

# European and External Affairs Committee

<b>Date:</b>	28 February 2007
<b>Time:</b>	09.30 – 12.30
<b>Venue:</b>	Committee Room 3, Senedd, Cardiff Bay
<b>Title:</b>	Legacy Report – 2003 to 2007

## Report to Plenary Under Standing Order 15.9

### Legacy Report - 2003 to 2007

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 The European and External Affairs Committee is one of the seven standing committees. This report is made under Standing Order 15.9, which requires the committee to report to the National Assembly from time to time on its progress in fulfilling their work programme. The report is made separately from the Committee's annual report for 2006-07, and is in two parts. The first section gives an overview of the strategic priorities and work activities of the European and External Affairs Committee (the Committee) during the Second Assembly. The second section is a legacy to the successor European and External Affairs Committee of the Third Assembly, indicating key issues that that Committee may wish to consider.

1.2 Copies of all the Committee's reports, agendas, papers, minutes and transcripts of meetings can be found on the National Assembly website.

#### 2. Strategic Overview

##### Remit and Responsibilities

2.1 The Committee's terms of reference are set out in Standing Order 15.1, listed below.

2.2 There shall be a Committee on European and External Affairs, which shall keep under review:

- The Assembly's relations with the regions, other nations and institutions of the European

- Union, and its methods for informing and advising those institutions of the needs of Wales;
- The Assembly's liaison arrangements with UKREP, and with United Kingdom government departments on European issues;
  - The Assembly's methods and procedures for the consideration of documents, issues and questions emanating from European institutions, having particular regard to the need for liaison with Members of Parliament responsible for scrutiny of European matters of particular relevance to Wales; and
  - The Assembly's relations with regions and nations external to the European Union and the Assembly's involvement in European and international organisations.

2.3 The First Minister, as Assembly Minister for Europe, is a Member of the Committee.

2.4 Committee membership is listed below:

<b>Member</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Constituency/Region</b>
Sandy Mewies AM (Chair)	Labour	Delyn
Nicholas Bourne AM	Conservative	Mid & West Wales
Rosemary Butler AM	Labour	Newport West
Jeff Cuthbert AM	Labour	Caerphilly
Mike German AM	Liberal Democrat	South Wales East
Christine Gwyther AM	Labour	Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire
Ieuan Wyn Jones AM	Plaid Cymru	Ynys Mon
Jonathan Morgan AM	Conservative	South West Central
Rhodri Morgan AM	Labour	Cardiff West
Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM	Plaid Cymru	Carmarthen East & Dinefwr

2.5 The Committee issued standing invitations to the following:

- Jill Evans MEP
- Jonathan Evans MEP
- Glenys Kinnock MEP
- Eluned Morgan MEP
- Janet Davies AM (Member of the Committee of the Regions)
- Rose D'Sa (Member of the European and Social Committee)
- Andy Klom (Head of the European Commission Office in Wales)

## **Work and Achievements**

2.6 The Committee met 30 times during the Second Assembly. As part of its commitment to foster relations with regions, other nations and institutions of the European Union and regions and nations external to the European Union, the Committee had held discussions with Welsh Members of the European Parliament, various European Commissioners and senior officials from the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions.

2.7 The Committee set its strategic priorities in June 2003 and these evolved to include: the strategic priorities of the various countries, including the UK, which held the EU presidency during this period; the convention on the future of Europe and the Constitutional Treaty; the proposals and negotiations on the various programmes for EU structural funds from 2007-2013 and the UK's National Strategic Reference Framework; the EU budget for the period 2007 to 2013; the Lisbon Strategy for economic growth; the regional aid maps 2007-2013 (review of state aid rules); the Welsh Assembly Government's external relations strategy; various EU directives including the services directive and the revision of the working time directive; and issues involving the principle of 'subsidiarity' – namely, that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen, and that EU action is only justified when it would be more effective than action taken at the national, regional or local level.

2.8 In addition, the Committee received regular updates from the First Minister, as the Minister for Europe, and members of the Committee of the Regions.

2.9 To supplement the strategic forward work programme, the Committee maintained a detailed forward work programme, which was reviewed regularly to ensure that Committee business focused on current issues.

2.10 The main achievements of the Committee during the Second Assembly are outlined below:

2.11 In November 2004, the Committee agreed a new, more strategic approach to the scrutiny of EU legislation and policy documents. This was approved by the Panel of Chairs and was also adopted by the subject committees. Previously, each committee was provided with a monthly list of relevant EU documents deposited with the UK Parliament. The new approach focuses on the European Commission's work programme, published at the start of each year. Each committee considered that part of the EC work programme relevant to its remit and selected items to scrutinise and monitor

during the year. The European and External Affairs Committee selected its own items and also maintained an overview of work by other committees.

