



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru  
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Materion Ewropeaidd ac Allanol  
The Committee on European and External Affairs**

**Dydd Iau, 7 Chwefror 2008  
Thursday, 7 February 2008**

**Cynnwys**  
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,  
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.  
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Nick Bourne	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Jeff Cuthbert	Llafur Labour
Nerys Evans	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
William Graham	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Gareth Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Val Lloyd	Llafur Labour
Sandy Mewies	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Ei Ardderchogrwydd/ His Excellency Mr Iztok Mirošič	Llysgennad Gweriniaeth Slofenia Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia
Andreja Viher	Llysgenhadaeth Gweriniaeth Slofenia Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia
Andy Klom	Pennaeth Swyddfa'r Comisiwn Ewropeaidd yng Nghymru Head of European Commission Office in Wales

**Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol**  
**Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance**

Gwyn Griffiths	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol y Pwyllgor Legal Adviser to the Committee
Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Chris Reading	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 1.29 p.m.*  
*The meeting began at 1.29 p.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau**  
**Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Sandy Mewies:** Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to another meeting of the Committee on European and External Affairs. I welcome those in the public gallery, along with officials and Members. This is a bilingual committee and headsets are available for

simultaneous translation—you will need to switch to channel 1. If it does not work, someone will come and correct it, and that is the same for the public gallery. The headsets will also amplify the sound for anybody who needs them for hearing; that is on channel 0. If you have a BlackBerry or a mobile phone, please switch them off, because they interfere with the broadcasting system. In the event of an emergency—I have not been informed of a fire alarm test—the alarm will sound and ushers will direct everyone to the nearest safe exit, and I recommend that people follow them.

[2] We have been provided with European briefing No. 23, prepared by the Members' research service; thank you for that. I also thank Members who took part in the debate in the Senedd with EU commissioner Margot Wallström last week. Andy will say a few words about the commissioner's visit. I have heard many times, from many Members across the parties, how much they gained from her visit and how much they enjoyed hearing her speak.

[3] I hosted a lunch on Tuesday for Herr Reinhart Weimer, political counsellor in the embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, and I believe that some Members had the opportunity to talk with him. He is particularly interested in devolution and, before he came here, he had been to Northern Ireland and Scotland and was interested in making comparisons.

[4] Many of you will know that Anna Daniel, who was head of the Assembly office in Brussels, has taken up a new post in the Legislation and Chamber Service. I put on record my thanks and those of the committee to her for all the work that she did, and I wish her good luck in the future.

[5] I have received apologies from Members of the European Parliament Jonathan Evans, Jill Evans, Glenys Kinnock and Eluned Morgan. There are no apologies from Assembly Members and there are no substitutions. Andy, would you like to say a few words on what you thought of the visit?

[6] **Mr Klom:** I wanted to take this opportunity to express the thanks and appreciation of the European Commission for the great welcome given to vice-president, Margot Wallström, not just by this institution but also by its elected Members, who participated so constructively in the debate with the commissioner. From her side, there was a very positive impression of the debate and of the visit. I give special thanks to Assembly officials who, behind the scenes, were so busy and worked so diligently to make the visit the success that it was. We have worked with Members and officials here for a long time but this was a high point in our collaboration, from the side of the commission office as well as from the side of the vice-president. We were very satisfied with this visit and hope that there will be a continuation of the very close relationship that we have begun. Fortunately, straight after the visit, Mrs Wallström also made quite an entry about the visit in her blog. So, if my words do not sound convincing, her writing is there to prove it.

[7] **Sandy Mewies:** I hope that we will be able to hold video conferences with her and with others. It was so successful when we did it last time.

[8] No-one has any declarations of interest.

1.34 p.m.

### **Gwybodaeth am Lywyddiaeth yr UE EU Presidency Briefing**

[9] **Sandy Mewies:** I welcome His Excellency Iztok Mirošič, ambassador to the Court of St James from the Republic of Slovenia. I believe that we all know that, on 1 January,

Slovenia took over the EU presidency from Portugal. It will hold it for six months and then hand over to France for the second half of the year. We are hoping that you will set out for us the Slovenian Government's main priorities for the EU presidency and perhaps you could answer some questions for us later.

[10] I also welcome first secretary Andreja Viher. You are both very welcome. Some of us have had the pleasure of talking to you and hearing about your lovely country over lunch. Thank you for coming, and over to you.

[11] **HE Mr Mirošič:** Thank you. It is my great pleasure to appear in front of you today, and I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to talk to you about the priorities for the Slovenian presidency of the EU. Thank you also for the very nice hosting arrangements during the lunch here. I am always delighted to be in Cardiff—this is my third or fourth visit—and I am not just interested, but amazed by the developments that are taking place in the city. Once again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be with you here.

[12] I will move on to the priorities for our presidency, and start with 2007. This was a year of success for the European Union: we completed its fifth enlargement, including Bulgaria and Romania; there was an enlargement of the eurozone, with my country, Slovenia, joining on 1 January 2007; and, at the end of the year, the Schengen area was successfully enlarged to include nine member countries, thus abolishing the borders between western and eastern member countries. The event in Lisbon was especially important, and a new optimism emerged in the EU following the agreement of the treaty of Lisbon. To a great extent, the 2007 success was a result of the presidencies of our predecessors, Germany and Portugal. Slovenia worked with them, for the first time in the history of the European Union, in a trio presidency. We are thankful to our predecessors, and we will continue their successful work during our presidency.

[13] I would call 2008 a new foundation for new challenges. This is a year for setting up a new foundation for the European Union, and for facing new challenges. As you know, the Slovenian presidency marks the first presidency by a new member country of the EU. We are extremely proud, but, at the same time, this is confirmation that the right decision was made in 2004, when the union was enlarged. You know that there is still some debate within the European Union about whether the enlargement was right, but I am more than confident that we will prove, during our presidency, that the decision to enlarge the European Union, and to make the European continent whole again, without borders, was the right one.

[14] As I mentioned, our presidency rounds off the trio presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, and, at the same time, it finishes the first 18-month programme, because Slovenia, Germany and Portugal agreed an 18-month programme last year that was the basis for all three consecutive presidencies, and, following that, we made a separate six-month programme for each presidency. However, for the first time in the EU, the basic programme was decided jointly by Slovenia, Portugal and Germany.

