

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ AN AONTAIS EORPAIGH

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 21 Meán Fómhair 2022

Wednesday, 21 September 2022

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 10.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 10.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Seán Haughey,	Lisa Chambers,
Brendan Howlin,	Regina Doherty,
Ruairí Ó Murchú,	Sharon Keogan.
Neale Richmond.	

Teachta / Deputy Joe McHugh sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Deputy Marian Harkin and Senator Vincent P. Martin.

EU Accession Process: Engagement with Ambassador of North Macedonia

Chairman: Ar son an choiste, cuirim fáilte roimh the representative from the Embassy of North Macedonia, Mrs. Eli Bojadjeska Ristovski. The representative of the Embassy of Montenegro, who was also scheduled to attend, has sent her apologies. As members know, we will be engaging with Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski today on the topic of EU enlargement in the western Balkans. We are looking forward to our conversation and she is very welcome.

Our conversation is twofold. First, it is to send a strong message to her country and to the other Balkan states that we are keen to engage with those countries in terms of EU enlargement. We have been engaging very much on the aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. We also have the Georgian ambassador, H.E. Mr. George Zurabashvili, with us here today and he is very welcome. As I said, it is twofold. We want to continue with engagement and we also want to inform ourselves. We are looking forward to Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski's contribution.

I have a note on privilege. All witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not criticise or make any charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him or her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. If the witnesses' statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

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 of the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I remind members of the constitutional requirements that members must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex to participate in public meetings. I will not permit members to participate where they are not adhering to this constitutional requirement. Everybody knows the drill in that regard.

I invite Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski to make her opening statement.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjeska Ristovski: I thank the committee for the invitation to address it today. It is a bit intimidating to be in a room full of men so I thank Senator Keogan for being here this morning. I am deeply honoured to sit in front of the members today to provide an update on the status of North Macedonia's European integration and to also have the opportunity to brief each other, because I believe this should be a two-way street, and to contribute to the wider strategic discussion on EU enlargement. Let me first express my gratitude for the continual interest and strong support of the Irish Parliament for EU enlargement. Ireland has always been a firm supporter of EU enlargement, not only in words but in deeds.

This meeting comes at the start of a brand new chapter for my country. Two months ago, on 19 July, the first Intergovernmental Conference with the EU took place. This was the opening

phase of the accession negotiations with the EU and it provided long-sought recognition for the reforms the country has undertaken in the past years. Only last Friday, on 15 September, we saw the actual start of the screening process whereby EU experts have begun to examine EU laws and policies under Chapter 1, which concerns the fundamentals. This will not just be a technical exercise but one with a concrete impact on improving the quality of life of citizens.

My country has transformed many years of disappointments, obstacles and blockades into yet another opportunity to enable us to offer arguments, to offer persistence and to offer trust in good neighbourly relations, thus coming to a solution facilitating the start of the EU accession negotiations. This long-awaited chapter in our integration process, after 17 long years of being a candidate country and facing many challenges along the way, is an achievement that the citizens have long been deserving of. We have proven to be a European country. We have shown that we can build compromise and we do not play the zero-sum game. We are a multi-ethnic society, a model of consensual democracy, and we have a lot to share and to offer to the EU's accommodating of diversity. We strongly believe that the EU integration process will be an additional drive that will mobilise all stakeholders in the country. Working together, we are committed to our reform dossier. The enlargement has always been a substantive and cohesive factor in the country and an element of our society. Our place is in the EU. We have said many times that we are a reliable partner to the EU and its member states. We will continue to function in that way. Our aim is to be a positive example of the fastest EU integration, just as we had the fastest integration as a member country of NATO. In this respect, the Government made a strong commitment to advance on EU reforms, especially in the areas of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime, etc. On this road, we know we can count on the support of our Irish friends.

I will refer to two other elements which speak to our determination and commitment to the EU agenda. The first is the alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy, CFSP. We are 100% aligned with the CFSP. We have shown that we can be a reliable and trusted partner in this troubled geopolitical context. We also have 100% compliance with the restrictive measures. This comes with a price. It has a socioeconomic impact, notably on energy. It is important for the EU to show it can involve the western Balkans and other partners when taking actions to mitigate the consequences of the war in Ukraine. I wish also to mention our growing regional co-operation, which has been significantly increased in recent years with our conciliatory approach to solving bilateral issues. We are taking a leading position in the context of the growing regional co-operation and would like to serve as a role model in contributing to strengthening regional stability. Our strong position is that regional initiatives should be complementary and should not interfere with the future EU negotiation processes. They should go together. It should be an inclusive process for all the counties in the region.

