

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM

FEIDHMIÚ CHOMHAONTÚ AOINE AN CHÉASTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Déardaoin, 9 Feabhra 2017

Thursday, 9 February 2017

The Joint Committee met at 2 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

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| Deputy Declan Breathnach, | Senator Frances Black, |
| Deputy Tony McLoughlin, | Senator Gerard P. Craughwell, |
| Deputy Fergus O'Dowd, | Senator Mark Daly, |
| Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, | Senator Frank Feighan. |
| Deputy Sean Sherlock, | |
| Deputy Brendan Smith, | |

In attendance: Senator Paul Coghlan..

DEPUTY KATHLEEN FUNCHION IN THE CHAIR.

Implications for Good Friday Agreement of UK Referendum Result: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: We will continue our consideration of the implications of Brexit for the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions. I am pleased to welcome the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, who will focus, in particular, on the implications of Brexit for the allocation of EU funding, including under the PEACE and INTERREG programmes.

Apologies have been received from Senators Denis Landy and Niall Ó Donnghaile. We have also received apologies from Mr. Francie Molloy, MP, and Mr. Mickey Brady, MP.

I remind members of two matters. First, votes will take place at 4 p.m. It is possible that we will finish the meeting before then because I am not sure how much time would remain if we were to suspend the sitting.

Second, on behalf of the joint committee, I welcome Ms Marylee Wall who has been appointed as our policy adviser. She is on secondment from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I am sure everyone will have loads of questions for her in the next few months. It is great to have the assistance of a person from the Department. I am very glad that she has joined us.

Implications for Good Friday Agreement of UK Referendum Result (Resumed): Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

Chairman: On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Minister and thank him for being with us today. We know his time is precious so we very much appreciate it. I remind members, guests and those in the Public Gallery to please ensure that their mobile phones, tablets or anything electronic are switched off or at least are on airplane mode as they interfere with the recording equipment.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person 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. If they are directed by the Chairman to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice 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.

There were many questions in the past on the possible implications of Brexit for EU funding for the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, PEACE, and the EU initiative for inter-regional co-operation INTERREG. I am sure the committee would be interested to hear the Minister's thoughts on that.

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I thank the

Cathaoirleach and the committee for the opportunity to appear before it. I am very pleased to be here to discuss, as the Chairman indicated, the implications of Brexit for the Good Friday Agreement. I will be focusing my remarks mainly on an area that I know is of interest to the committee, which is the status of European Union funding for Northern Ireland, how I see it at the moment and my expectation for its future evolution.

I am very much aware of the important work the committee has undertaken in recent months in this area. I appreciate the interest of members in the PEACE and INTERREG programmes for which I am responsible. It is a responsibility that I share with my colleague in the Northern Ireland Executive, Mr. Máirtín Ó Muilleoir. I know Mr. Ó Muilleoir has already appeared before the committee and I also know it has had the opportunity to be briefed by the chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body, SEUPB, Ms Gina McIntyre, with whom my officials and Department work closely.

In December I travelled to Derry where, along with Mr. Ó Muilleoir and Ms McIntyre, I saw some of the excellent work being undertaken by PEACE and INTERREG. I have had an opportunity to visit programmes and projects funded by both programmes, to meet with programme beneficiaries and to assure them of the Irish Government's continuing commitment to PEACE and INTERREG. I have had the opportunity over a number of years to meet those who are involved in organising PEACE projects that are funded by PEACE and INTERREG but I made a point at the end of last year of spending two days in Derry and going to visit a selection of the projects. No papers or meetings with those organising the projects compare with the opportunity to visit them, to see the work that is under way and to see the importance of that work from an economic perspective and the very important role that it plays in sustaining the peace process.

With both those perspectives in mind, let me be very clear about this Government's commitment and my commitment to the current programmes and to successor programmes post-2020. The Irish Government is justifiably very proud of its role in securing EU funding for a fourth PEACE programme. Between them, PEACE and INTERREG have seen nearly €3.5 billion of investment in Northern Ireland and the Border region of Ireland over the last quarter of a century, with more than €0.5 billion to be invested over the period beginning in 2014 and ending in 2020. These programmes have made an enormous contribution to cross-Border co-operation and remain important drivers of regional, economic and social development in a cross-Border context. More than that, the programmes have been a key element of the European Union's continuing commitment to the process of peace building, reconciliation and support for the Good Friday Agreement.

As part of the contingency planning undertaken by the Government prior to the UK referendum, my Department identified the risks to these EU-funded programmes in the event that the UK voted to leave. As soon as the result was known work started on securing the programmes. Early on the morning of the referendum result I had my first conversation with my officials about the steps that needed to be taken. That afternoon they had their first discussions with their counterparts in the European Commission, the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the SEUPB. A week later, the North-South Ministerial Council, NSMC, meeting in Dublin Castle, reiterated the joint commitment of the Government and the Executive to the successful implementation of the programmes and agreed that the two sponsor Ministers should consider how to secure European Regional Development Fund, ERDF, funding for the two programmes, including through engagement with the Commission. Later that week I hosted a sectoral meeting of the NSMC in Iveagh House where I proposed that Mr. Ó Muilleoir and I would write to

the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, Ms Corina Crețu, to highlight the importance of the programmes.

So began a process of patiently working through a very significant number of issues facing the programmes. I was delighted that on 28 October 2016, that is, four months and four days after the referendum result, and against a background of enormous uncertainty over Brexit, Mr. Ó Muilleoir and I were able to announce that we had agreed a safeguard clause that would Brexit-proof letters of offer to programme beneficiaries. That was a very significant development in light of the challenges that we then faced. I want to recognise the work that went into achieving that recognition from officials in the Northern Ireland Executive and from officials in my Department. Mr. Ó Muilleoir and I were really pleased to be able to communicate that development to projects which were dependent on certainty about future funding.

With that in mind, I will outline the three objectives I have with regard to such funding. In the short term, my objective was to secure the programmes and give programme beneficiaries the confidence they need to proceed with projects. That has now been achieved through a process of working quietly behind the scenes to address this particular challenge. This is the approach being taken by the Government across a range of headings to emphasise our concerns and to ensure that they are fully reflected in the EU position once negotiations commence. I would also like to acknowledge the collaboration and frequent contact that took place between myself and Mr. Ó Muilleoir across that period that played a key role in allowing everybody to get to that point.

