

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Date	5th December 2001
Time	10.00am
Venue	De Gasperi Room, Dorint Hotel, Brussels
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 to note the contents of the report.

Background

3. The Committee of European Affairs last met on the 17th October 2001. Developments since that time are listed below.

Visits

4. The second Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Power

was held between 15th – 16th November in Liege. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend. Gary Davies, Head of European & External Affairs and Des

Clifford, Head of the Assembly office in Brussels represented the Assembly and will provide an oral report.

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Council of Ministers

5. There wasn't much activity over the period 17th October to 5th December with Assembly Members attending Council of the European Union meetings. However, Carwyn Jones, AM, Minister for Rural Affairs attended the EU Agriculture Council in Brussels on the 20th November. The Minister's specific interest in attending this time lay with a topic on the agenda entitled, "Proposal for a Council Regulation on the common organisation of the market in sheep and goat meat" The Minister attends these Councils regularly as part of the UK delegation, along with the Scots and the Irish.

6. On the 29th November, Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and

Lifelong learning attended the Education and Youth Council Meeting in

Brussels and the Head of Youth Policy Team attended the Youth Council

session during the afternoon. The UK delegation was led by John Denham

MP, Youth Minister at the Home Office. The discussion centred upon the

publication and launch of the European White Paper on Youth.

Ministerial Visits

7. Following on from Andrew Davies's, Minister for Assembly Business attendance at the Tele Regions Networks (TRN) conference in Valencia between the 2nd and 6th October, and his subsequent presentation to the European Affairs Committee on the 17th October – he attended a conference in Brussels entitled "e-Government, from Policy to Practice" on the 29th and 30th November. The Minister also adopted the lead UK Minister's role at the conference representing Lord Macdonald. The conference was a joint venture between the Belgium Presidency and the European Commission to discuss where Europe currently stands with regards to e-Government and advance key issues to ensure successful e-Government. Andrew Davies AM was invited in his role as President of the TeleRegions Network.
8. Representatives of all Member States were present including Ministers, central, regional and local administrations, users, industry and international organisations and institutions.

Ministerial Events

9. On the 29 October I went to Brussels for a meeting of Chairs of European Committees from across the UK. I chaired the meeting and it commenced at the Assembly's Brussels Office as the Assembly was the host for the meeting. Scotland having organised the first meeting and Northern Ireland the second. Following discussions on the committees' activities the group had a luncheon discussion with officials from UKRep, focussing on issues of governance and enlargement, after which the group concluded, with a discussion of opportunities for co-operation between the committees. The meeting explored options for the committees to express joint views on issues of common concern and to ensure there are adequate opportunities for communication with the UK Government prior to the determination of the UK position on issues of interest.
10. On the 1st November I held a media briefing to mark the 60-day period prior to the introduction of notes and coin in the 12 eurozone countries. The event, at which I launched an information leaflet targeted at the business community was designed to raise awareness of euro issues. The media impact was very good with HTV, BBC and S4C carrying news items and there was also extensive radio and press coverage.
11. On 8 November I attended the Joint Ministerial Committee (Europe) at the Cabinet Office in London. This was chaired by the Foreign Secretary and was a government-wide discussion on items including preparations for the Laeken Summit in December and the Future of Europe debate leading up to the next IGC in 2004. The other item on the agenda was the need for departments and government as a whole to keep up to speed with European directives so that the UK avoids falling into disrepute.
12. The Ministerial Group for European Co-ordination met on the 21st November at the Foreign Office. I was unable to attend but was represented by John Griffiths AM. It was a single-issue agenda on Enlargement.

European Events

13. Over the period 21st November to 6th December the following significant youth-related European events took place.

● **21 November - Publication of the European White Paper on Youth –**

The Head of the Youth Policy Team, Elisabeth Williams, attended the entire

Ghent Colloquium. There are a number of themes to the White Paper,

which are – Participation and Active Citizenship; Equal Opportunities;

Lifelong Learning and Employment; Information and Voluntary Service.

