

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Date	23 May 2001
Time	9.30 am
Venue	Committee Room 3&4
Title	Chair's Report

Purpose

1. To provide an update on a range of issues arising since the Committee's last meeting.

Recommendation

2. Members note the content of the report.

Background

3. The Committee on European Affairs last met on 4 April 2001. A number of developments have taken place since then, and are listed below.

Visits

European Commission

4. The European Commission Representation in Wales celebrated its 25th anniversary on Wednesday 9 May by holding a reception in the Commission Offices in Cathedral Road.

Around 80 people attended, including several former holders of the office of Head of Representation (including myself). It was a most enjoyable event and I would like to extend my best wishes to the present incumbent, Catherine Eva, and to the Commission on reaching this significant milestone.

5. The Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, plans to meet

David Byrne, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection in Brussels on Monday 25 June to discuss European Community policy developments and to consider their relevance to the Assembly and Wales. The meeting will be the core component of the visit, but arrangements have also been made for Ms Hutt to meet MEPs from Wales, other MEPs with a specific health/public health role and the Director of the European Network of Health Promotion Agencies. Ms Hutt also plans to visit UKRep and the Wales European Centre.

Council of the European Union

6. The Assembly continues to strengthen its participation in Council meetings. I am pleased to note that Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Life-Long Learning, is scheduled to attend the European Council on Education and Youth on 28 May.

Ambassadorial visits

7. Jordi Pujol, the President of Catalunya, visited Wales on 6 and 7 April. During the visit, a new Co-operation Protocol between Wales and Catalunya was signed at St Fagan's Castle (on 6 April). The President was also presented with an honorary degree from Lampeter University (on 7 April).

8. His Excellency, Dr Bergquist, the Swedish Ambassador, visited Wales on 26 April at the invitation of the European Commission Representation in Wales. During his programme, he visited the Assembly, which Andrew Davies hosted.

9. The Dutch Ambassador, His Excellency Baron Vendinck-van-Schoonheten, visited the Assembly on 17 May, to discuss post-devolution issues. In addition to meeting me, he met Edwina Hart, Jane Davidson and the Presiding Officer. He also had separate meetings with Nick Bourne, Mike German and Ieuan Wyn Jones.

10. The Polish Ambassador, His Excellency Stanislaw Komorowski, will visit

Wales on 1 June. A programme of events is being arranged around the World Cup football match by the European Commission and the Polish Embassy. In particular, a conference entitled "*White Eagle, Red Dragon - Poland and Wales : Partners in an enlarged EU*" will take place at Jury's Hotel, Cardiff, the day before the match.

11. The Czech Republic Ambassador, His Excellency Pavel Seifter, plans to

come to Wales in June (the actual date has not been finalised) to meet Assembly Ministers and businesses in Wales with an interest in taking up business opportunities in the Czech Republic. A programme of meetings is under preparation.

PHARE/Twinning visits

12. Officials from the Assembly and the Wales European Centre (WEC)

joined a twinning mission to Poland and Hungary between 23 April and 25 April, to undertake a scoping study of possible twinning opportunities. The visit was organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in liaison with the British Embassies in Poland and Hungary. A large delegation of representatives from Whitehall Departments and the three devolved administrations were involved, some of them (like the Assembly) for the first time. The visit involved a programme of meetings, including a conference (in Warsaw) to hear about individual twinning projects and (in both countries) meetings between members of the visiting delegation and the relevant Ministries.

13. Several projects were identified as being of interest to the Assembly and

EEAD officials and WEC will work closely with their Whitehall counterparts to establish what role the Assembly might take in the process. The Assembly's participation in twinning projects will be an integral part of an all Wales enlargement strategy that is currently being developed.

14. Urszula Demidziuk, a Polish administrator with the Office of the

Committee for European Integration (UKIE), Department for co-ordination and monitoring of Foreign Assistance, visited the Wales European Funding Office between 29 April and 5 May. UKIE lead on the negotiations for Polish accession to the EU. The visit was part of a PHARE Special Preparation Twinning Project for Structural Funds. The project consists of a consortium of six Member States, of which the UK is in the lead. The main purpose of her visit was to broaden her knowledge of issues relating to Structural Funds, especially with regard to monitoring and control, programme preparation and implementation and partnerships.

"Action Local Government" visit

15. Mike Cross from the Assembly's Industrial Development Division, took

part in an "Action Local Government" workshop in the Polish city of Poznan on 16 and 17 May. "Action Local Government" is an initiative led by the British Embassy in Poland aimed at establishing informal links between the regions in Poland and regions in the UK. Mr Cross gave a presentation on Assembly

support for innovation.

Cohesion Policy

16. The European Commission held a second forum on economic and social

cohesion on 21 May (pm) and 22 May (am) at the European Parliament in Brussels. The forum consisted of two large plenary sessions for around

2,000 people to discuss the Cohesion Report. The Deputy First Minister, Phil Williams, Val Feld, Alun Cairns all attended along with two officials from the Assembly and one from the Welsh Development Agency.

(First Minister may wish to invite Val Feld and Phil Williams for feedback)

Enlargement Strategy

17. Following the presentation given at the last European Affairs Committee,

EEAD officials are working closely with the Wales European Centre to

develop and take forward a co-ordinated all-Wales enlargement strategy,

which will include the wider partnership.

Compliance

18. Standing Order 15 covers the Committee's activity. The Assembly

Compliance Office has been consulted and is content with the compliance

aspects.

Financial Implications

19. There are no financial implications for the Assembly arising from the

issues covered in this report.

European and External Affairs Directorate