

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

Dé Céadaoin, 2 Iúil 2014

Wednesday, 2 July 2014

The Joint Committee met at 2.30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Eric Byrne,	Senator Mark Daly.
Deputy Seán Crowe,	
Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,	
Deputy Olivia Mitchell,	
Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan,	
Deputy Brendan Smith,	

In attendance: Senator Thomas Byrne.

DEPUTY PAT BREEN IN THE CHAIR.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I have received apologies from a number of members, including Senator David Norris, who we hope is making a speedy recovery, and Senator Jim Walsh, who is attending the OSCE parliamentary assembly meeting in Baku.

The first item on the agenda is the minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2014, which have been circulated to members. Are the minutes agreed? Agreed. Unless there are matters arising from those minutes, we will proceed with our main business, which is a meeting with H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain.

Relations Between Ireland and Great Britain: Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain

Chairman: We will now commence the meeting with the ambassador, Mr. Dan Mulhall. We have had a busy morning, including a meeting with the Israeli ambassador and deputy ambassador. We also had one of the executives of the World Bank in, so we have had a busy day.

I wish to remind members, witnesses and those in the public gallery to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off completely for the duration of the meeting as, even on silent mode, they do cause interference with recording equipment in the committee rooms. This is particularly important today, as we are privileged that our meeting is being broadcast live. Many people will consequently be watching the meeting, so it is important to turn off mobile phones.

In advance of hearing the ambassador's presentation, I remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or body outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by the Chairman to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. Witnesses are further directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I welcome Ireland's ambassador to Great Britain, His Excellency Mr. Dan Mulhall, who has had a distinguished career in the diplomatic service over the past 35 years or so. His current post, to which he was appointed last year, is one of the most important and prominent in the diplomatic circle. It is a privilege for anyone to serve as ambassador to our nearest neighbour. Members will be aware of the long-standing and strong ties between Ireland and Britain, particularly in relation to trade, as underlined by the fact that approximately €1 billion is exchanged between our countries each week. It is a huge amount of money, representing the volume of trade between our countries. It is also the case that many thousands of Irish people have made Britain their home down through the years. A couple of months ago we had the historic state visit by President Higgins and three years before that we had the visit of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. These have been two very important milestones in the history of both countries. The ambassador was very involved in the visit of President Higgins.

The format of today's meeting will be a presentation by the ambassador, followed by a

question and answer session with members of the joint committee. The ambassador is very welcome. This is the first of a number of meetings the committee will have with our overseas diplomats. It is very important that we keep in touch with our diplomats, who are the eyes and ears of our country abroad. It is important for the public to know about their work, what is happening between our countries, the status of our relationships and what ambassadors plan to do. We are not scrutinising the ambassador's appointment or anything like that. It is simply that it is important for the committee and the public to know what is going on. This is part of our role as the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I thank the Chairman and members of the joint committee for the invitation to speak here today. Over the years, I have spoken in quite a few parliaments in other countries - indeed, I spoke in 15 German parliaments during our Presidency of the Council of the European Union - but it is a particular honour for me today to speak for the first time in our own. I have sat here beside Ministers quite a bit over the years, and in the back row at earlier stages of my career, but it is a particular privilege to speak personally at the Oireachtas. I regard it as a particular honour.

I have worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for 35 years. In that time I have served in seven different cities, including New Delhi, Vienna, Brussels in an EU capacity, Edinburgh, Kuala Lumpur, Berlin, and now London. One of the big changes I have witnessed during my career has been the increasingly public role our embassies and diplomats play and the increasing emphasis on economic and public diplomacy. Today, this has become a leading priority, which would not have been the case when I started on this road in the late 1970s. Personally, I see nothing more important than doing everything in my power in London - and Berlin, when I was there - to contribute to Ireland's economic recovery. Everything else will flow from economic recovery.

In my experience, each posting brings its own distinctive challenges and opportunities. I would like to say a few words, almost by way of contrast and comparison, about the first two ambassadorial postings I had the honour to occupy on Ireland's behalf before turning to my current assignment in London. Those appointments were in Kuala Lumpur and Berlin, respectively. I will spend most of my presentation discussing my experience in London. In Kuala Lumpur, our embassy shared an office with Enterprise Ireland, which meant that I had very close co-operation with its representatives. Wherever I have been over the years, I have had valued co-operation with the State agencies. Happily, we have all four State agencies in London. In Germany it was a bit more difficult because, while we worked very closely with the State agencies, they were located in Düsseldorf and Frankfurt, reflecting the more devolved nature of the Federal Republic of Germany. In Malaysia, a significant part of my work involved educational promotion. Our universities were prized by Malaysian students, thousands of whom were studying here. Our universities benefited greatly from the revenue generated by hosting Malaysian students, especially in the medical faculties. I recall, as its tenth anniversary is coming up in six months' time, that I was also involved in our consular response to the Asian tsunami in 2004. When our citizens are in need, everything else has to be dropped and that becomes our sole priority. I remember the day in December 2004 when I heard about the tsunami. The following day I was on a plane to Phuket and did not come back for three weeks. It is an illustration of how today Irish people are very likely to be involved or in need of assistance when something happens anywhere in the world.

Germany was a very different proposition. When I went there in October 2009, the economic clouds were darkening over our country. Frankly, there was a need to defend Ireland's

reputation, because Germany is a major market for Ireland. It is our fourth largest export market and the second largest source of inward investment into Ireland. It is also a major source of tourists. German tourists are very valuable to our tourism industry. Clearly, the threat to our reputation arising from the financial crisis was a serious one. It had the potential to spill out, undermining our export opportunities and discourage German companies from investing in Ireland. I decided at that time to produce my own newsletter. For two years at the height of the crisis I produced a newsletter entitled “Ireland’s Road to Economic Recovery”, which I sent out to an increasing number of German officials, journalists and politicians. A senior member of the board of the Bundesbank once told me he appreciated getting my newsletter every couple of weeks and said he read it every time. I felt it was well worth doing, because one cannot rely on the media. German media only covered the big stories from Ireland, generally the more negative ones. They were not being nasty; it was just the way it was. I was trying, through the newsletter, to highlight positive developments in the Irish situation that would not otherwise be known to my contacts in Germany. I also started using social media and now have my own official Twitter account. I do not tweet my personal views on anything, but simply use the account to tweet about what I am doing as ambassador in London.

I availed of opportunities that arose during our 2013 Presidency to undertake 64 separate speaking engagements in Germany. During that six-month period, I visited all but two of Germany’s regional parliaments, as well as speaking at the Bundestag to one of its committees. I am glad to be able to do today’s presentation in English, for which I thank the joint committee. At that time, half of what I said had to do with Ireland rather than the Presidency. Of course I gave the key messages about our Presidency, but the idea was that, while the Presidency got us in the door, I could use the opportunity to convey key points on Ireland’s situation.