[15] So, after a successful 2007, the EU now faces two major challenges: ratification and implementation of the treaty of Lisbon, and strengthening the EU's role globally. The Slovenian presidency's priorities will reflect these challenges, and we will focus on five main areas: the future of the EU and the ratification and implementation of the reform treaty, the so-called treaty of Lisbon; the successful launch of the new Lisbon strategy cycle, at the spring European Council; taking a step forward in addressing climate change and energy issues, through the package that was presented by the commission in January; strengthening the European perspective of the western Balkans, which will one of the top priorities for Slovenia, because the Slovenian presidency would like to place the western Balkans back on the agenda of the EU, including the interesting question of a solution to Kosovo's status; and finally, the promotion of intercultural dialogue. As you know, 2008 is the year of intercultural

dialogue.

1.40 p.m.

[16] To say a bit more about these priorities, first I will talk about the future of the union or the treaty of Lisbon. After the signing of the treaty on 13 December 2007, as I mentioned, the main task this year will be for the member states to efficiently pursue and complete the ratification process and to bring the treaty into force before the European Parliament elections in 2009. The ratification is important because the treaty forms the basis of the EU to face the new global challenges before us. Having reached agreement on the future of the institutional framework, the union now stands ready to face major challenges and exercise a delivery agenda of common policies. Slovenia wanted to provide a good example and that is why we ratified the treaty at the end of January. Now we have four ratifications, from Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Romania.

[17] We expect the majority of ratifications to take place in the first six months or during our presidency. This would provide impetus and optimism to those member states for which ratification could cause some difficulty. That is why we would like to see the majority of the ratifications occur during our six-month presidency, until June.

[18] As I mentioned, the common goal of all member states was already determined by the Berlin declaration last year and that is the bringing into force of the treaty before the European Parliament elections in 2009. That means that all the instruments of the ratification should be deposited by the end of 2008 or, at the very latest, in the first three months of 2009. As I said, this foundation will allow the EU to face major challenges in the delivery agenda.

[19] The next priority is the second cycle of the Lisbon strategy. So, in 2008 the second three-year cycle of the renewed Lisbon strategy will commence. We will strive for the main goal, namely successful preparation of the spring European Council, which is traditionally devoted to economic and social affairs, and to the timely adoption of the integrated guidelines for goods and jobs in 2008 and 2009, preferably in a package. That will enable member states to further implement the needed reforms through the national reform programmes.

[20] The presidency believes, and this is also based on the European Commission's report, that the renewed Lisbon strategy is working, is starting to deliver and that no radical change of the strategy or processes are needed. The key to success is consistent continuation of the processes, and keeping the momentum and implementation of national reform programmes. Therefore, the Slovenian presidency will further promote the strategic priorities of the Lisbon strategy in the next cycle in the areas of knowledge, research, innovation and creativity, development of the competitive business environment, developing human capital and adaptation of the labour market, as well as energy and climate change. For example, in the area of innovation and creativity, special emphasis will be given to creating and using knowledge and, in that context, the development of the EU research area, further work on the setting up of the European Institute of Technology, and joint technology initiatives for better co-operation between researchers and business.

[21] In the field of entrepreneurship, the focus will be on small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly on their growth and ability to access finance. The issue of agreeing industrial policy and innovation in the framework of clusters will also be the main focus.

[22] Of course, important fields of action will be the deepening of the internal market, better regulation and reduction of administrative burdens, and intellectual property rights. Slovenia will also give attention to the issues of adaptation of the labour market, particularly through the common flexicurity principles, and there will be further discussion on modernising the European social model and demographic changes. The inclusion of young

people in the labour market will probably be the centre of our attention. Of course, issues of gender equality, equal opportunities, the fight against poverty and social exclusion will also be a matter of debate in the European Council.

[23] The third priority is the legislative climate change energy package, which the European Commission issued on 27 January. As you know, this package will deal with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the review of emission trading schemes and renewables. We expect comprehensive, complex and quite difficult negotiations on the package. This will be tackled in probably two European Council meetings in the first half of 2008. We hope that member states will be ready for constructive co-operation and decisive action. We aim to decide on general conclusions to streamline the debate on the package at the spring European Council meeting, and to discuss more precise details at the meeting in June. The package will then probably be transferred to the French presidency, with an aim to accept it by the end of 2008 or early in 2009. It is hoped that the European Union will have a common position before the post-Kyoto conference in Copenhagen in 2009. As you know, and in my opinion, the only way that it will be possible for the European Union to have a leading world role in climate change is for it to have a common position before the Copenhagen conference.

[24] The Slovenian presidency also wishes to continue the work on the EU energy policy this year, which would mean the liberalisation of the gas and electricity internal market, to adopt an action plan on the strategic energy technologies and to enhance the external energy policies. At the March meeting of the council, we expect the higher representative for CFSBN to present the European Commission report on the impact of climate change on international security. This will serve as a basis for further policy measure proposals on international security and climate change issues.

[25] The next priority, which is very important for the Slovenian presidency, is enlargement and the inclusion of the western Balkan countries in particular. As you know, enlargement has been one of the most successful EU policies. The stability of the western Balkans is crucial, not just for the western Balkans, but for the security and prosperity of the whole union. Therefore, the development of a European perspective for the western Balkans should remain a central feature of the EU agenda, and it is an important incentive to encourage reform processes in those countries. So, basically, the Slovenian presidency would like to return the issue of the stability of the western Balkans and the need for reforms to the EU agenda, not only because of the Kosovo question, but because a clear message that these countries have the help of the European perspective and that, if they carry out difficult reforms, they will preserve the stability of the region. The main goals of the presidency in that area are the reaffirmation and refreshment of the 2003 Thessaloniki agenda and the 2006 Salzburg agenda regarding the EU perspective for the western Balkans, the possible conclusion of the network of stabilisation and association agreements for the countries of the region, and strengthening regional co-operation in several areas, which would mean the gradual liberalisation of visa regimes, energy corporations, transport corporations, research and development and the fight against organised crime. We will also convene an informal ministerial meeting in March in the format of Gimmich, where the European Commission communication on the western Balkans' progress will be presented.

1.50 p.m.

[26] Therefore, we have two aims. The first is for the region of the western Balkans as a whole to be put on the agenda of the European Union, and then we have particular aims for the countries of the region. For example, Croatia is well on its way towards the European Union in its negotiations. We hope that there will be some benchmarks to enable Macedonia to obtain a date to start the negotiations for the country's entry into the European Union. Based on progress on the police reform, we hope that, under constitutional reform, Bosnia-

Herzegovina will sign the stabilisation and association agreement. Albania and Montenegro have a stabilisation and association agreement, but they will have to focus much more to implement this agreement in particular reforms connected with the fight against organised crime, judicial reforms and the fight against corruption.