In the medium term, my objective now is to see implementation of these programmes out to 2020. This will take place during a period in which it will be likely that the United Kingdom will leave the European Union. We should not underestimate the challenge that will be involved here. We will look to maintain these programmes that receive EU funding across a period in which the UK leaves the EU. This is the importance of the safeguard clause that we secured and that was communicated to the project beneficiaries. I hope that the current political situation in Northern Ireland will not jeopardise that. This is why the Government has very strongly emphasised the need for the swift resumption of the power-sharing institutions after the election when we will play our part with the political parties and the British Government in the years ahead. I must also be very clear that the North-South programmes can only be implemented successfully with the co-operation of everyone concerned. These are EU-funded cross-Border programmes which is one of the many reasons it is so important to see a resumption of the political institutions. This needs to be understood by everybody involved in the programmes. We must all respect not just the letter but also the spirit of the programmes.

The long-term objective is to see the success of programmes beyond 2020. These programmes are very well regarded in the North, South, UK and throughout the EU. The necessary goodwill is there for successor programmes. Moreover, the regulatory framework for programmes with third countries already exists. My officials are already working with the SEUPB to examine such programmes to see how they might form a model for North-South programmes post 2020. Next week, I will be meeting colleagues within the European Commission and European Parliament on Wednesday and using that as a further opportunity to discuss a very important area. Of course, these programmes are not the only such programmes funded by the EU. For more than 20 years, we have had the very successful Ireland-Wales INTERREG programme. The current programme for the period 2014 to 2020 is worth almost €100 million. Last October, I had a very fruitful meeting with my Welsh counterpart, Mark Drakeford, to discuss the Ireland-Wales programme which supports an range of important investments across

our maritime border. There are also a range of cross-Border programmes supported by Horizon 2020, Leader, Erasmus+ and other EU funds that we want to see continue.

As I said, next week I will travel to Strasbourg for the plenary session of the European Parliament. In that session, I will meet members of the Parliament and Commission to emphasise our concerns about the impact of Brexit. I will highlight to them the importance of the peace process and the contribution EU funding has made as well as the necessity to protect the Good Friday Agreement and ensuring that the vital work of the programme continues. These are programmes that are worth fighting for. In the most recent visit I made, which was to Derry, I had the opportunity to walk across the peace bridge with a DUP mayor and a Minister of the Northern Ireland Government from Sinn Féin. This is a project that was enabled by the European Union through a funding stream we have fought to maintain and which we want to see deployed successfully up to 2020. I am absolutely committed to us doing everything we can to negotiate a structure and funding for these programmes for the future of Northern Ireland and those parts of the Border which have seen them make a huge difference to the economic and social development of their communities. That is an overview of where we are and of the various programmes. I look forward to responding to any questions or points the committee has.

Chairman: I will open the floor to questions. We will take three contributions together and then revert to the Minister for answers. Deputies Breathnach and Sherlock and Senator Craughwell will go first.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: I welcome the Minister's comments and thank him for his proactivity on questions from the Dáil and Seanad on this important funding stream. I have lived through all of the peace programmes and INTERREG programmes. Indeed, when INTERREG was announced, many in the Border area wondered if it was an Easter egg. There was a great deal of difficulty in trying to understand what the programme was. Thanks be to God, it was an Easter egg and a golden one at that, not just for the Border region, but indeed for myriad projects which have benefitted people right across the country from North-South interaction, whether in universities in Cork, Dublin or elsewhere. The country has benefitted greatly from it. I contend, however, that there is a major vacuum here albeit I welcome the commitment of the Government up to 2020. I took the liberty of writing to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who confirmed for me on 12 December that he wished to affirm his Government's commitment to Northern Ireland's hard-gained political stability and the continuation of the programme, which is welcome in itself. I hope that will be honoured.

I have said time out of number since I entered the Dáil that for too long communities turned their backs on each other. As a result of INTERREG and the peace programmes, communities have collaborated, faced each other and found commonality of purpose. That did not happen in the Border region for many years and required the aid of the EU whether it was students benefiting from the funds in attending colleges across the island, research or the collaboration of local authorities. That could be in difficulty post-Brexit. It is the uncertainty I want to come back to and the worry. While there is a commitment to 2020, people are afraid to plan post that date. It is dragging out the uncertainty as to whether these worthwhile projects from which communities have benefitted greatly will continue. I would like the Minister to comment on that.

We had the SEUPB in here and its representatives indicated, as has the Minister, that they were looking at mechanisms whereby funding is provided to non-EU countries by the EU. The EU was set up to ensure that peace continued. The peace process is probably the greatest peace process in Europe since the Second World War. Will the EU see it as an exemplar of how a peace process should operate and guarantee the funding into the future? The Minister referred

to various programmes. I could list a lot more, including the Atlantic programmes and other European programmes for which people have planned. There would be a serious risk to the peace process if these programmes were not followed through and if the EU does not find a special mechanism to ensure that, regardless of Brexit, these programmes continue beyond 2020.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I join the welcome to the Minister. My first question relates specifically to the Minister's intervention where he stated that he had agreed a safeguard clause to Brexit-proof letters of offer to programme beneficiaries. Could he flesh out that statement and tell us exactly what it means in relation to securing funding lines for the very programmes he talks about?

The second issue I wish to raise relates to Horizon 2020. I am encouraged by the fact that the Minister made specific reference to it. He might indicate what the permutations might be for Science Foundation Ireland, SFI, funded programmes whereby the legislative base within the Twenty-six Counties is such that the remit of SFI allows it to fund researchers in the North and the South. I am concerned that when the United Kingdom exits the European Union, it will put this island at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing the Horizon 2020 funding pot because, to all intents and purposes, there are two jurisdictions which can collaborate to access funding from the main source. Has the Government given any thought to what the permutations will be in seeking science funding and for the island of Ireland in reaching the stated target in accessing the Horizon 2020 funding pot? Has the Government, not specifically the Minister, engaged with Science Foundation Ireland on having a co-ordinated view on the research infrastructure which is vital in supporting thousands of jobs, North and South? What is the Minister's general view on that issue?

