have had no debate about CETA, we are pushing ahead with this major agreement. It is the wrong way to do things. If the Government wants to win people over to its argument, it must engage and talk, and it must be open.

The note says the Government wants the investment court system chapter excluded for the moment. Why is this? It was renamed the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. Every single time I raised the issue, every Irish Government Minister spoke in glowing terms about it, yet we are talking about it being temporarily excluded. I find it odd. Why not permanently exclude it, if there is a cause for concern, which there clearly is across the world?

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: Like other speakers, I welcome the Minister of State and thank him for his remarks. Like other speakers, I have very serious concerns about the major issues that will affect us all into the future. Like my colleague, I do not propose to go into the details of what must be done. I am appalled that Europe should have arrived at this juncture, given all the aspirations we had over the years. Gradually, slowly and inexorably, people in individual member states began to undermine public confidence in the European concept. It was extraordinary that after the referendum in the UK, a certain Member of the European Parliament claimed it as a great victory, having spent 18 or 20 years of his life working assiduously towards undermining the European project and bringing it down.

The original vision was that smaller countries such as Ireland would play a bigger role in the European project and would have common ground with their colleagues, the larger countries, with a view towards moving in a particular direction. Unfortunately, this has ceased. It does not matter what our future plans are because unless we can visualise what Europe will be like in five or even two years' time, we are missing the target. If we do not determine the structures of Europe and what it will be like in that period, and if it does not emerge, we will continue down the path we have travelled, much to the delight of the hard left and the hard right. They have not ceased to function. They are still there and they have an agenda to disrupt the European concept to the extent that it no longer will be workable. This would be a tragedy. What has happened so far is bad, but it could get worse.

I cannot put into words my concern and amazement at some of the things I have seen and heard in recent times. I have heard a Commissioner comment on this country in what I would regard as a condescending way. I also heard the head of a committee in the European Parliament make a prediction about an appeal in respect of the Apple situation to the effect that there was zero possibility of Ireland or Apple succeeding. My question is whether this person feels he also has control of the courts or whether they have gone by the wayside.

We must be very clear about what is happening around us and that none of these developments are likely to be beneficial to a small country. I fully agree with the remarks passed by my colleagues on all sides that this is a situation the like of which we have never seen before. We have talked about it in terms of the possibility that it might happen. The best thing that could happen is that sometime in the next 18 months or earlier, the UK would reconsider and recover the ground. If the UK leaves, it undoubtedly will be the first step in a direction in which we should not go, for many reasons to which my colleagues have referred. If Europe continues on this tangent, a two-speed Europe will emerge. We have fought against this for many years. A two-speed Europe would be a prelude to no Europe at all.

There was a reference to Germany. Germany has not always been our enemy. Germany has supported Ireland at crucial times when other countries of a similar size to ours did not, and were derogatory in their remarks. The theory regarding migration is that the EU was heartless, did not take account of the needs of refugees and should be condemned. That is not what happened. Individual member states unilaterally took decisions that forbade any discussion on accommodating refugees to the extent that was required. It would have been easier and more cohesive if the member states had showed what they wanted to do about the migration issue. For example, one of the visions we will live with forever is the razor wire that greets refugees. It was not the European Union that came up with that idea. That idea was brought up by member states on their own. If we allow the continuation of the discussion in that direction, Europe will be no more. It is a fact and it is with great sorrow that I say it, especially as a member of this committee.

There is a need within the European Union, in all its branches and functions, to recognise that this is where we are going and we should not in any way jump for joy at this prospect, either in this or any other country in the European Union. This relates to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and all the others as well. It is about who benefits more when there are barriers to trade. Bigger countries benefit more because they have more power, clout and access on a one-to-one basis with their bigger colleagues. I disagree with the reluctance to enter into free trade areas. That is our loophole. If we close that gap, along with everything that is likely to happen, we will find ourselves isolated as a small country, with little or no influence at all.

