

Inter-Parliamentary Forum Statement

29 February 2024



Credit: Jack Marshall (House of Lords)

The Interparliamentary Forum (IPF) met for the fifth time on 29th February 2024 at the House of Lords. The meeting was chaired by Baroness Drake and Lord Ricketts, chairs of the House of Lords Constitution and European Affairs committees, and attended by representatives from the House of Commons, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru.

Attendees were welcomed by the Lord Speaker, the Rt Hon Lord McFall of Alcuith. He said that it was a great pleasure to host members of the UK's parliaments and assemblies, almost two years to the day since the House of Lords hosted the first meeting of the IPF. He offered a warm welcome to members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, who were participating in the IPF for the first time since the establishment of a new Executive in Northern Ireland.

We heard updates from each legislature and discussed issues of common interest including the operation of the arrangements for intergovernmental relations that have been in place since 2022, the legislative consent process and the UK Government's recent *Safeguarding the Union* Command Paper. The distinctive nature of the devolution arrangements in different parts of the UK was acknowledged.

The statement issued following the previous meeting of the IPF identified shared concerns across our legislatures in relation to the transparency and future scrutiny of Common Frameworks. After that meeting we wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and ministers with responsibility for Common Frameworks in the devolved governments, about that issue.

We held a further discussion about scrutiny of Common Frameworks at this meeting and agreed to write again. We expressed a firm view that, following the establishment of the new Executive in Northern Ireland, it should now be possible for some further progress to be made towards finalising the 28 Common Frameworks that are currently operating on a provisional basis. This will help to facilitate scrutiny of these frameworks in our legislatures. In addition, we requested that details of an evaluation of the Common Frameworks process that is currently being undertaken by the UK Government are shared with the Forum.

There was also discussion about the operation of the arrangements for intergovernmental relations. Whilst good examples are apparent, we agreed that there is a need for greater consistency and clarity in the functioning of IGR. There were a number of concerns raised about the operation of the Sewel convention.

We discussed the most recent meeting of the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, held at Westminster on 4-5 December 2023, and looked ahead to the next meeting, which will take place in Brussels on 18-19 March 2024.

Finally, we held an exchange of views with Felicity Buchan MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. We raised several of the issues discussed earlier in the day with the Minister and heard about the UK Government's current work in this area.

In attendance

Baroness Drake, Chair of the Constitution Committee, House of Lords

Lord Ricketts, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, House of Lords

Baroness Andrews, former Chair of the Common Frameworks Committee and member of the Constitution Committee, House of Lords

Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland MP, Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons

Pete Wishart MP, Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee, House of Commons

William Wragg MP, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, House of Commons

Paula Bradshaw MLA, Chair of the Committee for the Executive Office, Northern Ireland Assembly

Matthew O'Toole MLA, Chair of the Committee for Finance, Northern Ireland Assembly

Clare Adamson MSP, Convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Scottish Parliament

Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, Senedd Cymru