We are all following the passage of the legislation before the House of Commons. I understand the opposition tabled an amendment, No. 86, to require Article 50 not break to anything agreed to in the Good Friday Agreement, to put it loosely. I understand the amendment was defeated by a majority of 39. Therefore, *de facto*, the Tories defeated the amendment. I am concerned about this. Is the Government watching the legislation from that vantage point? Does it have a strong view that sufficient attention is being given by the UK Government to the Good Friday Agreement? If the UK Government is defeating simple amendments of this nature, it may speak to a certain attitude that would concern me.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Tá fáilte roimh an tÁire. He will be aware that the members of the Joint Committee on European Affairs visited Brussels in the past two days. I was a member of the group and during the two-day period we held 14 meetings with different individuals and groupings, ranging from Monsieur Barnier to Commissioner Hogan. I have to compliment the Government because from what I heard in Brussels, a sizeable amount of work has been done by it in preparing for Brexit. However, it is perfectly clear to me from every meeting we held in Brussels that the time to drive home the needs of the Good Friday Agreement has passed. Everybody understands this. Yesterday morning Monsieur Barnier made the point that in 1999 he had visited Northern Ireland where he met two people on two occasions in different rooms, David Trimble and John Hume, and said the memory of the meetings would never leave him. He said the one thing he could tell us as we entered into the negotiations on Brexit was that he would not do anything to destabilise what had taken many years to put in place and work. He said he would do everything he could to hold it in place.

While Monsieur Barnier said it would be easy enough to deal with the issue of free movement of people, he also said he was asking the Irish Government to provide him with a solution in dealing with the issue of trade. What came across at every meeting was that they wanted the

Irish Government to identify five or six principles that Ireland held dear which set out our demands in the negotiations on Brexit and to provide solutions, where possible. Mr. Verhofstadt made the point yesterday that no matter how outlandish the solution seemed to us, we should put it on the table. He wants to hear how Ireland wants to deal with the issue. There was a clear understanding the island of Ireland had to be looked upon as a complete entity, North and South. Nobody had any answer as to how that would be achieved and one would not expect them to show their hand at this time, but I came away from Brussels totally satisfied in my mind that there was massive sympathy and support for our position within the Parliament, the Commission and among those who would be negotiating.

I fear there is a risk that we are sailing too close to the United Kingdom. We need to establish ourselves as good Europeans and to be seen as such. We need to constantly reaffirm our commitment to the European model and the European project which I believe the Minister will agree is in serious trouble, given the unrest across Europe. As good Europeans - we have always led the way in that regard - the time has come for us to do this.

What would be wrong at this stage with bringing in expertise from outside the Government? The members of the Irish Road Hauliers Association who cross borders every day of the week in travelling across Europe might have something to help us. The technological solution was dismissed in some of the discussions we had in which it was argued that the use of cameras and various other electronic devices might not be the way to go. I am not sure what the Minister's view is, but I know that he has all the sympathy and support he needs elsewhere in Europe.

The final matter I want to address is the Supreme Court ruling in the United Kingdom. It is clear from it - I attended a high level conference in Queen's University Belfast hosted by its legal department - that Westminster will trigger Article 50, irrespective of the view of any of the devolved governments. It does not need the permission of the assemblies in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales to trigger it. It is also clear that when it does trigger Article 50, it should have some primary legislation in place to reaffirm the Good Friday Agreement to ensure we will not find ourselves having to renegotiate any part of it, albeit that it is part of an international treaty which would be difficult to destabilise in any way.

Several of the people whom we met in Brussels pointed to the availability of European Investment Bank funding for capital projects in Ireland. One of the issues I discussed was the provision of what I refer to as a new European super highway to aid the further development of Rosslare, Waterford and Cork ports. There should be ferries sailing directly to mainland Europe, rather than having trucks stopped at the borders with the United Kingdom. We should develop our own super highway to bypass the UK problem. I do not know if such plans have yet been put on the table, but I do know that there are plans in Galway, for example, for a deep sea harbour. It might not be the most direct route to mainland Europe, but as a good Galwegian, I would have to support that plan. On the possibility of ferries sailing from Cork, Waterford, Rosslare, Dublin and Drogheda straight to the northern part of mainland Europe, are we looking at such projects, in addition to projects for the construction of a motorway to Letterkenny to improve the western corridor from Letterkenny to Cork, which is an horrendous trip to have to take?

I thank the Minister for giving of his time. I was most impressed by the understanding that exists and it is down to the work of the Government. The Minister of State, Deputy Murphy, was most accommodating while we were over there and I thank him for that.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I thank the Deputies and the Senator for their questions.

I will begin with the question from Deputy Breathnach. There is no vacuum. We have an agreement in place now to see the honouring of the programmes up to 2020. I will outline some of the detail for INTERREG. A total of 24 letters of offer have issued to projects. A total of 16 letters of offer for the PEACE programme have issued. We are in the process of finalising letters and agreements with projects in respect of funding. We gave a commitment to do everything possible to maintain the stability of these projects up to 2020. Had we not done that, then one could contend that such a vacuum exists. However, it does not because the agreement is in place up to 2020. The agreement is in place for a reason. Deputy Breathnach outlined the importance of the projects and the Government and I agree with him in this regard. Now, we need to move to looking at what can replace these programmes. The programmes matter and they have made a difference economically, socially and politically.

I was asked a direct question on whether this is in the interests of the European Union. I contend that it is. The EU is, first and foremost, a peace process - this point was alluded to already. Given its political provenance, there must be an opportunity for us to negotiate something to further support the peace process on our island. We will play our leading role to ensure that happens.

Deputy Sherlock asked what I meant by Brexit-proofing. In the letters of offer that we have issued to the projects, we have agreed text in respect of a safeguard clause. It has been agreed that letters of offer will include a safeguard clause whereby if, as a consequence of the UK leaving the EU, the UK element of the European Regional Development Fund is no longer available, the letters will be covered by the UK Treasury financial commitment in respect of EU funding programmes, even when specific projects continue beyond the UK departure from the EU.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: That is just in from the UK Exchequer. Is that correct?

