

British-Irish Council Ninth Summit, Belfast, 16 July 2007

Communiqué

The British-Irish Council (BIC), established under the Agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations in Belfast in 1998, held its ninth Summit meeting today at Parliament Buildings in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Council Members welcomed the historic nature of today's meeting, which is the first Summit meeting of the Council since the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2007 and the first Summit to take place in Northern Ireland. It is also the first occasion in which the eight Heads of Administration have had the opportunity to meet together since the recent elections in most of the Member Administrations.

The heads of delegations were welcomed by Northern Ireland First Minister the Rt Hon Dr Ian R K Paisley MP MLA and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP, MLA. The Northern Ireland Executive was also represented by the Minister of Education, Caitriona Ruane MLA, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey MLA, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Nigel Dodds MP MLA, the Minister of the Environment, Arlene Foster MLA, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, the Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MP MLA, the Minister for Regional Development Conor Murphy MP MLA, the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie MLA and Junior Ministers Ian Paisley Jr. MLA and Gerry Kelly MLA.

The Irish and British Government delegations were led by the Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern TD and the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, respectively.

The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by the Deputy First Minister, Ieuan Wyn Jones and the Scottish Executive by First Minister, the Rt Hon. Alex Salmond MP MSP.

The Bailiwick of Guernsey was represented by Deputy Chief Minister, Stuart Falla and the Bailiwick of Jersey was represented by Chief Minister, Senator Frank Walker. The Isle of Man Government was represented by the Chief Minister, Tony Brown MHK. A full list of delegation members is attached.

The BIC is a forum for its members to exchange information, discuss, consult and to agree as they see fit on cooperative measures in areas of mutual interest to them.

Strategic direction of the BIC

At today's meeting, the Council reviewed and discussed how the BIC might develop its work, now that all eight members are again represented by their respective administrations.

Recognising the potential of the BIC to strengthen relations between its members and to develop cooperation further between them across a range of sectors of mutual interest and benefit, they agreed it is now opportune to review the future direction of the BIC. In this context, Scotland proposed energy as a useful work area of the BIC and offered to lead on this.

The BIC tasked the Secretariat, in consultation with Member Administrations, to undertake a strategic review of the Council's work programmes, working methods and support arrangements, including arrangements for a standing secretariat, and report back with firm proposals as soon as possible.

Transport:

The Northern Ireland Executive leads the work of the Council in the transport sector.

Heads of Administrations discussed the current state and future of transport infrastructure links. They recognised that the provision of well planned infrastructure is critical to the economic and social development of these islands and that this is particularly the case in respect of transport. Fast, efficient and integrated transport links are important for all the Member Administrations to enable the movement of people and goods and the further promotion of investment, trade and tourism between them and the rest of the world.

The Council agreed to examine the potential for further cooperation and collaboration in relation to transport planning and investment to strengthen further the integration of transport networks across its boundaries and transport modes.

The Council noted the agreement by Scotland and Northern Ireland to examine the case for restoring the ferry between Campbeltown and Ballycastle.

The Council also concluded that it should continue to build on the valuable progress made in the area of road safety - including a more consistent approach to driver disqualification and lesser offences; and in sharing of best practice on sustainable travel and mobility.

Misuse of Drugs:

The Irish Government leads the work of the Council in relation to the misuse of drugs. At their last Ministerial meeting in December 2006, the Ministers focussed on the challenges presented by cocaine use. Ministers found that similar issues arose in relation to cocaine in each Administration but that the problem was at various stages of development in the different jurisdictions. The Ministers resolved to continue to cooperate and exchange experiences, with particular emphasis on initiatives that have led to successful outcomes and that may lend themselves to broader application in other Administrations.

Environment:

This sector was the focus of the last Summit held in London in June 2006. It is led within the Council by the British Government. At that Summit, the focus was on climate change including work on understanding the impact of unavoidable climate change and on developing adaptation strategies. The BIC is continuing to intensify cooperation and exchange of information between the members in this and other important areas, including understanding extreme weather events, integrated coastal zone management and managing radioactive waste.

e-Health:

The Isle of Man leads work within the BIC on e-Health - the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by the use of telecommunications technology, and the broader subject of e-Health. Work is continuing on interoperable technical standards, on a relevant clinical governance framework, on protocols for the secure exchange of confidential data and on quality standards for eHealth on the internet.