I agree with the points raised by my colleagues on the peace process in Northern Ireland. I listened attentively to the British Prime Minister's comments and I am not so hopeful about what is intended. There is an indication of a continuation in a direction that will achieve an objective regardless of the consequences, and that objective is to leave the European Union. That would be a major disaster for the European Union and Ireland, North and South. It would be a disaster for Scotland and the UK. I do not know how well this has been thought out. It appears that those in favour of Brexit did not have any alternative when challenged on the issue, and they still have none. That is where the problem exists.

Much water must flow under the bridge and the opportunity is very limited. I hope against hope at this stage that there will be a realisation that Europe and its future is at stake. If it disintegrates, the cost will be to all the people throughout Europe, including this country. There will be a major cost that we cannot even dare to quantify now. For what it is worth, I sincerely hope all the options can be carefully considered before the plug is eventually pulled and we go on a tangent that will lead to uncharted waters.

Deputy Frank O'Rourke: I thank the Minister of State and his officials for coming here to speak before the committee. We wish him every success in future and look forward to working with him in the time ahead. One advantage of speaking last is there is not much left to say, although perhaps that is not an advantage as such.

I will focus on the Brexit element and I have two or three queries. Perhaps the Minister of State can deal with them or come back to us on them. I agree totally with the previous speakers and there is no point in going over that ground. Deputy Durkan made a point about the people advocating Brexit. The problem, as Deputy Haughey stated, is that Europe is seen as removed from our lives with respect to policy and it does not seem to have much understanding sometimes. It has an idea that one size fits all, which does not happen in all cases. Sometimes that gives oxygen to the eurosceptics when they come out to support issues like Brexit. We saw it

happening in the recent campaign. As Deputy Durkan mentioned, the leaders of that campaign were no longer around after 24 or 48 hours to say what would be the follow-up and where the country went from there. They did not indicate how the issue was thought through and what happens. The reality is it was not thought through because nobody expected the vote and outcome in the way it unfolded. People are now scrambling and seeking solutions to provide a roadmap for what has not been predicted or considered.

One of Senator Leyden's proposals is very important, as it is necessary for Ireland to be aligned with the UK. It has had success for years with trade, business and all sorts of other relationships across different sectors. It is very important that Ireland has somebody at that table for the discussions to look after the future of the country and sustainability across all the areas we are concerned about. If we are to take an issue from today's meeting, it should be this and we should pursue it to see if it is possible. We must try to make it possible.

I serve the constituency of Kildare North and, like every other constituency, it has many exports to the UK. It is suffering because of the currency changes. It is a massive problem. I know there are issues to deal with down the road but now there are many problems for the small and medium enterprise, SME, sector and people exporting to the UK because of the currency exchange rate. These people are being put under much pressure financially and cannot go after their market to seek a top-up in the currency exchange. That would rule them out of business. We know the employment provided by the SME sector and the financial spin-off to the national economy.

I do not know what discussions have taken place on this or if it has been considered. Is it too early a stage? What are the thoughts of the Department or the Government on dealing with the issue? I know the Minister of State is aware that it is major issue with business and particularly those exporting to the UK. Many businesses export through the UK and I do not know if that has been considered. Many alarm bells are now ringing in businesses as they wonder how they will manage as Brexit develops and predictions ring true in the timelines set out. They are considering how that will affect them.

These are two major issues affecting businesses, the SME sector, exports, jobs and this economy. We must see how they can be dealt with and I wonder what are the Minister of State's views. Has there been any discussion on them?

Chairman: I thank all the members for their contributions.

Deputy Dara Murphy: I thank the members. I have a very significant amount of notes taken. I hope to get to many, if not all, of the issues. The consensus in the country is reflected in the consensus in the questioning. I agree with the vast majority of the observations. I will try to work through them as I got them, starting with Senator Leyden's point.

I concur with him very strongly that it is very regrettable that we have arrived at this position. It is a decision of the United Kingdom affecting Ireland but it also affects the other 26 member states. It has the potential to affect every part of our government and institutions, some much more than others. The Taoiseach will chair the strategic committee on Brexit issues and we are putting significant additional resources into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, so the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, will have additional people. It will be the number one issue for him to deal with in the Department and I will deal with it as Minister of State with responsibility for Europe. It will also be the number one issue for the Taoiseach.