I hope that Ireland will remain on our side along the way, as it has been so far. On his most recent visit to Skopje on 4 July, the Minister of State, Deputy Thomas Byrne, voiced Ireland's strong support and, most important, its deep understanding of the importance of preserving national identity and language while integrating into the EU. Ireland is best placed to understand and advocate for our position. EU membership brings opportunities to a country, be they economic, political or otherwise. We intend to follow that example and prove this premise true.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski for her presentation and her presence. I appreciate that coming over from London is not the easiest thing to do with such a busy schedule. It is much appreciated. This is a worthwhile engagement and I am grateful to the Chairman for organising it.

I was struck by the commitment, of which we are all supportive, made by the Minister of State, Deputy Byrne, on behalf of the Government to the future accession of North Macedonia. It is one thing for the Government to say it but an opinion poll released by European Movement Ireland yesterday showed massive public support for the enlargement of the European Union to include the accession of countries such as North Macedonia. Ireland has been consistent in wanting a growing European Union. Just because we have lost one member state does not mean we cannot bring in at least three if not a half a dozen others in the coming years.

Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski mentioned the assimilation of North Macedonia into the structures of NATO. Will she detail what that process involved and the level of engagement North Macedonia has with NATO? I would appreciate it if she could outline North Macedonia's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Has it implemented a sanctions regime? Has it taken any other actions to support the people of Ukraine against this vicious assault?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjeska Ristovski: The date of 24 February 2022 will be stored in the collective memory as the day when Russian aggression started in Ukraine. The invasion of a sovereign and peaceful country cannot be justified by any means. We have since the beginning expressed our full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We stand by Ukraine and its internationally recognised borders. We commend its brave defence, which is protecting freedom and sovereignty. The great courage Ukrainians have shown is inspiring. They are demonstrating that freedom and democracy are the most powerful weapons any country can have in its defence. We have since the beginning fully aligned, as I said in my opening remarks, to the EU's CFSP. We have aligned ourselves to the substantial package of sanctions against Russia. In March and April, we expelled 11 Russian diplomats from North Macedonia because there were clear signs of malign Russian activity. We have expressed support to Ukraine in several ways. We have sent military equipment, about which I will understandably not go into detail here. We have opened our doors to Ukrainian refugees. Approximately 1,200 refugees are currently housed in my country. This answer links to the question the Deputy asked about NATO. The NATO agenda in the past few months and the latest extraordinary meetings have once again proved that unity, solidarity and the resolute firmness of our allies and partners in dealing with the escalating crisis in Ukraine, and the political and practical support supplied to Ukraine, are stronger and more important when there are more member states around the table, including from the still vulnerable western Balkans region. We have fully engaged with all the meetings and preparatory works at NATO. As a NATO member, we have expressed our firm commitment to Ukraine and actively participated in creating the NATO common strategy with regard to Russian aggression in Ukraine. We also actively engaged in the adoption of the new strategic concept of NATO during the most recent summit in Madrid where, among other points, unequivocal support and determination were expressed to Ukraine and Russia was condemned as the most significant and direct threat not only to the security of Ukraine but also in a larger and broader context.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I thank Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski for being here. She should not let the men in here intimidate her in any way because we certainly are not intimidated by them.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski will find out in a while.

Senator Sharon Keogan: During the French Presidency of the EU Council, President Macron made proposals for the commencement of the accession negotiations that included conditions requiring both North Macedonia and Bulgaria to make concessions on their disputes. What were those conditions? What were they looking to resolve? There were protests around

that in July when the President of the Commission, Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, visited there. There clearly is some issue there with regard to the accession. Can Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski outline what the issue is and the feelings of the people on the ground?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: I thank Senator Keogan for her question. The Senator is correct. There is, indeed, an overall perception in the country that the country has paid a very high price for the start of the accession negotiations. It is a fact that the Opposition does not support the French-brokered deal with Bulgaria that the Government has accepted and that has now been implemented in order to start the accession negotiations and have the first intergovernmental conference. It is true that this is creating a difficult political situation in the country but let me assure the Senator that my country's leadership has demonstrated great courage and great vision for the European future of the country despite the strong opposition from the political parties in the Opposition.