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: It is about ensuring that a funding source is in place. It has also been agreed that the programmes and projects will continue to be subject to EU regulations.

Reference was made to Horizon 2020 and Science Foundation Ireland. The Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Deputy Mitchell O'Connor, is responsible for this area, in particular for Horizon 2020 funding. This is another area of cross-border EU funding that we are keen to see continue. Anyway, it will be subject to negotiation and agreement.

A point was made about the amendment on the Good Friday Agreement. It is my understanding that all amendments to the Bill were defeated in the House of Commons. However, the Government and, no doubt, the Oireachtas will be absolutely vigilant in respect of the maintenance of the Good Friday Agreement and any associated commitments. This leads me directly to the point Senator Craughwell made about the Good Friday Agreement. I thank the Senator for recognising the work that has taken place up to this point. Substantial work has been undertaken to copperfasten the understanding of the significance of the Good Friday Agreement, its status in international law and as an international treaty.

Reference was made to the broad communication of principals from the Government regarding where we are now in the aftermath of recent developments in the House of Commons and in the immediate run-up to the triggering of Article 50. That will happen imminently. That will be laid out on the part of the Government by the Taoiseach.

Senator Craughwell expressed concern about sailing too close to the UK. I can be explicit

in my comments by saying that I see Ireland's long-term economic, political and social development in the context of continuing as a strong member of the European Union. Any discussion that we have had within the European Union has been anchored firmly in that view. Of course, some may well make the charge that we are too close to the UK. It is our largest neighbour and a country in respect of which we have seen our relationship transformed. However, the UK is leaving and we are staying. In the coming years, we will work through specific areas to ensure that our needs are recognised and met. As I said, it will be subject to years of negotiation.

Reference was made to the Supreme Court ruling and the instruments of the Good Friday Agreement. I see no need for any further legal instruments relating to the Good Friday Agreement. It has been negotiated and ratified. It is recognised by both Governments and via an international treaty. There are no prospects for or basis on which I envisage the arrangement being reopened in any way. We will ensure that the interests of the Agreement are protected in the coming years.

Senator Craughwell referred to the role of the European Investment Bank, EIB. He is correct. We believe there could be an additional opportunity in this regard. The Department of Finance and my Department are working with the EIB on this matter.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I have two further questions on the UK Supreme Court ruling. I take on board what the Minister has said. Have we sought an explanation from the UK on its interpretation of the ruling? Have we taken legal advice on the ruling?

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: Is Senator Craughwell referring to the ruling of the UK Supreme Court?

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Yes.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: We have not really done so. Legal advice may have been sought and perhaps it may have been shared with the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I am not aware of that, but I can check. Senator Craughwell is raising an issue relating to a British political decision being implemented by the British Government that will be overseen by the UK courts. The issue of legal advice does not arise immediately for me, but I will check that for the Senator. We are not going to go down any avenue that might indicate any uncertainty regarding the status of the Good Friday Agreement, because there is no such uncertainty.

Senator Craughwell is right about ports. We need to give greater recognition to the role our ports can play in future. We are ahead of the game in that regard not for reasons of Brexit but because some years ago the boards of the various ports, as well as the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, recognised the need to invest more in our ports. As a result, the Alexandra Basin project is under way in the constituency of Deputy O'Sullivan and myself. When that is complete, Dublin Port will be able to handle the largest vessels in the world. The redevelopment of the Port of Cork is proceeding. My recollection is that it is at the planning stage. The idea is to move the location of the Port of Cork. Several other ports are involved in seeking to gain funding to strengthen their transport links. I would not underestimate for a moment the role of Shannon Foynes as well.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I thank the Minister for his presentation. He referred to the expenditure of €3.5 billion through the PEACE and INTERREG programmes over the past number of years. This has been a very welcome investment in the Border communities. The

funding has been drawn down by statutory agencies and local community and voluntary groups. In many instances, the funding that became available empowered both urban and rural local communities, in many areas very disadvantaged local communities, which was very welcome. I want to see this continue beyond 2020. As a person with some experience of different aspects of the programmes over the past 20 years, I must say a huge amount of preparatory work goes into preparing applications and getting to the point of drawing down money. The year 2020 is not that far away from the point of view of a community group that wants to put in motion the preparation of an application for a project to draw down funding. We need to get a clear message out now that there will be substantial PEACE and INTERREG programmes post-2020. If not, a huge vacuum would emerge in the Border community because we are all aware of the huge deficits and challenges that will face us due to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

Regarding Deputy Sherlock's question about Brexit-proofing and the letters of offer to which the Minister referred, the British Exchequer has committed to make good on that funding up to 2020. I sincerely hope it will not come out of the block grant it gives to the Northern Ireland Executive but that it will come from the necessary additional funding.

I listened with interest to Senator Craughwell's comments and I sincerely hope the message he has given us comes to pass. A number of us met members of the Dutch Parliament yesterday. To their credit, they were doing a report for their EU affairs committee and foreign affairs committee and were visiting London, Cardiff, Belfast and Dublin. They said clearly to us that the interest in our problems is non-existent in other member states of Europe. Unfortunately, I am inclined to agree with them, judging from the little interaction I have had with other member states. I sincerely hope I am wrong and that Senator Craughwell is right.

Senator Craughwell mentioned Michel Barnier. We are fortunate that he is the main negotiator because over the years, as European Commissioner for Regional Policy and, subsequently, European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, and in France as Minister of State for European Affairs and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, he had very significant contact and good relations with successive Irish Governments.

What Senator Craughwell says is in sharp contrast to what Alasdair McDonnell and Mark Durkan told us here two weeks ago. The content of their contributions to the committee was alarming. They spoke about the interest in Ireland in Westminster, Whitehall in particular, and it was very worrying. I wish to put on the record that, judging from some of the coverage I have managed to read up on and listen to in the House of Commons debate during the week, Alasdair McDonnell and Mark Durkan made exceptionally good contributions, hammering home the message of the huge challenges for all our island and the disregard with which the British Government is treating us.

