

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

---

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

---

*Déardaoin, 16 Eanáir 2014*

*Thursday, 16 January 2014*

---

The Joint Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

---

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Eric Byrne,	Senator Mark Daly,
Deputy Seán Crowe,	Senator Lorraine Higgins,
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	Senator Michael Mullins,
Deputy Dan Neville,	Senator David Norris,
Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan,	Senator Jim Walsh.
Deputy Brendan Smith,	

DEPUTY PAT BREEN IN THE CHAIR.

## BUSINESS OF JOINT COMMITTEE

*The joint committee met in private session until 2.22 p.m.*

### **Business of Joint Committee**

**Chairman:** We have a quorum so will commence the meeting in public session. We will adjourn the meeting for a vote between 2.30 p.m. and 2.35 p.m. for ten minutes or less and shall resume the meeting afterwards. Therefore, I am anxious to get the meeting started.

Draft minutes of the meetings of 17 and 19 December have been circulated. Are the minutes of 17 and 19 December agreed? Agreed. Unless there are matters arising from the minutes we will proceed with the main business of the meeting.

### **Review of Foreign Affairs Policy and External Relations: Discussion (Resumed)**

**Chairman:** I remind Members, witnesses and those in the Visitors Gallery to ensure their mobile telephones are switched off completely for the duration of the meeting as even on silent mode they interfere with the recording equipment in the committee room.

Today is the second day of our hearings on a review of Ireland's foreign policy and external engagement. The main purpose of the meetings this week is to conduct hearings that will enable the joint committee to compile a report that will be submitted to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As members will know, the Department is carrying out a review of foreign policy and external relations. Before Christmas the committee agreed to invite four individuals to make presentations that will assist us in compiling a report.

Today we will meet Mr. Denis Staunton, deputy editor, *The Irish Times*, and Mr. Graham Butler, University of Copenhagen. The format of today's meeting is that the two contributors will separately make presentations to the committee and their presentations will be followed by a question and answer session.

I welcome Mr. Denis Staunton who has previously held many posts with *The Irish Times*. He was its foreign editor. He has also worked as its Washington correspondent and as its European correspondent based in Brussels and Berlin. He has a wealth of experience from the media world, particularly in foreign affairs. I compliment *The Irish Times* on its work and coverage of foreign affairs issues. It does a comprehensive job on world news which is important for us on the committee. We thank Mr. Stanton for continuing the good work by reporting what happens globally which is very important. I ask him to make his presentation which shall be followed by a question and answer session.

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** I thank the Chairman and members of the committee for inviting me to be part of the discussion on the Government's foreign policy review.

I wish to say a few words outlining my perspective on the matter. As the Chairman mentioned, *The Irish Times* is the only news organisation on this island to sustain a global network of foreign correspondents, including staff correspondents in a number of capitals and full-time

correspondents in various other capitals and a whole network throughout the world. It is a big investment for a small newspaper in difficult economic times but we are committed to it because we believe it is essential, now more than ever, for the Irish public to be informed about and to better understand the world beyond our shores. In an increasingly networked world, events and decisions far away can have a powerful and immediate impact on citizens here, not least on their economic circumstances. This is particularly important given what we have seen over the past few years, as apparent certainties of the Cold War have given way to a new multi-polar global order. Therefore, various places that may once have seemed remote or peripheral to our interests have become central to them. The foreign policy review offers a welcome and timely opportunity to consider whether Government policy and the conduct of external relations ought to change in any way in order to take account of changed circumstances.

As a foreign correspondent in Berlin, Brussels and Washington and reporting at various stages from almost all of the countries of the European Union, parts of the Middle East and throughout North America, I have had the opportunity to observe Irish diplomacy at close quarters. Much of my brief remarks here will be devoted to the conduct of Irish diplomacy and how it might best adapt to ensure that it remains as effective as possible.

The purpose of Irish foreign policy is the same as it always has been, namely, to promote Ireland's interests and values abroad. There can be a perceived tension between the State's interests and its values but they should not be in conflict. Although economic diplomacy is increasingly important for Ireland as well as for other countries, it is a mistake to imagine that activities that have no apparent commercial benefit, such as promoting human rights, supporting efforts at disarmament and playing a full role in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the OSCE, are purely altruistic. As a small country, it is in our interest to support a rules-based global order, and respect for human rights and the rule of law are not only right in themselves but contribute to this country's image in the world.

The most dramatic geopolitical changes in recent years have been the rise of China and the remarkable economic advance of other previously poor countries in Asia, particularly, and in Latin America. These changes have been matched by the relative decline of the United States and Europe as their share of global output has reduced. The changes create major challenges particularly for a small, poorly funded foreign service such as ours, which has traditionally been staffed by gifted generalists rather than specialists. Since the foundation of the State, Ireland has been fortunate in that the interlocutors that have been most important to us have either shared our language - as in Britain and the United States - or else in Europe have shared deep and long-standing cultural links which we have benefited from up until now. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the rising powers in Asia which remain unfamiliar linguistically and culturally.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is highly unusual among foreign services in offering no incentives to learn languages – either in pay or promotion. Most other services pay annual allowances for language proficiency with harder languages, such as Chinese and Arabic, earning a bigger bonus. Some of the bonuses run to a few thousand euro a year in many of the European places. Many other services also take language proficiency and cultural knowledge into account for promotion. They do not simply base promotion on standard, conventional and managerial skills. Other services have a list of postings where ambassadors and other senior diplomats must be proficient in the local language before taking up appointment. If our diplomats are to be effective, particularly in unfamiliar cultures and in small embassies where they often operate on their own and take on multiple responsibilities, they must be equipped with

the requisite language skills. This means paying for full-time language training which means a year in the case of the harder languages and rewarding those who achieve and maintain language proficiency.

**Chairman:** Please excuse me, Mr. Staunton, I must suspend the meeting for ten minutes or until after the vote. You can resume your presentation after the vote.

*Sitting suspended at 2.30 p.m. and resumed at 2.50 p.m.*

**Chairman:** I apologise to our witnesses for the short interruption which was due to Dáil business.

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** I had been speaking about the need for language training. The other big issue relates to embassies and representation abroad. About a decade ago many countries were shrinking their embassy networks. They thought that technological and other changes would make traditional diplomacy obsolete. In fact the opposite has turned out to be the case. The past few years have seen many countries, including our nearest neighbour, the United Kingdom, opening new embassies and consulates around the world. Our Government needs to do the same, not least because many of the countries with which we want to increase trade place a very high value on formal government-to-government contacts and embassies play a key role in facilitating business and trade deals. An expansion of the embassy network in Asia and Latin America cannot, however, come at the expense of our diplomatic presence in Europe and the United States. Deeper political and economic integration in Europe has made it more important than ever to have an Irish presence in all European Union capitals. After all, each of these countries can vote on matters of great importance to Irish citizens.

This year's planned referendum on Scottish independence and a possible future vote on British membership of the European Union have introduced an element of constitutional uncertainty to the politics of the United Kingdom. Any change in the constitutional order there could not only affect Ireland's interest within the European Union but could undermine the stability of the constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland, with unpredictable consequences for the whole island.

In the United States of America a tiny Irish diplomat staff is not only dealing with the regular bilateral issues and the by-now traditional issues of Northern Ireland and immigration but also important new matters such as the US policy on tax avoidance and evasion. Ireland has enjoyed a remarkable level of access to legislators and policymakers on Capitol Hill and in successive US Administrations. This is a source of great envy to other European countries represented in Washington. Some people in Ireland may be under the impression that such access happens of its own accord or that it is a product of our unusual charm as a people. In fact, it is the result of years of cultivation of a vast network of relationships. These relationships must be constantly renewed and supplemented by our already overstretched diplomats.

This brings me to the Irish diaspora, an invaluable resource throughout the world but one that should be cultivated rather than simply exploited. If one spends any time with the Irish abroad one sees quickly that they know a great deal more about us than we know about them. Yet most of our efforts to engage them are focused on pumping out more and more information about ourselves and letting them know what they can do to help us. It might be worth occasionally allowing the traffic to move the other way and to offer them something, like a vote in some elections, perhaps, rather than simply identifying the wealthiest and most obviously useful and exploiting their goodwill.

It is not only the embassies that are overstretched. The hollowing out of the Department's headquarters at Iveagh House means that even if the money is found to send a diplomat abroad to study a language for a long period, often, there is no one suitable available to cover for the job that the diplomat had been doing. In the same way, secondments to international organisations, like the United Nations or the European External Action Service, can be problematic and can put an intolerable strain on resources at home. Many of the Irish officials who went to work in the European institutions in the early years of our EU membership are now approaching retirement age. We should be working in a focused way to encourage Irish officials to work there.

Meagre resources at Iveagh House have a further impact on our diplomatic relations. There are not enough staff to cultivate relationships properly with the foreign diplomatic corps in Dublin, some of whom believe they have a lack of access both to Department officials and politicians in Dublin. This produces a major wasted opportunity to increase the effectiveness of our bilateral relationships, particularly with smaller EU member states, by engaging more intensively with diplomats here.

Another issue, as far as Iveagh House is concerned, is the need for a dedicated policy unit to formulate policy in a long-term way. Again, Iveagh House does not have such a unit but it should. The committee will have noticed that none of the changes I have advocated will be possible unless the Government decides to spend more money on diplomacy. However, I maintain that in a world where the global influences the domestic so powerfully and immediately, it would be money well spent.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Staunton. I will ask you one question briefly before I hand over to Deputy Brendan Smith. You remarked in your introduction on the small number of diplomatic staff we have in the United States. I have been to most of the consular offices and the Washington office as well. Given the big geographical area in the United States, from east to west and from north to south, there are areas where we lack consular offices. Let us consider Texas, which is almost the size of France and a country in itself, as well as various other states. Where do you see potential to establish more consular offices in the United States?