[27] The Serbian European perspective has been separated from the resolution of the Kosovo status. We would like to see Serbia on the path towards the European Union as soon as possible. That is why the last general affairs council sent a positive message to the Serbian democratic and reformist forces in Belgrade before the elections by inviting Serbia to sign a temporary political agreement that will focus on and foster co-operation on economic areas, political dialogue and visa abolition. We hope that, in the next day, this agreement will be signed by the Serbian Government. As you know, there are different opinions in the Serbian Government on this issue, but we would like to see Serbia signing this agreement under the condition of full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and to see it signing the stabilisation and association agreement. We would be keen to see Serbia becoming a candidate country for membership of the European Union soon.

[28] The resolution of Kosovo's future status, as well as the management of the post-status process where the European Union will need to assume a leading role while maintaining a high level of unity, should be achieved in a way that strengthens the stability and security of the entire region. Therefore, the presidency will work first for the unity of the European Union and the common position of the European Union. Secondly, it will carry out the agenda that will take into consideration the stability of the whole region. The basis for our work will be the European Council's conclusions in December. I am sure that you are aware of these conclusions, and, if not, I can answer questions later regarding them.

[29] The last priority will be the European year of intercultural dialogue. We hope that this intercultural dialogue, which is focused predominantly on dialogue with different ethnic and religious groups in the societies of the member countries, will last not just one year, but beyond 2008. It should become a permanent activity in the European Union. It is the foundation of the coexistence of all European citizens and the different ethnic, cultural and social groups in the member countries, and it is important to present the value of intercultural dialogue and multilingualism among EU citizens and the European public at large. Therefore, we hope that the results of the European intercultural dialogue will be incorporated as a positive experience in future EU policies.

[30] There will be several events to promote intercultural dialogue, but the events will be focused on the national programme of the member countries. There will be a number of activities and a number of conferences in Slovenia. The presidency of Slovenia would like to broaden this intercultural dialogue to the countries of the western Balkans and the Mediterranean, which is a place where Islamic and western values meet. In that light, we have a special initiative to set up a so-called Mediterranean university in the Slovenian coastal city of Piran.

[31] These are the five main priorities, but there will be a number of other priorities. These include, for example: the abolition of borders in the Schengen area, which will probably occur in March 2008; the future management of the EU external border; and further expansion of the euro area by member countries that would like to join the eurozone—as you know, new member countries do not have free will on this issue, as they are obliged to join the eurozone. However, they can choose the time at which they join. As I mentioned earlier, we will carry out further activities in the enlargement negotiation process for Croatia and Turkey.

[32] It is likely that some activities will start on EU budget reform. The commission published a communication entitled 'Reforming the Budget, Changing Europe' in September



2007. This will be the basis for wide public debate leading up to the political conference in late May 2008. The review will not start before the end of 2008 or the beginning of 2009. There will be some activities on the health check of the common agricultural policy. A commission communication was published on 20 November. Slovenia will continue and conclude the discussion about the communication, preferably by March 2008, and will open a debate on legislative proposals that the commission will present in May 2008. Political agreement on the dossier is most likely to be achieved under the French presidency.

[33] Another priority will be to tackle health policy. For example, we will focus on the fight against cancer. Other priorities include police co-operation, illegal immigration, asylum policy, and judicial matters. Regarding external relations, our presidency will convene four summits with strategic partners in the region. These will include: a summit between the EU and the USA in Slovenia, which will probably be held in June; a summit with the Russian Federation after the Russian elections, which will be held in Russia; a summit with Japan in Japan; and the biggest will be the EU summit with Latin American and Caribbean countries in Peru, which will tackle issues like poverty, inequality, inclusion, the environment, climate change, and energy. We will also put some emphasis on both dimensions of the European neighbourhood policy—the eastern and Mediterranean—including the Barcelona process. We will probably be dealing with security and regional issues, which, in addition to the western Balkans and Kosovo, will include middle-eastern countries, Iraq, Iran, Asia and Africa—a follow-up of the EU Africa summit that was held during the Portuguese presidency. The emphasis will be on international development co-operation, focusing on the implementation of the millennium development goals. Our emphasis in that regard will be on children and women in armed conflicts.

[34] In conclusion, our slogan is Si.nergy. This means that Slovenia will concentrate its energy on European synergy. This means the synergy of various factors. It is synergy between European institutions and member countries, between member countries of the European Union and third countries, and between institutions and people of the European Union. Synergy is the best way to carry out the work for the future of Europe. That is our slogan and motto for the presidency. With that, I will conclude and, once again, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our priorities here.

2.00 p.m.

[35] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you, ambassador; that is a very ambitious and exciting programme. I am sure that people will have lots of questions on it.

[36] **Val Lloyd:** Ambassador, thank you very much for the presentation. You raised an enormous number of issues. Could you inform us what the commission is intending to work on in terms of multicultural dialogue, particularly with Turkey and other accession countries?

[37] **HE Mr Mirošič:** As I have already said, the main activities will be carried out through the national programmes in the member countries. Every member country has to form its own national programme for activities during the European year of intercultural dialogue because the activities are focused on the different groups in the society of a particular member country. In that light, I will briefly mention that there are a number of activities regarding the western Balkans, and I have written them down. We set up in Slovenia, if I may concentrate on Slovenia, the Centre for European Perspective. The centre will broaden intercultural dialogue with the western Balkan countries. This will happen because, after the terrible events that happened in the western Balkans, the reconciliation process is to be seen in the light of intercultural dialogue. In that regard, we have organised some conferences, such as the conference on interethnic and inter-religious relationships in Kosovo, to build bridges of understanding and co-operation and, then, for intercultural dialogue and democracy to spread. Then we have a seminar entitled ‘Muslims, Citizens of the

West' this month in Ljubljana. We have an informal meeting of the representatives of European cultural focal points in June, in Ljubljana.

[38] On the topic of intercultural dialogue between south-east Europe and the EU, we will help the process of exchanging information. Then we will help with the co-existence and co-operation in diversity project, to overcome stereotypes and prejudices. That is vital for free migration and in the fight against terrorism and organised crime in the western Balkans.

[39] Slovenia's national projects in that light are those that I mentioned—the projects focused on the western Balkans. Turkey is not specifically mentioned, but Turkey will come into the broader scenery, probably in the conference that we are organising, which is an international conference on intercultural dialogue as a basic EU value. That happened in Ljubljana on 8 January. There will then be a conference on Europe, the world and humanism in the twenty-first century, which will be in April in Ljubljana. There will also be a conference on foreign policy of the EU and culture, in May in Slovenia, and a UNESCO ALESCO conference on intercultural dialogue and the role of education, in March. We will also have a conference on the education of the Roma population in Europe, in September. We will have a number of projects, together with the European Commission, focusing on the young population, including, for example, Europe in School, which is co-financed by the European Commission. There are youth projects on creative thinking, European projects such as the Alter Ego radio campaign for intellectual dialogue, the Stranger Festival project and the people project, which will focus on the mobility of researchers and artists. Last year, in November, if I am not much mistaken, the European Commission had already chosen 15 ambassadors for the European year of intercultural dialogue, and this is where Turkey comes into consideration.

