

European and External Affairs Committee

Date: 9 December 2004
Time: 09.00am
Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay
Title: Silesia and Latvia Progress Report

Purpose

1. This paper has been produced at the request of the Committee. It provides an update on the progress made in relation to activity being undertaken under the Memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between Wales and Silesia and Wales and Latvia.

Summary / Recommendations

2. The Memoranda are working well. This is reflected in the amount of activity already under way and planned activity for the coming months. This extends across a number of sectors and is taking place at various levels of engagement.
3. This paper provides a snapshot of that activity and is presented to the Committee for information and discussion.

Background

4. Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Wales and Silesia and Wales and Latvia were signed on 16 October 2002 and 13 May 2004 respectively. The MOUs themselves are not legally binding and simply record an understanding by the participants to co-operate over a range of subject areas for their mutual benefit. In developing the Memoranda we have sought to engage all levels of society, the National Assembly, Assembly Government, local authorities, the private sector, voluntary sector and the general public. Wherever possible our intention has been to demonstrate the best of Wales and in particular we have made efforts to expose Welsh universities and companies to our colleagues.
5. The MOUs were the result of months of negotiations and meetings. They are designed to build upon existing links and to explore and develop projects and exchanges mainly in the economic, social and cultural sectors but drafted in such a way that potentially nothing is excluded. Silesia was seen as a natural candidate for developing such links since it has similar problems to those faced by Wales over the last few decades in terms of moving away from an economy based largely on coal extraction, heavy industry and its environmental aftermath. Silesia is also the second most important region in Poland (after Warsaw) and therefore has potential to be a 'big hitter' at regional level in the enlarged EU, a key consideration for Wales in terms of increasing our influence through strategic alliances. The MOU with Latvia is the first that Wales has signed with a full EU Member State, another potentially key alliance for the

future.

6. A summary of the co-operation is provided below. Overall we are very pleased with the progress that has been made, although it is evident that we have moved forward much quicker on the MOU with Latvia than that with Silesia. This has been largely due to the changes to the leadership of the Silesian Voivodeship towards the end of 2002. However, it may also be a reflection of the difference in working with a comparatively large regional tier of government (Silesia has a population of around 5 million) and a much smaller autonomous national government (Latvia has a population of around 2.3 million). A further consideration is that we have been able to secure a dedicated point of contact within the Latvian Embassy in London who facilitates the MOU and is a regular visitor to Wales.

MOU between Wales and Silesia

Political & diplomatic links

7. Links between Wales and Silesia were firmly established in December 2001 when the First Minister visited Silesia (and Warsaw). The (then) Marshal of Silesia, Jan Olbrycht, paid a reciprocal visit to Wales in May 2002, that resulted in the signing of the MOU in October 2002. That relationship has further blossomed with Michal Czarski's appointment, as has our relationship with the Marshal's office and the Polish Embassy in London. We hope, too, that our past association with Jan Olbrycht will continue to stand us in good stead, particularly in the light of his election to the European Parliament and appointment as Vice Chair of its Committee on Regional Development.

Trade & investment

8. Wales Trade international (WTI) is targeting Poland as a priority market. Since 2001, WTI has taken two trade missions to Poland and there are plans to include Katowice in the next trade visit, which will take place from 20-24 March 2005. Company recruitment is well underway for this event and we are encouraging direct contact between parallel institutions, such as Chambers of Commerce and the regional development agency.

Sustainable Development

9. Silesia is a "Shadow partner" in the Pan-European Laboratory on Sustainable Development (along with Estonia and Northern and Western Hungary) and participated in the 4th Conference of the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (on which Wales leads) at the City Hall in Cardiff on 22-26 March this year. Officials are working with Silesian colleagues on the Network to plan an event in Katowice in May 2005 "*EU Enlargement as a Chance for Regional Sustainable Development*". Latvia has also been invited to join the Network.