People talk a good deal about Asia at the moment and say it is the place to do business. Jakarta and Bangkok are mentioned as places where we do not have a diplomatic presence. Is it better to have a small network of embassies than no embassies? For example, is a one-man embassy with one local staff member better than none? Is it better to have a presence anyway rather than have no presence?

At the end of your contribution you referred to Iveagh House not cultivating enough of a relationship with diplomats. The members of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade have a special relationship with the foreign diplomats based here. We meet them on a regular basis and they come to meetings regularly as well. It is an area that is working well. You can answer my questions with those of Deputy Smith.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I thank the Chairman. My apologies for missing the earlier part of the meeting. I was at another committee meeting. I welcome Mr. Staunton. In his closing remarks he referred to Irish officials being seconded to international organisations and so on. From my limited experience in government, officials were invaluable to Departments, especially those who had experience in the European Commission, the European Parliament or the Council. They could bring back important corporate knowledge, friendships and the ability to network, valuable resources when working towards decisions and trying to influence decision-making at Commission level, especially at official level. Mr. Staunton made an important point

in that regard.

Reference was made to a vote for the diaspora in elections. The Seanad must be reformed and the Members of the Seanad have always maintained that. Is Mr. Staunton of the opinion that we should have particular representation for members of the diaspora, rather than simply a vote for them?

What happens under EU enlargement? If Turkey joins the EU will the sphere of influence shift dramatically in Europe in a more easterly direction than in the past?

What is Mr. Staunton's view on the United Nations, its architecture, its make-up at Security Council level and its ineffectiveness in many respects when dealing with many of the humanitarian disasters that occur, unfortunately, on a regular basis?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** Deputy Smith suggested the possibility of representation for the diaspora. It is a good idea and there is no question but that in the networked world in which we operate now, having more than 2 million people, or thereabouts, who hold Irish passports and who live abroad is advantageous. Having such a vast reservoir of potential contacts and networks is remarkably valuable. However, we cannot keep taking from these people and yet not offer them some kind of say or representation. We cannot keep telling them that they are altogether important to us and yet make no concrete gesture to show that this is the case.

Deputy Smith spoke of the value of representation in the EU institutions. It is true that we have people picking up expertise and bringing it back but it is also useful for a country to have its nationals represented in those institutions because they are points of contact. They can help to pursue our interests, while not in any sense compromising their primary loyalty to the institutions they serve.

Deputy Smith is correct to ask whether any shift in EU enlargement tends to shift the centre of gravity to some extent. However, it appears to me that Turkish accession is some distance away. Therefore, I do not believe the period this policy review is dealing with, that is, the medium term, is one we will have to think about too carefully in that regard.

Reference was made to outreach to the diplomatic corps based in Dublin. There is no lack of enthusiasm on the part of Irish diplomats. It is simply a lack of resources; there are not enough staff to do the job. Let us suppose we are dealing with a small country where, perhaps, we have a one-person embassy. Then we have two major points of contact. One is our embassy there and the other is that country's embassy here. If we are not exploiting fully the opportunities offered by that country having representation here and engaging with the people concerned, then we are missing an opportunity.

The Chairman referred to our network in the USA. He is correct to suggest that Texas would be a good place to start in terms of expansion and there are other places we could go as well. However, the most important and acute need is in Washington. Not only is the Administration there with all its departments, there are also more than 600 members of Congress. Many of these issues are very complicated and time-consuming. If, for example, Ireland were to be designated a tax haven by the US Congress, which has not happened partly due to successful Irish lobbying in Washington, for the sake of paying for an extra couple of diplomats or officials over there, would that be a prudent saving? I do not think it would be.

Finally, the Chairman asked, in respect of expanding in Asia, whether it was better to have a large number of embassies or to have a certain scale. I think it is possible for an embassy to

be too small. Some of the very small embassies we have in Europe are probably too small to function as full service embassies. Any Irish representation will have a duty and an obligation to take care of any Irish citizen in trouble, and there is an important reporting and representational function where EU matters are concerned, so that does not leave much capacity to do much more if an embassy consists of one person and one member of local staff. In fact, it does not provide much capacity to do even that. If we are planning any expansion of embassies, then the experiences of other small states, most of which have got better funded and better resourced foreign services than we have, are that embassies can be too small.

**Chairman:** Where does that leave the Vatican embassy?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** The Vatican embassy is something of an anomaly. I think it was a mistake to close the embassy to the Holy See. I do not think that these embassies should be opened or closed for sentimental reasons. I think it is a matter of national interest. The reason given was that it was a question of cost. It is difficult to argue that if people say that was the reason it was closed. However, given the influence the Catholic Church continues to exert in our society, regardless of whether one likes that, it seems to me to be a good idea to have one of our representatives there to let us know what is going on.

**Senator David Norris:** I welcome Mr. Staunton and I congratulate him on his very clear, very lucid and hard-hitting critique. It is a critique and that is very welcome. It is not a lot of blather, and I welcome the fact that *The Irish Times* continues to sustain a network of international correspondents around the globe. It has thinned down a bit over the past while, but it is very welcome and I would like Mr. Staunton to pass back to the newspaper that the committee welcomes this continuation. So many newspapers, including *The Irish Times* sometimes, have gone in the lifestyle direction and they are more about how to get fat or thin, what to cook or how to go skiing and so on. Some people might be interested in that, but I certainly am not.

One of the things that is most important is the question of language training. That is fundamental, even as a question of courtesy. People welcome so much the fact that our diplomats will have taken the opportunity, the time and trouble to learn the language. If diplomats are there for communication, how can they do it efficiently if they do not have the language? It should be a prerequisite. This committee might draft some kind of resolution, if people agree, that we strongly support the Minister if he is looking for extra money and some of the other-----

**Chairman:** We will include that in our report.

**Senator David Norris:** That would be absolutely splendid. The next thing is the observation that people thought they were going into the machine age and that everything would be done by twiddleometers, as it were, and other things. I am delighted Mr. Staunton indicated that human contact is vital. We are losing it all over the place. We are losing it in our banks. They do not want people; they want machines and more machines all the time. It does not work and it alienates people. That must be also true in the case of diplomacy.

Mr. Staunton spoke very effectively about our representation in Washington and how valuable it was, and that we have this idea that just because we are lovely, chirpy people, we are loved everywhere, which is all rubbish. It is hard work by diplomats and so on. However, I find that every time there is a change of Government, the Opposition will criticise the visits, the costs, the expenses and so on for days like St. Patrick's Day. I think they are immensely valuable and I wonder if we could make that clear and ask people who are in the Opposition not to be harping on about this for their own personal and party political gain, because it is a really

valuable thing. Mr. Staunton mentioned the diaspora. We all have had appeals from people in the diaspora, including in Argentina. They have their own newspaper and an old hurling club. They have ached to get involved in Ireland and we have spurned them. They are a resource.

I agree 100% with Mr. Staunton's idea of establishing a policy unit, and it would be worthwhile engraving on our notepaper the statement that although economic diplomacy is increasingly important for Ireland as well as other countries, it is a mistake to imagine that activities that have no apparent commercial benefit, such as promoting human rights, supporting efforts at disarmament and playing a full role in multilateral institutions such as the UN and the OECD, are purely altruistic. It is in our interest. That is a very important point. We should bear that in mind.

Due to that statement and the network of people in *The Irish Times*, would it not be appropriate to concentrate a little bit more on situations that are delicate, such as Tibet? Tibet is such a huge issue, not just in terms of human rights and the self-immolation of the Buddhist monks and so on, but also in terms of the utter destruction of natural resources. Now might be a good time to do this, because the Chinese are relaxing some of their policies on forced labour camps and re-education. If there is a space in *The Irish Times*-----

**Chairman:** We are not reporting on what *The Irish Times* should be writing about.

**Senator David Norris:** That is all right. I am just passing it on to-----

**Chairman:** I know, but that is not the reason we are here.

**Senator David Norris:** We are here to expand concern and interest in foreign policy. The Oireachtas is everlastingly complaining that it does not get covered. *The Irish Times* is the one newspaper that continues to cover even that neglected-----

**Chairman:** I was not referring to what the newspaper covers, but to the content of what the Senator was talking about.

**Senator David Norris:** That is all right. I do not mind whether it is reported.

**Chairman:** Thank you. I call Deputy Durkan.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** My apologies for arriving late. There was another committee meeting on at the same time. I read Mr. Staunton's submission and the points he made are important in the context of the review which is taking place. The references to the diaspora are important. While I do not agree with the suggestion on voting, something we discussed over many years, I strongly agree with Mr. Staunton's point about identification with the diaspora in a way that is seen to recognise their position, and in a way that is helpful to them rather than exploitative of them. Anything we do in that area is recognition of some degree of responsibility for them. That is the way it should be, because if we were running our show in the way it should be run, we would not have had such a large diaspora accumulate over the years. One of the things we need to learn is how to plan our economy in the future to ensure fewer people are forced to go abroad. If people wish to go of their own accord, then in the modern world we must provide for that.

One of the things we have learned in recent years is that the diaspora have become very influential abroad. It was in the recent times of difficulty that we recognised the full extent of their importance. It was acknowledged by the former President Mary Robinson that we needed



to recognise the existence of our diaspora and that we had an ongoing responsibility for them, rather than resiling from them and pretending they did not exist until we unexpectedly heard from them at Christmas and such times. It is crucially important that is done.