[40] We will also co-operate with some global actors, that is the United Nations, but it is better to say UNESCO. Within the framework of UNESCO, the so-called European-Arab dialogue is going on. Within the framework of the United Nations, there is an initiative on the alliance of civilisations. The first yearly forum was held in Madrid last month. There is a resolution on a religious tolerance project in the sight of the Human Rights Council. There are some projects going on in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE, and in the Council of Europe. So, there are several activities ongoing, some of which are part of national programmes and some of which are co-ordinated with the European Commission. I hope that I have answered your question.

[41] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. Thank you for your comprehensive reply.

[42] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Thank you for your presentation, which was most interesting. Before I ask my question, I wish to endorse your earlier comments about Margot Wallström's visit last week. I too thought that it was an excellent occasion, as indeed was the dinner in the evening in Cardiff castle. I think that William will agree that she was most impressed when the history of Cardiff castle was explained to her.

[43] My question relates to promoting the European Union, particularly among schoolchildren. It is a point that was made to the vice-president, commissioner Wallström, when she came here. I do not know what the attitude of the media is in Slovenia, but on European matters, the press here is often very cynical, if not hostile. Is it part of your programme to promote better understanding of the European Union's work in its member countries—the UK and Wales in this case? How can we use examples of good practice from your country or other member states to help to promote the work that is done? I am thinking in particular of the valuable use of European structural funds. Much of Wales will be benefiting from convergence and competitiveness funding over the next few years, but that is not understood by many people. Is awareness-raising of the benefits of membership part of the programme?

[44] **HE Mr Mirošič:** I will not comment on the media in this country. That relates to freedom of expression, and I will not enter into that debate. The situation here is quite different from that in Slovenia, which has, I think, a political and public opinion agreement. There was consensus on Slovenia's two major priorities, one of which was the European Union. That is why almost 90 per cent of the country voted for it in the referenda in 2004. That attitude is reflected in the media, so it is very positive about the European Union.

[45] The benefits are presented to people predominantly through co-ordination with member states and presidencies, but that is the commission's programme, and Margot Wallström was probably here because of that. As the presidency, we are willing to co-operate with and help the Government here, but that depends on the Government's needs. Whatever the Government of this country sees as helpful, the presidency and, I am sure, the member states will be willing to do. You are right; sometimes, having spoken to people and read the newspapers, I see that the benefits of the European Union are not broadly transmitted. That is why the Slovenian presidency would like to focus on the delivery agenda.

2.10 p.m.

[46] We created the basics to function or operate in a large European Union—by 'created', I mean that we agreed on the treaty, and I am sure that the ratification process will be ended by 2008—to focus on the delivery agenda, because the concrete consequences of our society and work in society must be presented to the general public. For example, there are clear benefits to ordinary people of being able to roam freely around the European Union: the internal market, such as banks, real estate and properties. So, energy issues will be very much at stake in the future, not just in future months but future years, and the EU has a great role in this regard. Climate change will affect us all, and, again, the EU has a great role in this regard, on communication. With the agreement of the countries now led by the European Commission, if the host Government thinks that we can be helpful, we will co-operate and participate in that.

[47] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you for the report, ambassador. I was interested in what you said about the Lisbon agenda. You talked about the fact that Slovenia wants to promote small and medium-sized enterprises, and you mentioned gender equality and poverty, all of which are very important issues for us in Wales. Do you have any plans or thoughts on how Wales and Slovenia could work on any projects together on these issues, because there are many similarities between us?

[48] **HE Mr Mirošič:** For SMEs, we will work on the Eurostars programme, which is an initiative based on article 169. It is the first European funding and support programme to be dedicated especially to SMEs, to stimulate them to lead international collaborative research and innovation projects. The gist of the programme is to enable small companies to enter into a financing process to ease financing for research and innovation by small and medium-sized enterprises on a European level. The next agenda on which we will focus and which is important for SMEs is that of better regulation. The target is 25 per cent less regulation, and that will be very important for small and medium-sized enterprises. Ambitious targets have been set by the European Union. Eurostars is a concrete programme in relation to research small and medium-sized enterprises, and the financing of it is at the centre of our presidency.

[49] **Nerys Evans:** Diolch am y cyflwyniad a'r wybodaeth a roddwyd gennych. Yr wyf hefyd yn ategu'r croeso a roddwyd ichi gan eraill. Bu'n ysbrydoliaeth i ni weld gwlad gyda phoblogaeth lai nag un Cymru yn ffynnu'n economaidd ar lefel  
**Nerys Evans:** Thank you for the presentation and the information that you have provided. I also reiterate the warm welcome extended to you by others. It has been an inspiration for us to see a country with a smaller population than Wales's prospering economically on a

Ewropeaidd a rhyngwladol. Mae gennyf ddau gwestiwn i chi, y cyntaf ohonynt am y cytuniad diwygio, sef cytuniad Lisbon. Dywedasoeh fod proses ar waith mewn gwledydd unigol sydd wedi cadarnhau'r cytuniad. Faint o arweiniad y mae Ewrop yn ei roi yn hynny o beth? Rhaid i Iwerddon gynnal refferendwm o dan ei chyfansoddiad. A ydych chi'n rhagweld mwy o refferenda yn cael eu cynnal ar draws Ewrop?

European and international level. I have two questions, one of which concerns the reform treaty, the treaty of Lisbon. You mentioned that a process is under way in the individual nations that have ratified the treaty. How much of direction does Europe give in that regard? Ireland is required to hold a referendum under its constitution. Do you foresee further referenda being held across Europe?

[50] Yr oeddwn hefyd am eich holi am Bwyllgor Rhanbarthau Ewrop. Sut ydych chi'n gweld gwaith a rôl y pwyllgor hwnnw yn datblygu?

I also wanted to ask about the European Committee of the Regions. How do you see the work and role of that committee developing?

[51] **HE Mr Mirošič:** The ratification process for the treaty of Lisbon will be carried out under the sovereign procedures of the member countries. The presidency will gather the data on how the process is going on in different member countries, and we would like to keep control over and the momentum of that. However, it comes under the procedures that are established by the national parliaments in member countries. For the time being, I do not see other referenda beside the Irish referendum being carried out, and Ireland will hold one because it has a constitutional obligation to do so. The Danes will ratify the treaty in parliament, as will the Portuguese. Therefore, the treaty will be ratified predominantly in the national parliaments, except in the case of Ireland.