Local Government

10. Welsh local government is working with Silesia at a number of levels. The commitment to share experiences, knowledge and good practice was underpinned in August this year, when the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) signed an MOU with the Silesian Union of Municipalities and Districts (SUMD). Prior to signing the agreement, the WLGA worked with Glamorgan University on delivering a series of joint seminars on structural funds in Katowice.
11. Denbighshire County Council is actively developing links with Gliwice in Silesia. There have been a number of reciprocal visits, including a scoping visit from a group of Polish envoys to North Wales in March this year and a visit by a small delegation from Denbigh to Katowice in May (to address a conference of municipal authorities on regeneration issues). The First Secretary of the Polish Embassy in London visited Llangollen Food Festival in October and we understand that as a result of attendance at the Festival, one Polish business is looking to establish a presence in the area. A further delegation from Denbigh visited Gliwice in November, accompanied by an officer from Anglesey County Council, to explore the possibilities of developing links with localities in Silesia. During the visit they met the Marshal of Silesia.

Education

12. Various education-based proposals have come forward from Wales and from the Silesians, including the possibility of school and FE & HE teacher and student exchanges. These have been shared with education colleagues and the British Council in Wales to consider. In particular, there has been interest in developing co-operation between institutions in Wales and Silesia that are responsible for social work training and initial steps have been taken to put the various institutions in contact with each other for them to explore. The University of Glamorgan has concluded a bilateral agreement with the University of Economics, Katowice.

Health

13. Health officials met the Marshal during his visit and subsequently visited Silesia in September 2004, as part of a job fair and recruitment exercise. While they were there, they explored a range of other health related issues where there may be scope for collaboration, including the sharing of medical and dental expertise and English language proficiency and registration for Polish doctors and dentists wishing to work in Wales. Those discussions are ongoing.

Land reclamation/regeneration

14. There have been discussions between the Welsh Development Agency, Cardiff University and the Vice President of the Voivodship Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management in Katowice over a possible collaborative project involving sustainable brownfield regeneration. Representatives from the WDA and the University visited Silesia in November to explore this further. They will also explore another proposal that came forward from the Silesians, to make a film chronicling post-industrial regeneration.

Structural Funds

15. WEFO has been working for some time with the Poles on various aspects of Structural Funds, either directly through study tours or through participation in visit programmes. Ms Sheila Maxwell is currently placed with the Department for Structural Policy Co-ordination within the Ministry of Economy & Labour, Warsaw, Poland, on attachment from the Welsh European Funding Office. Her placement as Residential Twinning Adviser commenced in March 2004 and runs until September 2005.
16. Her overarching objective is to assist six Managing Authorities implement the 2004 – 2006 Structural Fund programmes in Poland (Objective 1 & Interreg), and to strengthen the skills of central administration for effective programming and management of ERDF programmes.
17. Ms Maxwell has no specific brief regarding Silesia but has visited offices in Katowice to explain her role in Poland and has established contacts with the Honorary Consul for Silesia. She also attended a WLGA Structural Funds seminar in Toszak near Gliwice, and sent a personal invitation to Silesian colleagues to attend the Best Practice Conference organised in Warsaw detailing Welsh projects.

Culture

18. There has been a history of cultural exchanges between Wales and Poland, both prior and subsequent to, the signing of the MOU. Recent events include a short season of Polish/Silesian film at the Chapter Cinema, Cardiff, in May 2003 and a performance by the Diversions Dance Company at the Silesian Dance Theatre's International festival in Bytom and Krakow in June 2003. In May 2004, the work of Andrew Smith, a visual artist and co-organiser of the Harlech Biennale was included in a group exhibition in Katowice. In 2005, as part of their tour of the UK, the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, based in Katowice, will perform at the North Wales Theatre, Llandudno, and as part of the Swansea Festival.
19. Additional proposals were put forward by the Silesians during the Marshal's visit to Wales in June, including the film on regeneration mentioned above and several others focusing on music, poetry and the visual arts. A proposal has also come forward for Culture 2000 funding based on a virtual exhibition from several mining or former mining societies, including South Wales and Silesia.
20. Preliminary discussions are being held with Wales Arts International and, depending on the merits of the individual proposals, we will be looking to hold at least one cultural event in Silesia next year.