I recognise the challenge that is there but I emphasise again the need to ensure as soon as possible that there will be post-2020 PEACE and INTERREG programmes with substantial funding. Am I correct in thinking that these programmes to date have been funded 85% by the EU, with the remaining 15% being made up by the two member states?

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: Yes.

Deputy Brendan Smith: I am moving slightly away from today's specific topic, but there has already been a huge downer for business and communities in the Border region. I know of businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises in particular, that are very heavily reliant on

totally dependent on the British market and the Northern Ireland market. They have put on hold plans to develop, expand jobs and create additional employment because of the uncertainty. This arose immediately following the deterioration in the value of sterling against the euro. This has stabilised to some extent, but there is huge uncertainty, and it would hit the small and medium-sized enterprises more than the larger enterprises because many of the business I know well from my area depend particularly on the Northern Ireland market and the British market as their export base, so they see the particular difficulties. If good trade agreements are not in place from a British point of view and if World Trade Organization, WTO, tariffs kick in, there will be huge knock-on negative impacts for the agrifood and other sectors. We, as a State, need to support the enterprises that are creating very valuable employment in these areas. Many of these companies were established in the very hostile times of the Troubles and all the mayhem that occurred throughout the province of Ulster, with paramilitary activity and needless maiming and murder of people. Businesses established at that time have come through very difficult periods and now provide stable employment. While we have had a positive political dispensation since 1998, these businesses now see extra challenges again.

A critical evaluation of the infrastructural needs of the Border region needs to be carried out. If enterprise is to have any hope of remaining competitive in the region, we need huge upgrading of infrastructure. I know the Minister has given a commitment to review the capital programme. If possible, I would like in that review a particular evaluation of the needs of the Border region for infrastructural investment and upgrade because of the particular challenges hitting us right away. I sincerely hope that in the capital envelope available to the Minister over the next few years, he can target some specific funding towards upgrading infrastructure in the Border region because of these particular challenges. I am thinking of the road network, broadband, etc.

Senator Mark Daly: As my colleague, Deputy Smith, pointed out, the difficulty about the Dutch Parliament's understanding of our position is that it is not unique. I understand from meetings Fianna Fáil members had with some of the Sicilian and Italian parliamentarians that they thought Ireland is leaving the EU because Northern Ireland is leaving. This is the challenge we face. Malta had some understanding but, in reality, it requires a lot of education because there is so much going on and so much information-sharing and laying out of our position. One of the big challenges the Government faces is that while Theresa May has made her statement, we need to set out our asks and say what we want. Deputy Sherlock pointed out the votes that took place in Westminster. What is being said by the British Government and what it is doing are two entirely different things. Theresa May when she was Home Secretary said the hard Border would of course return if there were a Brexit. Then she became Prime Minister and said there would of course be no return to a hard Border. Now she says the Border will be as frictionless as possible. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, James Brokenshire, says there will be no special deal for Northern Ireland. The lack of understanding in Westminster could be put in the following way. While Westminster was trying to emphasise the importance of Northern Ireland in terms of the impact of Brexit, one of its reports which the House of Lords produced stated that - I thought it was a very telling line - the relationship between Ireland and Britain has not always been a smooth one. This would have to be the greatest understatement of any diplomat in the history of the State. The report's analysis of the impact was such that its authors dismissed everything that would suit us and would do everything to suit themselves. The UK currently has an operation called Operation Gull whereby people leaving Belfast, Derry and Larne are profiled and 752 people have been arrested on immigration grounds. It already has immigration controls between the North of Ireland and Britain. That is the solution to not having a hard Border. It has to accept that when 40,000 people were employed in the secu-

rity forces in the North, the Border could not be secured. Trying to secure it now would be foolhardy, whereas it is already carrying out immigration controls at the three exit points from Northern Ireland to Britain. Yet, it will not reimpose that. The House of Lords has said that it cannot be done for political reasons, even though exactly the same system was in place between 1939 and 1952 and, under it, identity checks were carried out on people travelling from the North to Britain.

I commend the great work done by the Minister in respect of funding. I do not think it was highlighted enough. Many of the organisations would not be aware that a lot of safeguards have been put in place. In essence, this goes back to the strategy and statement of the Government, in that we have to be quite forthright and say that Britain voted to leave the EU and Northern Ireland did not. Any loss of funding to the INTERREG and PEACE programmes will have to be made up by the British taxpayer post-Brexit, not from 2020 but from here on, because the peace process is that important. If there is not funding going into east Belfast and youths are no longer engaged in youth projects and looked after by the funding from the PEACE and INTERREG programmes, things will destabilise over time. That is how fellows would become indoctrinated. There would be a slow return to violence and, unfortunately, the economy would disintegrate, as much of the evidence shows. When I say EU funding, I just mean INTERREG. The British taxpayer should pay for that because Northern Ireland did not vote to leave the EU and, therefore, should not suffer. I accept, however, that many farmers there voted for Brexit. Again, the British taxpayer should see to it that those EU programmes continue. Otherwise, it will destabilise the economy and, in turn, the peace process.

Colleagues spoke about innovative programmes in terms of what we want and what we should be putting forward in our statement. Part of what we need to look at is trade quotas between the North and the South and between Britain and Ireland. Europe is very good at coming up with innovative language in order to facilitate such processes. We had an Anglo-Irish trade agreement back in the 1960s for beef and other produce. We have to examine that. There is an argument that if we have a hard Border between the North and the South, somebody would make money by smuggling people. It is an anti-criminal measure as well. We do not want to have these border checks because if we do, someone will make money getting around them. It is the same with customs checks. People will make money by getting around them. If there is a trade quota, there is then some chance of saying that we can continue to trade. Obviously, east-west trade is very important to us.

An issue that is arising in correspondence is analytics. Brexit is a huge project for Ireland. There are so many areas affected. I made a point on that at the previous meeting. Even within Leinster House, pretty much every committee is dealing with Brexit. From this committee's point of view, not all of them are going to include something to do with the North in their final report, even though it affects every committee. What is happening is just an exercise in ticking the box. The Government should say that every committee and Department must analyse how this is going to affect the North. Everything affects the North, even down to fishing. What are we going to do with the Naval Service? How are we going to patrol European waters when Britain leaves? The best of brains must carry out analytics to assist the Government from the outside and to structure things to ensure that every issue the Government wants to address for Ireland is addressed. That includes reaching out to the Italians and the people of Malta to say that we are not leaving the EU. We must lay out our five or ten key issues.