We had a deepened dialogue with Bulgaria led by the two foreign ministries. At the end, we believe that we have found an amicable solution which makes both sides equally satisfied and equally dissatisfied. The commitment that the Government has undertaken is to amend the constitution and include the Bulgarians as one of the founding peoples of the country along with Montenegrins and Croatians. So far, we have the Turks, the Albanians, the Vlachs and the Roma. We expect that all political actors and political parties, especially members of the parliament, should work together to advance any EU reforms because the parliament has and will have the key role in the accession process. Political parties have to work together. It requires a two thirds majority to change the constitution in the parliament which, for now, is lacking but I am convinced that the Government will spare no efforts in communicating the benefits of the EU integration process and to convince the public that the negotiating framework is in line with our national interests because the national identity is preserved, the Macedonian language is preserved and history has been kept out of the negotiating process. It will need to have a bottom-up approach to explain properly, to persuade the citizens and to gradually change their minds and their mindsets. It will be a battle of hearts and minds. All the members of the parliament and the political parties have to be up to their task and see the main interests of the country, which is the EU accession.

If I may say so on a personal level, the EU should double its presence in the country with concrete programmes with visible tangible results, for example, in infrastructure in connectivity, that will speak of the advantages to showcase that there are tangible deliverables of this accession process in order that we can create a positive momentum in our society.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I note North Macedonia has got €610 million since it applied in 2008. They are tangible things that people can see on the ground.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: Yes.

Senator Sharon Keogan: What type of projects were included in that €610 million that Ms Bojadjieska Ristovski knows of? Is there anything the European Union can do in relation to future projects that might bring the people with them in the future?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: Many projects have been done in the country so far. I cannot name all of them but major infrastructure projects are the main ones. For example, the European Investment Bank is now financing a €30 million grant to build a 68-km gas interconnector that will link North Macedonia with Greece in order that it provides a diversified and self-sustainable energy platform for the country.

Ireland has been vocal so far. I ask Ireland here to continue to do so, to be vocal and a strong advocate. In the upcoming 13 months of the screening process, which will then open the actual negotiations with the EU, Ireland's success in attracting foreign direct investments is something that we can learn of, and we are learning of. Our agency for foreign investment, when created 17 years ago, was based on Ireland's foreign investment agency's experience and Irish experts have helped in developing that. I ask Ireland to continue to be strong and vocal.

Chairman: I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski. With the agreement of the committee, I must be excused because I must attend another committee but I will be back. The Leas-Chathaoirleach, Deputy Howlin, will take the Chair. Deputy Howlin is up next but, being in a position of responsibility now, perhaps Senator Chambers will speak. Deputy Haughey will speak after that and then Deputy Howlin. Hopefully, I should be back in ten or 15 minutes. If I do not get into a row, I should be all right.

Deputy Brendan Howlin took the Chair.

Senator Lisa Chambers: I thank the Chair and Vice Chair.

I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski for being here this morning and for engaging with us. It is really appreciated.

I listened to Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski's responses to Senator Keogan. I note some of the opposition within her own country that it is still facing. We are the most pro-European member state. We have had lots of opposition over the past 50 years of membership. We have had political parties that have come full circle and have now seen the light but that opposed every referendum we have had in this country in terms of EU treaties. It has not been plain sailing for us either. We have had to do the same thing of winning the hearts and minds of our people and bringing people with us. Now there is beyond 90% support for the EU and Ireland's membership. If we have learned anything over the past number of years between Brexit and now the war in Ukraine, it is that we are stronger together and the more of us that are there, the stronger we are.

I very much look forward to Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski's country's accession to the European Union and to it becoming a fully-fledged member state. It will only strengthen the EU. North Macedonia will be a fantastic and reliable partner within the European Union. There are good things ahead.

Where are negotiations currently at? What timelines is North Macedonia aspiring to? What does North Macedonia hope to achieve? Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski mentioned wanting to be the fastest country to accede to the EU. What kind of timeframe have the North Macedonians set for themselves? To date, what has been the most challenging aspect of North Macedonia's accession journey with its engagements with the European Union? What has North Macedonia found difficult? If there was another country that was to go on that same journey, how would Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski advise it? What have been the biggest obstacles?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: I thank the Senator for her kind words of support. They are really appreciated. My presence here today is to, as I stated in my opening remarks, express how appreciative we are of the Irish support and how much we value it. As the Senator said, Ireland has been one of the most vocal, if not the most vocal, supporters of the EU enlargement.

Currently we have, as of last Friday, opened the screening process. EU experts are now analysing every law and how much the country is ready for the start of the accession negotiations.

This process will take 13 months. During those 13 months of analytical examination or screening of the body of the EU *acquis*, we will get to familiarise ourselves with the EU laws and standards that we will need to apply or implement in our legislation. We have been a candidate country for 17 long years owing to various reasons, the first of which was Greece and the issue of our name, and then Bulgaria and the question of identity and language. In those 17 years, we have not just waited in the lobby without doing anything. We have been preparing ourselves. If members read the European Commission's reports, they will see that the country has made tremendous reforms over the past several years to align its legislation with the EU *acquis*. We have worked in the background even though we have not started the negotiations.

