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Northern Ireland
Assembly

Tuesday 20th October 2015

Oral Answers to Questions (Justice) – Organised Crime Seminar

Summary: Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the recent cross-border seminar on organised crime that took place in Sligo. Mr Ford responded by describing the ways in which cross-border cooperation and intelligence sharing in particular is valuable.

Mr Ford: The annual cross-border organised crime conference, attended by law enforcement officers and policymakers, was held on 30 September and 1 October. Over 100 delegates from North and South attended. This year's conference title was 'One step ahead — jointly meeting the threat'. The conference was opened by the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD; the Garda Commissioner, Nóirín O'Sullivan; the Chief Constable of the PSNI, George Hamilton; and me.

There were presentations and workshops on the illegal production of counterfeit goods, emerging technologies, foreign-national organised crime groups and the new fuel marker. The aim was to identify and consider new and developing organised crime threats; to further develop cooperation and partnership working across the border; to exchange ideas on best practice; and to consider lessons learned in order to enhance the response to organised crime in both jurisdictions.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. Given the very recent tragedy of the murder of the guard across the border and the fact that the culprit was somebody from the North, is he confident that appropriate levels of intelligence-sharing are happening to ensure that those kinds of things cannot happen again?

Mr Ford: I think that Mr Eastwood has slightly expanded beyond the remit of the original question, Mr Deputy Speaker. The death of Garda Tony Golden was a great tragedy and the result of criminal activity perpetrated by somebody who originally lived in Northern Ireland and was then living in the Republic.

The issue of the organised crime response is not particularly relevant to such things, but, as I said, in the context of how we ensure the best possible public protection and how we deal with issues that

relate to domestic and sexual violence, it may well be that we have a greater need to see matters joined up across the border when people move in that way.

I am not sure that I can say that the intelligence was necessarily shared exactly as it might have been in that particular case, but it is something that I have given a commitment to look at with my Department and in conjunction with the Department of Justice and Equality as part of our ongoing cross-border work.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-20-10-2015.pdf>



Tuesday 20th October 2015

Written Answers – Department of Education and Skills

Summary: Mr Doherty submitted two written questions to the Minister for Education and Skills concerning updates on collaboration between higher education institutions on an all-island basis. Ms O’Sullivan reiterated her support for the initiative, as established by her predecessor.

Mr Doherty: 601. To ask the Minister for Education and Skills her plans to further advance inter-institutional collaboration between institutes of higher education; the progress that has been made to ensure that greater consolidation, with regards to course delivery and service provision within the sector, is carried out on an all-island basis; her plans to introduce legislation which will give recognition to the establishment of strategic alliances between individual institutions, which willingly agree to enter into a cluster agreement; if she has considered the economic and societal benefits which such legislation will potentially yield, in terms of higher educational attainment; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

602. To ask the Minister for Education and Skills her views on the findings and recommendations in a report compiled by Indecon International Economic Consultants in March 2009, entitled North West Gateway Strategic Alliance (NWGSA) Scoping Study, which was prepared for Letterkenny Institute of Technology and the University of Ulster, in which the delivery of higher education in the region is discussed; the progress that has been made to further advance co-operation between the institutions involved in the study; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Ms O’Sullivan: I propose to take Questions Nos. 601 and 602 together.

Furthering inter-institutional collaboration was a major objective of the National Strategy 2011 and substantial progress has been made in this regard. In 2013, following the receipt of advice from the

Higher Education Authority (HEA) on the future landscape of higher education, my predecessor set out the policy framework for the establishment of clusters of higher education institutions (HEIs). These clusters have commenced work in the designated priority areas of academic planning and student pathways, and some have made considerable progress. These cluster objectives have also been included in the mission based compacts agreed between the HEA and each HEI. Regional Skills fora are also being developed to underpin the interaction between HEIs, further education and training providers and enterprise on skills needs at regional level. Collaboration among regional stakeholders is a strong feature of the Action Plans for Jobs Regional initiative.

In respect of all island provision, there are significant bilateral linkages between individual HEIs in the border regions, particularly Dundalk IT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT, and the University of Ulster and Queen's University Belfast. I am aware of the Indecon report of 2009 referred to by the Deputy; however I understand that despite some work by both institutions to develop co-ordinated planning and provision it has not been possible to advance this significantly in the interim.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-10-20a.1410&s=all-island#g1411.q>

Wednesday 21st October 2015

Dáil Debates – Leaders' Questions

Summary: In response to Mr Martin's question regarding organised crime being carried out by paramilitary organisations in the border regions, Mr Kenny addresses the potential for a cross-border task force to be established to combat this. In his reply, Mr Kenny cites the effect of similar task forces currently in operation.

Mr Kenny: Statements to the effect that the IRA has gone away or left the stage are simply not credible. The reports speak for themselves. I spoke with British Prime Minister, David Cameron, last evening about this. The return of the DUP and First Minister Robinson to the talks currently under way and including the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party is a positive sign, given the two reports from the PSNI and the Garda.

I pointed out yesterday that the Criminal Assets Bureau had brought 99 individuals before the Special Criminal Court and, as the Deputy noted, €28 million was confiscated as a result. The impact of the report presented by the three members yesterday, to the effect that the members of the Provisional IRA believe that an army council now controls the Sinn Féin Party, both in political and electioneering terms, is certainly a matter that must be responded to by the president of Sinn Féin. I have said to Deputy Adams on many occasions that I have never accepted that he was not a member of the IRA over those years or a member of the army council. He has denied that on umpteen occasions.

Suffice it to say that the Deputy's question is about a particularly well-resourced cross-**Border** unit involving both governments, dealing with the Garda and PSNI. I am not opposed to this

and the suggestion is valid. I pointed out yesterday that we have two cross-**Border** task forces currently that are proving to be very successful, both in tackling diesel and fuel laundering and tobacco smuggling. I gave the evidence of this. I suggest that this is part of the process of talks now under way and it is partly the reason talks are under way. There is no place for the kind of activity referred to in the PSNI report in this society and democracy and on this island. The Garda Commissioner has pointed out that there will be no truck with this kind of carry-on from the remnants or divergent groups of the Provisional IRA, which has poisoned so many people in society over the past 35 or 40 years.

I accept that the Deputy's question is valid, given that operations are currently ongoing with the two task forces operating across the **Border** to deal with drug and tobacco smuggling, fuel laundering and so on. If emerging from the process there is acceptance that there should be a further development in having an agreed joint cross-**Border** unit or agency, I would not be opposed to it. I would like that to be considered in the talks, as if it comes from that, it would have an enhanced status.

I am happy to report to the House that the work of the two joint task forces is currently very successful. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Flanagan, is representing us at the talks. If representatives of the people feel it would be appropriate for both governments to have a different agency, well-resourced with all the facilities to deal with this once and for all, I would have an open mind on it and be supportive if it came from there.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2015-10-21a.303>