On the issue of embassies, I have always held the view that the diplomatic service has an important role to play. It reflects the image of the country, the integrity, role and values of the country and can impart those values on the international arena in a way which is beneficial to the country and also in a way that nobody else can. It is important to remember that we have been blessed with the calibre of the people who know their job and do it well. Internationally, they are recognised easily. Anywhere one goes one will find recognition for the Irish diplomat in a way that is not always evident and obvious with others.

The role of the diplomatic service now in the context of foreign policy will be greater than in the past. The world is a much smaller place. Travel times have shrunk enormously. What happens here in the morning happens in a couple of hours' time in another part of the globe. We need to gear ourselves for the modern era, the digital era for want of a better description, in terms of our foreign policy.

I mentioned previously about Ireland being a neutral country. Once upon a time we used to preface all our remarks that Ireland was a neutral country as if we were second-class citizens. I am glad to note that, generally speaking, we do not do that any more. There is a significant improvement in that area. We have a very important and meaningful role to play on the international stage and that can be done by simply stating our case as we are and being positive on the global stage. That can be done in terms of trade, for which the Department has responsibility, to a greater extent. I recognise it was stated yesterday by Mr. Noel Dorr that was always the case, but there is a greater emphasis on it now, and there has to be because the greater need arose in the past few years. As a result of that greater need, it gives us a great opportunity in this review to push all the buttons, in the type of situation referred to by Senator David Norris and others, and to point out all the areas in which we think we can improve and raise the bar that little bit more. That would be hugely beneficial to ourselves as a country, our diaspora and the international community.

I mentioned yesterday that our peacekeeping forces were recognised worldwide. They are recognised as being experts in that particular area. In the same way our trading sectors have shown in the past couple of years that when called upon, they can do as well as anywhere else in the world and better. Instead of being negative and resiling from the situation that presents itself, each Department, the diplomats and the progressive sectors of the media have all risen to the occasion. I will not refer to the individual medial outlets other than to congratulate them.

**Chairman:** Would Mr. Staunton like to answer those questions?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** Yes. I thank Senator Norris for his remarks about *The Irish Times* coverage. I am sorry he does not like the skiing sections.

With regard to St. Patrick's Day, he is absolutely right that it is an extraordinary opportunity. I was in Washington for four years. There is not a single other country, even its largest and closest allies, that has an annual appointment with the President and with the Speaker of the House. The number of hours the Taoiseach spends with the President that day is utterly ludicrous. Years ago, I recall speaking to a lobbyist in Washington and asking how much he charged to arrange that and he said he charged \$2 million but that he would not be able to deliver it. It is something that money cannot buy. The idea that we should complain about our officials going

there, given that, through no fault of our own, it is something from which we benefit, seems absurd.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** On a point of information, our party in opposition has not criticised trade missions or Ministers going on St. Patrick's Day business. We actually welcome and encourage it. That may have been the situation in the past but not now.

**Senator David Norris:** Good. I am glad to hear it. I remember it clearly in the past.

**Chairman:** Senator Norris, please.

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** On the issue of language training, it does not exist in a vacuum. I mention the fact that one of the difficulties is that even if a decision were to be made, say, to send somebody away for a year for full-time training in Arabic or whatever, because of the staffing shortage, it would be quite difficult to find somebody to do his or her job here or wherever the person was located. The other issue is that of valuing diplomacy as a profession. It is a very good thing that people from the Department of Foreign Affairs spend time in other Departments and people from other Departments spend time in the Department of Foreign Affairs. The fact is that diplomats require a particular skill set which is unique to the job they do and they are not interchangeable with other public servants. It probably does involve more than simply funding the language training. The British Foreign Office recently increased its language training budget by 30% and has reopened its language school which it had closed down. There is no reason we could not benefit from the fact that it has a language school nearby and available to us and, perhaps, that is one of those areas of British-----

**Senator David Norris:** Could they have it in Ireland?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** They could, indeed, perhaps.

**Senator David Norris:** And in the Department.

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** They could, although some of these languages require very lengthy and intensive training if possible.

To return to what Deputy Durkan said regarding the diaspora, he mentioned that many of these are very influential but, of course, we should not forget those who are not influential. We have a responsibility towards people who are not influential and who are connected with us. It is also the case that those who were not influential can be influential in the future. One of the occasions I remember that - it was most moving - was during one of the visits by Mrs. Mary McAleese to the US when she visited Butte, Montana, where many Irish people had gone to work in tin mines a century or more ago. These people sent money back to Ireland for many years. After the Second World War the tin mines closed and in the past few decades the place has become quite impoverished. She arrived at a town that was defeated and demoralised. Her presence there, even though the people were not terribly influential, was so effective, so powerful, and so welcome and made me feel very happy and proud as an Irishman.

**Chairman:** I call Deputy Eric Byrne.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** I thank Mr. Denis Staunton for his contribution. I have read his paper. I will start with the last part, which states that none of what he says is of any use unless financial resources are available. He was critical of the decision to close the embassy in the Holy See. We also closed the embassies in Timor and Tehran. I am concerned that we may quickly forget

the economic crisis experienced by this country and the obligation on a Department to take its portion of cuts, just as every other Department did, and that this is the background to the closures. To this day, it still strikes me as incongruous that we have an embassy in Rome but for some silly old formula, applied by the Vatican, one cannot use the same building for servicing the issues of the Holy See even though we have an embassy in Rome, right beside the Vatican.

One will notice, as politicians around this table, particularly at the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, more in the past than at present, that they have worked closely with the committee around the Irish Aid end of things and the poor blacks in Africa suffering from starvation and how we respond to world events, emergency aid and so on. The Irish Aid element was more prominent in the past than it is now. With the add on of trade to responsibilities of the Department of Foreign Affairs - we are all politicians, none with a business background - none of the staff who manages this committee is a specialist in trade, does Mr. Staunton have an opinion on whether the discussion on restructuring and policy review might eliminate the trade element? One is reading in the newspapers every other day of the week reports of those on trade missions. The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Richard Bruton, is on a trade mission, the Tánaiste is also out on trade missions. Everybody is on trade missions. Is there an umbrella? Are we the umbrella? Who is handling trade? Is the trade portfolio appropriate to the work on foreign affairs? I know there is a very important link between trade activities and embassies run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Call a spade a spade, I do not think those of us around this table focus very much on the trade element of the structure of the "Joint Committee of Foreign Affairs and Trade". What is Mr. Staunton's opinion on that?

Mr. Staunton's paper was fascinating in so far as for the first time I have discovered that those whom I hold in the highest of esteem are the diplomatic corps, having interacted with them throughout the world. When we had an embassy in Tehran, the ambassador spoke Farsi, in our embassy in Beijing, the ambassador speaks Mandarin, but they receive no incentive payments. That is absolutely disgraceful. If we are considering a policy review, I argue most strongly that the ability of our diplomatic corps to work in countries that speak Spanish, French and Asian languages is that staff go to the personal trouble of learning a language on top of their duties as professional diplomats. They then should be rewarded. It is an important stage in the development of Ireland *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world because it has been pointed out that the West and America are in decline. I have argued this point before. The area of economic growth is Asia, mainly led by China. Our education system must be seriously at fault. We have bilateral agreements with many countries and invariably embassy officials will tell us about the quota of 500 students who may go to Mexico and *vice versa*. Almost all non-English speaking countries with which we have student exchange programmes are taken up by the non-English speaking students. Ireland is abysmal in sending our quota of students to these countries. I often use as a comparison the parallel between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the international office in Dublin City Council. It might be worth noting that Dublin City Council is twinned with Beijing. As part of the memorandum of understanding three officials from the Beijing local authority have worked in Dublin City Council for ten weeks. They have just returned home. I would hazard a guess that it will be impossible for Dublin City Council to send three local authority staff to Beijing. This is what should be done. We must do it.

I have engaged with the OSCE as a short-term election monitor and am familiar with some of the countries that we often criticise around this table. Let us take Ukraine as an example. So many of these countries that are learning democracy give their citizens a vote through their embassies overseas. I used to think simplistically that would be the solution to our engagement

with the diaspora. Let me put a question because the witness suggests that nothing can happen unless extra resources are available. How do we use the resources? What resources are we to use to engage with our diaspora? What would it cost to try to facilitate the Irish in America to partake in a voting system? The paperwork is significant. The embassies are already undermanned. Would that be the best approach, or should we adopt the French system, where by a French citizen in Ireland, Ms H  l  ne Conway-Mouret would have engaged with the French in England and Ireland and was elected to the Senate initially and now a Minister? Is that a better way or should we be resourcing and supporting the GAA, which has a phenomenal engagement with the diaspora throughout the world? I remember being in Milwaukee which has and a major Irish musical festival. Should the concept of working through Irish organisations abroad be encouraged as the way to look after our diaspora?

We have been debating the question of where to target resources for a long time. We keep mentioning the BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India and China. The members of this committee will visit India sometime this year.

A decision was taken on economic grounds to close three embassies. It is vital to build up a network. Are we trying to be bigger than we actually are? Is it possible to develop in the way we desire and build a network of well resourced embassies in the present climate?