While the decision is not mine, we have been receiving positive assessments from the European Commission so far. We are as ready as Serbia and Montenegro, which have already been negotiating with the EU for a few years. The screening process consists of two phases. The first is the explanatory session, which is very technical EU wording that I do not grasp very well. The second is the bilateral session, in which each country is invited to present where it stands chapter by chapter. At the end of this, the Commission will evaluate our readiness and present an assessment of the country's degree of preparedness. It will then start opening cluster by cluster. Our goal is to move quickly through those chapters and clusters and implement the reforms as well as the strong commitment that our Government has made.

The timeline is difficult to predict, but we would like to join the package with Serbia and Montenegro and join the EU by 2030, if possible. That is a deadline that we would like to achieve.

Senator Lisa Chambers: Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski referred to challenges. What have been the greatest challenges in North Macedonia's journey so far?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: So far, the challenge has been to start the accession negotiations. We had to show our commitment through our readiness to compromise, a compromise that will preserve our national interest, especially in terms of language and identity. Now we intend to catch up with the others and, if we can, accelerate our process until it is faster than those of Serbia and Montenegro. That is our goal.

Senator Lisa Chambers: Best wishes.

Deputy Seán Haughey: I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski for her presence. She has travelled to be with us, which we appreciate.

Ireland, as a matter of principle, is in favour of enlargement. We believe it is good for the EU and the individual countries. It is also good for promoting regional stability. Unanimity is required at the European Council to bring in a new member state. That has obviously been one of North Macedonia's problems, given the objections from Bulgaria and Greece. North Macedonia has dealt with the Bulgarian issues. Is the issue with Greece large resolved now that the country has been renamed? Is that issue off the table and are the Greeks on board, so to speak, insofar as they can be?

During the French Presidency, there was a suggestion by President Macron of some sort of two-speed Europe in terms of enlargement, with some sort of lesser form of membership. I am unsure as to whether that suggestion got any traction, but I presume that North Macedonia wants to be a full member of the EU. There is no question of a two-tier membership. I believe that Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski has answered that question already.

Regarding how Ireland can help, Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski said that we must continue being vocal. Is that the only way we can help? Obviously, it is important that we be vocal at European Council meetings and at the various other meetings held by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State with responsibility for EU affairs. Is there any other way in which Ireland can help or need we only be vocal and proactive around North Macedonia's membership application?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: Ireland has not only been vocal, but has shown its strong and firm support for enlargement in practice, particularly as regards North Macedonia. I request that it continue to do so. Our permanent missions in Brussels have good co-operation with each other. They lead on all aspects of the co-operation. We are also working on our bilateral agenda. Combined, these efforts are helping our advance towards the EU.

Regarding Greece, the name issue has been solved with the Prespa forum. Greece is now one of our strongest supporters on our EU path. Our co-operation is broad and has many levels of engagement - political and, especially, economic. Greek aeroplanes protect our skies. Prespa has put an end to the issue and, with Greek support, we are now moving together towards our EU integration.

Vice Chairman: I might ask a question or two, although a great deal of ground has been covered.

It is important for us to have this dialogue with Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski and we greatly appreciate her attendance. Since February, there has understandably been a focus on the three applicant states, one of which is under direct assault. The ambassador of another applicant state is present with us. There was a concern in some applicant states that considered themselves to be much further advanced that they would somehow be eclipsed by the focus on the applications of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. I would be interested in hearing Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski's perspective on that. Was there a fear that a new focus would delay the advance in the accession route of countries such as her own? What was the official view in North Macedonia?

We have a particular understanding of some of the questions that North Macedonia had to address in terms of almost defining nationality, particularly with neighbours who were assertive of their own nationality and did not want any exclusion of their minority populations, including language and name. Has that been the most difficult issue to address? In addressing it, and speaking from our own experience, it can be an opportunity for opposition political voices to divide public opinion in terms of the value of advancing in the direction of the EU.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: The Russian aggression against Ukraine has shattered all notions that we have been nurturing to date about the development of the future of Europe and about the 21st century in general. On 24 February, a new era and a new chapter in geopolitics began. If Russia's aggression against Ukraine has not brought all of us together with a common understanding of the intrinsic value of EU enlargement, including the western Balkans, Georgia and Moldova, as was the case back in the 1990s with the enlargement to include central European countries, then there is nothing in the future of a greater magnitude to achieve this. We warmly welcomed the EU candidate status for Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the European perspective for Georgia. It is an important message of solidarity and a historic step for the recognition of the European future of these countries. As I said, we welcome this decision. We do not see it as a threat to the western Balkans in general. It is positive news. The success of one country is a success for all countries. If Serbia and Montenegro are progressing towards the EU, that is a good sign for us that we will progress. It is motivation for us, Moldova and

Ukraine too.

