

Committee on European Affairs

MINUTES

Date: 14 October 1999

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Room 1

Attendance: Members

Alun Michael, Chair	Labour: Mid & West Wales
Mick Bates	Liberal Democrat: Montgomeryshire
Nicholas Bourne	Conservative: Mid & West Wales
Val Feld	Labour: Swansea East
Christine Gwyther	Labour: Carmarthen West and South
Elin Jones	Plaid Cymru: Ceredigion
Jonathon Morgan	Conservative: South Wales Central
Rhodri Morgan	Labour: Cardiff West
Alun Pugh	Labour: Clwyd West
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru: Carmarthen & East Dinefwr
Phil Williams	Plaid Cymru: South Wales East
Jill Evans	MEP
Eluned Morgan	MEP
Eurig Wyn	MEP
George Wright	ECOSOC and Chair of Wales European Centre Board
Prof Rose D'Sa	ECOSOC
Councillor Brian Smith	Committee of the Regions
Joseph Gallacher	Wales European Centre Director
Officials	
Hugh Rawlings	Head, European Affairs Division
Caroline Turner	European Affairs Division

Andrew George

Clerk

Julie Bragg

Deputy Clerk

Apologies: Linda Matthews, Committee of the Regions

Glenys Kinnock and Jonathan Evans, MEPs

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Opening Remarks

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone, and especially those who had become members of the Committee since the inaugural meeting and the Welsh representatives of European institutions and the Wales European Centre. He explained that the broad theme of the meeting was the representation of Wales and Welsh interests in Europe.

Agenda Item 2: The role of the United Kingdom's Permanent Representation to the European Union

Paper: EUR-02-99 (p.1)

2.1 The Committee noted the information paper relating to the role of UKRep which had been requested at the previous meeting of the Committee.

Agenda Item 3: Assembly Representation in Brussels

i) Paper: EUR-02-99(p.2)

ii) Presentation by George Wright and Joseph Gallacher

3.1 The Chair indicated that this item provided a valuable opportunity for the Committee to consider the nature of the Assembly's presence in Brussels. Because the Assembly had a different role to that previously played by the Welsh Office, there was an opportunity to take advantage of working with the Wales European Centre (WEC) as well as with UKRep.

3.2 The presentation outlined the scope of the WEC's activities, which included assistance in policy monitoring, advocacy and lobbying, networking, study visits and providing information and seminars back in Wales. It could also work with the European Union, European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC). However, it was not able to work with the Council of Ministers: Wales has to do this as part of the UK via UKRep. The WEC felt that it was essential that Wales was seen to be present in Brussels in its own right as well as being there as part of the UK. The WEC could provide added value in enabling the Assembly to benefit from the contacts and profile that it had built up to date. By joining the other 76 WEC members, the Assembly could help to further the 'Team Wales' approach.

Indeed, the WEC would shortly be moving to new premises, which had been secured with the possibility of an enhanced role under the Assembly in mind.

3.3 As it was acknowledged that it was essential for Wales to have a presence in Brussels, ensuing discussion focused on the most effective approach. It was felt that there might be lessons to be learned from the experiences of other regions in developing a presence in Brussels but Wales had to have its own distinctive approach to meet Welsh circumstances. It was recognised that an arrangement with United Kingdom's Permanent Representation to the European Union (UKRep) was essential in order to guarantee diplomatic status and access to UK Government information. It was suggested that in addition to having a separate Assembly representation the Assembly should also encourage civil servants to apply for mainstream posts within UKRep.

3.4 Members were supportive of the principle of complementing formal representation at UKRep with membership of WEC. The Chair requested a more detailed paper on the Assembly's representation for the next meeting of the Committee. George Wright also offered to provide a paper on the new location of the WEC.

Agenda Item 4: Policy Review - A strategy to assess the impact of European Union Policies on the National Assembly for Wales
Paper: EUR-02-99 (p.3)

4.1 The Chair introduced paper 3, which proposed a process to enable National Assembly Subject Committees to take full account of the European dimension within their work programmes. This would help to emphasise the co-ordinating role of the European Affairs Committee and its capacity to support Subject Committees in their work.

4.2 Discussion focussed on the advice which could be given to Chairs to help them to assess the priorities to attach to European issues and their timing of their consideration of them. It was noted that the approach to implementing European legislation in the National Assembly would be the same as that used for any other orders which the Assembly proposed to make. It was acknowledged that the list of policy areas relevant to individual Subject Committees was not exhaustive and would be refined over time. In emphasising the role she saw MEPs playing in the Committee, Jill Evans proposed that the MEPs could come up with their own list so that the two papers could be cross-referenced. Members agreed that this could become a part of the process.

Agenda Item 5: Report on the Concordat between the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales and the UK Government on the Co-ordination of European Union Policy Issues
Paper: EUR-02-99 (p.4)

5.1 The Committee noted this paper which had been published on 1 October. In answer to a

question, the Chair confirmed that differing political viewpoints could be taken into account in developing a UK negotiating position. The arrangements would apply in Northern Ireland where the Labour Party had no representation and with the coalition in Scotland.

Agenda Item 6: Report in the INTERREG Conference, Dublin, 24 September

6.1 Rhodri Morgan provided feedback on this Conference, which had demonstrated that the relationship between Wales and Ireland on the INTERREG project had been very successful for both countries. The project was now being rolled forward into a second Wales/Ireland INTERREG programme. This would have a slightly different emphasis in that Wales would now be receiving Objective 1 funding from the EU and Ireland would not. There was therefore potential for doing more in Wales. It was important to bear in mind that West Wales now had two major sources of funding to consider for significant projects, INTERREG and Objective 1.

Agenda Item 7: Programme for the Wales European Forum, 22 October

Paper: EUR-02-99 (p.5)

7.1 The programme for the first Wales European Forum was discussed, following the Committee's decision at its last meeting. It was suggested that the guest list should include more grass roots 'practitioners' who could give useful feedback on their experiences at first hand and the Chair said that the invitation list might change to reflect the topic under discussion if the Forum was considered worth continuing. It was agreed that a more thematic approach for future meetings would enable the Forum to explore the major themes in more depth and allow officials to target invitations accordingly.

7.2 It was agreed to hold another Forum in April on the themes of the Single Currency and Expansion of the EU to Eastern Europe. Officials were asked to prepare a draft programme for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee. The longer term would be considered in the light of responses to the first meeting.

Agenda Item 8: Draft 12-month forward work programme for the European Committee

Paper: EUR-02-99 (p.6)

8.1 The Chair introduced this paper which was intended to provide a systematic approach to strategic issues which affected the relationship between Wales and the European Union. Detailed policy issues would be dealt with by the Subject Committees.

8.2 It was suggested that the programme could be more outward-looking and address the insights which Wales could offer to Europe in return, for example, in terms of experience of the devolution process (including the involvement of women in the decision making process). Others felt that the programme could also include consideration of the impact of the forthcoming Inter-governmental Conference on Wales.. Officials were asked to take these

views into account in revisiting the Programme.

Agenda Item 9: A European Parliament Annexe in Wales

9.1 Jill Evans invited the Committee to support her proposal that the European Parliament should establish an office in Wales , which would raise awareness, and understanding of the Parliament's role and that of its members. A satellite office had already been established in Edinburgh and Wales appeared to meet the criteria for selecting locations for such offices.

9.2 Members agreed that officials should explore the idea in more detail and report back at a future meeting.

Agenda Item 10: Minutes of Previous Meeting

Paper: EUR-01-99 (min)

10.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. The meeting closed at 12.00

Committee Secretariat