**Deputy Dan Neville:** I welcome Mr. Denis Staunton. I will be careful not to overly repeat what has been said already. I believe the activities of all of our embassies are very important in presenting an image of Ireland abroad. I can give examples of how important this role is. The importance of making links at government level with other member states helped to bring about some positive developments for this country. That was actively done by the Government. One can generalise that argument in a broader sense in terms of our international relations with other countries and other people, not alone for trade but for other policy areas, such as human rights and international relations. There are sensitivities. Quite often we experience the need for delicacy. Last week we had a trade delegation to the Middle East and there was some controversy around it. There are sensitivities around it as well.

The representatives of the chambers of commerce were very emphatic when they appeared before the committee that no Minister should be in Ireland to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. It offers such an opportunity to promote trade and business with this country. Does Mr. Staunton have a view on whether the embassy in the Vatican should be reopened? We have much contact with the Republic of China, Taipei. Obviously we do not have diplomatic relations, as there are international reasons for not having them, but there is a friendship with their very good diplomats. Has Mr. Staunton a view on how that relationship could be developed? Has he information on how relations are developing between the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China?

**Chairman:** Before I call on Deputy Crowe, I ask the Vice Chairman to take the Chair as I must deal with a matter in the D  il. I should be back in a few minutes, but in case of a delay may I put a question to the witnesses?

The role of parliamentarians in foreign policy has not been mentioned yet. Will they consider what role Parliament could have and, in particular, a role for this committee?

*Deputy Bernard J. Durkan took the Chair.*

**Deputy Se  n Crowe:** It is very positive that no matter where one goes in the world, there

is goodwill toward the Irish people. We have no negative colonial past. People seem to like our sense of humour and our music. We are not seen as a threat or not perceived as people with a hidden agenda.

It can be argued that we have a small pot of money to invest in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It is a question of how best to use the available resources.

People spoke about the three embassies which were closed, ostensibly for financial reasons but I would argue the Iranian closure was probably more to do with global politics rather than financial reasons. The closure of the Vatican Embassy was probably due to other reasons also. I suppose a way around that would be an opening in the Vatican. That would probably be the simplest way around it and it would save a lot of money. One could probably argue there are historical links with the building there but at a time when this country is supposed to be on its knees financially, perhaps it is one of the buildings we should consider selling off and perhaps investing in something else. There is an advantage to owning rather than renting. However, this country faces fiscal problems. I do not know how people would feel if we started to open embassies all over the world if there is not some sort of financial benefit, trade benefit or otherwise. It must be done sensibly and slowly and explained to people.

The United States, St. Patrick's Day and the amount of work involved was mentioned. I was there recently and spoke to different groups, some of which were quite critical. In the past, the embassy - this probably applies not only to the embassy in the United States - was not doing enough in terms of outreach. We were relying on the same individuals, such as the "Ted Kennedys" in the United States, and we needed to reach out to the new kids on the block, such as the Tea Party, and that we need to build up a profile. I suppose that is one of the positives we found in terms of immigration reform. We are pushing right out and are going to the mid-west, the south and into virgin territory in terms of Irish connections. There is the Scots Irish connection also.

Could we do the same in other countries? We have a large diaspora in Argentina, where there are people with German and Spanish backgrounds. We need to use that goodwill and the diaspora as perhaps a listening posts in terms of what is happening in countries in regard to politics, the economy and so on. Is there any way to tie them in? Again, there would not be a huge cost factor.

What was said about language jumps out. There should be opportunities but I am not sure about the monetary aspect. If people have languages, I would like to think they would move up the ranks more quickly in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There needs to be a mechanism for people to learn languages but I would be horrified if I thought somebody in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade had to pay for language classes. If that is the case, it needs to be looked at.

I refer to the Scottish issue and the unpredictable consequences in terms of settlements and so on. I would be more worried about a passive approach from the British and Irish Governments in regard to the North than the possible break up in regard to Scotland or Wales. I would be interested to hear Mr. Staunton's views.

The importance of European matters was mentioned. In terms of scrutiny, there is so much material coming out and one would not be able to go through all of the documents. We are supposed to scrutinise such material. A greater role for the Seanad in regard to scrutiny was mentioned yesterday. Does Mr. Staunton have any ideas in regard to that?

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** Mr. Staunton may have covered some of the points I will raise and, if so, he can tell me and I will check the record later. Through my membership of this committee and as head of the Irish section of AWEPA, I have had a number of dealings with our embassies in African countries, including Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Ghana and Mozambique, and I acknowledge and compliment the Irish embassy staff in each of those countries. I am not saying anything about the other countries but they are the four about which I know and I have seen at first-hand the work they do. Certainly in the case of Mozambique, several members of the staff in the embassy speak Portuguese which is a real advantage to them.

I was part of the delegation which has just come back from Iran. All those we met pointed out how disappointed they were that the Irish embassy closed. It would make things much easier in terms of trade and human rights, which we discussed, if the embassy was reopened as soon as possible.

The first question is a general one about Mr. Staunton’s time working abroad. How does he think Ireland is seen as an international actor? I was interested in what he said about tax havens. We have been seen as a tax haven and I do not think we are doing enough on the tax justice issue or have a strong enough voice for countries, in particular in Africa which are at the mercy of multinational companies which, for a variety of reasons, are not working the terms of agreements as they should to the benefit of those countries. Sometimes it is due to lack of capacity but other times it is because of corruption. We could be a stronger voice when it comes to companies paying their corporate tax.

On the debt issue, we have seen very immoral deals between African countries, the IMF and the World Bank, which have decimated native industries in some of those countries and have left them in really precarious positions. Are we a strong enough voice in that regard?

Yesterday, I asked Mr. Dorr if human rights and trade are compatible. Do we ignore human rights when we look at trade agreements? Should there not be an obligation on us, when we are negotiating trade agreements that, at the very least, workers’ rights are included, whether decent working conditions or a decent wage? They should be part of it. I know it is something which the President, Michael D. Higgins, was very strong on when he was a member of this committee. One hears the argument that if we are to trade, we have to forget about human rights. I do not think we can but I would be interested to hear Mr. Staunton’s opinion on that.

We discussed the UN yesterday and I think the general conclusion was that it is the best we have got but its ineffectiveness is seen more and more, certainly on the political side. We saw what happened in Bosnia and we said it would never happen again but it happened in Rwanda and again we said it would never happen again. Look at what is happening in Syria now. Where are the voices on that? Ireland is on the UN Human Rights Council but can we do more? I would be interested to hear Mr. Staunton’s response.

**Senator Mark Daly:** I welcome Mr. Staunton. He made some very valid points on the diaspora. We seem to aim at the well-off and well-to-do and seem to have a policy of extracting as much as we can out of them and other than St. Patrick’s Day, that is about it.

I would like Mr. Staunton’s view on extending the vote, on which he touched. The Constitutional Convention seemed to pose a radical proposal to extend the vote in the presidential election. However, of the 115 countries which give votes to their citizens overseas, only eight restrict it to presidential elections. Of those eight, they are all executive presidents. What Ireland proposes to do - I do not think we will do it in the lifetime of this Government - is to give

the lowest expression of democratic representation to its citizens in the North and overseas in a presidential election. The role of the President is largely ceremonial. We talk about extending voting rights to our diaspora, and possibly a reformed Seanad would be a way to do that. I do not believe Members of the Dáil would allow membership to be decided on by anybody living outside their constituencies.

I refer to the concept of a Minister or a junior Minister for the Irish overseas and the diaspora, possibly tied into trade. Other countries have one. Israel has moved that ministry into its prime minister's office, such is the importance it places on its diaspora. Countries with a large diaspora such as India and China have ministers for the diaspora. We have one of the largest diasporas in the world, yet we do not have a Minister for the diaspora. We have a Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade who deals with every issue in the world. We have what Kingsley Aikins referred to as a national asset, yet we do not deploy enough resources to it. We do not have a co-ordinating Minister who would be a touchstone for the diaspora. If someone has an issue in Boston, he or she to go to the consulate, the consulate might have to refer it to the ambassador, the ambassador will bring it to the foreign affairs and Irish overseas sections, which might bring it to the Secretary General who might bring it to the attention of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Every citizen should have direct access to a Minister who is representing him or her. Does Mr. Staunton believe that is something that should arise out of this White Paper, which would be a solid commitment by this Government, or any future Government, that Ministers would not just show up at meet and greet events on St. Patrick's Day? I have always said that we should send out every Minister and every Minister of State on St. Patrick's Day. As the witness would know in Washington, we have an opportunity that countries would give their first born to have in terms of our access to the American system but also the systems in Australia and New Zealand, which always welcome us.

I raise a smaller issue which the witness might respond to given his experience in Washington. The Haass negotiations in the North have not been successful. For the past two years we have not had a counterpart ambassador here. Ambassador Rooney was an excellent ambassador who travelled to all counties. I know there are many issues in Washington that have little to do with us and over which we have little control, but what effect is the lack of an appointment of a United States ambassador to Ireland having on us in terms of trying to resolve the issues in the North, and what effect is it having on investment?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** To start with the last point, I am not sure it has made all that much difference whether a US ambassador is appointed. From what I understand, and I am not there now but on the basis of visits I have made to the US and conversations I have had with people, I do not believe it has any meaning. A number of other countries, including some large and important countries close to the United States, did not have an ambassador appointed for over a year. It has been about two years here, and that is an unusually long period, but I do not believe it says anything about the US attitude towards Ireland. Given there is a fairly effective US embassy in Dublin, I do not believe the lack of an appointment has made that much difference in terms of investment or anything like that.