The embassy in London has a different character from any other mission in which I have served. That is because our relations with the UK are deeper, more diverse and more intensive than those with any other country in the world. The best illustration of this is to be found in our economic ties. The key figure is 40%. Up to 40% of the exports of Irish-owned companies go to our neighbouring island; 40% of all visitors to Ireland come from Britain; 40% of our food and beverage exports, worth €4 billion last year, cross the Irish Sea. Moreover, Irish people are to be found in every walk of life in Britain. Up to 500,000 people living in Britain were born in Ireland, and many of those people have deep connections with the country. At a recent event in one of the Irish centres in London, I met a 93-year-old woman who went to Britain to work as a nurse in 1937, still hale and hearty and still as Irish as the day she left Ireland. This community in Britain is a microcosm of Ireland with every aspect of Irishness in it.

The embassy works very closely with Irish job promotion agencies in promoting Ireland’s economic interests. We frequently host events at the embassy on behalf of the agencies. Several weeks ago, I hosted a dinner on behalf of Enterprise Ireland in support of Irish companies providing products and services to the aviation sector. This was attended by representatives of Irish companies and their UK-based clients. Our guest speaker that evening was the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Joe Costello. During the past year, it has been a pleasure to host the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste and the majority of Ministers. Such visits are vital promotional opportunities for Ireland because they give us access to other levels of the British system. Each year, we host a dinner for senior executives from IDA Ireland’s target companies and a business breakfast around St. Patrick’s Day. In the food sector, we host an annual Bord Bia reception for 400 guests from Irish food and drinks companies and their British contacts. Last autumn, in conjunction with Tourism Ireland, we organised a meeting of enablers of The Gathering. Last year, the number of visitors from Britain increased by

6%, largely due to the impact of The Gathering, which encouraged people to visit Ireland for the first time.

My experience is that these embassy events are very effective. The response from Irish companies is always positive. I get many thank-you messages from people who have derived genuine benefit from being at the embassy and being able to host some of their key clients there. My wife and I greet all of our guests at the top of the stairs. We are struck by how many people tell us they have never before been at an embassy and how pleased they are to have been invited. It is a great advantage in London that we have colleagues on secondment from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, who work closely with me on economic promotion. All of us, including colleagues from State agencies, see ourselves as part of Team Ireland in Britain. We meet four times a year to plan and ensure we get the best out of our promotional efforts in Britain.

The embassy also has a passport office, consular service and visa operation, all of which provide important services which are beneficial to our country and people. We engage with the large and diverse Irish community in Britain, who are, I believe, a valuable resource for Ireland. More importantly, they are part of our wider family. It is amazing to meet third-generation Irish people who play Irish music at the highest possible level. Next week, I will be giving out fáinnes to people learning Irish in various parts of London.

Our community work has broadly two elements. The first is the engagement with our community through the many welfare organisations that serve the needs of vulnerable Irish people throughout Britain. More than 100 such organisations working with the Irish elderly, vulnerable groups and Travellers received funding from the emigrant support programme last year of £5.3 million. I pay frequent visits to them, such as lunch clubs which they organise. One often finds these meetings are the only social interaction for the people involved.

The second aspect of our community work is our contact with and support for the range of Irish business and professional networks in Britain. We estimate that there are around 20 such groups in London alone, including the Irish International Business Network, the London Irish Business Society, the Women's Irish Network and the London Irish Graduate Network. These networks are a valuable source of influence, as many of their members occupy influential positions in British society. For example, about 40 members of the Government's Global Irish Network are based in Britain.

A third aspect of our work is public and cultural diplomacy. Over the years, I have realised that our culture is an important calling card for Ireland. For a country of our size, there is exceptional international interest in Irish music, dance, literature and the arts. Throughout my career I have tried to capitalise on this fact. The best example of the appeal of our culture came during the President's historic state visit to Britain, when we put on a wonderful concert, Ceiliúradh, which demonstrated our cultural appeal to people outside of the country. We support a range of Irish cultural bodies in Britain. I have delivered several public lectures recently, including on Ulysses at the York Festival of Ideas, on Sean O'Casey at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, and on commemorations at the University of Liverpool. My recent speeches are available on our embassy website and I now produce a regular blog to maintain contact.

Last night, we held a function at the embassy marking the centenary of the Home Rule Act. Journalist Fergal Keane moderated a discussion involving Lord Bew, Professor Michael Laffan, the former Taoiseach John Bruton, and the British historian Professor Richard Toye. The event was opened by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Jimmy Deenihan. This

attracted a good attendance and was filmed by the BBC for broadcast this coming Saturday at 9 p.m. on BBC Parliament, for those not watching the World Cup. Anybody who misses it will have other opportunities to catch it as the channel plans to repeat it several times throughout the summer months. The programme makers put a very good effort into filming it last night, with five or more different cameras employed to capture proceedings in a fully professional way.

My final point concerns the embassy's role in connecting our two countries. This involves maintaining contact with a wide range of people within the British system, including Ministers, politicians, senior officials, opinion makers, journalists, business groups, trade unions and so on. We take full advantage of London's status as a global city to maintain contact with international media based there and spread the word about the Irish recovery and the opportunities for connecting in a positive way with Ireland. I attend the annual political party conferences and maintain dialogue with key contacts on Northern Ireland, the European Union and Ireland's economic recovery. Our aim is to ensure our position is understood in Britain and that we understand where they are coming from on issues that concern both our countries.

There were two particular highlights in the past year. One was St. Patrick's Day, which is a superb promotional opportunity for Ireland. Wherever I have been in the world, I have always tried to use the occasion as best I can to promote our country. It is a great opportunity for us to attract attention that might not otherwise be available to us. This year I had the honour, accompanied by the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Deputy Pat Rabbitte, of leading the St. Patrick's Day parade through the streets of London on a sunny Sunday in March. I could not help recalling the words of Percy French, "while the whole population of London looked on". That is certainly what it looked like, with crowds seven or eight people deep on the footpaths as we walked through some of the city's main streets on our way to Trafalgar Square. A concert took place in the square, paid for by the City of London, under Mayor Johnson, in order to recognise the contribution of the Irish to London life over the generations. Some 25,000 people attended this wonderful display of Irish culture and it was a great opportunity to promote our country.

However, the highlight not just of this year, but of my career, which stretches back 35 years, was the visit of President Higgins to Britain in April. The President did a fantastic job and hugely impressed everyone who met him. His speeches were extremely powerful and very well received. Indeed, I am still receiving positive comments from people who were present for some of those speeches or saw the coverage of them on television. The positive effect of the President's state visit should not be underestimated. It has taken relations between the two countries to a new plateau. It will be my privilege in the coming years to help to build that relationship further, taking advantage of the wonderful impact of the presidential visit and the general improvement in British-Irish relations that has taken place in the 15 years since the Good Friday Agreement.

Chairman: Thank you, Ambassador Mulhall. My question relates to the current and future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union. I realise the ambassador cannot give a personal opinion on this issue, but will he comment on developments in regard to the in-out debate and the proposed referendum, and the importance from our perspective, particularly in the context of trade, that the UK should remain within the Union?

