

European and External Affairs Committee

Draft Minutes EUR2 09-04 min

Meeting date: 9 December 2004

Meeting time: 9.00 to 12.15

Meeting venue: National Assembly for Wales

Attendance

EEAC Members	Constituency
Sandy Mewies (Chair)	Labour: Delyn
Rosemary Butler	Labour: Newport West
Christine Chapman	Labour: Cynon Valley
Mike German	Liberal Democrat: South Wales East
Christine Gwyther	Labour: Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Plaid Cymru: Ynys Môn
Rhodri Morgan	Labour: Cardiff West
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru: Carmarthen East & Dinefwr

Standing Invitees

Janet Davies, AM	
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External presenters

Andris Taurins,	Honorary Consul to Latvia
His Excellency M. Jean-Louis Wolzfeld	Ambassador of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Officials

Gary Davies	European and External Affairs Division
Phil Bird	European and External Affairs Division
Steve Davies	European and External Affairs Division

Secretariat

John Grimes	Clerk
Siân Wilkins	Clerk

Item 1: Introduction, apologies and substitutions

1. Apologies had been received from Nick Bourne, AM, Jonathan Morgan AM, and from Standing Invitees: Jonathan Evans MEP, Glenys Kinnock MEP, Eluned Morgan, MEP
2. The Chair introduced Anna Daniel who had just started work with MRS in the APS office in Brussels. Ms Daniel said she had previously worked for the Local Government International Bureau in Brussels and had a range of knowledge and experience to bring to the committee. She would welcome the views of members on the support that she might provide for them. The Chair said that a fuller discussion would be scheduled for the next meeting.
3. Members welcomed Ms Daniel. It was suggested she might try to get round and speak to each member individually in the next few weeks. The Chair asked members to let the Clerk know if they had any particular issues or observations to pass on to her.

Item 2: Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

1. The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November were agreed as a true record.
2. On action outstanding:

Item 2.2, 14 October – The Chair said she had just received a letter from the EC saying that Andy Klom had been appointed the new head of the Commission Office in Cardiff and would take up his post on 1 February 2005. The clerk was asked to circulate the letter to members along with any background information that was available. [Action: Clerk]

Item 2.4, 14 October – The Chair said that it looked likely that it would not be possible to arrange a meeting in Brussels until the summer term.

Item 3.2, 11 November – Mike German said that the transcript was in fact available and provided the Clerk with a copy to circulate to members. [Action: Clerk]

Item 3: Latvia and Silesia – Progress report (9.15 – 9.45)

Paper: EUR(2) 09-04(p1)

1. Introducing the paper, officials spoke of the good progress that had been made following the signing of the memorandum of understanding with Silesia, which was now two years old, and that with Latvia of seven months. They said that the paper did not list every initiative that was being pursued but rather sought to give a flavour of what was happening. The memoranda were considered as live working documents which would evolve and develop over time. They emphasised the active support in developing these links that had come from Assembly members, partner organisations, the Honorary Consuls and from the Embassies of the countries involved.
2. In the discussion, members welcomed the work being done by Silesia in relation to sustainable development and the role played by the Assembly in supporting them in this. It was noted that Wales had experience of producing reinforced steel products which was a sector in which Latvia was also strong and one where there was a good opportunity for sharing knowledge on SD production techniques.
3. Members welcomed the collaborative work in the health sector and the sharing of medical and dental expertise referred to in the paper. The First Minister agreed to provide an update on these discussions. [Action: First Minister]
4. In relation to funding for initiatives and projects, officials said that they were working to identify EU money that was available. The Leonardo da Vinci programme was one possible source. They were also looking more broadly for support and said some FCO money was available and, in some cases, National Assembly budgets could be used. Officials were having regular meetings on this with the WLGA.
5. Members also noted the range of cultural events that were planned for 2005 and asked that the Committee, and also the Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee, be kept informed of them. [Action: First Minister]
6. Andy Taurins, Latvian Honorary Consul to Wales, reinforced the positive messages presented to the committee. He said he had been impressed by how many things had been achieved since May. A great deal of work had been done and everyone was very grateful for the collaboration which in the tradition of the best kind of collaboration was beneficial for both countries.
7. Summing up the discussion, the Chair said the Committee was delighted to hear of the excellent progress being made in the developing relationships with Latvia and Silesia. She asked Mr Taurins to pass on the Committee's very best wishes to his President whom he was seeing later that day.