2.12 This new approach and the protocol for committee scrutiny and action on EU policy (adopted by the Panel of Chairs in April 2005) were reviewed in November 2005 by this Committee. We made a few recommendations to strengthen the system, which were subsequently adopted by the Panel of Chairs. Committee Chairs welcomed the new approach and found it more effective in scrutinising and monitoring items of significance to Wales.

2.13 During this reporting period, the Committee has made its views known on a number of issues, including those listed in paragraph 2.7, to relevant stakeholders; including the EU Institutions, the Welsh Assembly Government and the UK Government and Parliament.

2.14 During 2006, the Committee undertook a review of European and Global Citizenship Education; taking written and oral evidence from relevant organisations and young people. The Committee will publish its report in March 2007.

2.15 In November 2003, the Committee visited Brussels and held a formal meeting. This included presentations from Jill Evans MEP and senior officials from the European Commission, concerning world trade and regional policy. The Committee also considered the draft EU constitution with the Head of EU Affairs of the Flemish Regional Government, and a senior official from the UK Permanent Representation to the EU.

2.16 In February 2006, the Committee paid a second visit to Brussels and met Commissioners Joe Borg and Danuta Hubner to discuss the development of an EU maritime policy and EU structural funds respectively. Members also met senior officials from the European Parliament and the Director of the Committee of Regions, with whom they discussed ways in which Wales could work more closely with the Committee of the Regions and other European regional assemblies. During the visit, the Chair hosted a lunch in Wales House attended by Commissioner Hubner and officials from the European Commission, European Parliament, the UK Permanent Representation to the EU, Wales House and other Brussels based stakeholders.

2.17 Members of the Committee had previously met Commissioner Hubner during her visit to Wales in September 2005, when they discussed the implications of negotiations on the future of the EU budget and structural fund programmes for Wales for 2007-2013.

2.18 The Committee received progress updates on the EU Presidency priorities of the governments of Austria and Finland, via their ambassadors to the United Kingdom. When the EU Presidency was held by the United Kingdom, the Committee received regular briefings from the First Minister and senior Whitehall officials.

2.19 The Committee was invited to take part in the Committee of the Regions (CoR) pilot subsidiarity monitoring network. The CoR is keen to facilitate the better application of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles within the EU. The Committee submitted its views on the subsidiarity and proportionality implications of selected legislative proposals at an early stage. In this

way, it helped the CoR to improve its consultation base, as it prepares its opinion on these proposals. The network also helps to strengthen ties between the European Union institutions and local and regional authorities. The first test phase was held in October 2005, and the second in October 2006. The Committee participated in both. The CoR will publish a report on the outcome of the second test project in spring 2007.

2.20 The Committee received regular reports from the Assembly Government and other Assembly Members on the activities of European and International organisations of which the Assembly is a member: CALRE, REGLEG, Council of Europe, British Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body (BIIPB), and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

2.21 The Committee has developed links with a number of voluntary sector organisations; including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Oxfam Cymru, and the Welsh Council for Voluntary Action. We received very interesting presentations from the 'Make Poverty History Coalition' and its successor organisation – the 'Wales Overseas Agencies Group'.

2.22 The Committee worked closely with the British Council, which made presentations on a number of issues; including, an outline of its work in developing stronger ties between the UK and other countries; the British Council Wales 'media project' (which included discussions with young journalists from a dozen countries within Europe and beyond, to give them a better understanding of the work of the National Assembly for Wales); a 'Women in Politics' conference held in Cardiff (during which a number of delegates from around the world told the Committee of their experiences and the barriers they had to overcome); and a very interesting contribution to our inquiry on European and Global Citizenship Education.

2.23 In July 2005, the Committee held a formal meeting in Llangollen, which included a presentation by the British Council Wales 'media project' and discussion with young journalists, referred to in paragraph 2.22. This was followed by a reception, hosted by the Chair, for local dignitaries in the National Assembly Pavilion on the 'maes' during the International Eisteddfod.

2.24 The Committee has developed working relationships with officials and elected members of other UK based European Scrutiny Committees; House of Commons, House of Lords and the Scottish Parliament.

2.25 In January 2005, the Chair hosted a meeting of the UK European Committee Chairs – comprising the Chairs of European Committees from the House of Commons, House of Lords, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly and Welsh Assembly. The meeting was held in Cardiff and focused on issues of common interest; and was considered very useful by all those attending. A further meeting was held in the House of Lords in February 2007.

2.26 Following the opening of the new Senedd in March 2006, the Committee has used video technology, during formal Committee meetings, to allow discussion between the Committee and Welsh Members of the European Parliament - Jill Evans MEP and Eluned Morgan MEP; and also Commissioner Margot Wallstrom the Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communications Strategy. This has enhanced the debate on EU matters in the Committee and helped to bridge the gap

between Brussels and the Assembly.