[52] On the Committee of the Regions, regions are important in the European Union. National governments and the national states will decide on the format of the council's formation. However, the regions are more and more important in the European Union, because they are focused on the direct needs of people. That is where I see the role of the Committee of the Regions being further developed. Member states will focus on the delivery agenda at the EU level, and the Committee of the Regions will have to focus on the direct needs of the specific regions. Collaboration between the regions is useful. The idea of euro regions is going on. Some thought has also been given to establishing a euro region for the regions of Austria, Slovenia and Italy. So, the euro regions are an interesting idea and they are growing.

[53] **Michael German:** Thank you for your presentation, your Excellency. I have a question on the Lisbon strategy. The spring council meeting is looking at the national reform programmes. A problem in the past has been not the unity of performance of the programmes, but how people decide to report their programmes and their outcomes, to see whether there is any consistency. Does the presidency agree that there is a need to create more consistency of national reporting? Some member states are treated almost as an academic exercise, in which masses of data are collected, while others take it much more seriously, and involve the wider community and citizens. Thinking about the role that the EU now wants to play with its citizens, it seems that the second of those options is more appropriate than the first, but it is not how many member states are bringing together their national reform programmes. What do you think will be in your presidency's list of notes when it chairs the council on this matter?

[54] **HE Mr Mirošič:** It will be precisely to accept the new guidelines. Things have become much more unified. At the start of the Lisbon strategy, we focused on many different priorities. Then, in 2005, we had a review of the strategy, focusing on the main priorities, namely growth and jobs. Social affairs and so on are still priorities, but the EU is focused mainly on growth and jobs. The aim of the spring European Council is to adopt guidelines,

which will unify the national programmes. However, national programmes will always reflect the situation in a current member country. We hope that the guidelines will unify all the different adaptations of the national programmes to the situation in particular member countries and that they will streamline. You answered it in your question. By having guidelines, and by launching a new cycle of the Lisbon strategy based on the guidelines, we will try to unify the priorities. However, I am sure that there will always be differences in prioritising through the national programmes, because every Government of every member state has to evaluate the situation in its member state. However, carrying out the strategy is becoming more and more unified.

2.20 p.m.

[55] **Michael German:** The second part of the question was about the manner in which these national reform programmes are gathered together and the level of engagement and involvement with the parts of the countries and the citizenship that have had an impact on the programmes, and the way in which people have inducted the programmes. Margot Wallström said to us that, in the European Union, we have to engage with our citizens—that almost seems to be its slogan now. Is that part of the programme in this area too, and will that be in the notes before the chair of the presidency?

[56] **HE Mr Mirošič:** Definitely. One of the chair's main aims is to connect the union with its citizens. The Lisbon agenda is the delivery agenda and I mentioned that, by focusing on the delivery agenda, we, namely the Governments and European Union institutions, would like to get closer to citizens by delivering concrete results. That is why I said that Governments will have to estimate the situation in particular member countries, as reflected by their people. Governments have to take note of how people see the carrying out of the Lisbon agenda. So, definitely, it is a means to get closer to people. It is about a delivery agenda. The Lisbon agenda is not intended to be there just because of the Governments and the European Union; primarily, it is devoted to strengthening employment and that goes directly to the people.

[57] **Nick Bourne:** Thank you for the presentation, ambassador. My question relates to the western Balkans, which you mentioned as one of the priorities in the Slovenian presidency, and rightly so. Can you give us a guideline as to when you expect Croatia to accede, if progress is being made in that direction? Perhaps even more crucially, how will the presidency be used in relation to the Kosovo situation and trying to move things forward there? If they are moved forward successfully, do you anticipate that, during the presidency or perhaps in the foreseeable future, negotiations will open with Serbia, given the result of the elections there, for Serbia to become a candidate country and, ultimately, accede?

[58] **HE Mr Mirošič:** Slovenia is a big supporter of Croatia and we would like to see Croatia become a member country as soon as possible. Of course, it is up to the Croatian Government how it complies with all the conditions and demands in the negotiating process. As you know, Croatia has some problems in carrying out reform, but we hope that it will come into the European Union as soon as it can. We support Croatia 100 per cent but it depends on the Croatian Government. The conditions, negotiating process and chapters are very clear, and we just hope that, after the elections, Croatia will carry out the needed reforms quickly and execute them effectively.

[59] On the Kosovo question, I have already mentioned that the task of the presidency will be to preserve the unity of the European Union to reach unanimous decisions and to work on the basis of the European Council conclusions from December. These conclusions stated that we had had negotiations, that they had ended without a positive result, that there was no likelihood of achieving a result in the security council, that the situation on the ground is untenable, and that the European Union is willing to take a leading role on the Kosovo

question—including sending to Kosovo a European Security and Defence Policy mission, or EUlex, because it was confirmed two days ago. I would not like to speculate upon what will happen—we will have to wait to see what developments happen on the ground.

[60] As I said, we see Serbia's future and the resolution of Kosovo's status as two separate issues. In signing the stabilisation and association agreement, Serbia's elected president has indicated that he takes the same stance—he would like to see Serbia on the path towards joining the European Union as soon as possible, and we would like to see Serbia join. Serbia has a clear European future: it is a European country, and has always bordered the European Union. That is why the presidency strived to enable Serbia to sign the SAA agreement. Then we got a compromise on the interim political agreement, which is on offer to the Serbian Government right now. Inside the European Union we are striving for the abolition of visa controls. Why? Even during the communist era, Serbia has always bordered an European Union state, and allowed entry without visas. Many young people and academics in Serbia cannot travel to the European Union because of these difficult visa processes. The visa facilitation and readmission agreement between the EU, Serbia and other countries in the western Balkans came into force on 1 January, but we think that the presidency, in order to send a positive signal from the EU and to encourage further reform, should start a dialogue on visa abolition—indeed, Commissioner Frattini has already started that dialogue. Visa abolition would be of direct benefit to the younger generations of Serbia, and the future of Serbia lies with the young. You should know that, under Milošević, unfortunately, 300,000 educated young people left the country, and, as there is limited progress in Serbia, these people are not willing to return. We must speed up communication links between Serbia, the western Balkans, and the European Union member countries.

[61] We definitely see Serbia's future in the European Union. There are some conditions that must be met, particularly full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, including the extradition of war criminals. However, at the last general affairs council, the presidency succeeded in setting up a working group to help Serbia to fulfil those conditions—it will report to the European Union about Serbia's progress, while also advising Serbia on how to speed up compliance. The presidency thinks that, once these conditions are met, Serbia deserves to have candidate status as soon as possible.