To come to Deputy O'Rourke's point, other Departments, such as the Departments of Finance and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, will consider how we look at market diversification. This is too big for any one Minister and it will command the attention of everybody from the Taoiseach, all members of the Cabinet, this committee and party groups, including Independents. Given our presence in the European Parliament, with Fianna Fáil a member of the ALDE group, Sinn Féin having four MEPs, the Labour Party a member of the Socialist group and Fine Gael in the European People's Party, we can collectively exert significant influence.

Deputy Seán Haughey asked how do we deliver our message to our friends and how well our unique circumstances are understood. We will all have to work on these issues. Trade and currency issues will affect all member states that export to the United Kingdom. Many continental countries that face onto the east coast of the UK are strongly affected by Brexit. I recently visited Denmark, for example, which, while not a member of the euro area, is a country with significant food exports, as are the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. The key point for us is to emphasise the unique journey this island has travelled and the support we have been given on that journey. We will work to support PEACE and INTERREG funding and the issue forms part of the current deliberations.

We must establish robustly, on the basis that we share a border with the UK on this island and the journey we have travelled, that Ireland has unique issues. All member states have trade and institutional issues to deal with and we all share concerns about the vision for Europe and its future direction. However, Ireland will be affected in a different way with respect to common travel, the journey the two communities in the North have made and the North-South and British-Irish bodies. We will continue to make this case robustly. There is a good appreciation that Ireland has specific challenges. Once the negotiations start in March, it will be up to us to explicitly ensure these issues are addressed as part of the final agreement.

To respond to Deputy Haughey's question on neutrality, the current discussions do not present a threat to Irish neutrality. Our position is specifically provided for in a protocol to the Lisbon treaty and this is very well understood, as members will be keen to learn.

Deputy Haughey also asked an interesting question on new partnerships. Ireland has stated that we share a common view with the United Kingdom in many areas, including innovation, trade and being open and dynamic economies. We strongly support the position that the European Union should continue to function as 27 member states. However, there are areas where we will seek stronger co-operation such as, for example, digital innovation. Smaller and peripheral member states require that greater attention is paid to digital single markets because we can benefit more from them than other countries.

Reference was made to protectionism. Some will argue that the position taken on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP, and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, is protectionist but it is important that Europe remains innovative. To respond to Deputy Frank O'Rourke's point, Ireland must also seek new markets and partnerships. There is an urgency among countries across the European Union, especially in Scandinavia and north-east Europe, about increasing trading partnerships.

I touched on Deputy Breathnach's question on PEACE and INTERREG moneys. We are determined to ensure this funding continues because it has provided significant support to local communities. It is vital to ensure it remains predictable and stable and there are no question marks hanging over it. We are discussing this issue with the United Kingdom and the European Commission.

Senator Neale Richmond asked a question on the aims of the other 26 member states. Ireland is affected in every way by virtue of our involvement and engagement with Britain in many different areas. For this reason, we are significantly ahead of most other member states in terms of the preparations undertaken in advance of Brexit. Other member states are involved in a process similar to that under way in the UK in examining issues that will arise.

Deputy Seán Crowe and Senator Gerard P. Craughwell raised the issue of the future of the European Union. Politicians across the Union, whether Members of the European Parliament or members of this committee, should try not to speak about it in the third person. The rules issued by the European Commission are agreements that have been put in place at meetings of the Council and by governments and democratically elected politicians from the member states, including Members of the European Parliament who have reached agreements on certain issues. When voicing criticism of some elements of the European Union, politicians in the member states cannot absolve themselves of their role in the decision-making process. On a personal level, one of the most disappointing aspects of the debate in the United Kingdom was that much of the criticism levelled at the European Union was directed at laws and agreements to which UK Governments had agreed. We must have a more honest debate and accept that the European Union was created by its member states.

To respond to Deputy Bernard J. Durkan's point, it is crucial that we remember the bigger issues and the reason the European Union came into being. It is the outcome of a peace process started by member states and nations that were picking themselves up after the Second World War. When one reflects on thousands of years of European history, as Europeans, we should not take peace on our continent for granted. The European Union needs to focus on concrete measures such as ensuring social services work better and young people can secure employment. We must address the fundamentals of politics.