On the general issue of the diaspora and the suggestion made by Senator Daly, and the various options Deputy Byrne and Deputy Crowe spoke about, I am not sure what the answer is with regard to what Ireland should do. Many of the ideas put forward are very good. It is a question of first evaluating, perhaps in this foreign policy review, the importance to us of this network of people and how we can best engage these people and give them some sense of ownership of what is happening here as well as calling on them to help us.

That brings me to the bigger point, and as Deputy Byrne suggested, it is the most difficult issue, namely, the business of money. I would argue that we must have a whole of Government approach to the fact we are a country that exports everything we produce and imports almost everything we consume. It is operating in an environment where global capital is not only global; it is mobile. Everything is moving so fast in this particular way that it will be impossible for us to pursue our interests properly or govern ourselves as well as we should if we do not invest more in foreign representation.

To give the Senator another example, leaving aside issues of trade, there is the business of representation in European Union capitals. Since the economic crisis, we have seen a massive and dramatic integration and pooling of sovereignty in the European Union, particularly on economic issues. That simply means we share the mastery of our own fate with other people, and the voices of people in Tallinn, Riga, Prague, Copenhagen and Lisbon matter as much as the voices of those in many other countries. I would argue that we should administer ourselves efficiently in the world we live in today. We cannot operate the kind of budgetary policy with regard to foreign affairs that we would have operated 50 years ago because we live in a different world. More of our world is connected with the rest of the world.

Deputy O'Sullivan spoke about the way we are perceived. There is no question, and Deputy Crowe mentioned it, that we are fortunate in terms of the way we are perceived, generally speaking, around the world. To those who are aware of it, the issue of tax, not just the traditional issue of the level of our corporate tax, and the discovery that major digital giants have been able to use our tax regime to effectively escape paying tax anywhere on vast sums, is damaging to our reputation. I am pleased the Government has taken some action with regard to easing some of the most grievous elements of that regime but it is something of which we must be aware.

At the same time, the Deputy is right that our engagement in terms of development aid is to our benefit, not only in terms of the way we are perceived as a responsible actor in the world but also because many of the countries that have been our traditional aid partners are becoming more economically developed. Without trying to tie our aid to trade, we can be beneficiaries of the fact that we have been investing resources within that area.

With regard to the embassies, if it were up to me, I am not sure I would have closed the Tehran embassy, but on the issue of the Holy See, there is curiosity with regard to the Vatican's rule whereby it insists we must have a separate ambassador. I imagine that is because it expects if it did not, it would not have an embassy as countries would appoint the ambassador to Rome. However, other countries have taken ingenious approaches to reducing the cost of having this embassy. It is important, and it is not a question of how one views the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland, that we should be in a position to monitor what is happening in the Vatican as closely as possible. That may be more true now than ever that the Vatican appears to be going through something of a change.

To return to the question the Chairman posed on the role of parliamentarians, it is a very important one. This committee plays an important role in holding the Government to account with regard to foreign policy but also in exploring issues such as those we have been discussing today. The members also play an important role on behalf of the people in terms of their travels to other countries where they can learn first-hand what is happening, particularly in some of the more obscure countries that are under-reported, even in *The Irish Times*, and from where it is difficult to report in many cases. It is also the issue the Chairman mentioned earlier about members making themselves available to representatives of other countries here. That, too, can enhance our relationships with important partners.



**Vice Chairman:** I thank Mr. Staunton for his contribution. We will use much of what he has stated here today in our report. It was very useful.

*Deputy Pat Breen resumed the Chair.*

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** I am sorry but could Mr. Staunton give me his opinion of the add-on of trade to foreign affairs?

**Mr. Denis Staunton:** I understand what the Deputy is saying. I am not sure but on balance it is probably a welcome move to combine trade and foreign affairs. Sometimes one needs to get the embassy involved if one wants to make a trade deal. Our relationships with many of the countries with which we trade are complicated. What one does not want is somebody bulldozing in with some kind of commercial proposition which can upset a delicate balance that may be more important to our interests. All in all, if they are not together, and I do not think that there is a problem in their being together, they need to work closely together.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Staunton for his wide-ranging and interesting discussion. It is very useful for us on the committee to have somebody with his experience here this afternoon. It will be useful when we present our report to the Department.

I invite Mr. Graham Butler from the University of Copenhagen to make his presentation. We received his submission before Christmas and it made very interesting reading. On that basis the committee decided to invite him to make a formal presentation this afternoon. He is one of the youngest witnesses to have appeared before us. He will give us a very different view of how policy should change.

**Mr. Graham Butler:** I thank the Chairman and the members of the committee for their invitation to address the committee today. I have distributed my paper, which is quite extensive. I will speak to it rather than read it in full. I listened carefully yesterday to some of the comments by Mr. Noel Dorr and Professor Ben Tonra and today to Mr. Staunton. I hope their comments and mine will form part of the committee's submission to the review to be submitted in three weeks' time.

The three speakers before me have gone through the different elements of foreign policy on a broad spectrum. I will focus on one issue, the parliamentary oversight and scrutiny by the Oireachtas, this committee and the Joint Committee on European Affairs. There is no lack of appetite at this committee to be more involved in foreign policy, which is important. When making the submission, there is no point in the committee's asking to be more involved if the committee is not willing to do the work that flows from that.

I have brought here today the last White Paper the Department produced, in 1996. It was the first and it has been 18 years since that review. As the Chairman pointed out, I was quite young when it was produced. It was entitled Challenges and Opportunities Abroad. It is 350 pages long and references to the Oireachtas, the Dáil, Seanad and committees are relatively few and far between. There is one short chapter at the very end entitled Democratic Accountability of Foreign Policy. At the end of last year, when the Department issued the public consultation document for the new review of foreign policy, although it was relatively short it did not refer to any new insight into parliamentary involvement in Irish foreign policy. I hope that is not a sign that in the next White Paper the Department intends to move away from that, rather that it will incorporate it throughout the next document instead of sticking the parliamentary oversight into one chapter.

I noticed from the 2012 work programme for this committee that “the committee is committed to a constructive contribution to the committee system in the Houses of the Oireachtas and to continue to assert the proper oversight and accountability role of the Legislature in respect of the Executive”. This is very important for the committee. This review is the perfect opportunity to move that expression forward. The speaker before me pointed out that there are several things the committee already does, such as engaging in the scrutiny of EU proposals and communications, discussing policy issues of the Department and going through the long-term strategy goals. It is involved in the protection and promotion of human rights, the accountability of the Irish Aid programme, the annual Vote allocation for the Department as part of the budgetary process, engagement with fellow parliamentarians from other EU member states and from states around the world, and the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade comes here before the Foreign Affairs Council meeting to discuss that meeting. The committee does all these things, which is much of what the Government policy document envisaged it doing, as set out in Chapter 16 of the last White Paper. This committee had been formed only two and a half or three years before the White Paper was published, so it was in its infancy at that time.

The new White Paper, whether it lasts for ten or 20 years, provides a good opportunity for the committee to envisage its involvement in the future and for setting out new ideas for what it could do, while continuing to do what it does already. Yesterday, the Government produced its legislative programme for its spring and summer sessions. There is no foreign policy legislation coming forward, which is not unusual. Foreign policy is distinctly different from other public policy areas in that it is not based on legislation. It has to be examined and scrutinised in other ways and this committee has a role in that scrutiny. Foreign policy is Executive-dominated and so has to be scrutinised in a different way.

My paper is approximately 7,000 words or 28 pages long. I will pick a few items from it that I think the committee should prioritise. First is the time between the dissolution of the Dáil and the setting up of the committee in the next Dáil. Sometimes this can take six months, for example, in 2011 there was a change of Government. The Dáil was dissolved in January 2011. The general election was held in February and the new Government was formed in March 2011. There were Seanad elections in April, and in May some of the Senators were appointed. The committee structure was set up in June. It is not unusual to have a period of six months during which foreign policy, which is not based on legislation, does not have proper parliamentary oversight. The problem that creates is that, although the Parliament may not be conducting its oversight, there is a Government throughout that period, the Civil Service continues its work, the EU does not stop working – it has 27 other member states to deal with - so there must be a new way to scrutinise foreign policy during those periods. This affects other policy areas too, but because there is no legislation in the foreign policy area, it is particularly important.

In the referendum tied in with the presidential election in October 2011, it was proposed to constitutionalise the Oireachtas committees. As we all know, that was defeated for several reasons which I will not go into today. The only reference in Bunreacht na hÉireann to Oireachtas committees is to the committees on privilege in each House. There is absolutely no reference to a committee such as this one, a joint committee. That makes them inherently weak if they do not have a constitutional base, which is quite different from the situation in some other member states. The committee could consider this in the long term. In Denmark, not only are some of the committees constitutionalised but also, since 1953, the foreign affairs committee has been enshrined within the constitution.

We all know that the Minister comes in here before meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council

and engages with members on upcoming proposals from some of his colleagues in Brussels or Luxembourg. The Minister does not have to receive a mandate. There is literally an exchange of views between members. The committee cannot mandate a Minister or the Government to hold a position on certain things. He can take the committee's advice on board and go with it or discard it. After the meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, generally, the Minister does not come back into this committee and report on any of the workings or compromises he has made or on developments in particular areas.

That does not happen. Again, that is very different to the position in other EU member states in that they have to come forward and update members on some of the progression. At the moment, after the Foreign Affairs Council meets once a month, the Minister comes in and talks about what will happen at the next meeting as opposed to what happened the last time. It is different. I know this poses some practical difficulties for the committee in terms of time, and there would be a lot more meetings. For example, there are more committee meetings in this Dáil term than ever before, which poses a problem, although nothing that cannot be looked at.

