

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Date: 4 April 2001

Time: 9.00 am

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

Title : Chair's Report

Purpose

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

Recommendation

Members note the content of the report.

Background

The Committee on European Affairs last met on 31 January 2001. A number of developments have taken place since then, and are listed below.

Council of Ministers

Carwyn Jones attended the Agriculture Council on 27th Feb. Jane Davidson was due to attend the Education and Youth Council on 12th February, but the agenda was changed and she was no longer needed.

St David's Day and other visits/events.

One of the highlights of St David's Day was the very welcome and high profile visit to Wales and the Assembly of **An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD**, He combined his visit to us with a keynote address to our Forum on Wales, Europe and the World, at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport.

The Forum attracted representatives from other EU Member States and many members of the London-

based Diplomatic Corps including High Commissioners and Ambassadors. Without exception, those who attended felt that the event, and An Taoiseach's contribution, was an outstanding success. It could well form a model for future events to mark the celebration of our National Day.

The **British Ambassador to Ireland, Sir Ivor Roberts**, also attended the Forum. I subsequently met him on 2 March and we discussed the potential for inward investment from Ireland and the export potential there for Welsh businesses in the light of the continuing strong performance of the Irish economy. The Ambassador has strong Welsh links and is keen to assist us in promoting Welsh products and produce. The possibility of a reception for Irish companies who might wish to invest in Wales was also discussed. I have asked for a package of information to be prepared for the Ambassador to assist him in helping promote Wales in Ireland.

Sir Ivor also undertook a full programme of meetings and visits on 2 March. This included meetings with the Deputy First Minister, the Permanent Secretary and other senior staff. He also visited the Millennium Stadium (which he has a role in promoting in Ireland) and the Assembly building in Cardiff Bay.

On 13 March, **Dennis Haughey and Dermot Nesbitt**, Northern Ireland Assembly Ministers, also visited the Assembly. The purpose of their visit was a discussion on a range of European matters, including the role of this Committee. During their visit they met myself and Val Feld AM.

On 29 March, the **Vice President of the Regional Council of Skane**, Sweden and Mrs Kerstin Hardenstedt, a Member of the Regional Council, together with two officials from Skane's Department for National and International Relations and Health Care and an official from Skane's Department for Strategy, City of Malmo, visited the Assembly for a study tour.

The visitors were interested to learn about devolution in Wales and undertook a full programme, including meetings with the Minister for Finance and Communities, Edwina Hart, and the Deputy First Minister and officials from Local Government Division and the Assembly Constitutional Unit. They were also invited to attend a plenary session as observers and undertook a tour of the Visitor's Centre at the Pierhead Building.

Joint Ministerial Committee

The first Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe was convened in the Cabinet Office on 1 March. I participated for part of the meeting via video link from Cardiff.

The agenda covered arrangements for handling EU business in the light of devolution and a Foreign and Commonwealth Memorandum on the Stockholm European Council in March 2001. The focus of the Stockholm Council is employment, enlargement and the environment.

There will be another JMC later this year to consider the implications of the Belgian presidency

Arrangements are in hand for Lode Willems, the Belgian Ambassador to attend the meeting of the European Affairs Committee on 27 June.

European Commission's Forward Work Programme

The Commission's work programme for 2001 was announced on 1 February 2001. Catherine Eva, Head of the Commission Representation in Wales, has submitted a short paper outlining the work of the Committee and Des Clifford will be outlining key issues of interest to Wales (Item 2 of today's meeting).

Wales Forum on European Affairs

A paper outlining the future role of the Forum was to have been put before the Committee today. I have not yet had responses from the other party political leaders with their views and a paper will come forward once I have received these.

In the meantime, there has not been a meeting of the Forum for some time and I propose to move ahead with a meeting in North Wales in September on rural development.

The Post Nice Agenda

On 12 February I wrote to Keith Vaz, Minister for Europe at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, pointing out to him the importance of the Assembly being fully involved in any future discussions in relation to the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. I also asked him to take particular account of the Assembly's interest in any discussion of a "Charter of Competences".

Stockholm Priorities

The European Council met in Stockholm on 23 and 24 March for its first Annual Spring meeting on economic and social questions.

The Stockholm European Council:

- Addressed the demographic challenge of an ageing population of which people of working age constitute an even smaller part;
- Discussed how to create more and better jobs, accelerate economic reform, modernise the European social model and harness new technologies;
- Issued strategic guidance for the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines in order to achieve sustained growth and stable macroeconomic conditions;
- Agreed to improved procedures so that the European Council's spring meeting will become the focal point for an annual review of economic and social questions. In this context, the Göteborg European Council in June will take account in this review of the generally agreed objective of

sustainability;

- Agreed to develop ways and means of actively involving the candidate countries in the goals and procedures of the Lisbon strategy.

Cohesion Report

The Second Cohesion Report reviews progress on diminishing regional and national disparities across Europe through the key instrument of structural funds and cohesion funds. It also sets the framework for the structural funds post 2006.

The European Commission is organising a second forum on economic and social cohesion on 21 May (pm) and 22 May (am) at the European Parliament in Brussels. The forum will consist of two large plenary sessions for around 2,000 people to discuss the Cohesion Report. Following agreement from the Deputy First Minister, the Commission have invited the Deputy First Minister, Phil Williams AM, Val Feld AM and Alun Cairns AM. In addition, 2 officials from the Assembly and one from the WDA have been invited.

Compliance

Standing Order 15 covers the Committee's activity. The Assembly Compliance Office has been consulted and is content with the compliance aspects.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications for the Assembly arising from the issues covered in this report.