MOU between Wales and Latvia

Political & diplomatic links

21. Links between the Welsh Assembly Government and Latvia were primarily forged during the First Minister's visit as the head of a Wales Trade International trade mission to Latvia in September 2003 and the Latvian Ambassador's visit to Wales in December 2003. They were re-enforced in May 2004, when the Minister for Economic Development and Transport held a bilateral with the Latvian Finance Minister and the Latvian State Secretary for Regional Policy, during a Cohesion Forum in Brussels. The relationship was further cemented with the signing of the MOU in Newport, by the First Minister and the Latvian Minister of the Economy, in the presence of the President of Latvia.
22. We have an excellent relationship with the Latvian Embassy in London, with whom we are in regular, often daily, contact. We also maintain close links with the Latvian Honorary Consul in Wales who attends many of the functions and visits by Latvians into Wales. As soon as a new Latvian Ambassador has been appointed, we plan to invite him or her to Wales and, in consultation with the Committee Secretariat, issue an invitation to appear before this Committee.

Trade & Investment

23. WTI has taken two trade missions to Latvia, one in September 2003 (which also included Estonia) and the other in September this year (along with Lithuania). Ten Welsh delegates participated in this event and they reported positive feedback from the meetings held. A number of companies have expressed their interest in revisiting these Baltic markets in order to build on relationships and obtain tangible market value. In total, some 81 meetings were held, and three new Welsh exporters were created. The total value of potential sales expected to follow is £231,000
24. As a result of developing trading links, we understand that, at least one leading company from Wales has decided to establish a presence in Latvia. An inward trade mission is also under consideration.
25. As part of the MOU agreement, WTI will host a two or three week secondment of a senior official from the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (LIDA) in the New Year. The LIDA is keen to learn how the Assembly and its business support agencies have developed international trade, attracted inward investment, helped indigenous businesses to start up and grow and supported innovation as well as looking at how Wales has gained and used Structural Funds.

Education

26. There are a number of established academic links between the University of Wales and the University of Latvia. Most recently, in the light of the MOU, the University of Glamorgan invited the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) in Riga to participate in a project that the University is currently developing called "Digital Cities and Other Stories". This is being pursued through the University's Film Academy and the Film and Drama Department of the LAC. Swansea College is actively pursuing opportunities with the vocational educational sector

and, as with Silesia, we are looking to establish contact between schools.

Tourism

27. Responding to a request from the Latvians, representatives from the Wales Tourist Board visited Latvia in July this year to participate in a Cultural Tourism Conference and explore possible options for future co-operation, including regional tourism. The Latvian Tourist Agency has subsequently confirmed that they wish to join the Wales-led European Cultural Tourism Network. Along with 9 other partners (Wales, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Hungary, S W Finland, W Sweden, Huelva CC (Andulcia) and Andulcia Legends Association), the Agency is participating in a bid for a project under Interreg IIC. Silesia has also participated in the Network.

Structural Funds

28. WEFO officials are working closely with the Latvians on the development and implementation of effective financial controls and research, monitoring and evaluation issues in respect of Structural Funds management. To help deliver these objectives WEFO presented a number of seminars and training workshops in Riga, in April.

29. Mr Phil Gray is currently placed with the Treasury of the Republic of Latvia in Riga on attachment from the UK National Audit Office (on loan from the Welsh Assembly Government). As Residential Twinning Adviser (RTA) his placement runs from 25 July 2004 – 16 March 2005. His overarching objective is to ensure efficient management and control of the EU and public funds in Latvia, in compliance with EC Regulations.

30. As part of this project, a representative from the National Audit Office, Cardiff, will visit Riga shortly to help the Latvian State Treasury with a review of the Latvian Co-Financing report. A study visit has also been arranged to enable auditors from the Latvian State Treasury Internal Audit Department to visit their opposite numbers here in Wales, to see how an audit of Structural Funds functions is planned and prepared, and to take part in the fieldwork. Some weeks later there will be a reciprocal visit to Riga to present the final report, including the client's reaction, and to exchange views on audit practice more generally.

National Library of Wales

31. There are strong links developing between the National Library of Wales, the National Library of Latvia and the National Libraries of Estonia and Finland. The Libraries are looking to develop a programme based on similarities in their aims and objectives, as well as the nature of the social, political and linguistic contexts in which they operate. A programme of mutual visits is already underway.