The other proposal which I believe should be prioritised is engaging ambassador-designates. This is a new idea but it is standard practice in many other democracies. For example, the committee spoke earlier about the way there has been no US ambassador to Ireland. Of course, in the United States, when an ambassador is appointed to a country, that person has to appear before the foreign affairs committee of the United States Senate to be confirmed. It is a good accountability mechanism and, in general, most people are confirmed without particular problems. There may be some diplomats in Iveagh House who would choke at this idea of having their ambassadors appear before this committee before they are appointed, but I point out that this idea is not dissimilar to current Government policy where chairpersons-designate of State boards and public bodies appear before the respective sectoral committees. It is not so much a confirmation process but an exchange of viewpoints before the person takes up his or her position.

It is something the committee could explore. Again, there are practical issues. Ireland has some 50 embassies, seven or eight consulates and a number of delegations to international institutions. Obviously, it is not practical to have an exchange of views with every single one in public session, but there could be a starting point here for selecting a few important international institutions, like the EU and the UN, or some important trading partners that Ireland has close ties with, like the United Kingdom and the United States, in order to start the process. It is nothing unusual and it might ruffle a few feathers, if anything.

The next point I will make is in regard to committee resources. Over time, committee resources have generally increased. In other member states there are some parliamentary committees that have resources to back them up that are as powerful as the Departments they oversee. We all know this is not the case for the Oireachtas and, of course, the comparability of the Oireachtas is quite weak in all sectoral areas for oversight and scrutiny of the Government. Things have changed, however. There is the Oireachtas Library and Research Service, which does excellent work and is well placed to support the committees in the work they do. Of course, there was a time when there was no permanent committee secretariat, and this has changed for the better. However, recent Government initiatives such as longer Dáil sitting hours, combined with a reduction in the overall number of staff working in the Oireachtas, can hamper the work, and, of course, the current financial circumstances do not permit additional resources to be given to any committee at this time. However, that will not always be the case. I know there might be a case for administrative officers joining the Houses of the Oireachtas

next year and, of course, when more financial resources are available over the next period of the White Paper, the committee should look at attaining further resources to complement the work the existing committee staff do.

While it is not coming immediately, there is likely to be treaty change in the future. The Lisbon treaty has been in place for some four years and the European Council has not even put together an intergovernmental conference to look at new treaty change to replace the Treaty of Lisbon. However, when such a move does take place, this will have implications for foreign policy, both in the European Union and for Ireland. Before the Lisbon treaty, there was the constitutional treaty that was defeated in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, which ultimately postponed the referendum in Ireland. Foreign policy was to have substantially changed under that treaty. However, when it was reformulated into the Lisbon treaty, a lot of the foreign policy elements were watered down, which gave us the new role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy which, of course, also has the double-hatted role of also being Vice President of the European Commission. This watering down is likely to re-emerge when the next treaty comes forward in the sense that there is more than likely going to be a push by some member states to move this role of High Representative all the way up to a Union foreign minister, to have something comparable to the US Secretary of State. That empowering of the position in the future is something this committee should take account of, including in regard to the implications it will have for the abilities of the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to be an actor throughout the world.

Much has been achieved in terms of oversight and the committee is doing more than it has ever done. However, member states of comparative size do it a lot better. This review of foreign policy and external relations is a great opportunity for the committee to seize. I take it the committee will be putting together a submission and, indeed, it made one in 1996. While I do not have that submission on hand, I am sure it fed very well into some of the Chapter 16 proposals that were contained within that White Paper.

I would love to continue on some of the other elements but I have included them in my paper. I thank the committee once again for the invitation and I look forward to the questions.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much for your powerful and well-researched presentation, which had many good ideas. You obviously put a lot of work and time into it, which we greatly appreciate. As all members wish to speak, I will let them ask their questions and you can then reply to them all. I call Deputy Smith.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** I welcome Mr. Butler's presentation and the detailed paper. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to go through his paper in detail but I look forward to reading it later today. I have several comments. How does Mr. Butler see the European External Action Service developing? Does he see it impacting on our foreign policy in the future? It has not been a great success to date but there have been some recent improvements. For the longer term, how does Mr. Butler see it evolving?

We will never have effective scrutiny of EU legislation unless there is a specific role for Seanad Éireann. The reality is that the workload on Members of Dáil Éireann and on committees is very onerous and there is not the opportunity to give EU legislation the scrutiny it deserves.

Mr. Butler mentions on page 9 of his paper that "the Irish Parliament, historically at least, has demonstrated disinterest in EU and international affairs". I do not agree with that.

**Mr. Graham Butler:** It is not my quote.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** Is it from Mr. O'Halpin?

**Mr. Graham Butler:** That is correct.

**Deputy Brendan Smith:** My apologies. Strength of our parliamentary system and our political system is that, by and large, the political system supports the Minister and the Government of the day while they are on international business, whether it is at EU level or otherwise, although that is not to say we do not have our nuances and some differences of emphasis. By and large, however, the Minister doing business abroad on behalf of the State gets the support of the political system at home, which is the way it should be. I remember one European Commissioner saying to me that it was the first time he was in a parliament where the Government was supported by all of the Opposition parties in regard to particular issues, which he said was most unusual. That has its strengths.

Does Mr. Butler consider we should be putting a message out about the need to review the international organisations, in particular their workings and their architecture? He listened to Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan speak earlier in regard to the UN, about which I also spoke yesterday, including how it is structured and how, sadly, it has not been effective enough. Should we be more vigorous and more bullish in regard to putting a message out that we would like to see the international organisations, to which we subscribe and are members of, play a more effective role in many of the huge challenges and difficulties that face people in many countries, particularly where there is hunger, starvation and poverty?

On another issue, in my experience, climate change does not get much address in foreign policy. Is it an issue that should be brought to some extent under our foreign policy?

**Deputy Seán Crowe:** I welcome Mr. Butler. I like the idea of bringing the ambassadors before the committee. This is the first occasion on which that suggestion has been made. Not only would their coming before us be helpful for the ambassadors, it would also provide the committee with an overview in respect of various matters. There is a need to recognise the sensitive nature of the diplomatic job which ambassadors do, but it would be positive if we extended invitations to them to come before us. For example, we could invite the US ambassador to appear before us to discuss immigration reform or those from Brazil, China and Russia to discuss improving trade relations. We would not have to subject them to a grilling, rather our proceedings could be framed as a conversation designed to allow us to get to know one another. It would be very useful if ambassadors from the countries to which Ireland gives aid came before the committee in order that we might have oversight with regard to what is happening and be kept abreast of developments. I am definitely in favour of the suggestion.

On the Minister of the day coming before the committee, that is the norm in many European countries. It is also the norm in such countries that the chair of the foreign affairs committee is a member of the Opposition and that there is a balance in the context of composition, namely, that there are equal numbers of Opposition and Government members. Would our guests see it as a positive move if we were to follow the example of our European neighbours? I am of the view that it would probably make Parliament more democratic if that were to happen. People may frown upon the idea that the Opposition might have a majority on this committee. However, it must be remembered that the number of occasions on which matters are put to a vote at meetings of this committee are few and far between. I am of the view that following the example of our European counterparts would be a positive move. Is Mr. Butler in a position to provide

positive examples of member states where that is the norm?

I agree with the suggestion that membership of Oireachtas committees should be open to MEPs, particularly in the context of their knowledge with regard to European legislation, etc. MEPs are allowed to attend our meetings-----

**Chairman:** Yes, that is correct.

**Deputy Seán Crowe:** -----but they do not do so. In my opinion, they should be allowed to attend meetings of all committees and not just this one. On the subject of MEPs, perhaps those in the North could also be invited to attend. A relationship exists and we tend to sell Ireland on an all-island basis. Even if they never took up the option, it would be a positive move to invite MEPs from the North to attend and take part in our meetings.

Mr. Butler referred to the fact that there is no Irish representative on the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament. All Irish MEPs are members of various groups within the Parliament which have representatives on that committee. Perhaps we could invite people from some of those European groupings to come before the committee to discuss particular matters. I thank Mr. Butler for what is an extremely interesting paper.

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** I thank Mr. Butler for such a comprehensive paper. In the context of his comment that “the Taoiseach is the highest representative of Government and, accordingly, has a strong input into the formulation of Irish foreign policy and its delivery”, will Mr. Butler outline his views on the Taoiseach’s remarks in respect of the separation of trade and human rights during his visit to Saudi Arabia? Were those remarks both predictable and clumsy? I have also discussed this matter with Mr. Noel Dorr and Mr. Denis Staunton in the context of whether it is possible to align trade interests and human rights.

Asylum and migration are two of the great humanitarian causes of the modern era. I wonder how we will be judged in respect of our efforts in respect of both. A recent report indicates that Sweden has taken in the largest number of refugees from Syria. Ireland is very low down in the context of the number of refugees it has taken in from that country. Will Mr. Butler indicate how he thinks Ireland will be judged with regard to its efforts in respect of asylum and migration?

Mr. Butler is based in Denmark. Professor Joseph Lee, the historian, voiced an opinion about Denmark and Ireland to the effect that the former was pursuing a much more independent and co-operative small farming social model than Ireland. I know that Denmark is a member of NATO and I am not advocating that Ireland should follow its example in that regard. Where does Mr. Butler see Ireland and Denmark in the context of a comparison of their approaches to human rights? My impression is that Denmark is more vigorous than Ireland in respect of this matter.

**Senator David Norris:** I congratulate Mr. Butler on his presentation. The fact he has received such support from the Danish embassy to this country is very instructive, as is the fact that a senior member of the diplomatic staff of that embassy was here with him until very recently.