The BIC is also examining legal, regulatory and ethical issues within the sector which have come to the fore recently and will require firm guidelines to allow the sector to continue its current rapid development.

Tourism:

Guernsey takes the lead on the tourism work sector within the Council. The tourism work sector has completed several projects, including a model to measure the economic impact of tourism in the regions and training programmes for staff working in the sector. A review of the future work and direction of this group will be carried out by the next Ministerial meeting in this sector.

Knowledge Economy:

Jersey takes the lead in the Council on work relating to the knowledge economy.

Work is underway within the group to assess the sustainability of business faced with potential serious threats. Possible preventative measures and business continuity planning are being developed to strengthen the sustainability of business. An assessment of the readiness of small, medium and micro sized businesses has been carried out. A common set of best practice guidelines on preventative measures and business continuity planning is being developed.

Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages:

The Welsh Assembly Government takes the lead in the indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages work sector. The most recent Ministerial meeting in October 2006 focused on three areas:

- Language Transmission within the Family;
- Adult Education; and
- Information and Communications Technology .

Language transmission in the family is recognised as vital in the process of maintaining a language. Ministers endorsed further work in this area in order to explore what works to support language transmission in the family, how models could be transferred to other language situations, identifying gaps in knowledge and how BIC Administrations could work together to fill those gaps.

The Ministers agreed that whilst the approach adopted and the support for adult education provision will vary from one Administration to another, there are valuable opportunities to be gained in continuing to share and exchange experiences in this area.

The Indigenous, Minority and Lesser Used Languages Group continues to advance work in these areas and is also working on two new areas; Planning and Linguistic Considerations and Research, Data and Language Use Surveys.

Social Inclusion:

The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government jointly lead on the Council's work on social inclusion.

The group is now examining the issue of child poverty with a focus on lone parents. The work is focused on transition points in peoples' lives and the proper provision of support at these times. The BIC is also looking at how Administrations identify and take into account, the views of parents, young people and children when formulating their policies.

Demography:

This is the newest work sector and is led by the Scottish Executive. The group has recently commenced work and has agreed to focus its efforts on the issue of migration which has a broad and varied impact on the eight Members.

Next Summit

The next BIC Summit will be held in late 2007 and will be hosted by Ireland at a venue to be announced.

British Irish Council

16th July 2007

www.British-IrishCouncil.org

List of Delegates

<u>Northern Ireland Executive</u>	
Northern Ireland First Minister	Rt Hon Dr Ian R K Paisley MP MLA
Deputy First Minister	Martin McGuinness MP, MLA
Minister of Education	Caitriona Ruane MLA
Minister for Employment and Learning	Sir Reg Empey MLA
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	Nigel Dodds MP MLA
Minister of the Environment	Arlene Foster MLA
Minister of Finance and Personnel	Rt. Hon. Peter Robinson MP MLA
Minister for Regional Development	Conor Murphy MP MLA
Minister for Social Development	Margaret Ritchie MLA
Junior Minister	Ian Paisley Jr MLA
Junior Minister	Gerry Kelly MLA.
<u>British Government</u>	
Prime Minister	Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Rt Hon Shaun Woodward MP
Minister of State for Transport	Rt Hon Rosie Winterton MP
<u>Irish Government</u>	
An Taoiseach	Bertie Ahern TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Dermot Ahern TD
<u>Scottish Executive</u>	
First Minister	Rt Hon Alex Salmond MP MSP
<u>Welsh Assembly Government</u>	
Deputy First Minister	Ieuan Wyn Jones AM
<u>Jersey</u>	
Chief Minister	Senator Frank Walker
<u>Guernsey</u>	
Deputy Chief Minister	Deputy Stuart Falla MBE
<u>Government of the Isle of Man</u>	
Chief Minister	Hon Tony Brown MHK