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I take every opportunity when I am at European events or giving a speech anywhere on any subject to include a paragraph on Europe. The message I give to people is quite simple, that we have been around the table together in Brussels for 40 years and it has been a very positive experience for Ireland. I express the view, while acknowledging it

is a matter for the British people to decide, that EU membership has also been advantageous for Britain. I am not the only one putting forth that argument; many British sources are making the same case. I also make the point that our common EU membership has been hugely important and positive for British-Irish relations. Sitting together around the table in Brussels and elsewhere has allowed us to see the things we have in common. There are, of course, issues that divide us on the European agenda, but there is also much we have in common. I try to make people in Britain understand that the advantages of EU membership for British-Irish relations ought to be part of their calculation when they make a decision on what their future will be within Europe. That issue is clearly a matter of concern for the EU as a whole and for every EU member state, but it is a matter of particular interest and significance for Ireland given the nature of our relationship with the UK and our geographical proximity. There is no reason for us to be too shy about offering our views. We must always emphasise that it is a matter for the British Government, Parliament and people to decide at some stage, perhaps, on Britain's future in Europe, but is perfectly valid for us, as a friendly country with very deep connections with Britain, to offer our opinion on the subject.

Chairman: Thank you, Ambassador Mulhall. I will now take questions from members, beginning with Deputy Brendan Smith.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I compliment Ambassador Mulhall on his presentation today and his work over the years in different postings. Most of us will recall that the former President, Mary McAleese, had as the theme of her first presidential campaign the notion of building bridges. While we understood that as being about North-South co-operation, we were all delighted to see it being expanded to include the east-west relationship. The two state visits by Queen Elizabeth and President Higgins have been important in building relations and fostering a positive profile. Those visits were not organised without huge commitment by the staff of the two embassies and other support staff.

Is it the ambassador's view that doubts surrounding Britain's continued membership of the EU and whether that question will be put to a referendum are sowing seeds of doubt among the business community, or is civic society engaged at all on that issue? On the forthcoming referendum on Scottish independence, I realise we must remain impartial but I personally would like to see Scotland decide its own destiny and have its own particular structures of governance, as it so ordains. We cannot be disinterested on this issue. The ambassador is confined as to what he can say in this regard, but how is that issue being engaged with by society south of the Scottish border?

With regard to trade, the ambassador pointed out that 40% of our exports go to Britain. We are fortunate that in recent years we have had relative stability in exchange rates, with none of the currency turmoil we saw in 2008 and some previous years. On the issue of trade promotion, which is critically important, does the ambassador see a need to expand the potential of the North-South bodies, particularly in the context of trade between Ireland and Britain?

The emigrant support programme, which is run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is extremely important for a group of people about whom we do not hear enough and some of whom may be experiencing very difficult circumstances. Many of those requiring assistance are in the older age cohort. It is important that in all our conversations about improved British-Irish relations, we have those people uppermost in our mind. Over the years the emigrant support programme has assisted societies and representative organisations in the major cities such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Luton, Glasgow and Edinburgh. I am concerned, however, that there also are communities in smaller cities and large towns which

may effectively be under the radar when it comes to the need for supporting community efforts. For example, the large town of Coatbridge, situated midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh, has the largest Irish community in Britain. It has a week-long St. Patrick's festival, not a one-day festival. I am anxious to ensure we cover all aspects of Irish society throughout Britain.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I obviously follow the British debate on EU membership very carefully in the newspapers and in other media, but also by talking to senior people in the British system. I also attend quite a few of these think tanks, including the Centre for European Reform and Chatham House. I am invited to an increasing number of events which have as their topic Britain's future in Europe. While it is not a matter for me to judge, my sense is that the debate about Britain's future in Europe is expanding, developing and moving forward. I and my colleagues at the embassy will continue to monitor that debate as it evolves and advise Dublin on the direction of the debate as it progresses in the months and years ahead.

Whereas I think we are quite at liberty to express a view about Britain's membership of the EU because we are also members of the EU - it is a club to which we belong and it is clearly relevant to us - I think we need to maintain a strict silence on Scotland. People have made valiant efforts to draw me out on Scotland and I have refused to be drawn. I was posted to Scotland for three years at the end of the 1990s. I opened the consulate general there so I know Scotland very well and know the people involved, but that makes me even more wary about making any comment. Any comment one might make, even one that might seem tangential, is likely to put one on one side of the argument or the other, an argument that is essentially a matter for Scotland.

My view is that whatever happens to Scotland or to the UK's position in Europe, our aim as a country must be to ensure our interests are protected and that the advantages we now derive from our relations with the UK generally and from our relations with Scotland continue to prevail, even if the structure of those particular entities changes and their relations with each other and with the European Union change. We must try to ensure our positive relations with our nearest neighbour are affected as little as possible by changes in the UK's composition or its European orientation.

We are aware of about 200 Irish organisations that have at one time or another made an application for funding from the ESP, including Coatbridge, because our consul general in Edinburgh, Pat Bourne, is very active in Scotland. I know he was at the Coatbridge festival because I saw it on his Twitter account a short while ago. Last weekend he also attended the All-Britain Fleadh which took place in Scotland. We are connecting with as many parts of the Irish community as we possibly can. We will continue to look for Irish connections throughout Britain.

Of course, ultimately it requires an Irish organisation to lodge an application for funding. The funding is not provided to individuals but to organisations which must have some kind of solid track record locally. We vet these applications very carefully. I have two colleagues at the embassy who do a huge amount of work in monitoring and connecting with the Irish community organisations to ensure the money we make available through the emigrant support programme is being used to the maximum possible effect.

For me one of the great moments of the President's visit was when Her Majesty at the state banquet said she regretted that there had been some discrimination against Irish people in the past, but that she wanted to make it clear that her country was a better country because of the contribution of the Irish community. That comment was widely reported in the Irish media in Britain. It went down extremely well with members of our community who saw themselves

being recognised at the highest level. The queen also hosted a reception in Buckingham Palace for the Irish community about three weeks before the state visit. That was an extraordinary occasion. It involved people who had been in Britain for 30, 40, 50 or 60 years and saw their country and their identity being recognised at the highest level. That was a great moment for the Irish community in Britain.

As far as North-South bodies are concerned, that is a policy matter and I do not really want to comment on it. Clearly every economic activity that connects us with our nearest neighbour in a positive and constructive way is to be encouraged. I agree with the Deputy that the east-west connection has really flourished over the past ten years, about which we should be very happy because it gives great benefit to Ireland. It also gives great benefit to Britain because we are the fifth biggest export market for the UK.

Deputy Seán Crowe: The ambassador and I go back a few years. I believe we first met at the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation many years ago.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: Correct.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I had dark hair. Did the ambassador have dark hair at the time?

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: My hair was brownish.

Deputy Seán Crowe: I want to concentrate my questions on that area of peace and reconciliation. Deputy Adams is leading a Sinn Féin delegation in London today meeting the British Prime Minister, Mr. Cameron, and the Opposition Labour leader. There is a difference in what has happened in Britain and Ireland. The Irish Government would be constantly involved in meeting all parties and none regarding the peace process. The fact that it is four years and this is the first official meeting with Sinn Féin reflects the work the British Government has been involved in.