In the event of Britain breaching elements of the Good Friday Agreement, there are opportunities to deal with that. We have signed up to the International Court of Justice. For some

reason, however, the only country that does not come under that is Britain and the North. We can take every other country to the International Court of Justice for a breach of an agreement that we have with them or for any grievance we have with them. The only country we cannot take to court is Britain. When it comes to a breach of the Good Friday Agreement, there is no mechanism to adjudicate between the two sides. Even the European Union has pointed out that there appears to be a breach of the Good Friday Agreement. Now we have no body to decide upon it. The Government might need to look at that case for the North and Britain to be brought under the remit of the International Court of Justice.

I thank the Minister for coming before the committee and for outlining all of the stuff he has been doing in the background on this. It is a huge challenge for the Government and for the country just to understand the scope of it. Every time one thinks of a problem, there is another underneath it. If we listed out all of the problems, we could then start to address them. However, I do not think that we have one document that has everything on it. That is the start upon which we can base policy.

Mr. Pat Doherty: I welcome the Minister and thank him for his presentation. I am aware of and commend the Minister's work with Máirtín Ó Muilleoir on securing the EU funding programmes and Brexit-proofing them up to 2020. I would also like to commend the Minister on his more long-term objective of looking beyond 2020. However, there is no such thing as a soft Border. It is just so many soft words. It is not going to happen. The road on which the British Government is travelling is going to lead to a hard Border on the island of Ireland. That is going to happen. There is an example that Deputy Sherlock mentioned. Amendment No. 86 tabled at Westminster, stating that the Good Friday Agreement would not be affected by Brexit, was defeated. We are now depending on the House of Lords. God help us if that is what we have come to. We are in for a very difficult time.

I have absolutely no doubt that the Irish Government and political parties North and South, with the possible exception of People Before Profit and the Traditional Unionist Voice, TUV, do not want a hard Border. None of the major parties want a hard Border. However, there is a lot of emphasis by the British Government on the common travel area. I came home from Britain in 1968 to my parents place in Donegal and I worked in Derry. I had to cross the Border every day. In Donegal terms, that did not involved travelling north to south but more like east to west. I had to stop at the Irish customs post and at the British customs post both ways every day. I was driving an ordinary car. They would search the boot and the car. There were lorries queued up on both sides of the Border with massive amounts of forms that they had to have filled in by customs clearance agents. There were massive delays. This was all under the common travel area and this was before there was any sign of the Troubles or even the civil rights movement emerging. We should not be naive about the intention of the British Government. It is going to have a hard Border and it does not care in any meaningful way about its impact on Ireland.

I could give numerous examples of how the British Government deals with things. I will give a quite benign one. In 1997, when Mr. Tony Blair became Prime Minister, he came to Belfast and made a hugely pro-Unionist public statement and privately authorised dialogue with Sinn Féin. That is the way the British Government operates all the time, not just some of the time. With regard to Europe, I was part of the Assembly commission and part of the infrastructure committee. We went to Europe as a delegation. As part of our work, we had to meet Irish Government officials who briefed us about what was coming. They told us that most European countries had little knowledge of the reality in Ireland and that they actually believed that there was a train link between London and Dublin. Their belief was that because there

was a train link between Belfast, which was part of the UK, and Dublin, there must also have been one between London and Dublin. That was the level of their knowledge. The Minister's officials told us that and warned us that we had to be careful about how much knowledge we might believe people in Europe possessed. We have a huge job to convince Europe of how big a problem Brexit poses.

The Good Friday Agreement was voted for on the basis of referendums held in the North and the South. It was accepted by 74% of the people in the North and 91% of those in the South. That stands against an advisory referendum on Brexit in the UK. It is quite clear now that it is advisory because it has to make its way through Westminster. We need to face up to these problems and realise that there is a huge amount at stake for the people of Ireland, North and South.

Europe is well able to devise special situations and special circumstances. They have done it for other countries and members of this committee all know the examples. There is enough capacity in the Irish people, political parties and the Government to devise a special status for the North within Europe. Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, every citizen in the North is entitled to be an EU citizen. Some of them may not take that up but they are entitled to do so. They are entitled to be Irish, British or both. We need to be focused and clear. The British Government does not care about the impact of Brexit on Ireland. They care about it in terms of the Tory-Conservative vote, mostly in England.

Chairman: If Mr. Doherty is finished, I will revert to the Minister.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: The common theme of what Deputy Brendan Smith, Senator Mark Daly and Mr. Pat Doherty, MP, have said is that we need to be careful not to overestimate the knowledge that other European parliaments might have about Ireland. I could not agree more. Furthermore, I cannot see why we should think that they have a very high stock of knowledge in that regard. The Dutch parliament is preoccupied with the election that is coming up there. Do members think the parliaments of Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania are spending a lot of time considering Ireland's plight? Europe is a crowded marketplace of interests. When we get to European Council negotiations, we cannot rely on the fact that everybody around the table will have anywhere near as high a level of knowledge about our circumstances as we do. Of course they will not. That is why we are in the room. It is our job to do that.

I am not at all surprised to hear what Deputy Brendan Smith said about their engagement with the Dutch parliament. I would expect that if one went to many other European parliaments they would have a degree of knowledge about Ireland and Northern Ireland, but I would not expect them to have anywhere near the level of appreciation of the details that we have just discussed. That is why in the coming years - because this will take years - the Government will play a strong role in explaining what is our Irish national interest. We will also explain why we believe it is in the interests of Europe that our needs in this area should be met.

Senator Mark Daly spoke about the relationship between economic and political stability, and he is right. That is why I believe these programmes matter. Deputy Brendan Smith spoke about what we need to do beyond 2020. I agree with him that said need is there, but we have a lot of work to do to get to the point where we will have those programmes in place. If we did not have funding stability in place up to 2020 we would be having a very different kind of committee hearing now, and justifiably so. We have that commitment in place, however, and in recognition of the Deputy's point, we must now start examining other models that would allow us to construct an argument about the replacement of these funding streams. For example, we

will be looking at what happens in Sweden and Norway, as well as relations between France and Switzerland. We will be examining whether there are models there that would allow for the development of a new approach for the funding programmes to which the Deputy referred.

