

**EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**Date:** 6 March 2003  
**Time:** 14.00  
**Venue:** Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly Building

**Attendance:**

**Members**

Tom Middlehurst (Chair)	Labour: Alyn and Deeside
Rosemary Butler	Labour: Newport West
Christine Chapman	Labour: Cynon Valley
Mike German	Liberal Democrat: South Wales East
Rhodri Morgan	Labour: Cardiff West
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru: Carmarthen East & Dinefwr
Phil Williams	Plaid Cymru: South Wales East

**Standing Invitees**

Janet Davies AM	Committee of the Regions
Rose D'Sa	ECOSOC
Eluned Morgan	MEP

**Invitees**

Gareth Jones AM	Chair, Education and Lifelong Learning Committee
Mr David Lynch	Local Government International Bureau, Secretariat to the UK Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)

**In Attendance**

Phil Bird	European and External Affairs Division
Jackie Brown	Head of Unit, European Programmes
Gary Davies	Head, European and External Affairs Division

Claire Bennett	Committee Clerk
Lara Date	Deputy Committee Clerk

**14.03- 14.05**

**Item 1**

**Introductions, apologies and declarations of interest.**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular David Lynch from the Secretariat of Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe CLRAE and Gareth Jones AM, Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, who would both be speaking to the committee.
- 1.2 Apologies had been received from Nicholas Bourne AM, John Griffiths AM, Jonathan Morgan AM, from the MEPs Jill Evans, Jonathan Evans, Glenys Kinnock and Eurig Wynn, and from standing invitee Glenn Vaughan.

**14.05 – 14.14**

## **Item 2**

### **Minister's Report**

#### **Paper: EUR-02-03(p1)**

- 2.1 The Deputy First Minister made an oral update on his written report.
- 2.2 Wales Week was underway and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister had attended events in Brussels. Events this year, including a reception in the EU Parliament on Monday 3 March and seminars on sustainable development, information technology and the environment had been well attended. The questions posed by candidate countries and member states at the seminars demonstrated that they were a good investment in sharing expertise, and Wales was seen as a place to go to learn lessons. The work of all those involved, including the Wales European Centre and Welsh Development Agency, was noted.
- 2.3 Over 40 countries had held St David's Day events, one of the most notable being the decorating of the Empire State Building in New York with the colours of the Welsh flag. Welsh food prepared by award-winning Welsh chefs had been served and the Committee noted the importance of promoting the export of Welsh produce.
- 2.4 The Enlargement working group had met last week and a contract had been awarded to consultants to advise on how to engage key players in Wales, and exploit the opportunities available from enlargement. Their report would be put to the working group on 29 March. The group would advise the Committee on the outcome, and on the future of the group. Referenda on enlargement in the candidate countries began that week with Malta, and the shape of the enlarged EU would be known after the last referendum in Latvia on 20 September.

#### **Action point:**

- A report from the Enlargement Working Group would be presented to the first meeting of the Committee after the elections.

## **14.14 – 14.37**

### **Item 3**

#### **Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee (ELL)**

- 3.1 Gareth Jones AM spoke to the Committee about the European dimension of the work of the ELL Committee. The main points of his presentation and the discussion were:
- 3.2 Work with an EU dimension had been limited but very useful and was mostly focused on seeking best practice to inform policy reviews. For example, the Committee had heard from Canadian experts about arrangements for promoting bilingualism in Canadian regions. Experience in the Basque region had also been considered, and had led to the Minister allocating funds for teachers' sabbaticals to improve their language skills based on the Basque model.
- 3.3 The Minister had also signed memoranda of understanding with her counterparts in the Basque region and in Cuba.
- 3.4 In reports to the Committee the Education Minister kept the members updated on developments with a European dimension, such as progress on the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL) network.

- 3.5 In the future it might be possible to include the European dimension more in research. For example, the ELL Committee was due to publish an interim report on policy for the school of the future. Unfortunately it had not been possible to visit areas outside Wales due to time constraints, but members would have liked an opportunity to look at community-based schools in North America, Scotland and Scandinavia. This was something that the in-coming Committee would need to consider how to take forward.
- 3.6 European and External Affairs Committee members hoped that individual members of the ELL Committee would visit other countries to share best practice and promote what was happening in Wales, in particular in relation to early years development work. The Chair of ELL Committee hoped to see more visits by members in the future.
- 3.7 The differences in early years teaching in other European countries was noted, for example in Denmark where formal education began later but literacy levels were higher. An early learning adviser had been appointed and it was hoped that their report would highlight good practice that could be taken up in Wales, as the degree of continuity in this area of work had not been as high as the Committee had hoped.
- 3.8 The lack of progress in teaching modern languages in Wales was a matter of concern and the Education Committee could look at practice elsewhere in Europe. This could include consideration of the take-up of ERASMUS, SOCRATES and Leonardo educational exchange programmes and school exchange activities, which seemed to have reduced. It was hoped that the incoming Education Committee would continue research in this area. Promoting Welsh-English bi-lingualism for younger schoolchildren was seen as an important way to help children pick up other, modern languages later.
- 3.9 The European and External Affairs Committee questioned how much the ELL Committee had looked at EU funding through the Framework Programmes to develop the education sector. The ELL Committee's attention had not been drawn to this issue before but it would be important to monitor in the future.
- 3.10 It was suggested that the Committee consider models to encourage citizenship and political participation in other parts of Europe. The ELL Chair said that the PSE framework would be introduced into Welsh schools in September, which would include how decision-making for and by young people, and the Committee saw this as a way to tackle the issue of citizenship.