I have not had an opportunity to read the extended version of the paper but I did read the abbreviated version. Mr. Butler refers to the fact that the committee has been doing all right, that it is not contemplated within the terms of the Constitution, etc. The reason for this is that successive Governments were against it. Those in Iveagh House went mad when this commit-

tee was first established - a development in which I was deeply implicated - because they did not want amateurs fooling around in their area. Mr. Butler states that Ireland does a reasonably good job but that other countries of comparable size do much better. That is a very valuable comment, particularly if he can substantiate it and provide examples of what such countries do that is better. If we can learn from the foreign affairs committees of other nations, it would be a very valuable lesson for us.

With the greatest respect to my old friend, Deputy Smith, this business of the Seanad scrutinising EU legislation is a load of balls that arose during the defective referendum on the abolition of the Upper House. During the campaign on that referendum, the Government told nothing but lies and the Opposition was split all over the place until the final ten day.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** That is unfair.

**Senator David Norris:** It is utterly true.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** No lies were told by this Government.

**Senator David Norris:** I am not going to argue with the Deputy. I will discuss the matter with him on another occasion.

**Chairman:** Deputy Eric Byrne should allow Senator Norris to continue, without interruption.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** Bloody Seanad.

**Senator David Norris:** There is an enormous amount of EU legislation and it is squirted out at a rate which could lead to it being classified as pollution. Some of it is completely mad. I do not like English newspapers - I do not like those in Ireland very much these days either - but at least some of them got it right when they laughed at square sausages, round bananas and similar drivel. We have had experience of that legislation in this country in the context of the move to equalise the actuarial risks relating to motorists. For the sake of equality, women had to be charged as much as men for car insurance even though there is statistical proof to the effect that they are better, safer and more careful drivers. Everyone involved, including feminists, voted in favour of the legislation to which I refer and I could not believe that. I would not hold out any great hopes in respect of the Seanad scrutinising EU legislation.

During the referendum campaign on the Seanad, I continually outlined my concern to the effect that this suggestion is a sneaky trick on the part of the Government. If it can impose a job on the Upper House which that House cannot do, at which it would be incompetent and which would oblige it, as a result of a lack of time and resources, to neglect its other responsibilities, that would be a very good argument in favour of getting rid of it. The Seanad could possibly scrutinise EU legislation if it was properly resourced. If, for example, a system of bureaucracy were put in place to refine the list of legislation in order that the Upper House would only scrutinise that which is appropriate to it, then it would probably work. However, the ordinary work of the Seanad would be completely overwhelmed if it were to take seriously the scrutiny of EU legislation in the absence of adequate resources and support. As matters stand, what is proposed would make a farce of the Seanad. Under the Constitution, the Upper House's primary responsibility - and what it has done damn well, actually - is to introduce legislation on social issues and so forth, as many of my colleagues have done, and to correct Government legislation by amendment in instances where it is wrong.

No one should be under the illusion that working Senators - I do not refer here to the part-timers - do not put in at least as much time as any Member of the Dáil whom I have come across during my 27 years as a Member of the Upper House. I note that it was somebody else and not the Chairman who said that.

**Chairman:** I am not allowing a rerun of the debate on the Seanad.

**Senator David Norris:** It was suggested that we were floating around with vast amounts of time-----

**Chairman:** I acknowledge the Senator's point. I admit that Senator Norris is one of the hardest working Senators.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** How many clinics does the Senator run?

**Senator David Norris:** Not currently.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** How many funerals did he attend last year?

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I would like to discuss a number of issues but first to dispose of the Seanad issue. I was previously a Member of the Seanad, although that is some time ago now.

**Chairman:** I cannot allow a debate on the role of the Seanad.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I know but it is relevant in the context of the debate we are having now. I believe that the Seanad has a specific role, namely, it is a Legislature. As such, offering it step-down facilities and responsibilities is rubbish. It was never intended to work that way. It is a second House, the purpose of which has been correctly outlined by Senator Norris. Legislation can be initiated and improved in the Seanad. As such, the Seanad does serve a particular purpose. I acknowledge its members are elected by a different electorate in the form of an electoral college and that it comes at legislation from a different perspective and with different views. The Seanad plays an important role, which should be recognised. As the Chairman is aware, that has been my view for many years.

In terms of scrutiny, I believe that the Seanad is not the appropriate route to go in terms of scrutiny and that the appropriate route in this regard is a dedicated committee, be it the Joint Committee on European Affairs or Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade. I believe also that a proper scrutinising system will remove red herrings and so on, thereby reducing wasted time and so on. That is how such issues were addressed previously. The old system was replaced with a new system a number of years ago. It was believed that the new system was better because it would operate across all committees. However, it did not work. The reason it did not work is because Ministers were choosing which committees they would and would not appear before. I have experience of this, having seen it happen from both sides of the counter. I believe that a dedicated committee is the way to go, there is no better. Another reason the dedicated committee system is best is because members of that committee will develop an authority on the subjects before it, which nobody else will have. It is important all other committees while focusing on the issues relevant to them are required to reference matters of scrutiny to the dedicated committee. There should also be a reporting system to identify the issues that need to be tackled first. Also, that committee should be independent of Government. Whoever takes on the job will be doing important work.



I would like to correct a point made earlier. There is in place a system whereby the Tánaiste or Taoiseach reports to the Houses of the Oireachtas, through the Dáil, prior to and following European Council meetings. The problem that arises is that there is only limited participation in such debate by Members of the House. While the leaders of the groups are given an opportunity to speak during such debates ordinary back benchers are excluded from commenting. Perhaps that is a good thing: I do not know. Previous Ministers for Foreign Affairs were relatively good in terms of appearing before this committee and the Joint Committee on European Affairs to outline what they proposed to do at general council meetings and so on. They also reported to committees following such meetings. We are well served in this area. I would not fault the Tánaiste or previous Ministers for Foreign Affairs in that regard. There were a couple of previous Ministers, who shall remain anonymous for the benefit of this exercise, who were reluctant to appear before any committee with a view to explaining what they were doing at Council meetings and so on. It is important that is mentioned.

Reference was made again to Mr. O’Halpin’s statement that “The Irish Parliament, historically at least, has demonstrated disinterest in EU international affairs. This can be shown by a number of factors, including the electoral system”. That is rubbish. The reality is that there are several other parliaments throughout Europe and the world that have inherited systems which they are improving over time. The problem is that we, politicians and the public, tend to act out a different role when it suits us. We pretend we are not part of the European Union. We pretend it is a case of “them” and “us” and that we are somehow offshore and have a different role to play. This is the biggest mistake we have made. To be successful in any business one must integrate oneself into it and take ownership of it. While it is okay to be disinterested in particular issues, we should not resort to euroscepticism, calling for reform because Europe does not work. That is rubbish. The parliamentary system of democracy has existed for hundreds of years. Even the Romans had their own version of democracy, although it was fairly abrupt in certain circumstances. The French also had their version of democracy, as did the Greeks, the Egyptians and so on. Genghis Khan could have had his own version of democracy, although it would probably not be one we would readily go along with. It should be emphasised that there is nothing as old or as successful as democracy. Everybody accepts it should be reformed and improved. Historically, a few people - I will not mention names but they are well known - have tried to do so. At least one person tried during the last century to introduce his own version of democracy. He received huge support for the changes he sought at that time.

**Chairman:** I must ask the Deputy to confine his comments to foreign policy.

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** I am speaking about foreign policy.

**Senator David Norris:** Does the name of that person begin with a “H” and end in an “R”?

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** Yes. However, it was populism in its worst form but it was fully supported by the people.

We need to get back to basics and to recognise the fundamentals of the democratic system. We need to improve and respond to the issues that present to us and we need to make it work. There is no sense in opting out of the system and pretending that somebody else is the causing the problem for us. Sonny Liston, a famous boxer, once said something during a fight between him and Cassius Clay, which was a miniature international bout that was and is world famous, in which he was clobbered a number of times. When he was told by his trainer on going back to his corner, “Keep on in there, he’s not laying a glove on you”, his response was, “Would you keep an eye on the referee: there’s somebody hitting me”.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** Mr. Butler might be interested to hear that I read seven eighths of the document, which I found fascinating. It is different to submissions we have received from others to date in so far as he appears to have researched ways and means of this committee being better empowered in terms of holding the Parliament and the Executive to account, which is very refreshing. Mr. Butler has touched on many issues. I note from the quotations he referenced that he is an academic. However, there is nothing wrong with that. I married an academic.

Mr. Butler has raised important questions about the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, which issues were previously discussed at COSAC conference in Dublin Castle. While it was interesting that so many people had come together under one roof, the average delegate was unable to engage in a serious way on the issues on the agenda. This leads me to the role of the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, and our role, as a small committee in a small country, *vis-à-vis* the European Union. Deputy Durkan disagreed with Mr. Butler's view on Ministers coming before the joint committee. Perhaps we could tease out the degree to which Ireland compromised in respect of its relationship with the other 27 member states at the COSAC conferences.

I highlighted our interest in European and international affairs. We heard about what Mr. O'Halpin said. While I do not know anything about Mr. O'Halpin, I note the excitement in the contribution made by my colleague who has just left the meeting. Was Mr. O'Halpin criticising the Irish electoral system for promoting clientelism through multi-seat constituencies? Serious people argued at either this committee or the Committee on European Union Affairs that the single transferable vote system was not serving us well. Perhaps I am misreading Mr. O'Halpin. I disagree with his view that there is little interest in the European Union and international affairs. I believe we have been to the fore at all levels in this regard.