The ambassador spoke about the queen and some of her statements. She has been very much involved in reconciliation work and many of her statements have been seen as helpful to peace and reconciliation between our two islands. There is not the same sort of impact from the British Government. I know part of the ambassador's role is to be a listening post. Is part of that that the British Government sees the peace process almost as a done deal so it feels it does not need to be as heavily involved as previous administrations or is it more to do with difficulties within the British Conservative Party looking down the road at possible elections?

Many people and not just those in Sinn Féin are concerned about its inactivity. We had the Haass talks with no agreement on a number of the issues. The Irish Government has come out on those talks and the way to resolve it, as have the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party. However, the British Government and the Unionist parties have not adopted a position in that regard. Does the ambassador get a sense that the British Government has disengaged or is that a misconception on my behalf? Does he believe it could be doing more on peace and reconciliation work in Ireland?

I will give one example. May of this year saw the 40th anniversary of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Tremendous hurt was felt by those families over the largest number of people killed in the conflict. There has been a demand from this House for files to be released. Does the ambassador get any sense that the British Government will at some stage release those files? We do not see such initiatives coming from that Government. I hope after today's meeting much more vigour and energy will be put into the process. Is the ambassador concerned

about the British Government's lack of strategic involvement in that process?

Chairman: I will bring in Deputy Eric Byrne because he has to slip out to attend a meeting of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs. Unfortunately that meeting is on next door. I know the Deputy will come back again but he wanted to get in before leaving.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I welcome Ambassador Mulhall. I regret that I will be short of time, as we must meet an Albanian delegation from the Parliament.

Would Ambassador Mulhall agree that the relationship between Ireland and Britain has improved remarkably - almost miraculously - in the short time since the Provisional IRA tried to annihilate members of the British Government and that Britain has been extremely co-operative in rebuilding the relationship? If he comes across the former British ambassador who brought Her Majesty to Ireland, could Ambassador Mulhall tell him that this was the most spectacular and important political event that I have experienced in my time in politics, together with the reciprocal State visit by President Higgins which was warmly received. Given all the bombings and killing in England, would he agree that we have had a remarkable rebuilding of the relationship that is now at the highest point since Independence?

In the historical context, the labouring classes, builders and tradesmen went to the United Kingdom to build the bridges, the roads and the railways. His Excellency speaks in terms of 100 welfare organisations and when we think of the relative sophistication of Irish society today and the people who have gone to England, will he explain whether there is a need today for 100 organisations to cater for the welfare of the Irish in England? We are only a stone's throw away, the boat takes a couple of hours and a plane takes less than an hour. Is there still that level of deprivation or is it mainly the older generation cohort who went over as construction workers?

I understand the ambassador did not want to speak about Scotland. Would he agree that the British Prime Minister left himself out on a limb when 26 of the 28 countries of the EU found he was barking up the wrong tree?

Chairman: I am not sure that Ambassador Mulhall will agree with the Deputy on some of those questions. I am aware that Deputy O'Sullivan must rush to the Chamber so I will allow her in now.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I thank Ambassador Mulhall for his very comprehensive report. It is also in keeping with the reports we have had from other Irish ambassadors in embassies throughout the world. Quite a number of Irish ambassadors have presented to the joint committee and we have visited them when we were on official visits abroad.

In regard to the possibility of Britain leaving the European Union and in the event that it does, is there much discussion among the ambassador's contacts in the agencies and bodies, particularly those involved with Irish business, about contingency plans? What sense is he getting from them of coping should Britain leave the EU?

My second question relates to issues I have been involved with in Ireland, such as the Magdalen laundries and I know there are groups of survivors of Magdalen laundries ladies in Britain and I wonder about their contact with the embassy.

In relation to prisoner issues in the North, a group of Deputies have been pursuing this issue from a human rights basis. We have met the Minister for Justice in Northern Ireland several times as well as the Secretary of State, but there is no doubt this issue is very far down the

agenda and I wonder how to tackle it in a way that will contribute to a lasting and just peace. I noted that His Excellency said he has a lot of contacts with the British Government and sometimes it is the unofficial word, the unofficial chat that is much more effective.

Chairman: Perhaps one of those question would be outside our remit, but that is up to the ambassador to decide on.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: I welcome Ambassador Mulhall, who I also remember from the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. The only thing I cannot remember is what colour my hair was at the time.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Pink? No, somebody else.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: Blue rinse, perhaps. The ambassador mentioned the advantage it is to have representatives from the Departments of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and Agriculture, Food and the Marine, based in the Embassy in London. Is that a new departure? Was that always the case or is it a result of the addition of the trade portfolio to foreign affairs to form the Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade? Did they work at greater arms length in the past?

On the issue of whether Britain would vote to leave the European Union, I have occasion to meet English people and to a man they would vote to get out of Europe, they blame Europe for everything, even for the weather. My two children work in London in what could be broadly called the City and they and all their colleagues are horrified at the prospect of Britain leaving the EU. Generally they think that the business community would be very much against Britain leaving the EU. If a similar proposition was put to the people in Ireland, once the campaign got going different sectors would come out in favour of staying in. Are there other sectors that are silent, in that we have not heard from them, in Britain? Will we hear from different sectors when a campaign starts or does Ambassador Mulhall sense that the vast majority of English people want to get out of the EU? The ambassador may not want to answer that question.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I think what I can do is explain the role and the work of the Embassy in London on the whole range of issues right across the spectrum, but it is not for me to articulate policy or to make judgments about the British Government. That is a matter for others. It is certainly not normal for an ambassador to comment publicly, positively or negatively, on the government of the country to which he or she is accredited. I am there as a representative of Ireland and am there to articulate Irish policies to a British audience and also to understand British positions and to inform my colleagues in Dublin, in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, other Departments and ultimately Government on how I see the evolution of the situation in Britain as it affects our interests. I am not going to duck the issues but I wish to make clear the extent to which I can and cannot comment.

Chairman: We understand that.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I certainly have better access in Britain that I would have had in previous countries where I have been posted at different levels. I think our access to the key people in Britain is actually really very impressive. During the week I met the governor of the Bank of England, Mr. Mark Carney. I have no difficulty in accessing people in the British system, business, public service and politics. Yesterday I was at a First World War centenary event which the Prime Minister, David Cameron, hosted in the garden of No. 10 and I had a chance to meet the Prime Minister and have a short but interesting discussion with him. The night before I was at a function in the Italian embassy, which was organised in conjunction with

the Centre for European Reform, which is a broadly pro European think-tank in London which is run by a former economist-journalist, Charles Grant, whom I knew from my days as a press officer in Brussels back in the 1990s. There I had a chance to meet and talk to Michael Gove. I was at Buckingham Palace a few weeks ago for the garden party and I had a chance to speak to Her Majesty and other members of the royal family. In Britain access for diplomats and Irish ambassadors is very good at the moment. I take every possible opportunity to meet key people in the British system to explain our thinking on European issues, Northern Ireland and the various issues mentioned by members of this committee. I believe the relationship has never been better than it is today. After all, I am the 19th person to represent Ireland in London as head of mission since Independence but I am the first to have experienced a State visit. This says something about the nature of the relationship.