That brings me to the more contentious issue of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP. Deputy Seán Crowe made a point on the investor state element of the CETA and referred to a lack of debate. This element of the agreement will become a national competence and come before the Oireachtas and a committee of the House for discussion, which is welcome.

Ireland is an island off an island. One of the great successes of the European Union has been our ability to trade in a free market. I know that people have concerns about the CETA and the TTIP, but they are, in their most basic form, extensions of the Single Market to North America through free trade agreements. If we cannot agree common terms for trade and regulation between North America and Europe, we will be passed out by the rest of the world. Collectively, our proportion of global GDP is shrinking. It is important, especially for islands, that we reach an agreement. I agree with Deputy Seán Crowe, however, that a more robust debate is needed and that we must convince people of the merits of both the CETA and the TTIP.

Senator Paul Coghlan asked a very good question on the effect of Brexit on the EU budget. This issue has yet to be determined. We must decide whether to reduce the overall budget as a result of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, given that some costs will reduce by virtue of Brexit, or whether member states will be asked to increase their contribution to the budget. These are some of the issues for debate at the start of the next round of the multi-annual financial framework discussions. Of course this is an issue. We are very mindful in that context of the great value to our country of the Common Agricultural Policy. We, like other member states, are strong supporters of CAP.

I agree that migration remains a major challenge. Our commitment on numbers stands. It is not down to the Republic of Ireland that numbers are very low. We have sent Irish people out to try to identify why it is the case that the numbers travelling to Ireland have been small. A number of people will be coming soon.

In regard to the visit of Michel Barnier, he will meet the Taoiseach and other relevant Ministers next week but we do not have the exact date and time of his visit as of yet.

On the suggestion of having an Irish person on the Brexit negotiating team, our permanent representative, Declan Kelleher, the Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach, other Secretaries General, and everybody involved in the Department of the Taoiseach in particular, will keep us abreast of every comma and every sentence of these negotiations. They are the most important negotiations that the country will undertake since the very difficult talks we had with respect to the peace process in Northern Ireland. The fact that these decisions are being taken at European Council level is significant because the Taoiseach has been in office for more than five years and he knows many of the other prime ministers very well. We are moving into a new chapter of Irish politics. I know Deputies Seán Haughey, Micheál Martin, Joan Burton and others were in the European Parliament recently to meet their groups. This will be an opportunity to work together to influence prime ministers who are part of our groups. There was a very good suggestion from Senator Terry Leyden to bring politicians to Ireland to see the country.

Equally, there may be an opportunity for some members of this committee to travel with me to meet our Commissioner and MEPs because they belong to a good cross-section of party groups. We could dedicate some time in either Strasbourg or Brussels to reach out and meet other colleagues similar to our plan to bring members from all parts of Ireland to show where we have unity. There may be areas where we might disagree as a committee on the issue of our national concern in respect to Brexit, but we agree on the vast majority of matters we would like to see in the outcome. I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Chairman to see how we might do that. Perhaps we could get the political parties to look at engaging in the coming months with our MEPs as well. I think I have covered most of the questions.

Chairman: I thank the Minister of State and his officials for appearing before the committee today. I thank the members for their contributions. It has been a worthwhile meeting. Members join with me in wishing the Minister of State well in his endeavours and we look forward to working with him.

Deputy Dara Murphy: I wish the Chairman and members well in their endeavours. I think Deputy Healy-Rae will find his role as chairman of the Committee on European Affairs enjoyable and stimulating but it entails a lot of hard work. The Department will support the work of the committee.

I thank the diplomatic representatives who attend these meetings. They play an important part in getting the message from the politicians from all parties and none about Ireland's unique concern. When they are communicating with their own country, I hope they understand that we have unique concerns on the Brexit negotiations.

Chairman: That concludes our business in public session.

The joint committee went into private session at 6.45 p.m. and adjourned at 7.10 p.m. until 12 noon on Thursday, 20 October 2016.