As regards the points made by Pat Doherty, neither I nor the Government want to see a return to the circumstances he has mentioned. We will do everything possible to ensure that does not happen. The Taoiseach has been clear that this Government does not want to see a return to a hard Border with the kind of friction that Mr. Doherty has described. He made an important point in that the movement of people and goods can be different things and we need to be cognisant of that. We clearly need to do everything possible to ensure that the kind of Border arrangements described by Mr. Doherty do not return to our island.

Chairman: We have three more people indicating. They are Deputy O'Dowd, Senator Feighan and Senator Black. I call Deputy O'Dowd first.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat a Chathaoirligh agus cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire. I agree with a lot of what everybody has said and I particularly welcome the Minister's comments. The frictionless Border is a real economic Border, if it is there at all. The point is that if there is any tariff, no matter what that might be or whether it is imposed electronically or physically, it is still a division. Brexit is really dividing our country economically in a new and different way. It will be profoundly traumatic for people North and South, but particularly for those living along either side of the Border.

I know we cannot make policy here today and I am not suggesting that we should. It seems to me, however, that a lot of product manufactured in the North ends up in the South and *vice versa*. If we could at the very least have a tariff-free regime for products which originate either in the North or South, but which are not exported outside the island, it would allow for farming produce, Guinness and other products to be traded freely. It would require such products to be technically certified as tariff-free, with only the occasional check on manifests.

When the Assembly election is over, it will be hugely important for parties North and South to reach a consensus. I know that there will not be an agreement on the constitutional issue but, post-2020, there will be infrastructural plans North and South. We can provide funding for our end of it through the capital expansion programme, but the North will have difficulties because it will have to obtain funding from the UK. It is important in our discussions with the United Kingdom and the European Union that we can plan beyond that point. The Minister could say that his capital programme, which he will announce shortly, will dovetail in respect of health benefit in the way it is happening between Donegal and Derry, and transport. We could have all those matters planned and ready to go and get a consensus through the North South Ministerial Council if we can. We will have to make provision here for our contribution to those programmes. If the North does not get the money and if it cannot get it from the EU where are we?

I welcome the engagement we are having today. The most important issue is our ports but some of the comments today sound as if we are finding a way to get around having to use the North. I am not suggesting people are implying this. Products come into Warrenpoint and Drogheda that go North and South and there will be a negative transformation for one of those ports if we do not solve those problems. We have to give a commitment in the South not to take business from the North. There is no future in that. We have to plan for working together.

The Minister said that North-South programmes can only be implemented successfully with full co-operation and this needs to be understood by everybody. We need to respect not just the

letter but also the spirit, what does that mean?

Senator Frank Feighan: I welcome the Minister. Brexit has taken up a great deal of time in all sectors because it is one of the most serious issues to hit our country, this island, the UK and Europe for many years. I was at two conferences, one in Carrick on Shannon a few weeks ago chaired by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, about the impact on jobs. Last Monday I was at an all-Ireland conference on energy, chaired by the Minister for Communications Climate Action and the Environment. It is very worrying to see how vulnerable we are given the amount of energy coming from the United Kingdom. These are issues we have to resolve, for example there is talk of a 45% tariff on agricultural goods. It is up to negotiators but it is right for us to highlight them. We have to get those tariffs down as close to zero as possible. We have people in the public service and other positions to negotiate those, although we are part of the 27. The United Kingdom will fight for its side. We are losing an ally. We have our differences but it was an ally in Europe. Every day for the past 20 or 30 years there was an average of 26 meetings between UK and Republic of Ireland negotiators. We are going to lose that kind of link and must do everything possible to try to increase the co-operation. These voids have to be filled, I do not know how. We need to consider this opportunity.

We have had a chequered relationship with that island. The queen's visit in 2011 certainly woke us up. We have had decades of trade with our neighbour, amounting to €1 billion and 200,000 jobs on each side but the British Irish Chamber of Commerce was set up only five or six years ago. We must work harder and increase those links. It is good to know we are planning for 2020 but there cannot be a hard Border on the island of Ireland. That is the negotiating step that our Government, and the EU have to ensure. There cannot be a return to a hard or soft Border. The only way is a border in the Irish Sea. There is no way around this. Whether we will have to produce a passport going from one to the other I do not know. These issues need to be discussed.

People are talking about special status for Northern Ireland. We spoke to some Dutch parliamentarians. We are not familiar with what is happening all over France or Germany but it is up to us to inform them and do our best. We laud the United States and the United Kingdom but the EU has put €3.5 billion into peace projects. It was the main player in the Northern Ireland peace project and it is a huge success. If we want a special status there should be a peace building that Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland should be seen as good news. This is good news. The EU put huge energy and resources into this for 25 years and it has been a success, for the two parts of our island and for the UK, apart from a few little problems. We must pass this message on to the EU.

We have to build bridges. One island has gone insular. I launched the Irish for Europe in Britain last year calling for a "yes" vote in the Brexit referendum and I said that referendums were a blunt instrument. We have had 27 referendums over 27 years and people do not normally vote on the question that is put to them. Immigration was one aspect of the vote in Britain. There were many aspects.

To our left we have the continent of the United States. These are our neighbours and we find on the island of Ireland that we are being reasonable and democratic whereas the countries that built bridges are being seen as insular, building walls and borders and whatever. We have a unique position on the island of Ireland to step up and make that difference but we need help.

What brought Brexit up was a brand of unionism. It was the United Kingdom, England and others who wanted to be part of that union. That is their right but it is creating huge difficulties.

Many of them feel that the Republic of Ireland will have no choice but to follow them out of Europe. We have to stand firm and say we are committed members of the European Union and will be the last country ever to leave. The European Union has been a wonderful peacebuilding project since the Second World War. The Republic of Ireland will be the last one standing as far as I am concerned. When we see what it has done for the Republic of Ireland, the island of Ireland and around eastern Europe, we have to stand firm and we can take our place there.