Deputy Eric Byrne mentioned the former British ambassador to Ireland, Julian King, who was here during the Queen of England's State visit to Ireland. Not only am in contact with him but he was at the Irish Embassy last night to attend our event marking the centenary of the Home Rule Act. I had a conversation with him and yesterday he gave a briefing at the UK Foreign Office on last week's EU summit. He is now director general at the Foreign Office with responsibility for European affairs and this indicates how strong the connection is between our countries. We do not lack in opportunities to put our message across to key people throughout the British system and this is an impressive aspect of that system. It is open to contact and the views of others, especially Ireland's views.

We have contact with around 200 organisations that at one time or another received or applied for funding from the emigrant support programme. The Irish community in Britain is 500,000 strong and it is elderly, compared to the Polish, Indian and Pakistani communities. The average age of an Irish immigrant to Britain is far higher than that of other immigrant communities. The Irish community has particular issues that must be addressed. Not all of the organisations mentioned are welfare organisations - some are county associations and so on. They are important because they provide support, though we tend not to fund county associations unless they are carrying out a project that fits into the remit of the emigrant support programme. I spend many Saturday nights between October and April attending annual dinners for county associations. They usually take place at the Crown Moran Hotel in Cricklewood, which I am sure some of the committee members have attended. I believe the Irish community requires particular support because it has more elderly and vulnerable people than other immigrant communities.

The issue of Britain and the European Union is receiving considerable attention within our system at the moment but we must remember that much could happen in the coming years. We should not make assumptions about how the debate will unfold but we are monitoring it very carefully. I know people in Dublin and throughout the Irish system are genuinely concerned as to how the debate evolves and the Embassy will continue to keep our colleagues in Dublin and other interested Irish parties fully informed. It is a very important issue from an Irish point of view.

We do have contact with those affected by the Magdalen laundries. There was a big event at the Embassy last year before I arrived - the Taoiseach met them and I understand it was a very emotional occasion

In terms of prisoner issues, we support the Irish chaplaincy and the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas. We have a role in this area and I have dedicated colleagues at the Embassy. Last year we were involved in a total of 219 consular cases and that amounts to four cases per week.

This only covers cases where there is a substantial engagement by the Embassy with an Irish citizen who has a consular problem, which could be anything, including theft of a passport or possessions. We have a great deal of contact with Irish people who are either based in Britain or passing through London. We issue some 40,000 passports and 7,500 visas per year. The Embassy has 51 members of staff to cover all of these issues.

Senator Mark Daly: I thank the ambassador for his contribution. He outlined issues around the forgotten Irish in Britain and the organisations that look after them and the scale of this problem is growing every year. It was once proposed that those Irish living isolated lives in Britain, in terms of housing and communities that are no longer Irish in nature, could be brought back to Ireland. Is there any such proposal now? How much financial assistance do the forgotten Irish receive?

The ambassador skipped the issue of Scottish independence so I will not ask him to comment further but I have direct questions on other issues on which the ambassador may receive instructions from Dublin. The Dáil and Seanad passed motions on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings but have we requested those files and received a written response from the British Government?

The television programme “Panorama” on the BBC covered the admissions of some members of a British army unit that they were involved in shootings in Belfast. Was this raised at an official level and did we ask that the British Government seek convictions? I ask this because it was the first time there was an admission that a British Prime Minister was made aware of what was happening in the North. Downing Street correspondence from 1972 said “the Prime Minister thought it particularly important that it is envisaged, in paragraph seven of the note attached to your Secretary of State minutes, special care should be taken to operate within the law”. This was after the Prime Minister was made aware of the activities of the undercover unit that shot unarmed civilians in Belfast. Did we do anything in response to the BBC “Panorama” programme?

Chairman: Senator Daly is straying outside the ambassador’s remit on policy. He cannot answer some of these questions.

Senator Mark Daly: I am just asking questions.

Chairman: To be fair, we need answers and some of those questions relate to Government policy rather than the role of the ambassador. This is within the remit of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Senator Mark Daly: Either we did not raise this issue at an official level with the British Government or we did. Ironically, when I wrote to Downing Street asking about the letter in question the reply was sent to Senator Mark Daly and Marcus Ó Dálaigh.

Chairman: The Senator’s colleagues in the Oireachtas could table a parliamentary question on those issues.

Senator Mark Daly: I just ask for it to be raised. The programme by the RTE special investigations unit on the “hooded men” will have ongoing consequences around the world. The Irish Government took a case to the European Court of Human Rights and information was withheld by the British Government.

Chairman: The Senator is straying outside the area. The ambassador is not here to answer

questions on Northern Ireland.

Senator Mark Daly: What about British-Irish relations?

Chairman: The topic is British Irish relations in trade. We are straying into the area of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Senator Mark Daly: I am looking at the agenda and I do not see that we are excluding particular topics for discussion. I am just asking a question. An RTE documentary about hooded men was broadcast. The European Court of Human Rights ruled on the evidence given, but some evidence was not made available to the Irish Government. The fact that the torture or interrogation techniques used were permissible is used today as justification in countries throughout the world for using what are known as, ironically enough, enhanced interrogation techniques.

Chairman: Come on, Senator, you do not expect the ambassador to answer these questions. Be fair to the ambassador. He is here to answer questions on our remit, which is trade.

Senator Mark Daly: This committee deals with foreign affairs.

Chairman: Yes, but another committee deals with Northern Ireland.

Senator Mark Daly: Does the agenda state we cannot bring up anything about the North?

Chairman: The Senator can, but the witness is an ambassador who represents his country. The Senator is asking him for opinions and questions on areas which are outside our remit.

Senator Mark Daly: I am asking whether we raised anything about the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

Chairman: That is a matter for the committee which deals with the Good Friday Agreement.

Senator Mark Daly: It is not.

Chairman: It is. We do not deal with that area. The committees have agreed that we do not overlap.

Senator Mark Daly: We are a foreign affairs committee.

Chairman: Yes, but we also have the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement which deals with those issues.

Senator Mark Daly: We do but-----

Chairman: There is a rule that we cannot overlap.

Senator Mark Daly: The Dáil and Seanad passed motions on the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

Chairman: Those are the Houses and this is the committee.

Senator Mark Daly: I am asking what are we doing at a departmental level. The Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement does not have an ambassador-----

Chairman: The ambassador will answer the questions in his capacity if he can do so, and I would like the Senator to stay within our remit if at all possible.

Senator Mark Daly: He is our representative-----

Chairman: I am asking the Senator to stay within our remit.

Senator Mark Daly: He is our representative as an ambassador with the British Government. I am asking whether we did anything to seek the files. Did we do anything about the facts raised by the BBC "Panorama" programme?

Deputy Eric Byrne: On a point of order, the questions being posed-----

Senator Mark Daly: I am asking about the RTE-----

Deputy Eric Byrne: With all due respect-----

Chairman: I ask Senator Daly to finish. I have given him much time.