Item 4: First Minister's Report (9.45 - 10.15)

Paper: EUR(2) 09-04(p2) – First Minister’s Report

1. The First Minister introduced his report saying that it had been a busy period since the last meeting of the committee and highlighted the key points.
2. In the discussion, he said that during the UK presidency, it had been agreed that there would be an informal meeting of the European Council in Wales. This would be the Competitiveness Council which was meeting in Cardiff City Hall at the start of the presidency. He said that it was hoped to have a second meeting outside Cardiff, but this was not in the control of the Welsh Assembly Government and was ultimately a matter for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. One factor was the choice of venue which was limited when security, logistics, hotel accommodation etc were taken into account.
3. The First Minister stressed that during the presidency, formal meetings of the Council would still take place in Brussels, as it was more practical and efficient for these to be held there. He also reminded Members that there would be many cultural and other events going on during the Presidency which would provide an opportunity to promote other parts of Wales.
4. Drawing attention to the proposed youth event, members stressed the importance of this involving people from all over Wales and hoped that the Assembly would consider contributing to travel expenses in order facilitate this.
5. Members also noted that the UK Presidency would bring a large number of foreign journalists to Great Britain and said that every effort must be made to ensure they write positively about every aspect of Wales.
6. The First Minister reminded Members that the UK Presidency of the G8 Summit, which was to be held in Scotland, would provide an opportunity for promoting Wales. This would last a full year.
7. In relation to his discussions with Sr Bargallo to discuss increased Wales – Catalonia co-operation, the First Minister said that there was an opportunity to use this link to help the development of bilingual education in Wales. However, the language differences were not the same as those between Welsh and English and therefore there were limits to the scope for sharing educational experiences.
8. The First Minister said that he had the previous night sent the Chair a letter about the forthcoming closure of the Wales European Centre in Brussels. Copies were provided at the meeting for members. The closure decision had been taken because of the merger of the WDA and ELWa with the Welsh Assembly Government as a consequence of which the remaining partners did not feel the centre would continue to be viable. The letter also indicated an intention to seek new premises to house Welsh representation in Brussels which would allow the deficiencies of the current premises to be resolved. The Assembly Government was already working on this and would consult with other interested parties as the work develops.
9. Members recognised the need to improve the situation in relation to health and safety and disabled access to the offices. But some felt there was a need to take the opportunity to consider whether a broader range of interest should be represented in the new office. At present, the building provided facilities for public sector bodies and it was suggested that consideration should be given to taking a broader view of Welsh representation and to bring in the views of civil society in Wales and the private sector. The point was also made that the central location of

the present building made it very suitable for access to the European Commission. In agreeing on a new building, it was also important have regard to future plans and, perhaps, further support for the MRS work.

10. Responding, officials said that they were talking to universities and the voluntary sector about their needs in Brussels so that these could be taken into account. They were also proposing to make provision for 'drop in' facilities to be used by business interests, as were available at present.
11. Members added that there was also a need for facilities for AM's who were attending meetings in Brussels to have somewhere to work between meetings. This would be particularly valuable at the present time because, with no direct flights from Cardiff to Brussels, members often tried to arrange a number of meetings on a visit. The Clerk was asked to pursue this as an issue for APS. [Action: Clerk]
12. In the discussion Members paid tribute to the high quality of briefing provided from the Brussels office and emphasised that co-location of the various Welsh interests was a major factor behind this.
13. Concluding this discussion, the Chair asked for the Committee to receive an update when progress had been made. The First Minister agreed to a request for a written statement on it to be made to plenary but said that he would not commit to an oral one. [Action: First Minister]
14. Referring to his visit to Guernsey, the First Minister drew attention to the changing economy of the island and its greater dependence than before on tourism. He noted training was a critical issue and also that they were now very dependent on people from Eastern Europe who would generally highly skilled.

Item 5: Enlargement – six months on (10.15 – 10.40)

Paper: EUR(2) 09-04 (p3) – The Enlarged European union: Next Steps

1. Introducing the paper, officials said that many of the issues involved with EU enlargement were not devolved. The last seven months since enlargement had been an unsettled time for the new members with over half of them having a change of Government. The increased membership had had a dramatic effect on European institutions with new members still learning how to operate in the Council and initially they had been focusing on areas of most impact to them, such as regional aid. However, it was too early to judge the long term impact. Nonetheless, it was time to start thinking about the next expansion of membership with Bulgaria and Romania expected to join in 2007 and the possibility of Croatia in 2009, although there was at present no date for talks to commence. In relation to Bulgaria, officials indicated that all the chapters had now been concluded. For Romania, two remained and the aim was to conclude these both soon. Turkey's membership was a rather different and longer-term issue.
2. There was a general discussion of the latter and the EC's recommendation that Turkey was eligible to start accession negotiations although these could not be completed unless there were further improvements in relation to democracy and human rights. It was noted that no country had every failed to complete entry negotiations but also that, for the first time, the EU would

introduce a ‘break’ clause which would permit negotiations to be suspended if these issues were not satisfactory. The key issue on Turkey was the decision to be taken on 17 December by EU Ministers as to whether to open talks and, if so, the date for talks on accession to commence.

