

European Affairs Committee

Date: 23 May 2001
Time : 9.30am
Venue: Committee room 3&4

A Position Paper on European Governance for the European Affairs Committee Meeting on 23 May 2001.

Introduction: the Story So Far

1. The President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, identified promoting new forms of European Governance as one of the Commission's four strategic aims for its 2000-2004 term. The Commission opened tentative dialogue to try and define what this might mean in practice. Potentially it could mean many things. What it will boil down to in reality is still not clear.
2. Underpinning the exercise is a sense that the EC needs to re-invigorate its relationships with its partners – governments, regions, NGOs, civil society and the wider EU public. The prospect of enlargement on a grand scale in the years ahead also challenges traditional ways of doing business.
3. The Commission plans to publish a White Paper in July at the start of the Belgian Presidency. It will be called "**Enhancing Democracy in the European Union**".
4. Commission working groups have been collecting thoughts around a range of themes and a web-site detailing progress has been opened at: europa.eu.int/comm/governance.
5. The exercise could produce tangible improvements in the way European policy is made and delivered. The Assembly has an interest in encouraging this effort. Improved accountability and transparency in the Commission will add to its legitimacy and help raise the debate on European matters.
6. Running alongside the Governance project is a debate on "the Future of Europe". There is no formal connection between the two but it is possible – indeed, likely - that one will influence the other. The Future of Europe debate is longer term and will address issues leading to the next IGC in 2004 and may result in Treaty changes where necessary and if agreement can be reached.

What Will the Governance White Paper Say?

7. No one knows for sure, including the Commission. The pre-White Paper discussions have been elastic and difficult to pin down. There has been a tendency for contributors to see what they want to see. Discussion has ranged from practical business-handling issues through to enormously dull and unrewarding topics like the role of the citizen in European spatial development. It's a mixed bag but people are unlikely to be discussing many of the issues in pubs and clubs across Wales.
8. The Commission has identified six themes that are likely to be reflected in some shape in the White Paper. These are listed with a brief commentary suggesting, where possible, some issues arising for Wales:
 - **Broadening and enriching the public debate on European matters.** Devolution has raised the visibility of the EU in Wales and, we hope, Wales in the EU. The focus on European matters is much deeper than before. A legitimate Commission needs to be able to say why it has taken particular decisions and why that decision is justified: is the Commission doing this well enough? Do EU issues have sufficient profile in the Assembly and in Wales more generally? Should the Assembly itself do more to explain European matters to the Welsh public?
 - **Handling the process of producing and implementing Community rules.** The EU depends on rules to promote common policies in agreed areas. The quality of rules depends on the quality of decision making. Is consultation wide enough and meaningful? Is enough use made of expert help across the Union? Are regional authorities sufficiently involved? The Commission can only consult people who are willing to be consulted with. Are we willing to play a more active part in policy formation? Will resources be prioritised for this kind of work?
 - **Improving the exercise of European executive responsibilities through decentralisation.** Decentralisation will naturally be of interest to us. Greater engagement with devolved administrations like ours would be welcome given the Assembly's wide responsibilities for implementing EU rules. (Debate around the division of competences will form part of the Future of Europe exercise referred to earlier).
 - **Promoting coherence and co-operation within a "networked" Europe.** This is partially about what we call "joined-up government". Another element of networking is to encourage clusters of regions, for example, to collaborate on policy approaches, benchmarking etc.
 - **Strengthening Europe's contribution to world governance.** Limited role for the Assembly here. The EU clearly does have a world role in some respects – trade negotiations with the WTO for example – but in many areas, Member States will want emphasise inter-governmental working and to preserve the multiple of identities of nations and regions.

- **Strengthening the integration and strategic dimension of policies across the continent.** Is the Commission agenda always transparently clear? Do its objectives have enough focus to enable Member States to respond in concert where inter-governmental action is necessary?

What Happens Next?

1. The debate so far has not been clearly focussed and we will need to study the White Paper when it emerges to see exactly what it has to offer. This process provides an opportunity to join in discussion on the wider European Union machinery, as opposed to the specific policy areas where we have direct interests. The Assembly has a legitimate role in considering these issues and in putting forward views both to the UK Government and the Commission. The White Paper may also act as a stimulus for the Assembly to look critically at how it handles European business.
2. The White Paper will be published in July at the earliest – there is always

potential for slippage. The European Affairs Committee should consider

the full text at its first meeting after the summer recess.

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