Senator Mark Daly: With regard to the RTE special investigations unit, did we raise any issue? Last Friday *The Guardian* had a special report on the Ballymurphy massacre. Will we raise this issue? Last night at an event John Bruton expressed his regret at the 1916 Rising, which I thought was interesting, and his support for John Redmond who, some would say, sent more people to their deaths than any other Irishman in history.

Chairman: Come on, Senator. The mood and relationship between the UK and Ireland have changed. The Senator is straying into matters which are part of the remit of another committee, to be honest about it. Be fair about it.

Senator Mark Daly: This is from *The Guardian* newspaper last Friday.

Chairman: I ask the Senator to finish on this point.

Deputy Eric Byrne: On a point of information, and I am serious about this-----

Senator Mark Daly: If I want a point of information, I will ask for it, and if Deputy Byrne wants to come back in-----

Chairman: I ask Senator Daly to finish please.

Senator Mark Daly: Did we raise any of these issues during the ambassador's term? Are we likely to raise them?

Deputy Eric Byrne: On a point of order, my understanding of an ambassadorial role is the complete opposite to that of the previous speaker. There are political obligations on Ministers with responsibility for foreign affairs to deal with these political matters with the Taoiseach. I seek a ruling from the Chairman on whether it is appropriate that an ambassador, who is an agent of the country, is subject to these questionings because they are more appropriate to the political bosses who run the show.

Chairman: Some of the questions asked by Senator Daly can be asked in the Dáil, through parliamentary questions or through the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. It is not the function of the ambassador to discuss the issue before this committee. We have moved on.

Senator Mark Daly: Sorry, Chairman-----

Chairman: The Senator has asked his questions.

Senator Mark Daly: I will wait for the answers.

Chairman: Some of the questions are outside the remit of the ambassador. He is a capable man and is well able to decide whether he should answer them.

Senator Mark Daly: He is well able to answer them, and I am asking him whether he has been directed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to ask the questions.

Chairman: All I am saying is that those questions are outside our remit. We have discussed this before-----

Senator Mark Daly: They are not. International relations between Ireland and Great Britain are on the agenda.

Chairman: I wish to return to trade. Britain is the fifth largest exporting market-----

Senator Mark Daly: Sorry, Chairman, please do not interrupt me. I am asking a question. Is the ambassador allowed to answer my question?

Chairman: He will be. I am asking more questions.

Senator Mark Daly: That is fine.

Chairman: Please.

Senator Mark Daly: Okay, Chairman.

Chairman: Take the ruling of the Chair, please, if you do not mind. I grouped the questions when you were not here and I want to remind you of this.

I want to return to the issue of trade. Britain is our fifth largest exporting market and the UK is the third largest investor in Ireland, which is extremely important. We have a very open economy and export 80% of what we produce. Foreign direct investment into the country is extremely important. We have seen the results of the two state visits and there have been talks about Prime Minister David Cameron leading a trade mission here in the near future. He had talks with the Taoiseach in Downing Street on this matter. Prime Minister Cameron has led a number of trade missions to other countries, particularly India and other such areas. Does the ambassador see a visit such as this happening in the near future, so as to cement further the economic relationship between our two countries?

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I realise I failed to answer one or two questions from the previous round because I had written them on a second page and I did not get to it. Deputy Mitchell asked about secondments from other Departments. In my view these are extremely valuable. It is not a new practice and has gone on for quite some time. For as long as I can remember there have always been people at the embassy in London from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation or its predecessor, and at present there are two. We have also always had a representative from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. In Berlin there was a representative from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine but not from the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. For me it is a win-win because we get extra resources at the embassy and we get people with other skills. I work extremely closely, and have

daily contact, with my colleagues from the Departments. They work very much as part of our team, which is very important because we cannot have separate operations running simultaneously in a country. We must have an integrated joined-up team Ireland approach, which is the approach we pursue.

Deputy Mitchell also asked about the attitude of business to the debate about Britain and the EU. I work with many of the Irish business networks. Recently we hosted an event at the embassy for the Dublin Chamber of Commerce. We have also held events for other chambers of commerce. The business community in Britain is very active on the question of Britain's future in the European Union. A wonderful report was published by the Confederation of British Industry last November, at the time of its annual congress, about Britain's future in Europe. It is well worth reading and shows the business community in Britain is very much seized of the issue. Last week, the Centre for European Reform also brought out a very good report which argues that if Britain were to leave the European Union, it would not result in reduced regulation because the regulation would need to be in place on a national basis anyway. There is much good discussion on the issue of Britain in Europe. We are following the debate very carefully and will continue to do so. Nobody has reached the point of discussing contingencies because we do not know what the future will bring. We must be ready to respond as the situation develops because of the significance of our relations with the UK.

With regard to the forgotten Irish I will give a little anecdote. Recently I visited Mind Yourself, which started as a women's support charity network. It now has a more general remit and works with four or five groups, all of which deal with issues of vulnerability. I gave a little talk and read a few poems for its literary group. In responding, one man told me that he had two homes, in that when he went to Ireland, he felt like he was going home, but when he returned to London after his holiday in Ireland, he felt like he was going home as well. I told him that was how it should be and asked him would it not be terrible if he was living in a country and always pining away for his old country? Would it also not be a terrible thing if he forgot the country of his birth and upbringing? That man had a good attitude to being an immigrant. He felt at home in both countries, which I hope is the way most people feel.

I will cite another example. At the great reception at Buckingham Palace hosted by the Queen, two Irish women were interviewed by RTE as they were getting ready to go to the palace and again afterwards. One, a wonderful woman I know who is involved in the county association and went to Britain in the early 1960s or late 1950s, stated that Britain had been good to her, but that she had also been good to it. She went there as a 17 year old and worked until she was 75 years of age. This is exactly the kind of connection between our two countries that I want to cherish and support. One does not want people going to Britain and feeling that, somehow, they are dependent on the good graces of British employers. I was delighted when President Higgins visited University College Hospital in London and met half a dozen Irish nurses, one of whom was in her 90s. These are people who made a major contribution to the life of Britain. As Irish people living in and representing Ireland, we should be proud of that contribution. I always tell younger people I meet of my hope that, not too far into the future, they will go home and bring skills, ideas and innovations back to Ireland to help the development of our society. I also tell them that, if they decide to stay in the UK, I want them to be connected with and a resource for Ireland. It is for this reason that I host so many events for the Irish in Britain. I want to keep young people connected with our country so that they can make a contribution in future even if they decide to stay in Britain.

The situation is a bit different from how it was previously. I meet people who come home

12 times per year, are on Skype every day to their families, read *The Irish Times* first thing in the morning and listen to RTE or local radio. As such, it should not be part of our brief to bring people back. Most are quite happy living in Britain, but they want the connection with Ireland. I am not aware of any programme to return people and am not sure that it would be a good idea. If people spend their lives in Britain and have families and contacts there, that should be respected and they should be able to continue living there. For this reason, it is good that the emigrant support programme provides such people with support to enable them to continue connecting with Ireland. We are not replacing British social welfare or the British health system. We are simply giving people an opportunity to access Irish themed or connected services that supplement those to which they are entitled as people who have spent their lives in Britain and are now retired.