I congratulate Mr. Butler again on his report which I assume will be read by administrators. I refer especially to his views on how we should grasp the opportunity to reinvigorate ourselves and become more involved in the power structure. Perhaps it is coincidental that he repeatedly argued that Denmark has a different and better system given that he may know the Danish system inside out. The paper makes a statement to the effect that the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs is directed by the Danish foreign affairs committee.

**Mr. Graham Butler:** Yes. The Minister cannot go to a Foreign Affairs Council without receiving a mandate.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** I believe we heard that point made by a delegation from Sweden or Denmark. That is a very interesting concept.

I congratulate Mr. Butler on being so quick off the mark. I was shocked to learn from a press statement covered in *The Irish Times* that the Government planned a review. This returns me to Mr. Butler's point about the Minister being able to determine policy alone. For example, he can issue a press statement announcing a review. We had to place this issue on our agenda to ascertain what the hell he was talking about. That is the reason we are having this discussion.

I do not see anything wrong with the notion of ambassadors appearing before the joint committee when they are being appointed. We would not deprive them of their jobs but it would be nice to find out, for example, from an ambassador being appointed to China or a Spanish-speaking country, whether he or she can speak Mandarin or Spanish as the case may be. This is basic information which we could elicit at such a meeting. The joint committee would have

a more important role to play if it acquired greater status. Is this the start of a debate that will result in a White Paper?

The committee's relationship with Members of the European Parliament was raised. The relationship between the committee and the EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, is very weak. How much do we compromise our national view on global developments when we engage with the European Union given that Ms Ashton subsequently acts as the spokesperson for all 28 member states?

I enjoyed reading Mr. Butler's paper and I thank him for encouraging the committee to grasp the nettle by empowering ourselves, acquiring greater responsibility and respect and assuming a role of parliamentary oversight.

**Chairman:** I, too, thank Mr. Butler. He was quick off the mark and submitted his presentation to the committee very quickly. I ask him to respond by providing an overview as to answer all the questions asked would take too long.

**Mr. Graham Butler:** The reason I was so quick off the mark is that much of the research was ready as I was doing research in any case. The review came at the right time.

On the role of Seanad Éireann in scrutinising the European Union, I strongly concur with Deputy Durkan's comments on the role of a second chamber. I am not sure, however, if the correct approach would be for one committee to take responsibility for all oversight. I agree that scrutiny at parliamentary level, whether by one committee or all the sectoral committees, must be independent of government. This function has expanded considerably. A protocol attached to the Lisbon treaty dealt specifically with national parliaments. The practice of issuing communications seeking an input from national parliaments through their early warning mechanisms is a very good way of having political dialogue with the European Union. Committees that are independent of government can make a substantial contribution by submitting its thoughts about how a particular proposal should proceed.

Deputy Crowe referred to the European Parliament committee on foreign affairs. None of our 12 MEPs are on that committee in the parliamentary term from 2009 until 2014. As there are 22 sectoral committees of the Parliament, it is impossible for 12 Irish MEPs to cover them all. That three Irish MEPs sit on the agriculture committee is indicative of where the interests of Ireland lie in Europe. Elections to the European Parliament are imminent and I will not say that no Irish MEP will sit on the foreign affairs committee in the 2014 to 2019 term, notwithstanding the decline in the number of Irish MEPs from 12 to 11. I would love to see one MEP on the committee but it is not certain that will be the case. The manner in which this committee would engage with any Irish MEP appointed to it could be quite interesting. Members of this committee should have some idea of the type of working relationship they would have with an Irish MEP on the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan asked a question on the human rights element of trade missions. I listened very carefully to the comments made yesterday by the former Secretary General of the Department and I agree with him to some extent. From my examination of Ireland's engagement at the General Assembly in New York, I found that while we have a strong record on human rights in terms of reforming international institutions, we also know that this is not the most effective way to achieve results. The UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, which has only been in operation for a few years, is already experiencing major problems as a result of the voting blocs on the council. Some of its members do not have a great human rights record. I am

not making charges against any particular state because the problem is global. The European Union has a seat as an observer at the UN General Assembly and each of the 28 member states is also a member of the UN. There are 192 or 193 UN members, which means EU member states are in a small minority in the world order. The existence of a forum to deal with human rights issues does not necessarily mean that a Minister visiting a country with a poor human rights record must raise human rights issues on every single occasion. However, countries must be made aware of Ireland's position on some matters.

Senator Norris stated Iveagh House did not like the idea of a joint committee being established. Foreign policy is traditionally conducted behind closed doors. An argument is made that foreign policy is about deal making and should not have a public light shone on it. While this may have been the case previously, it is no longer acceptable either nationally or internationally. The communications revolution has made all information more accessible. It is also empowering citizens to find out more about parliamentarians, governments and foreign policy.

I am pleased the joint committee takes such an interest in foreign affairs. Deputy Byrne mentioned the conference on Common Foreign Security Policy, CFSP and the Common Defence and Security Policy. That conference is separate from COSAC. COSAC comes under the European Affairs Committee. This new conference happens with the Presidency. I presume the Chairman will be going to Greece soon for the next conference on CFSP and CDSP. The committees tend to send a great many people. With 28 member states each sending three or four delegates to these conferences one will have roughly 150 people which is equivalent almost to the size of the Dáil. It is a good way for parliamentarians to engage with each other on these issues, but it is impossible for these people when they come together in an once-off forum every six months to engage in proper oversight of the High Representative, Ms Catherine Ashton when she is accountable to the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament itself. The European Parliament would be more of a correct forum for proper oversight of her role.

Returning to the point on the European External Action Service, there are ways for Ireland to engage with the European External Action Service. I think there are seven Irish diplomats coming down on secondment to the European External Action Service, but that is less than 3% of the total make-up of the European External Action Service. The European External Action Service, EEAS, got off to a rocky start, as Deputy Smith pointed out, although it is developing. We now have EU delegations across the world and in some places, as Professor Tonra mentioned yesterday, that when the EEAS was set up there were great ideas that they would share premises with some member states with EU embassies in which all the different cultures would have their operations. That has not happened. EU embassies might flourish with the next treaty into the future, but we do not know what will happen yet. Although it is still a developing organisation, there is some institutional conflict between the role of the European External Action Service, EEAS, in foreign policy and the office of the permanent president of the European Council which have split competencies in foreign policy. Of course, that will probably change in the future but again we do not know.

A number of members mentioned the quotation from Mr. O'Halpin, which I used in my paper. I double-checked the reference, the quote I used was from 1996 in which Mr. O'Halpin was providing an historical context to the role of the Oireachtas as opposed to the-----

**Deputy Bernard J. Durkan:** A dangerous place to go.

**Mr. Graham Butler:** Not my quote again. What summed up many of the points that Deputy Byrne highlighted was reading about the review of foreign policy in *The Irish Times*. That

is where I also read it. There should be a mechanism to let the committee know before it goes out to the newspapers but that is not what is done in practice. When the new foreign policy document is published, that might change.

**Chairman:** I thank Mr. Butler. May I give my opinion to my good colleague Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan on the Taoiseach’s visit? She mentioned it was a clumsy response, but I do not agree. The Taoiseach was there at the invitation of Enterprise Ireland. It was not organised by the Department of the Taoiseach or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The trade mission was organised by Enterprise Ireland and was focused on 80 to 90 companies doing the business. Clearly the Taoiseach did not want to get distracted by other human rights issues because members who went to Iran last week will have seen that journalists were more concerned about the way one shakes hands and what one wears than about the content of what we were doing.

The Taoiseach was correct not to answer questions because it would lead to other questions and other issues and sidetrack the whole trade mission, which was very successful and resulted in new contracts worth approximately €5 million for the many Irish companies that work extremely hard. In my opinion that was the reason.

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** It is a bit of a contradiction as we are members of the UN Human Rights Council.

**Chairman:** We are indeed. That is the arena in which we should raise these issues.

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** That could have been his answer.

**Chairman:** As the Deputy knows, we raised these issues when we went to Iran.

**Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan:** Yes.

**Chairman:** We were there on our own initiative, and were not guests of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland or anything else. However, the Taoiseach was present as a guest of Enterprise Ireland, and totally focused on trade. The idea of the visit was to focus on trade and not be distracted by other issues. I understand where the Deputy is coming from but the Taoiseach took the right decision in regard to it. Otherwise it would lead to other questions and other answers, bringing one down a different road. The mission was successful.

**Deputy Eric Byrne:** Given that we both read it in *The Irish Times*, is this the first step toward the publication of a White Paper? Is it envisaged that a White Paper will result from this debate?

**Chairman:** No, just a review. The last one was conducted in 1996, some 18 years ago, so a policy review will again be conducted.

I thank Mr. Graham Butler for coming before the committee and being so frank and open. I admire the way he had his paper so well researched. Mr. Butler has done Trojan work and has given us great idea for the committee’s report.

Yesterday an experienced retired diplomat and a professor from Dublin appeared before the committee. Today we had the media and the news perspective. We have heard four very different perspectives. I think it is worthwhile to have these meetings. I thank the four contributors in the past two days for coming before us. I thank Mr. Butler for travelling from Copenhagen to come before us. I hope he has learned something from the way we work in the Dáil although I

REVIEW OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS POLICY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS: DISCUSSION (RESUMED)

do not think he has to learn very much because he has a good knowledge of the way the system works.

The joint committee went into private session at 4.45 p.m and adjourned at 4.50 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 29 January 2014.