[62] **Nick Bourne:** On the non-linkage with Kosovo, is that an EU position or a Slovenian one?

[63] **HE Mr Mirošič:** It is an European Union position.

[64] **Nick Bourne:** I am grateful.

[65] **Gareth Jones:** Diolch i'r llysgennad am gyflwyniad hynod ddiddorol, a oedd hefyd yn uchelgeisiol. Ategaf yr hyn a ddywedodd Nerys, ein bod yn cydnabod y gwaith anhygoel yr ydych yn ei wneud mewn gwlad gymharol fach. Yn sicr yr ydych yn ysbrydoliaeth i wledydd eraill, gan gynnwys Cymru.

**Gareth Jones:** I thank the ambassador for an exceptionally interesting presentation, which was also ambitious. I endorse Nerys's comments, that we acknowledge the incredible work that you are doing in a relatively small nation. You are certainly an inspiration to other countries, including Wales.

2.30 p.m.

[66] Wrth ystyried eich maint a'r agenda y bu ichi gyfeirio ati o ran cytundeb Lisbon ac ail ran y cylch tair blynedd, cyfeiriasoch at nifer o bethau sydd o ddiddordeb i ni, fel y

Given your size and the agenda to which you referred in terms of the Lisbon agreement and the second part of the three-year cycle, you referred to many things that are of interest to

dywedodd Christine, er enghraifft busnes, y farchnad lafur, defnyddio a throsglwyddo gwybodaeth, entrepreneuriaeth, ac ati. Derbyniaf fod cytundeb Lisbon yn eang cyn belled ag y mae'r undeb yn y cwestiwn, ond, yn y pen draw, mater i bob gwlad, gan gynnwys Slofenia, yw llwyddo yn y maes hwn. Mae honno'n dipyn o agenda.

us, as Christine mentioned, for example business, the labour market, the use and transfer of knowledge, entrepreneurship, and so on. I accept that the Lisbon agreement is broad as far as the union is concerned, but, ultimately, it is up to every country, including Slovenia, to succeed in this area. That is quite an agenda.

[67] Yr hyn sydd o ddiddordeb i mi yw, er mwyn cyflawni'r twf a'r ffyniant economaidd hwnnw, gan gynnwys cynhwysiant cymdeithasol, bod yn rhaid i addysg uwch chwarae rôl allweddol, i'ch helpu i gyflawni'r targedau hyn a sicrhau'r cynnydd y bu ichi ei amlinellu. Eto, o ystyried maint Slofenia ac, efallai, rhai trafferthion sydd gennym yng Nghymru, hyd yn oed, i ddenu digon o arian i gynnal ymchwil mewn meysydd allweddol—yn sicr yn sgîl datganoli—pa strategaeth sydd gennych, neu yr ydych yn ei datblygu, i sicrhau bod addysg uwch yn cael y gefnogaeth hon ac yn gallu gwneud cyfraniad a gwahaniaeth o ddifrif i'ch dyfodol fel gwlad ac i bobl eich gwlad?

What is of particular interest to me is that, in order to achieve the growth and economic prosperity that you have outlined, including social inclusion, higher education must play a crucial role, to help you to reach these targets and to ensure the progress that you outlined. Again, given the size of Slovenia and bearing in mind, perhaps, some of the difficulties that we have, even in Wales, in attracting adequate funding for research in crucial areas—certainly in the wake of devolution—what strategy do you have, or are you developing, to ensure that higher education is given the necessary support and is able to make a contribution and a real difference to your future as a nation and to your people?

[68] **HE Mr Mirošič:** You refer to Slovenia and, as you point out, the Lisbon strategy is based on the national programmes, so it depends on the national programme of each member country as to what they make a priority. The general priority is to focus on jobs and growth and on the four priorities of the Lisbon strategy—research, development, innovation and skills, entrepreneurship, climate change and energy, and competitiveness.

[69] So, the national programme of Slovenia focuses on connecting small and medium-sized enterprises with innovation, and that also includes higher education. We are making the transformation to the so-called Bologna process, which, I have to tell you, is not very easy, at least in my country; I do not know about your country. You have more or less established the Bologna system here. Basically, the finance still comes through the national programmes and the national budget. However, we will use all the grants from the European Union, but the grants can be used, more or less, by universities with direct programmes. We emphasise and enable the projects that allow us to carry things out from the bottom up—to be prepared and to be effective in extracting money from the EU grants. It lies more with national states and their subjects than with the European Union. Grants are available on the European Union level, but you should extract money from EU programmes. If I understood correctly, we would like to enable universities and emphasise direct communication with them, in the light of higher education, to enter the European programmes, such as Erasmus Mundus. One element is the Bologna process to reform education, but other programmes are also available. I am not sure that I have answered your question.

[70] **Gareth Jones:** I would add that, following devolution, we find that there is some concern in Wales that our universities are not tuning in to the extent that they should in terms of undertaking research on issues that will help to promote the economy of Wales. The question is about those challenges in Slovenia, in terms of the size of the country and higher education. In terms of a strategy, how would you ensure that higher education in your country is in tune with the changing needs and demands of Slovenia?

[71] **HE Mr Mirošič:** We do that through a national programme and the implementation of reform processes in higher education through the Bologna school-reform process, which is intended to directly connect science and higher education with business needs. People can be employed more easily and quickly if they have suitable education. That is the connection, and this is part of the national programme.

[72] **Sandy Mewies:** My question follows on from a discussion that we had on the Bologna process and Erasmus Mundus quite recently in the Enterprise and Learning Committee. I thank you very much indeed, ambassador, not only for a very interesting presentation, but for identifying very clearly some of the big challenges that the European Union faces, and not just during your presidency. These are challenges that we must all solve by working together in the future. I have a brief question, as I know that you have to leave soon. What intrigued me was that your presidency is the third of a trio of presidencies. How did you come to an agreement on a programme, and on who would do what? Was it a difficult process?

[73] **HE Mr Mirošič:** It was set up a year before the German presidency. We got together several times on different levels first and we took a bottom-up approach. Before the presidency, we confirmed what was in the common interest of the three consecutive presidencies, but the programme is also based on the inherited agenda, as most of the work of the presidency is inherited from previous presidencies. We then focused on the new needs and challenges within the European Union—energy, climate change, the Lisbon strategy and external relations. We also wanted to focus on the western Balkans, because we think that it might be dangerous if the EU were reluctant about a region that is on its doorstep. We had several meetings to agree on the broad programme of the presidency to benefit the whole union. I must tell you that we did not just co-ordinate work between this trio of presidencies; in order for the Slovenian presidency to be effective, we must also co-ordinate with the next trio. France, which will take over the presidency from us, will have to carry out the agenda that it inherits from us. So, we are already co-ordinating with France, the Czech Republic and Sweden in terms of the process over the next three years.