I will not discuss the individual issues raised by Senator Daly, but we have contact with the British Government at all levels. There are contacts between my colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade who deal with Anglo-Irish relations and their counterparts in Britain. I have contacts with British officials in the Cabinet Office, the Northern Ireland Office, NIO, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO. We have frequent ministerial contacts. The Tánaiste meets the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland frequently. The Taoiseach has regular contact with Prime Minister Cameron through visits and correspondence. A great deal of contact is happening. All of the issues on the agenda at this meeting are being dealt with at the appropriate level, but I do not want to get into the individual issues-----

Senator Mark Daly: To the best of Mr. Mulhall's knowledge-----

Chairman: Senator, please. The ambassador is speaking, so have manners.

Senator Mark Daly: I would like to ask a supplementary question.

Chairman: Afterwards, but do not interrupt.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I wish to comment on last night's event. I organised it because I believe in inclusivity. I invited people from a range of political points of view. We should be inclusive when it comes to commemorations in terms of who takes part and what we commemorate. We should not be selective. Recently, I gave a talk at the University of Liverpool entitled, "History is not to blame: Commemorating Ireland 1912-1922". It is on the Irish Embassy's website. In my speech, I stated that, for me, a central narrative in Irish history led up to the birth of the State, including the GPO and the various events that preceded the formation of the State. However, there are also other narratives, for example, the House of Commons and the battlefields of the First World War. We should be able to accommodate all of those narratives without in any way denying the centrality of 1916 and the subsequent developments that resulted in Irish Independence.

At last night's event, I stated that, during my time in Britain, I intended to commemorate a range of events. Last night it was the Home Rule Act, in that we recognised the contribution of generations of Irishmen - they were men, apart from Constance Markievicz who never got to take her seat - who represented Ireland in the British Parliament for almost 120 years and 90 years after Catholic emancipation. They represented Nationalist Ireland and did their best to try to ameliorate the circumstances of our country during that time. Their contribution should be acknowledged and respected because they were Nationalists and had the best interests of the people they served at heart when they went across in difficult circumstances, argued the case for Ireland and achieved many advances that the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht,

Deputy Deenihan, mentioned in his speech at the beginning of last night's event. By the way, it will be televised on BBC Parliament on Saturday evening. That channel is available in Ireland on Sky and everyone watching will be able to see the range of opinions aired at the Irish Embassy last night.

I also stated last night that I was determined that Ireland would hold a commemoration in Britain in 2016 of the Easter Rising. That was an event that had an important impact on relations between our two islands and led to Independence. I made the point that, with the passage of 100 years, we ought to be able to examine our history and have differences of opinion about it without those getting out of hand and creating difficulties for present and future relationships between our two countries. I am in favour of inclusivity and I intend not only to commemorate the First World War and Home Rule Act but also in the coming years to commemorate the events that led to the foundation of the Irish State and, as I also mentioned last night, to commemorate literary anniversaries. For example, next year is the 150th anniversary of the birth of W.B. Yeats. I have already discussed with Senator Susan O'Keeffe, who is involved in a programme in this regard, how I can help to promote that programme of events in Britain in the coming year. This year marks the centenary of the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*, which is a great literary achievement. We should, I believe, be willing to recognise, commemorate and celebrate not only the political events that changed the face of Ireland during the decade between 1912 and 1922 but its literary achievements during that time.

On trade, Britain is our second biggest export market. Remarkably, we are the fifth most important export market for the UK. If, as I suggested earlier, members were to read the report by the CBI published last November, they would see listed therein all of the export markets, and from that information, Britain currently exports more to Ireland than to China, India and Brazil combined, which countries combined have a population of 2.5 billion. A recent KPMG study predicts that in 2030 Ireland will be the third biggest export market for the UK and will still at that time be a more important market for the UK than China. When one considers the enormous expansion of the Chinese economy, exports and so forth, that is a remarkable fact. The two-way advantage that flows from the relationship between our two countries is vital. I constantly remind people in Britain of the fact that this is not a one-way street. Our relations with the UK are a matter of two-way advantage. This was acknowledged by Britain when, during the height of our crisis, it provided a bilateral loan to Ireland, reflecting the fact that Ireland is an important export market for it.

The joint trade mission that took place earlier this year in Singapore was a success. I know the Taoiseach has spoken to Prime Minister Cameron about some further joint trade initiatives, which obviously would be a good thing. While we are separate and have our separate interests there are, I believe, areas where we can combine and should do so whenever it brings advantage to Ireland.

Senator Mark Daly: I thank the ambassador for his response. I asked about the specific cases because they were of concern. I am sure that if they were being raised in London, Mr. Mulhall, as our man in London, would be told so by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Chairman: The Senator can have the issue raised by way of parliamentary question by a colleague in the other House.

Senator Mark Daly: The cases were discussed in the Dáil and that is the reason I asked if Mr. Mulhall could confirm if they had been raised in the UK.

Chairman: Sorry, Senator. Mr. Mulhall has already dealt with that issue.

Senator Mark Daly: He has not answered my question.

Chairman: I call Deputy Durkan.

Senator Mark Daly: Sorry, Chairman. I asked a question.

Chairman: The Senator must not have been listening. Mr. Mulhall said he would not respond to that question.

Senator Mark Daly: I was listening.

(Interruptions).

Chairman: Deputy Durkan, without interruption, please.

Senator Mark Daly: That is why I asked the question, Chairman.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: I compliment Ambassador Mulhall on his work. I have seen first-hand the work done by him and his wife over many years in various locations throughout the globe. He is a shining example of the type of people we most desperately needed during the past couple of years to promote our cause. He has done a tremendous job. I also compliment Mr. Mulhall for encouraging thinking to evolve with the passage of time. As said by Mr. Mulhall, it is hugely important for a country like ours that is dependant on trade for commercial purposes and shares its culture with the world that we evolve. The relationship between Ireland and the UK is a classic example in this regard.

I believe Mr. Mulhall is well placed. Those whose decision it was to place Mr. Mulhall in his current position are to be complimented on doing so. There has been a major evolution of the relationship between Ireland and the UK over recent years. This must continue. It must be remembered that we all have a right to commemorate events of the past. Some countries commemorate events that occurred further back, which is great. It is also worth remembering that European citizens have come together to acknowledge and honour the past while at the same time using the lessons learned from that past to the benefit of future generations. Mr. Mulhall is also doing this.

Mr. Mulhall spoke about Irish companies and said that in his role as ambassador he has dealt with many. I once saw a promotion of an Irish-owned multinational corporation, the like of which I have never seen before. It showed a progressive modern Irish company that started out in a shed at the bottom of a garden in north-eastern Leinster and grew to international proportions. The promotion was only 15 minutes long and was the greatest and most powerful image I have ever seen of a company and country. This is the type of work in which Mr. Mulhall and his colleagues in other embassies across the globe have been engaged on behalf of this country. We owe him and them for much of what has happened. We were in a very bad place only a few short years ago.

