

Anglo-Irish Division

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North South Ministerial Council and North South Co-operation

The 18th NSMC Plenary meeting was scheduled to take place in Dublin Castle on 4 July, but was postponed as a consequence of the unionist withdrawal from the political talks. It has been suggested by the DUP that the Plenary could be held instead in September. The Plenary had been due to feature substantive discussions with a strong economic focus. It will continue to be an important Government objective to ensure that the momentum in the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) is maintained. To date in 2014, there have been 13 Ministerial meetings across the various Sectors for co-operation including one in Institutional format (which involves the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, NI First Minister and NI deputy First Minister). A further round of sectoral meetings plus a Plenary and Institutional should take place in the autumn.

Discussion of EU matters has become a regular feature at Plenary meetings and at the various Ministerials. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is finalising new draft Programmes for both the new PEACE and INTERREG programme which will need to be endorsed by the Government by 22 September. The total EU allocation for PEACE and INTERREG is expected to be c€470m. [The lead Department on EU funds is the Department

of Public Expenditure and Reform, with whom given the NI dimension, this Department works closely.]

As provided for under the St Andrews Agreement, in a series of meetings since January 2014 Ministers have met with their Northern Ireland counterparts to identify and develop priorities for further cooperation including consideration of joint trade missions as in the recent London-Dublin-Belfast joint visit to the Singapore air-show, co-operation on an all-island bid for the Rugby World Cup in 2023 and exploration of other major sporting events with significant tourism impact for the island, collaboration to boost jobs and support entrepreneurship. It is intended that a paper be considered at the next NSMC Institutional meeting on deepening and widening the existing areas of North South co-operation. There is a wide variety of activity outside of the formal NSMC channels with numerous Ministerial visits to Northern Ireland (e.g. recent months have seen addresses by Ministers to investment conferences, the NI Chamber of Commerce, the Ulster Farmers Union, party political conferences etc). The former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade also used his regular visits to Northern Ireland to meet with leading business representatives. This interest and interaction is much appreciated by the NI business community. In addition, officials regularly meet with a variety of interlocutors, including local chambers of commerce, cross-border groups, local authorities, members of political parties, in order to exchange views on ongoing issues and to keep them informed of Government policy in relation to North South co-operation in general.

The Reconciliation Fund

The aim of the Reconciliation Fund is to enable organisations to pursue projects promoting genuine and lasting reconciliation and building sustainable community relations. A new strategy for the Reconciliation Fund for the period 2014-2017 was launched on 9 June 2014. It places the full implementation of the Agreements at the heart of the Fund's work and targets projects under two pillars: 'repairing' (sectarianism, segregation, hard-to-reach and marginalised communities) and 'building' (cross-border and cross-community links, supporting women in peacebuilding and developing British-Irish links).

The budget for the Fund in 2014 is €2.7 million. Around 150-170 projects are supported each year. Funding is awarded through two main funding rounds held in the spring and the autumn. The spring 2014 funding round saw awards of €1,502,500 granted to 77 projects. The second funding round will close to applications on 26th September 2014.

Preparations have begun for the annual Reconciliation Networking Forum, to be hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, which will take place in Dublin Castle on 15th September 2014.

International Fund for Ireland

The International Fund for Ireland was established by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 and supports projects in Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties which promote peace and reconciliation.

While IFI has enjoyed substantial financial support from the US, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in the past, its only source of new funding since 2010 has been from the USA. The US Administration has sought and received authorisation from Congress to grant US\$2.5 million annually from 2011 to 2014 (although this was restricted in 2013 by the Congressional sequestration process

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Decade of Commemorations

Overall responsibility for commemorations lies with the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, who will lead on a number of upcoming events including the National Day of Commemoration on 13th July, the unveiling of the Cross of Sacrifice in Glasnevin on 31 July and events in Dublin and Belfast on 3rd and 4th August to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Commemorations policy within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is guided in the first instance by the potential impact of commemorations on the peace process in Northern Ireland, as well as international aspects of the commemorations. The Department is working to support commemoration of the 1916 centenary overseas and planning is underway for an international cultural programme to mark the anniversary, although funding for this programme is yet to be confirmed.

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British-Irish Relations

Following the recent successful visit of President Higgins to the UK, British Irish relations remain close and cordial, extending right across government, business and cultural activity. This engagement is anchored at the political level by the annual summit review meeting in London between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, shortly before St Patrick's Day. At the first summit in 2012, a Joint Statement set out key areas for British-Irish cooperation and part of the follow up saw the two Governments commission in 2012 a joint evaluation of the British-Irish economic relationship which has facilitated the collaborative work between the two Governments and supports policy development in both jurisdictions. The

Joint Statement also provided for formal structured engagement at the Secretary General/Permanent Secretary level across the civil service, with the next such meeting scheduled to take place on 25 September. The British-Irish Council, established under the Good Friday Agreement to promote and support east-west relations continues to have an important role while the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly continues to operate as a link between parliamentarians.