2.27 The Committee has developed a close working relationship with the Brussels Office of the Assembly Parliamentary Service (APS), in order to develop the strategic and detailed forward work programmes. The Committee receives regular briefing from the Brussels office and the Members' Research Service. The European Brief, given to Members before each meeting, includes a section summarising recent work by other committees on EU issues. In this way, the Committee keeps an overview of relevant scrutiny and other activity.

2.28 At this meeting, the Committee was also pleased to welcome His Excellency Robert Holmes Tuttle, the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Court of St James's. The Ambassador addresses the Committee and then held a brief discussion.

2.29 A recent development has been the production of an electronic newsletter called 'Europe Matters', which is issued in the name of Sandy Mewies AM (Chair) and produced by the APS Brussels office. It aims to inform those with an interest in European issues in Wales of what's currently under discussion in the Assembly's Committees. It summarises forthcoming issues to be considered by the European and External Affairs Committee and also relevant activity by other committees. It is circulated to all Assembly Members, some Assembly staff and external stakeholders. It has been well received and has a growing circulation list.

### **3. Legacy to Successor Committee**

#### **Possible Functions of the successor Committee**

3.1 At its meeting on 25 October 2006, the Committee made the following suggestion as to the possible functions of the successor Committee in its advice to the Standing Orders Committee.

3.2 Consideration of:

- EU legislation and policy proposals.
- Any other EU issue either devolved to the National Assembly for Wales or of particular interest to Members.
- The Welsh Assembly Government's relations with EU institutions and the UK government on European and international issues.
- The Welsh Assembly Government's external affairs policy; its relations with other nations and regions; and its membership of other European or international organisations.
- The Welsh Assembly Government's implementation, transposition and enforcement of EU legislation and policy.
- Methods and procedures of the National Assembly for Wales for considering EU policy, legislation and its external relations.
- Relations of the National Assembly for Wales with EU institutions and consultative bodies, and other bodies dealing with EU and international issues.
- The budget related to European and external affairs.

## Strategic Issues

3.3 During the Third Assembly, the Committee recommends that:

- Future agendas should be focused on fewer items - those which could have a significant impact on Wales - so that some items can be considered over a number of meetings for more in depth inquiries.
- The Committee should widen and improve the participation and consultation of external stakeholders in its work in order to strengthen the role of the Committee. Making greater use of e-democracy and video conferencing technology could help in this respect.
- The Committee could also consider playing a more active role in developing dialogue on European and international matters within Wales with the aim of promoting citizens' understanding of these issues and in turn improving the effectiveness of the Committee's role.
- Members and officials should develop links with other European scrutiny committees and EU institutions, and explore opportunities for joint working on specific projects. The Committee should seek to encourage further regular meetings of the UK European Committee Chairs (see paragraph 2.25) – to explore matters of common interest.
- Currently, all the subject Committees and the Equal Opportunities Committee have a duty to undertake scrutiny of EU legislative and policy proposals. The European and External Affairs Committee has therefore focused on more strategic issues, those of a cross-cutting nature and has avoided duplicating scrutiny work undertaken in the subject committees. In the light of the new Committee structure expected in the Third Assembly and their respective responsibilities, the successor Committee may wish to consider whether this mainstreaming of European scrutiny within the work programmes of the subject committees will in practice still be feasible given the pressures of domestic work in the Third Assembly. The Committee should review how scrutiny and monitoring of EU issues can best be dealt with by the Assembly's Committees and revisit the protocol for committee scrutiny and action on EU policy.
- It is important to influence the formulation of policy and legislation at an early stage in the process. The Committee should make use of the resources and expertise of the APS Brussels Office, to provide: an 'early warning' of forthcoming EU policy initiatives and consultations; regular EU briefing and agenda specific briefing, tailored to the work of the Committee; follow up action with relevant officials and politicians in the various EU institutions, to help raise the profile of the Committee.

## Specific Issues

3.4 The Committee suggests that the following issues are incorporated in the forward work programme:

- Scrutiny of the Welsh Assembly Government in developing and implementing relevant policies, including the external relations strategy.
- European Commission Work Programme for 2007 (specific items to be selected)
- The work of EU and international bodies; for example, European Regions with Legislative Powers (REG LEG and CALRE), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the British Council.

- The priorities of countries holding the EU Presidency, via their ambassadors to the UK.

## **Cross-cutting issues**

3.5 The Committee suggests that the following cross-cutting issues are kept under review:

- The Lisbon Strategy, as this is important to both employment and wealth creation in Wales.
- Recommendations in the Committee's report on European and Global Citizenship Education.
- The emerging EU Communication Policy and its implications and opportunities for the Assembly.
- The future of the EU Constitutional Treaty and the implications for regional assemblies with legislative powers.
- The wide-ranging review of the EU's future budgetary priorities and its implications for Wales.
- Monitoring the application of the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality; collaboration with the UK's parliamentary European Committees and the Committee of the Regions.