3. Members noted that the research had shown that enlargement had not resulted in mass migration within Europe and that in fact the new workers who had come to the UK were largely young, well educated and multilingual.
4. In response to a question, officials said that no assessment had yet been made of the cost to the EU of Turkey joining or, for example, the effect this would have on Wales’ GDP in relation to that of the enlarged Union. A member referred to a meeting he had had with representatives of the Kurdish community in Wales who saw the accession of Turkey into the EU as very significant in relation to recognition of their rights. It was likely that this would reduce the pressure for them to seek independence within the country.
5. Rosemary Butler said that the Committee of the Regions had broadly endorsed Turkey’s bid to become a member of the EU subject to resolving the issues related to democracy and human rights etc. She provided a copy of the Resolution of the Committee of the Regions for the Clerk to circulate to members. She emphasised that the resolution drew attention to the EC’s conclusion about suspending negotiations in the circumstances referred to previously. [Action: Clerk]
6. Members noted that there were indications that some 70% of Turkish people wanted to join the EU.
7. Summing up the discussion, the Chair said the committee recognised that Turkey faced major hurdles before it could gain EU membership but considered there was no fundamental barrier to their joining and, subject to the concerns about issues such as democracy and human rights, welcomed their membership.

Item 6: Wales, A World Nation – a strategic framework (10.55 – 11.10)

Paper: EUR(2) 09-04(p4) - Wales, A World Nation –a strategic framework

1. The First Minister introduced the paper saying that the revised version of the document incorporated drafting changes to reflect comments made at the Committee’s last meeting. He hoped it removed some of the inconsistencies that had concerned Members. He said that the paper now clarified that ownership of the document clearly lay with the Welsh Assembly Government and that if Members still felt it should be subject to a full debate in Plenary, he would try to facilitate this but could offer no guarantee.
2. Members had no issue with the substance of the document. In terms of presentation, a Member commented that there was a gap in the paper between ‘The Vision’ and the objectives. Others suggested that it also needed to set out the political objectives for the specific partnerships with other regions and there should be a clear link to the overarching Government policies.
3. Members welcomed the changes to the document which they recognised was important and would need to remain current and be reviewed on a regular basis. They stressed the importance of Wales continuing to be ambitious in growing its international reputation. The First Minister said

that in its evolution further versions would seek to develop the links between the vision and the strategies.

Item 7: Update from Members of the Committee of the Regions (11.10-11.20)

1. Rosemary Butler highlighted the Committee of the Regions (COR) meeting in Cardiff the previous week and the part that the EEAC Committee and First Minister had played in this important meeting.
2. She outlined the key recommendations in the Opinion she had prepared on the Budget for Culture 2007-2013. In total 14 recommendations had been made which the COR had accepted and which were due to go to the Commission in February 2005. She agreed to circulate the full report to the Committee. [Action: Clerk]
3. The WLGA had now agreed a replacement Member for Brian Smith which would enable Janet Davies to return to her role as an 'alternate' and to attend meetings. Meanwhile, she had pursued a number of avenues to ensure she attended as many COR meetings as possible to remain in touch. Rosemary Butler also referred to a report carried out in Holland which highlighted the benefits with health issues that could be brought to a range of people in working in the Countryside. A Member requested further information on this and said that the Committee (EEAC) might concentrate more on in-depth discussions on reports such as this, while recognising the need to not cut across the work of subject committees. [Action: Clerk]
4. Janet Davies outlined the topics that had been discussed at the recent meeting of the Commission for Social and Economic Policy she had attended and agreed to let Members have further information on any topics they were interested in.
5. Members were interested to hear how 'Opinions' from the COR were presented to the European Parliament. Rosemary Butler said that 'lobbying' on reports was definitely an area that could be developed and maybe this was something for the new MRS appointee in Brussels to consider. It was also said that the report might be considered as evidence for the BIIPB sub-committee study on cross-border European funding which was looking at Culture.

Item 8: European proposals deposited in the UK parliament (11.20-11.30)

Paper: EUR(2) 09-04(p5) – European proposals deposited in the UK Parliament
EUR(2) 09-04(p6) – The EU Services Directive

1. The Committee agreed to defer the discussion on EU Services Directive as the Member who had requested the discussion had not been able to attend the meeting.
2. A Member suggested that the Committee look in further detail at the proposal for a Council

Decision authorising the United Kingdom to apply an exemption from climate change levy for low value solid fuels in accordance with Article 19 of Directive 2003/96/EC. [Action: Clerk]

Item 9: Luxembourg Presidency of the European Union (11.30-12.15)

To follow

Committee Service November 2004