**Action point:**

- The ELL Committee Chair welcomed the members' comments and would take them back to his Committee.

**14.37 – 14.58**

**Item 4**

**EU Structural Funds post-2006: European Commission Second Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion**

**Paper: EUR 02-03(p2)**

- 4.1 The Deputy First Minister updated the Committee on the EU Commission's latest report on the debate on the future of the structural funds, including the latest statistics for the current Objective 1 regions.
- 4.2 The UK Government had launched its consultation document on the future of EU Structural Funds, 'A Modern Regional Policy for the United Kingdom',

that day. The Welsh Assembly Government would manage the consultation process in Wales, launching the process in March. The incoming cabinet would collect the views of stakeholders and develop the consultation response for the 4 July deadline.

- 4.3 It was noted in relation to cohesion that the last meeting of the Committee of the Regions territorial cohesion Commission had considered a draft opinion on whether territorial cohesion should have the same standing as economic and social cohesion. It had considered how cohesion policy could be simplified and there had been a strong push for flexibility in the administration, i.e. that Member States like the UK with a good regulatory framework should have a simplified funding mechanism at Member State level, whereas other Member States such as Italy and Greece should continue to have stronger regulation. The matter would be referred to the Committee of the Regions plenary meeting on 30 April.
- 4.4 The Committee discussed the impact of enlargement on eligibility for funds and the availability of transitional funding, which was expected to be better than in earlier funding rounds from 1992-2000. The committee noted that these issues and the UK Government consultation were of critical importance to the Assembly. The Deputy First Minister assured the Committee that the UK Government consultation paper, “Modern Regional Policy for the United Kingdom”, contained guarantees that Wales and other regions would not lose out as a result of in the UK's suggestion that EU regional funding should be repatriated to Member States.
- 4.5 It was acknowledged that the Commission was keen to maintain a role in determining funding on an objective basis. It was also acknowledged that some of the bureaucracy associated with the funds was necessary to maintain key values and features of EU structural funding and guard against fraud, although it was felt that these requirements could be applied to a different degree depending on the Member State.
- 4.6 Regional representatives, including Saxony, had approached the Welsh Assembly Government with various positions and initiatives on the issue.
- 4.7 There was concern that current Objective 2 areas might slip further down the list of areas eligible for future funding. While the future of Objective 1 seemed quite secure, Objective 2 was still very much open to discussion, and consideration was being given to merging several of the existing funding streams. It was noted that there had been a high level of representation from mayors of big cities at the February meeting on the subject, who were lobbying for Objective 2 money to go to urban areas of Europe. There was a degree of concern about the potential impact of such a change on Wales.

**Action point:**

- The UK Government consultation document would be circulated to the Committee members for information.
- The incoming European Committee would receive a future report on the UK Government consultation document and could consider whether to formulate its own response to the consultation.

The Committee agreed to break from 14.58 to 15.14

**15.14 – 15.31**

## **Item 5**

### **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)**

#### **Paper: EUR 02-03(p3)**

- 5.1 David Lynch, Policy Promotion and Member Support Officer of CLRAE spoke to the Committee about the work of CLRAE and noted that the National Assembly for Wales was the first devolved administration to receive a report on this organisation's work. Alan Lloyd, a Welsh member of CLRAE and leader of the UK delegation regretted that he was unable to speak to the Committee as he was in Azerbaijan monitoring elections to establish local democracy, but would be happy to attend in future to give a members' perspective. The UK delegation had a broad political balance, was active in CLRAE committees.
- 5.2 CLRAE was a formal institution of the Council of Europe and was committed to establishing local democracy. Unlike the EU, the Council of Europe was a pan-European organisation whose members included Turkey and Russia and did not have a budget to spend.
- 5.3 It was noted that the UK delegation would like to see more flexibility in the way CLRAE was administered. Attending meetings in Strasbourg was time-consuming, especially for members travelling from peripheral parts of Europe. The two-year mandate of members also limited strategy development and continuity. The current Chief of the Congress would give way to a replacement soon, and the full delegation would meet in April to discuss institutional reform.
- 5.4 CLRAE was making progress on drafting a Charter for regional self-government. This Charter would be discussed at a meeting in March, which would also examine how it could sit harmoniously with the EU Charter on regional self-government.
- 5.5 It was noted that since devolution the links between the CLRAE secretariat and devolved authorities had become closer and it was more able to feed into the work of the Committee of the Regions.
- 5.6 It was agreed that the Committee would like to be kept informed from time to time of the work of CLRAE.