- **26 – 28 November - Official launch of the European White Paper on**

Youth

A 3 day colloquium in Ghent at which policy makers and young people had an opportunity to discuss the detail of the White Paper for the first time.

- **28 November - Conference on participation, social inclusion and citizenship**

This focused on participation in schools. Head of Schools Management Division 2 and one young person from Llais Ifanc attended.

- **6 December - Welsh Conference on the European White Paper on**

Youth

Implications of the White Paper for Wales. This has been organised by the Wales European Centre (WEC) and will be held in Risca, with Jane Davidson, AM making the address. Invitations have been sent out to all the WEC members. .

The event is being promoted within Wales by the Wales Youth Agency; Caerphilly County Borough Council (local authorities), and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (voluntary sector in general). It is very unlikely that Commissioner Reding will be able to attend this event, but Pierre Mairesse, Head of Youth Policy at the Commission will be there.

1. In October I agreed to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning,

Jane Davidson AM, making arrangements for the Assembly to join the European Association of Regional Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL). This Association is being established, with European Commission support, to provide a focus for European regional administrations to work together and share ideas in the field of lifelong learning.

2. Our modernisation of post –16 learning structures and our strategies to develop Wales as ‘The Learning Country’ put Wales at the forefront of policy development in this area, and we potentially have a lot to offer our European partners. However, we also have the potential to gain from membership of EARLALL. I expect EARLALL to provide a useful vehicle for benchmarking Wales’ lifelong learning activities with other European regional administrations. It will also enable the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, her officials and key agencies in Wales, such as ELWa, to influence and benefit from lifelong learning developments across Europe and to play an active part in developmental projects and the formulation of new initiatives.
3. On the 13th November I met briefly with His Excellency, Mr Tarald Brautaset, the Norwegian Ambassador. This was a short meeting and was part of the Ambassadors day in Wales which included a visit to Tower Colliery

Wales Forum on European Affairs

4. In line with the Committee's views I intend to hold a Wales Forum on European Affairs early in the New Year. The event will be held on the topic of "Governance" and we are exercising joined up working responsibilities by organising the event in conjunction with the Welsh Local Government Association, who have a keen interest in the Governance agenda. The information collected from the debate on Governance will feed into my response on the White Paper to the Commission on behalf of the Assembly when the consultation period ends on March 31st 2002. A date and venue have yet to be considered (details should be available by the 5th December).

Enlargement

5. At the last meeting, the Committee considered a report on the first meeting of the Working Group on Enlargement. Members will recall that the approach was to engage with a region of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary and independent states with small Wales sized populations such as Slovenia and Estonia combined industrial inheritance, with the aim of arriving at a mix of regions, some with similarities to our own and others which are technologically advanced. Since the last meeting there has been activity on a number of fronts.

Slovenia

6. A party of six Slovenian officials from the Ministry of Labour visited the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) over a ten day period which commenced on the 29th October. They were interested in all aspects of WEFO's activities.

Czech Republic

7. His Excellency, Pavel Seifter, the Ambassador of the Czech Republic visited

Wales for a two day period on the 29th and 30th November. His visit built on an earlier one this year and in addition to holding further discussions with him exploring the opportunities for further links. A business seminar was

arranged by Wales Trade International, to cover opportunities for Welsh companies considering, or already exporting to the Czech Republic.

Latvia

21 Six editors visited the National Assembly on the 22nd November. The visit was part of a Foreign Office programme and at their request we arranged briefing sessions on a range of Agricultural and Structural Funds issues.

Hungary

22. Tomorrow I am meeting His Excellency Gabor Szentivanyi, the Ambassador of the Republic of Hungary, who will be formally introducing the new Honorary Consul to Wales, Sir Geoffrey Inkin.

Silesia

23. Between 18th and 20th December, I will at the invitation of Marshall Jan Olbrycht be visiting the Silesia Voivodship. One of the issues under consideration during the visit will be whether it would be mutually beneficial to conclude a formal Memorandum of Understanding between our regions.

General

24. In accordance with the views expressed by the Committee a major exercise has been started to compile a database of all existing links with the candidate countries. This should be available to the next meeting of the working group in January.

