

02 February 2023

Reference No: DFA-MCO-18141-2022

Dear Ms Boyle,

On behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Micheál Martin TD, I wish to thank you for your letter of 28 November enclosing a copy of Committee A's report on "Consolidating the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland", which was adopted by the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly at its 62nd Plenary in Cavan in October.

The Tánaiste welcomes this timely and insightful report and wishes to comment on some of its core points.

The Tánaiste wholeheartedly agrees that British Irish relations are of fundamental importance. Given our joint stewardship of the Good Friday Agreement, our trading connections, numerous interconnected strategic interests and the depth of our community, cultural and family ties, positive and strong relations with the UK are a priority.

Like many others, the Tánaiste was reminded of the strength and depth of the British Irish relationship following the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth last September. At her State Funeral he was glad as Taoiseach to have the opportunity to pay tribute to her enormous contribution to friendship between our countries and reconciliation on these islands.

The Tánaiste is also very conscious of the need to consider the specifics of the post-Brexit context in efforts to invest in and develop our relations. Naturally, the context of EU-UK relations and of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement and Trade and Cooperation Agreement now frame our bilateral relations. In addition, as we work to support dialogue and engagement, we take full account of the fact that Irish and British politicians and officials no longer meet and cooperate through EU structures.

In line with the report's recommendations, the Government is committed to continuing to enhance the role that the British-Irish Council and the British Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) play in structuring British Irish relations. We do this conscious of their status as institutions established under strand three of the Good Friday Agreement.

As you will know, in his previous role, the Tánaiste was a strong and consistent supporter of the British-Irish Council. We look forward to hosting a BIC summit in Ireland later this year. As the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was established "to promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of the UK and Irish Governments", it is of particular importance that it has met twice a year for the last two years. It is also positive that the most recent BIIGC, which the Tánaiste co-chaired on 19 January with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, covered an especially wide spectrum of inter-governmental interests relating to both Northern Ireland and East-West relations, including on energy and cyber security matters. The Tánaiste will continue to

work with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and other British Ministers to support and develop this work.

As part of our wider approach for the post-Brexit era, the Tánaiste is also glad that the Government has been able to invest in East-West ties through high level visits, our expanding Embassy in London, our newly launched consulates general in Cardiff and Manchester and new bilateral frameworks with Scotland and Wales.

The Tánaiste supports the importance that the report attaches to regular bilateral contacts. He is pleased that at all levels we have continued to give priority to meetings with British counterparts in recent years. As the report recommends, the Tánaiste has asked his officials to provide BIPA with regular updates on the number of bilateral meetings that take place annually.

The Tánaiste also wishes to encourage the consultations that are taking place within BIPA on steps it could take to maximise its contribution to building mutual understanding between parliamentarians in the UK and Ireland. He appreciates the update that the report provides in this regard. As he demonstrated most recently at the plenary in Cavan, the Tánaiste is a strong supporter of the work of BIPA. Opportunities for regular interaction are needed more than ever following the UK's departure from the European Union.

Please pass on to Committee A Chair, Senator Emer Currie, Vice Chair Nigel Mills MP, and all members of the Committee the Tánaiste's sincere appreciation for their work on "Consolidating the bilateral relationship between the UK and Ireland". They have produced a valuable review of the relationship and numerous important suggestions for improving it.

Yours sincerely,

Ciarán Doyle
Private Secretary to the Tánaiste and
Minister for Foreign Affairs