## **15.31 – 15.45**

### **Item 6**

#### **Convention on the Future of Europe**

##### **Papers: EUR 02-03(p4)**

##### **EUR 02-03(p5)**

- 6.1 The Committee discussed the Convention on the Future of Europe. The outcome of discussions would be communicated to the Secretary of State for Wales, who was central to negotiation on the Convention, and regretted not being able to attend the Committee to discuss the issue directly with members. The Chair would be meeting with him on Monday 10 March to present the Committee's views.
- 6.2 The Deputy First Minister advised the Committee that the outcome of negotiations on the Treaty would not be known until late Spring, but it was important for regions to have a strong voice in the debate. Wales had been able to influence debate at the last meeting on 7 February through the UK Government position.

- 6.3 The UK was seeking for the treaty to include references to the following: acknowledging the importance of the regions' role; endorsing the regional role with regard to subsidiarity; to make consultation with the regions mandatory; to have an early warning system for regions to input into the legislative process; and to enhance the role of the Committee of the Regions.
- 6.4 It was noted that without the work done by the current President of the Committee of the Regions it would not be ready to taken on the additional role proposed by UK Government.
- 6.5 It was noted that the changes in European structures might require changes in the way the Assembly deals with European issues. For example ensuring that the Assembly was able to monitor EU legislation effectively. The European and External Affairs Committee would need to consider what its most effective role would be.
- 6.6 It was noted that one point in paper 5 referred to the Assembly's right to appeal against EU law, and this should be amended to clarify that it related to right of appeal to the European Court of Justice.
- 6.7 The Committee approved paper 5 with that amendment.

**Action point:**

- The Chair of the European and External Affairs Committee would present the paper with the Committee's views on the Convention to the Rt Hon Peter Hain, Secretary of State for Wales, at a meeting on Monday 10 March.

**15.45 – 15.50**

**Item 7**

**Summary of Committee activity**

**Paper: EUR 02-03(p6)**

- 7.1 The Committee considered suggestions of possible areas of activity for the incoming European and External Affairs Committee.
- 7.2 It was suggested that a comparison with the work of the counterpart Committees in Scotland and Northern Ireland, in order to highlight areas of development, would be useful.
- 7.3 It was noted that the new staffing structure in Brussels would provide better resources in the future to inform the Committee of forthcoming issues.
- 7.4 Action on reform of EU structural funds should be added to the forward work programme, in particular development of regional aid.
- 7.5 The impact of enlargement and the impact of the Euro should be considered as separate issues.
- 7.6 The Committee noted with thanks that the Strategic Review of EU Law 2003 had been forwarded to them by Rose D'Sa of ECOSOC. The review should also be considered when formulating the incoming Committee's forward work programme.

**Action point:**

- The Secretariat would make the necessary amendments to the forward work programme for consideration by the incoming Committee.

**15.50 – 16.00**

**Item 8**

**Report from members of the Committee of the Regions**

- 8.1 Members of the Committee of the Regions updated the Committee on developments since the last meeting.
- 8.2 Rosemary Butler reported that all mayors of capital cities had been invited to Committee of the Regions and all had spoken in an interesting debate.
- 8.3 Final drafts of opinions would be circulated to the relevant Committee Chairs and Ministers along with advance briefings that were provided for meetings. It was noted that there was not always time to send the papers to the relevant members before the opinions were formed.
- 8.4 Janet Davies had observed Committee of the Regions plenary. The meeting had discussed territorial cohesion, consequences of natural disasters, tripartite agreements and capacity of regional airports. She regretted being forced to miss this item to avoid missing her return flight. Reports of the meeting were available for interested members.

## **16.00 – 16.07**

### **Item 9**

#### **Report from Standing Invitees**

- 9.1 Rose D'Sa of ECOSOC noted interest in the sustainable development seminar during Wales Week and that there had been a significant ECOSOC opinion on the issue but there was no clear EU definition of the term 'sustainable development' – agreement was yet to be reached. Too often it was seen as a purely environmental and not social definition. EU criteria referred to 'environmental sustainability'.
- 9.2 Glenn Vaughan of WEC could not be present due to involvement in Wales Week. The Committee noted the latest developments in Welsh representation in Brussels. The best mechanisms for Assembly representation was being considered by the House Committee, and WEC had been invited to present to that Committee on what services it could offer.

#### **Action point:**

- The Committee would ask the Minister for Environment for her opinion on a suitable definition of 'sustainable development'.

## **16.07 – 16.09**

### **Item 10**

#### **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

##### **Paper: EUR 01-03(min)**

- 10.1 The committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting of 30 January 2003.
- 10.2 It was the final meeting of the European and External Affairs Committee for the first session of the Assembly. The Chair thanked the members for their courtesy, and officials for their assistance and advice. The standing invitees, the Ministers and the Secretariat were also thanked, and the Chair wished the incoming Committee well.

**The meeting closed at 16.09pm**