Senator Frances Black: I thank the Minister for coming in today and for his commitment and hard work. He has a tough road ahead.

I was at an event in Belfast a couple of weeks ago about the Supreme Court ruling. A political scientist, Brendan O’Leary, spoke on Skype. He has a huge interest in this area. He spoke about the fears of a hard border, and his idea is that Westminster in particular does not really care about the North or about Ireland, and that it has to come from the Irish Government’s perspective. We have to stand firm on not letting that hard border happen. It is a red line issue, and I would encourage the Minister to connect with him because he is a very bright man.

I have a couple of questions for the Minister about EU funding. I know that the Minister has done great work in this area. Does the Minister think that EU funding is dependent on the Assembly being in place in the North? We all know that the reason it has fallen is because of the lack of equality. Should the Irish Government encourage the DUP to agree to an equality agenda? It is really important that there are talks and connections with the DUP, in particular around the Irish language. My colleague, Senator Mark Daly, spoke in the Seanad recently about the 100,000 plus Irish speakers in the North. It is a huge issue. My father came for Rathlin Island, which is off north Antrim, and his grandfather spoke the Irish language exclusively. It means so much to people. It is part of people’s identity, and it is a very important part of our culture.

I want to ask the Minister about the amendment calling on the UK to guarantee the rights of EU nationals living in the UK which was defeated in the House of Commons last night. That is very worrying. The Labour Party Whip’s office tweeted, either last night or this morning, that: “The defeat of this amendment means that the agreements in the Good Friday agreement could be broken.” The Good Friday Agreement is weakened by the defeat of this amendment. It should be rock solid at this point. Does this mean that Irish citizens living in the North will be treated as second class citizens again? What will happen?

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe): I thank Deputy O’Dowd and Senators Feighan and Black for their questions and comments. With regard to Deputy O’Dowd’s comments about the potential nature or level of any tariffs, the discussion and negotiation has not commenced yet. If we look at how long it took to reach agreement in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP, negotiations, or the nature of the agreement between the European Union and Canada, it took years of negotiations before they reached the ratification stage. We have not even reached the starting point of that process with regards to Brexit. We are very clear that we want the current trading relationship between the United Kingdom and Ireland to be as close to current circumstances as possible. That is the approach that we will use and the objective that we will have entering those negotiations. It is important to acknowledge that the British Government is very clear about its relationship with the Single Market. It wants to leave; it will be out of it. They have left space regarding what their relationship with the customs union will be in the future. That is an important area within which we would have to negotiate a trading arrangement that best suits the needs of the Irish economy.

Deputy O'Dowd and Deputy Smith made the point to me - and I did not acknowledge this with Deputy Smith earlier - about the capital needs of the north west of our country and the Border counties. I am very much aware of that. It takes on a new significance in the context of Brexit. It will feature in the review of the capital plan now under way and which I aim to conclude in the second half of this year.

Senator Feighan made the point about losing an ally. I would not understate the importance of that point. It is a fact that in many negotiations that took place in meetings of ministerial councils that the country to which we were most closely aligned in many policy areas was the United Kingdom. An example of that would be when I was Minister for transport and discussing aviation, an area which is absolutely crucial to the development of the Irish economy and to access in a changing world. Frequently the country which was the nearest to sharing our views was the United Kingdom. Its departure will mean that in a whole breadth of areas, from the digital economy to agriculture to security and foreign policy, we will now need to develop new allies, depending on the policy area. That is one of the reasons we will be supporting the office of the permanent representative in Brussels to make sure that we have the resources in place to do this work in the future. It will take more effort, more work and more contact to guide negotiations to places that meet our national interest.

Comments were made regarding a hard border, with which I agree. We see Ireland's future within the European Union and the eurozone.

I thank Senator Black for her contribution. Any time I visit any of our Border counties I hear very clearly from concerned citizens there about economic stability and their freedoms in the future, given what is happening with Brexit. I am well aware of that. I agree with the Senator that we cannot see a return to a hard border because of the destabilising effects that it would have on the North and indeed all parts of our island.

As for the Senator's specific questions concerning the status of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the answer is that it would definitely help in delivering the agenda I have outlined if we have functional, stable institutions in Northern Ireland. In delivering the agenda I have spoken about in terms of making sure that the agreements that are in place up to 2020 translate into activity on the ground, it will be absolutely vital that we have functioning institutions in the North. We have to have Ministers and civil servants in the Northern Ireland Administration who we can pick up the phone to and with whom we can co-operate to make sure these agreements happen. That is one of the many reasons I hope that we see the resumption of the political institutions after the Assembly elections which are taking place at the moment.

I believe that any issues regarding equality and people feeling that they are being treated respectfully and fairly should be dealt with. To borrow a phrase from another setting in terms of the politics of Northern Ireland, parity of esteem is vital. Each community has parts of our heritage that are important to them and they must be treated with respect. I hope we will see further progress on that in the coming years. The Irish Government does not want to see anybody treated as a second class citizen in Northern Ireland. It is our ability to move away from that environment, in which all political parties here and in the North have taken risks and have played a role, to get to a point where that does not happen and we do not have to use that kind of language or to have people asking me these kinds of questions. That is what we have to hold on to. Brexit will make all this more challenging but we must rise to the occasion. I submit to the committee that the progress we have made in clarifying where these programmes stand within just over four months is evidence of our ambition to so do.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Chairman: On behalf of the committee, I thank the Minister for attending and giving us his time. I also thank his officials for their attendance.

Mr. Pat Doherty: I agree with Senator Feighan's comment that, by and large, the British and Irish Governments had been allies at the European table. However, let us remember that the British Government does not have permanent friends; it only has permanent interests. That is where the land lies at this point in time.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: That comment can be applied to all countries. People must know the difference between friends, interests and allies. Allies change but we are clear on where we stand.

Chairman: I thank the Minister for securing funding and we do not underestimate the importance of his work.

Deputy Paschal Donohoe: I thank the Chairman.

Chairman: I propose that we go into private session to conclude a few housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.50 p.m. and adjourned at 4 p.m until 2 p.m. on Thursday, 23 February 2017.