There are two proximate issues concerning the British-Irish relationship currently;

The people of Scotland will vote in a Scottish Independence Referendum on 18 September on whether or not Scotland should become an independent country. Current opinion poll figures suggest that the result will be around 57% against independence and 43% in favour. In the event of a No vote, Scotland is likely to be given further devolved powers, including more tax-raising and spending authority. Any changes in the devolution arrangements for Scotland will have consequences for Ireland, North and South, and the situation is being carefully monitored by our Consulate General in Edinburgh and the Embassy in London. Prominent issues in the debate include economic, fiscal and monetary policies, borders, citizenship and immigration, and EU membership – all areas where Ireland has an interest. The Irish Government has been careful to maintain a neutral stance on the debate and to avoid being drawn into commenting on ‘hypotheticals’ and possible outcomes or implications for Ireland.

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US– Ireland Relationship

A five-year Review of the Department’s March 2009 Strategic Review of Ireland - U.S. Relations, “Ireland and America: Challenges and Opportunities in a New Context”, was recently completed. The purpose of the original review was to guide the future development of Irish-US relations, and to offer a range of specific proposals across individual sectors, many of which have been implemented. The five-year Review updates the 2009 Review and sets out a perspective for the coming years. In particular, it emphasises:

- Valuing and prioritising the relationship with the US;
- Focusing on the economic agenda;
- Affirming Irish America;
- Pursuing immigration reform;
- Advancing reconciliation in Northern Ireland;
- Crediting culture;
- Developing the shared foreign policy agenda;
- Building our diplomatic footprint in the US.

Reform of the US immigration system to provide relief for currently undocumented Irish migrants in the US, as well as a facility for additional future legal migration between Ireland and the US, remains a key Government priority.

The prospects for such reform are particularly uncertain at present with the already complex political landscape in the US having become even more complicated by the recent electoral defeat of the Republican House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor. It is generally felt

that further time will be needed to assess the full implications of this development for ongoing immigration reform efforts, particularly from the perspective of the upcoming Congressional mid-term elections. More recently, there has been a further sharpening of the political engagement in Congress in relation to the situation of unaccompanied migrant children who are seeking to enter the United States via its southern border. This may now impact negatively on the prospects for wider immigration reform progress being achieved over the immediate period ahead. President Obama has indicated that he will take executive action "to fix as much as I can on my own of our broken (immigration) system" in the absence of progress on the legislative route in Congress. In this context, he has directed Secretary Johnson of the Department of Homeland Security and Attorney General Holder to begin to identify additional administrative actions and to report to him before the end of the summer following which he will "then act without further delay". The Embassy in Washington is continuing to follow developments on this issue and the wider immigration reform debate very closely [REDACTED]

Preparations are well-advanced for the opening of the new Consulate in Austin, Texas. [REDACTED]

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The date for the opening of the UN General Assembly is yet to be confirmed but it is likely to start on 24 September, with the Ministerial speaking slot likely to be between 26- 29 September. In addition to the UN engagements, a bilateral element including Irish community, economic and trade promotional elements will be added to the Ministerial programme.

The US college football teams of Penn State University and the University of Central Florida will play in Croke Park on 30 August in the "Croke Park Classic". The event will be similar to the Notre Dame v Navy match which took place in August 2012 and which attracted very significant tourist figures from the US. Approximately 10-12,000 US visitors are expected to attend on this occasion. The Consulate General in New York have been involved in

significant promotional work with the organisers at Penn State to leverage the presence in Dublin of high-level Penn State alumni, with a particular focus on the business dimension. An “American-Irish business forum” will be held in the Croke Park Conference centre on 28 August. A pre-reception will be held at Dublin Castle on 27 August.

The timing of arrival in Ireland of the new US Ambassador, Kevin O’Malley, is not yet clear due to uncertainty regarding when the Senate confirmation hearing will take place.

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Canada, Australia and New Zealand

In 2009 the EU and Canada launched negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). All the big ticket items have been agreed in CETA and it should be ready to be initialled in the coming weeks. It was also proposed that the EU and Canada should also update their 1976 political agreement into a Special Framework Agreement (SPA), to be negotiated with CETA, which is now ready to be initialled.

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Irish Abroad

The Irish Abroad Unit is responsible for developing Government policy towards Irish communities abroad and the wider Irish Diaspora. This includes: the management of the Emigrant Support Programme grant scheme (allocation €11.595m in 2014); the management of the Global Irish Network and Global Irish Economic Forum, management of the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad and the Certificate of Irish Heritage.

The Unit is currently engaged in a comprehensive review of our Diaspora Policy. This Review can either be completed after the Department’s Foreign Policy Review or, if the Minister wished, this work could be incorporated into the Foreign Policy Review.

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The High Level Panel that makes recommendations to the Government on the Presidential Distinguished Service Award for the Irish Abroad met on 2 July. Recommendations from this Panel need to be brought to Cabinet for approval in September.

The allocation for 2014 for the Emigrant Support Programme is €11.595m. There is no carryover of funds from year to year. The Unit will bring forward recommendations for expenditure in coming months.

In Britain, the grant assessment process includes the Emigrant Services Advisory Committee (ESAC). It provides recommendations on applications from British-based organisations for funding from the Emigrant Support Programme. Apart from the Chairperson and Secretary, who are officers serving in the Embassy of Ireland in London, the Committee members, who have a background in the Irish community sector within Britain, serve in a voluntary capacity. The current Committee is mandated up to the 31st December 2014 and will need to be reviewed for the period 1 Jan 2015 – 31 Dec 2016.

Anglo-Irish Division
4 July 2014