[74] **Sandy Mewies:** It is a very interesting process.

2.40 p.m.

[75] **HE Mr Mirošič:** The basic idea behind having a trio of presidencies is to be efficient. The constitutional treaty presented the idea of 18-month presidencies. When we were asked whether we would like to take over the presidency, we asked ourselves in what form we would preside over the European Union, and whether it would be in the format under the new, at that time, constitutional treaty, or in single presidencies like before. We then decided that it was better to prepare ourselves in the format of a trio presidency, despite the fact that France and Denmark did not ratify the former constitutional treaty. As 18-month presidencies were envisaged, we decided that it was better to co-ordinate in order to be more efficient.

[76] **Sandy Mewies:** That is very sensible and interesting. Thank you, we have all enjoyed your presentation and your visit today. I know that you are familiar with Cardiff and I hope that both of you will make many more visits in the future.

[77] **HE Mr Mirošič:** I thank you, as Chair, and the committee and Assembly Members. It is an exceptional privilege for me to be among you and I hope that I will return to Cardiff soon. Thank you.

2.41 p.m.



**Rhaglen Ddeddfwriaethol a Rhaglen Waith y Comisiwn Ewropeaidd 2008  
European Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2008**

[78] **Sandy Mewies:** Some items for our discussions have been identified. I have very little to say about this, and so I will just ask Members for your observations. You can see that there are suggested areas of interest for our committee to look at, and I think that they leap out in many ways, but it is just a matter of how many we have the time to tackle. There are also recommendations for other committees. My suggestion, if the committee agrees, is that we just put them before them, because I do not think that it is for us to decide what other committees should debate. We may ask for some reports back from them on some recommendations, because they impinge in a more strategic way, and we may consider some joint working. That is how I suggest we handle it, unless Members have other ideas. I suggest that we go back to our own programme first of all. Andy, do you want to say anything on this?

[79] **Mr Klom:** I have some comments after the presentation of the programme itself. Do you want me to make those comments now?

[80] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that now would probably be more useful.

[81] **Mr Klom:** I will not repeat everything that is stated in the perfect summary given by the Assembly's Members research service. What I want to comment on is very much the context framework of the European Commission's programme for this year, or rather to read between the lines.

[82] I want to point out that 2008 is a special year because it is a pre-election year, not in terms of a British general election, but there are elections in June 2009 for the next European Parliament. So, 2008 is the last full year of work activities for the European Parliament and, as such, also for the European Commission, because the next European Commission, in principle, will come into office in November 2009, and the designation of a new president of the European Commission should take place around about the June European Council of 2009 as well. So it is the last year for both the commission and parliament.

[83] The way the commission has been working over the past four years under president Barroso has been very much focused on trying to deliver, not so much in high-flying initiatives and big ambitious projects, but rather in trying to show citizens that there are benefits to the EU in concrete aspects. This will be the last year for the delivery of the Barroso commission, and it is very important for the commission in demonstrating that it wanted to make a difference. We have seen, in that respect, recent initiatives and proposals for legislation on climate change and energy, which did not come out of the blue, but were the successors to the whole package of proposals that were put forward in January 2007 and approved in principle by the Council of Ministers in March 2007 and now followed up through proposals for legislation. It is that element that is important for both parliament and the commission. Of course, one could say that the ratification process of the reform treaty could be the most important point for this year, but as already shown in the presentation by the ambassador, many member states are already moving on to the next step, and the ratification as such is very much a national issue, a national competence, based on the constitutional processes in each member state. It will also be an important year, because the longer-term perspective comes into play.

[84] It is not just about this year and the parliament and commission delivering; it looks beyond that year. We see many initiatives popping up in the work programme, such as the cohesion policy regional policy review, the budget review, and the common agricultural

policy health check, which are already looking beyond this horizon towards the period after 2013-14, which will be the end of this EU budgetary period and the start of the next period. In that respect, consultation is taking place, such as the CAP health-check consultation, which was launched in November. The commission held a public meeting on 28 January in Bangor together with the Farmers Union of Wales. A smaller meeting was also held Tuesday afternoon in Carmarthen to entice people to come out and to debate the issue. I believe that the Assembly Government has also organised a consultation. Those are very important element and initiatives, not only for 2008, but looking towards 2014.

[85] In a similar way, the budget review proposals that the commission hopes to put forward later this year will be of great importance, not just for this commission, but for the following period. I do not have to refer to the regional policy cohesion policy aspects, which are extremely important for Wales.

[86] As the ambassador has already mentioned, one important point that is shared by the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, and the European Parliament this year is that this year is the Year of Intercultural Dialogue. All of the institutions of the EU want to focus on that. It seems very much like a domestic, internal issue for the EU countries, because it is all about the integration or the lack of integration of large minority communities in our societies. In this day and age, after 9/11, it is clear that this also has all kinds of security implications. This is a joint initiative to try to make a difference and to do something to include, integrate, and engage with these communities and mainstream society.

[87] The commission in Wales will try to set up a number of activities, but we also hope that many other organisations and authorities will also hold their own activities or work with us. We have planned, once again, a public meeting in Llangollen on the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, which will probably be held in the second half of May. There is a small percentage of minority communities in Wales compared with England, so this does not translate so much in that direction. However, we think that it will very much focus on the large influx of new European citizens from eastern Europe, who have come to the UK—including Wales—in such great numbers. We hope that this Year of Intercultural Dialogue will help them to gain acceptance, to integrate, and encourage better understanding in the local communities where they reside. This follows on a little from what we have been doing this year. We held two public meetings on migration in Wrexham in 2007. These also involved some local voices. I also undertook a fact-finding mission to Llanelli to visit the council there as well as the Polish cultural centre. That is an important point, but it is more confined to 2008. I think I will stop there, because it is your debate. I wanted to show that, between the lines, many of these initiatives go beyond the horizon of this year and will have consequences and will bear fruit in years to come.

[88] **Sandy Mewies:** You are absolutely right, Andy. In Europe, we have to stop thinking of cycles lasting for a certain number of years, and just thinking to the end of that cycle. As soon as it starts, we have to think about what comes after it. I agree with you totally on that.

[89] The clerk has just pointed out to me that the Rural Development Sub-committee has been approached by the Northern Ireland agriculture committee to hold joint discussions this term on the CAP health check. So, we may ask for a report on that and then discuss it further ourselves if necessary. Is that okay? I see that it is. I will now throw open the discussion to Members.