In response to the second question, as I said at the beginning, political parties, especially the opposition, should be up to their tasks, as should members of parliament. They should concentrate on what is in the interests of the country, not on what is in the interests of the political party until the next elections. I do not agree with the perception that the country has paid a high price to start the accession negotiations. The great courage and vision which has been shown by the political leadership with regard to the European future of the country and its citizens is something we should acknowledge and use for the future generations of the country.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I apologise. I had to be in three different places at once and I did them all badly. I am sure a number of people have covered what I will deal with. I imagine that the western Balkans and North Macedonia have probably felt they paid a high price, to use the ambassador's term, to enter negotiations. Could we get more information about that? It is fair to say the conversation about accession in recent years was not really serious. The war in Ukraine has changed the geopolitics and people are looking at accession differently. I accept that rule of law issues within the European Union were not dealt with, particularly in Hungary, which would have been a source of fear for many others.

We all see that the European Union has been a force for good, even with all of the mistakes that may have been made. On some level, it has been a bulwark of democracy against places that are not necessarily very democratic. Will Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski give us an idea of the difficulties she encountered before? How does she believe the relationship is progressing now? I believe we are in different circumstances with regard to accession. Beyond that, there are issues across the entire former Yugoslavia and further afield where international power plays are made, where there is an element of Russian gameplay and even an element of Chinese involvement. It is a very interconnected world. It is no different from any other time in history in that everybody is making a play. If Mrs. Bojadjeska Ristovski can decipher the three questions I asked, I will be impressed.

Vice Chairman: It gives Mrs. Ristovski a broad spectrum to cover.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjeska Ristovski: It does. I already addressed the state of play of the country with regard to EU enlargement with Senators Keogan and Chambers.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: They are not as important as me.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjeska Ristovski: I am sorry to repeat myself. We have just started the screening process with the EU, which will take 13 months. The EU experts will analyse the laws and preparedness of the country for starting accession negotiations. We have struggled and had a difficult dialogue with Bulgaria to come to a solution which we think leaves both countries equally satisfied and is, most importantly, within both our national interest and theirs. This has allowed us to open the road to work on lessening the tensions in the population, create friendship, deepen the friendship and create new co-operation at every level and in every area. I think the government's commitment to accomplish what has been agreed with Bulgaria is strong, and it will probably spare no effort in communicating the benefits of this approach to the public. As I said to Senator Keogan, it will be a battle of hearts and minds. It would be the best counterattack against all the malign foreign propaganda that, even though North Macedonia delivered, it is still not getting anywhere. We are getting somewhere. We have opened negotiations and started the screening process. There is a long way to go but we are committed to that. If we are not convinced of that, then nobody else will convince us. I think we are on a

good path.

Vice Chairman: I thank Mrs Bojadjieska Ristovski for being with us. Does she want to add anything before we conclude?

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: This happened at the end of a long week. Even though it is only Wednesday, I have the impression that it is Friday or Saturday because of the long week we had in London with the state funeral arrangements and the visit of the president. The Irish President was there too. I am sorry if I may have sounded a little confused but I hope the message was clear. I thank the committee for this important meeting. I wanted to come to show how important Ireland is to us and to say it to the committee. I ask the committee to please continue as it has been.

Vice Chairman: I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski. Her presentation was a work of clarity. Hearing from her answered all the issues that have been raised at our briefings. As Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski rightly said, I hope it is the start of an ongoing dialogue. There is a difficulty in that her mission is based in London, in a non-EU country, rather than here, but we can overcome that with technology and, even better, by actually having people present. The human interaction is always the most important.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: I agree. Covid has very much affected our work in the past three years. We have not had an opportunity to travel to Ireland as much as we wanted. Since Brexit the embassy has even more arguments to convince our authorities back home that it is the right time to think about having our own resident diplomatic presence here. We will be working on this issue.

Vice Chairman: We look forward to that. I thank Mrs. Bojadjieska Ristovski for making the time in a very busy week to come before the committee and for being so clear in her presentation.

Mrs. Eli Bojadjieska Ristovski: It has been my pleasure. I thank the Vice Chair.

Vice Chairman: We will adjourn for a moment and resume in private session.

Sitting suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed in private session at 11.25 a.m.

The joint committee adjourned at 11.38 a.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 28 September 2022.