Deputy Olivia Mitchell: Well said.

Chairman: Would Mr. Mulhall like to respond?

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I thank Deputy Durkan for acknowledging the role of spouses

of officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. My wife and the wives of many colleagues have made a huge contribution in this area in the public interest. I am glad Deputy Durkan has recognised that contribution. It is something of which I have been aware for many years, including from my time as a young diplomat in terms of the work undertaken at that time by the spouses of then ambassadors. All of the moving around affects families. My daughter attended eight different schools during her school years. Happily, she has turned out to be a fine and pleasant young woman.

Deputy Eric Byrne: Multi-talented.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I dislike casual articles in newspapers about ambassadors with silver spoons in their mouths, flustering around eating Ferrero Rocher and drinking champagne. That was never the reality and is certainly not the reality these days. These days it is all about delivering results and so on. I will give an example of how the world has changed since I first started work. When I started work, if more than five copies of a document were needed, one had to do a stencil. I am now on Twitter. There is no greater contrast than that. I started at a time when every letter commenced with “I am directed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to say”. Last year, I gave approximately 64 speeches throughout Germany. I probably gave more in Britain. The role has changed. It has become much more a role of spreading the word about Ireland. In my view the role is to represent and spread the word about Ireland and to help Irish companies to get their foot in the door in order that they can sell their goods and services, thus sustaining jobs and prosperity in this country.

Deputy Brendan Smith: The role of the GAA in Britain is very important for our young emigrants. We have spoken about the societies that do excellent work for older age cohorts, which is important, and reference was made to facilitating people who wish to return to Ireland. In my county of Cavan we did work some years ago making housing available for people who wished to relocate. It is not straightforward and in many instances people find it hard to read-just. The issue must be driven locally, perhaps in conjunction with county societies. We have all been to the Crown Moran Hotel on different occasions. The GAA is very important to young emigrants, both in providing a sporting outlet, a social outlet and a networking opportunity. I am given to understand the ambassador is responsible for the London GAA team not doing as well in the football championship this year as last year. I understand he has made a firm commitment that 2015 will be a better year for London GAA in the all-Ireland championship.

Deputy Eric Byrne: I am not sure I expect the witness to answer this supplementary question as I hope there are mechanisms of conveying opinions on the document to which I refer. The EU has found Ireland in breach of the norm and has sought correction with regard to the eligibility of the Irish overseas in voting in general elections. Has the matter been addressed or have opinions been conveyed? With the number of Irish passports in England, it would be a challenging proposition.

Chairman: The ambassador should not forget the GAA.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I should have mentioned the GAA in my initial statement, as it is fantastic. A couple of weeks ago at the embassy we launched a study commissioned by the London Irish Centre, which surveyed new Irish emigrants, or those who have come to Britain in the past ten years. It was trying to figure out the views of such people, etc. Essentially, it concerned Irish teachers working in Britain. One of the conclusions of the report was that these younger people do not connect with the traditional Irish organisations in Britain except for the GAA, as all of them named it as a fundamental organisation that they connected and identified

with. It is an important point.

I went to Ruislip to see London play Galway and although I did my best to support London, I am afraid the chairman of the Galway county board, a former Minister and Deputy, Mr. Noel Treacy, had the winning formula. It was a great day and a fantastic occasion, as Irish people from all over south-east England flocked to Ruislip. I am delighted the Tánaiste announced some months ago a grant of €600,000 for the redevelopment of facilities at Ruislip so it can become a venue for Irish people to gather in future to watch intercounty football. I saw an intercounty game and although it was a bit one-sided, the standard was very high. It was impressive and I was delighted to be there. We have had much contact with the GAA in London over the past number of years and I have much admiration for the work it does.

The eligibility to vote issue has been raised with me fairly frequently and there is an organisation based in London which campaigns for the vote. It was also raised by the Irish community in Germany as in that country one cannot vote unless one is a citizen; the Irish felt they were being excluded there. In Britain, Irish people can vote, so the matter is slightly different. I give the same answer every time. The matter is being examined and the Constitutional Convention held a discussion about it, with submissions made from various Irish organisations around the world. The issue is on the agenda but it is a matter for the Government and the Oireachtas to decide who should be eligible to cast a vote. Perhaps it will be a matter for the people if constitutional change is required.

Chairman: The ambassador is a star attraction as Deputy O’Sullivan now has a supplementary question.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: I recently met a group of women and I wonder if they were in touch with the ambassador. These women spent time in the industrial schools here but are now living in England. They are women of mixed race, and they have had to deal with particular issues because of that. I do not know if the ambassador has come across the group.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I met them a couple of times at recent events, although I cannot remember exactly where they were. We have exchanged cards and I have encouraged them to contact me about the issues affecting them. They explained these briefly but we only had a conversation standing up for a couple of minutes. I would need to sit down with the women to speak properly with them. The Deputy should encourage them to do so. I expected them to follow up with me but they have not yet done so. I would be delighted to speak with them.

I am a great believer in inclusivity and the role of the embassy should be to cover Irishness in all its expressions. For example, last year I was asked to launch at the Embassy the London Irish lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual network. It was a tremendous evening and a wonderful occasion, as the people who came along that evening probably felt they would never be welcome at an Irish embassy. I told them that whatever may have been the case when they left Ireland, it is now a country that can embrace Irishness in its broadest expression, including that particular community. I encouraged them to continue to connect with Ireland, as some of them had been gone for a long time and perhaps had difficulty. I encouraged them to believe that we are now a country very different from that which they left many years before. It is now capable of embracing a range of identities and defining them as Irish.

Chairman: We appreciate the ambassador’s time before the committee. We understand the work of an ambassador is now very different from what it was; it is a challenging job but it is very enjoyable. Please pass our best wishes to the support team in the Embassy, as they are

extremely important to the work. Some of us have had contact with them because of incidents in our constituencies and they have always been very helpful and supportive as public representatives.

This is the first of a series of meetings in which we hope to have our ambassadors from abroad coming before the committee to outline the work done by them and their teams. They are the face, ears and eyes of the Irish people in the UK and elsewhere, and Mr. Mulhall is serving in the UK at a very important time in history, particularly with regard to relations between our countries. Our relationship with the UK can only go from strength to strength, and it is the work of the embassies abroad and our people there which helps that. I am delighted the GAA has been mentioned as I am sure Mr. Mulhall was probably there to celebrate with Clare when the Liam McCarthy Cup went to London.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: We had the captain of the Clare team at the Embassy recently.

Chairman: I heard that.

H.E. Mr. Dan Mulhall: I am a Déise man.

Chairman: Waterford hurling will be improving as the football improves. We thank the ambassador for his interest in all areas of culture and the arts, and much of that was reflected in the event at the Royal Albert Hall during the visit of President Higgins, which he seemed to enjoy so much. That was due to Mr. Mulhall's wealth of experience as a diplomat who has served in Asia and Europe, and his time in the UK will be very fruitful as well. We wish him well for the future.

The joint committee went into private session at 4.20 p.m. and adjourned at 4.25 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 9 July 2014.