2.50 p.m.

[90] **Michael German:** In paragraph 4 on page 2 of the report, there are many bullet points; I do not know how many you propose that we get through, so I am just going to give you a top two from my choices. The last bullet point of the lot is the most practical thing that

we have to achieve. You just mentioned looking forward and when, and if, the treaty is ratified—I suspect that it will be—the consequence of how we, in the National Assembly, act in terms of dealing with legislation and regulations that have been proposed by the European Commission will become a very important feature. The biggest problem that we have, of course, is the speed at which we can react and the level of co-operation that we can offer in order to be able to undertake that sort of work. I believe that since it is about legislation, it should not just be the Government that makes decisions about it; the legislature should have a voice in that. I would make a pitch for trying to find a *modus operandi* for operating the last bullet point.

[91] **Sandy Mewies:** That is the bullet point on subsidiarity and proportionality.

[92] **Michael German:** Yes, because there are big questions for us on that.

[93] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that those views are shared by some of the other legislatures. I have had letters that seem to indicate that there are other concerns.

[94] **Michael German:** If we could have a study, I would put that as No. 1 in terms of the work that we might do. My second choice would be future regional policy. Looking beyond where we are, and using the current programmes, can we achieve a soft landing, post 2013? That is what I think the second bullet point is all about.

[95] **Sandy Mewies:** Does anybody want to up those bids?

[96] **Nick Bourne:** I agree with those bids and their order. If there is to be a third, I think that that should probably be the common agricultural policy health checks.

[97] **Sandy Mewies:** Perhaps we can do that after the discussions have been held. It may fit in nicely if we have a report back, as part of the programme.

[98] **Nick Bourne:** If we can have the timetable as to when that is happening. We need some indication of the timetable.

[99] **Sandy Mewies:** I do not know when it is happening, but we could have a look. It might fit in quite nicely later.

[100] **Nick Bourne:** Yes, if it does, but if it does not, I would suggest that that is a strong reserve.

[101] **Sandy Mewies:** That is fine.

[102] **Nerys Evans:** I just wanted to agree with what Mike and Nick said and also note, as Andy said, that the Government is consulting on CAP at the moment, so perhaps we could take that again as well.

[103] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I apologise for being out of the room for a few minutes. Did anybody mention the bullet point on the Lisbon strategy? I would certainly put a bid in for that.

[104] **Sandy Mewies:** What about the EU budget?

[105] **Nick Bourne:** It is not that important—it is a bit cosmic and outside our control.

[106] **Sandy Mewies:** We shall ignore that then, shall we?

[107] **Nick Bourne:** It is an important backdrop, in a way.

[108] **Sandy Mewies:** The First Minister is coming on 28 February and one of the things that he is going to talk about is the EU budget, if that is of any assistance to you at all.

[109] **Nick Bourne:** It is, yes.

[110] **Sandy Mewies:** The health check will also be a part of it. I think that that is probably enough to be getting on with for the time being. This does not stop us from coming back to anything.

[111] There is another note here for me. Nerys and Christine, you have not yet been formally elected to the Committee of the Regions, but it should happen soon. You probably know this better than I do. You know which committees you are going to be on and you hope to be able to start your regular reports on 13 March, and we look forward to them. The Committee of the Regions will play a huge part in the subsidiarity mechanism. We have already done an exercise or two. It principally involved being a sort of e-mail exercise for us in many ways. However, we have already done that and I think that it comes back to the point that Mike made that it is going to be extremely important for us to get that right.

[112] **Christine Chapman:** Nerys and I had a meeting with the UK delegation before Christmas and, obviously, that was useful. The formal election should go through very quickly. It could be this month, but I know that it is a long-winded exercise. However, we have been given the committees that we will be on and we have discussed that so, hopefully, in March, it should be okay. We look forward to it.

[113] **Sandy Mewies:** That is fine.

[114] **Nick Bourne:** Perhaps it is just me, but I am not clear on what we have agreed regarding the areas that we are going to look at and whether the order of importance mattered, or whether we had agreed an order of importance.

[115] **Sandy Mewies:** We so far have subsidiarity, the future of regional policy, the CAP health check and the Lisbon strategy.

[116] **Nick Bourne:** I do not disagree with that.

[117] **Sandy Mewies:** I suggest that if the clerk sends out the list, and if you have priority orders, he can look at that and we can deal with the most popular.

[118] **William Graham:** I thought that we could agree the order now.

[119] **Nick Bourne:** Yes. I queried it because, if we are all here, we can probably agree it now.

[120] **Sandy Mewies:** I am happy with that.

[121] **Jeff Cuthbert:** If we take that order, we can discuss issues as they arise.

[122] **Sandy Mewies:** We will have to see, at the appropriate time, depending on whether something is happening, but that looks okay to me. Does anyone else see any problems with that? I see not. Finally, should we send these items as they are to other committee Chairs? I will write to them to draw these matters to their attention, but there are some things in here that I would ask our clerk and other clerks to go through so that we do not lose the thread of what is happening. This is a strategic committee so we need to build up the whole picture.

[123] **Michael German:** In your letter to the other committee Chairs, will you ask them to draw the attention of their committees to these issues, so that it is part of an agenda to look at them?

[124] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes, certainly. I have had some very terse words back in the past when I have suggested what other committee Chairs should do. However, we do not have a panel of Chairs now.

[125] **Gareth Jones:** Did you ask them nicely? [*Laughter.*]

[126] **Sandy Mewies:** I asked very nicely as always. [*Laughter.*]

[127] The next meeting will be on 28 February. Today's was an extremely interesting presentation that really faced up to the issues.

[128] **Nick Bourne:** Is that meeting in the morning or afternoon?

[129] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Is it possible to have it in the morning?

[130] **Sandy Mewies:** It is scheduled for the afternoon, but if anyone else wants to bid for the morning, I would be happy to go with that. However, at the moment we are scheduled for the afternoon. Generally speaking, we will start at 1.30 p.m.. The First Minister will attend to report on the Welsh Assembly Government's consultation on the EU budget, the future of regional policy, the implications of the common agricultural policy health check, and other matters. Thank you all for attending.

[131] **Christine Chapman:** There is a meeting of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity, on which I sit, in Wrexham on the morning of 28 February. We are looking at the issue of migrant workers.

[132] **Sandy Mewies:** Okay. It is difficult to schedule things at the moment.

[133] As you probably know, we have visitors from Western Australia and Somaliland at the moment. I am going to meet Western Australia now, before meeting north Wales again. Thank you all for your attendance.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 2.58 p.m.  
The meeting ended at 2.58 p.m.*