Innovation and Technology

32. There has been a great deal of interest expressed in co-operation between Wales and Latvia over innovation and technology. The Director of the Welsh Techniums in Swansea has taken the view that there are synergies between the work of the Techniums and the Latvian Technology Centre in Riga. Jelgava Council, in particular, would like to learn more about Wales' experience in developing technology parks and the Mayor of Jelgava, together with the mayors of two other major cities in Latvia (Valmiera and Ventspils), visited the Techniums in October this year. The visit was undertaken during a two week study visit to the Centre for English Language Teaching in Cardiff (CELT) organised by the British Council.

Local Government

33. Welsh local government is working with the Latvians on a number of levels. The Welsh Local Government Association has affirmed that it would like to work with the Latvian regions and has exchanged information with its equivalent in Latvia. It is currently looking to match up one of the regions in Latvia with a local authority in Wales that has similar interests with a view to joint working and exchanges.

34. The Welsh Assembly Government and Caerphilly County Borough Council hosted a two-day visit of representatives from 11 Latvian municipalities in October. The objectives of the visit, which was organised through the Latvian Embassy in London (with input from the Welsh Local Government Association), were to gain a greater understanding of Wales and Wales' experience of local governance.

35. At a local level, Caerphilly Council's Head of Planning visited the town of Smiltene in October to advise on local planning issues.

Sustainable Development

36. Latvia is currently considering an invitation to join the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development on which Wales leads.

Culture/Welsh Language

37. A number of exciting and innovative projects have been put forward by both sides and officials are working with Wales Arts International to explore their feasibility. The nature of some of the proposals is such that they will require a reasonably long lead in time, but we are hoping to kick off with at least one small cultural event in Latvia in 2005.

38. One initiative that has come forward on the arts side is a bid from Artists' Project Ltd (Cardiff) & the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Centre for Research in Art & Design (in collaboration with 5 international co-organisers), for European Union Culture 2000 funding.

39. The bid is part of "SENSE IN PLACE" Site-ations International Europe 2005, a collaborative, interdisciplinary visual arts project involving 14 European

countries. Participants create site-specific work, in situ, which reflect the social, historical and environmental contexts of diverse locations across Europe. The project will instigate 6 site-related projects in each of the 6 co-organiser countries (Latvia, Poland, Spain, Iceland and Ireland), including 3 bi-lateral education projects and a mutual exchange of artists from the 8 other partner countries - Finland, Hungary, Croatia, France, Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark and Sweden.

40. A cultural heritage project bid has also been submitted under INTERREG IIIC. The aim of the project is to bring heritage buildings back into self-sustaining use and, if the bid is successful, will include Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University and Kurzemer Tourism Association (Latvia). Other partners will include Belgium (who are in the lead), Hungary, Spain, UK, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania and Slovakia.
41. The Latvians, who consider themselves, like Wales, to be a “small language” nation, are keen to learn how Wales is safeguarding the Welsh language. During a visit to Wales in December 2003, the Latvian Ambassador met the Chief Executive of the Welsh language Board and the Embassy has established direct dialogue with the Board.
42. A key literary event in the Baltic calendar is the annual Baltic Book Fair. This rotates between the three Baltic States and will take place in Riga in March next year. Wales Arts International has been made aware of this and we hope that Welsh poets and writers will be among the participants.

NGOs and Voluntary Sector Bodies

43. The Silesians, the Latvians and we, are keen to facilitate contact between similar institutions and organisations. While this has been relatively simple in terms of public sector bodies and private sector umbrella organisations, it is proving much more difficult in terms of Non Governmental and voluntary sector organisations. That said, we are doing what we can through our contacts in the Embassies and others, like the British Council, to bring together like-minded organisations that will, we hope, provide the opportunity for exchanges of good practice etc and assist them to develop their interests through a wider international network.

Cross Cutting Themes

44. The Assembly Government is co-operating with local government and other public sector bodies, business and the voluntary sector in identifying and taking forward the activity set out above.

Action for Subject Committee

45. Members are invited to note the latest position

Rt Hon Rhodri Morgan AM
First Minister

Contact Point: Philip Bird, European and External Affairs Division. Ext 3514