

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE EUR-03-02(p1)

Date:	8 May 2002
Time:	9.30am
Venue:	Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly Building
Title:	Chairs 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 content of the report.

Background

3. The Committee last met on 20th March 2002. This paper provides information on contacts between National Assembly Members and officials of the Welsh Assembly Government with European organisations or National Governments since the last meeting.

General EU Issues.

4. The UK government was successful in meeting the Barcelona target for implementing EC Single Market Directives, achieving a rate of 98.7% against a target of 98.5%, putting the UK in third position across the EU. The efforts of the National Assembly played a significant role in ensuring the UK's position in the league table on this issue was much improved and I am pleased to say that this has been recognised at UK government level in a letter to Jack Straw from Patricia Hewitt.
5. In a visit organised by the Commissions Representation Office, the European Ombudsman, Mr Jacob Soderman, is visiting Cardiff on 27-28 May to raise the profile of his work. At his request I am meeting him at 14.00 on Monday 27 May and would encourage members of this Committee to avail themselves of the opportunity to also meet him.
6. **8 – 12 April.** Delegations from both Cyprus and Malta attended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Regional Conference which took place at the National Assembly building at Cardiff Bay. This was organised by the Office of the Presiding Officer.

7. **Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions.** An official from EEAD2 visited CPMR at their headquarters in Rennes Brittany recently. Various matters were discussed, in particular relating to structural and cohesion funds policy, though CPMR have expertise in a number of areas of interest to the Assembly – transport, planning and environment matters, for example. While CPMR send us copies of their position papers, we discussed with them the scope for CPMR to be a little more proactive in their communications strategy, for example through an electronic newsletter. An official will attend the UK Members' Group meeting on the Isle of Wight on 9-10 May; as this will be our first participation in the Group, the main objective is to discover more about how we can exploit our membership fully. CPMR officers are participating in the development of our INTERREG III B and C programme involvement; a paper on this will be discussed at today's meeting.
8. **The Future of Structural and Cohesion Funds.** Economic Development Minister put a paper to the 24 April meeting of the Economic Development Committee. The paper, requested by EDC members, provided an update on the debate, similar to that presented to EEAC members in March, with a technical annex on GDP prepared by the Statistical Directorate. Copies are available on the Committee website: <http://assembly/committees/Economic> [paper reference: EDC 07-02 (p4)]. Officials will attend a 2-day technical workshop in Brussels on 27-28 May, as part of the UK government delegation.

Ministerial Visits

9. **23-24th April.** His Excellency Dr. Alexander Christiani Ambassador for Austria visited the National Assembly to discuss opportunities to strengthen links in trade and economic co-operation; the issue on the role for the regions in Europe was also discussed. Both the Presiding Officer and myself met the Ambassador.
10. **3-5th April.** A delegation from the Regional Assembly of Skane, Sweden studied the National Assembly's programmes on health care and regional economic development. Jane Hutt AM and myself met with the delegation. Visits to a local Hospital and Health Centre were arranged for the visitors.

First Ministers Activities

11. **22nd April.** UK European Comm of Chairs - House of Commons
12. **23rd April.** Informal evening reception for Austrian Ambassador, St Davids Hotel, Cardiff Bay.
24th April. Meeting with Austrian Ambassador (Dr Christiani).
13. **25th April.** MINECOR meeting at Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Whitehall.
14. **26th April.** Bilateral meeting with Peter Hain MP to discuss European issues.

Enlargement.: Visits to The National Assembly By Candidate Country Delegations.

Czech Republic

15. A delegation from the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic visited the National Assembly on 21st March. The delegation consisted of 4 MPs, the Assistant of the Committee, the Political Secretary of the Embassy and an interpreter. This visit was organised by the Office of the Presiding Officer with the intent to provide insight into constitutional and legal factors arising from Devolution. An invitation for a reciprocal visit has been received by the Presiding Office.

Czech and Slovak Republics

16. To coincide with the Wales-v-Czech Republic national football match on Wednesday 27th March, a friendly football match between officials at the Welsh Assembly and the Czech Republic (and Slovak Republic) Embassy was organised. The football match took place on the afternoon of the 27th March at Cardiff City Football Club.
17. I attended and jointly kicked off the proceedings with the Ambassador for the Czech Republic, His Excellency Pavel Seifter The Ambassador for the Slovak Republic, His Excellency Frantisek Dlhopolcek played in the match. The game was a resounding success in both a diplomatic and sporting sense with the National Assembly team winning 9-3.
18. Following the match, Wales Trade International officials met with officials of CzechTrade to further discuss the creation of links between WTI and Czechtrade. Wales Trade International are in the process of drafting a proposed 'Memorandum of Understanding' to formalise the creation of mutually beneficial economic links. It is proposed that the MOU will be signed by the Ministers for Economic Development in both countries.

Poland

19. Izabela van den Bossche, Political Officer responsible for Regional Affairs, from the Polish Embassy in Warsaw visited Wales on 20th March. Ms van den Bossche was keen to learn how the National Assembly operates and to discuss foreign relations, EU Enlargement, Regional Development and Structural Funds with officials. During her visit to the National Assembly she met with representatives from Wales Trade International, Wales European Funding Office and European and External Affairs.

Estonia

20. Mr Margus Rava, the Economic Affairs Counsellor at the Embassy of Estonia in London, and Meelis Kuusberg, representative of the Enterprise Estonia Foundation visited Wales on 18th April. Prior to their visit, they expressed a desire to establish contact with the National Assembly

to explain about developments in Estonia and to gain a greater insight into Wales. During their visit they met with officials from Wales Trade International, European and External Affairs Division, Wales European Funding Office, Wales Tourist Board and the Welsh Development Agency.

Romania

21. A representative from the Welsh European Funding Office visited Romania and participated in a short programme arranged by the UK Co-ordinator as part of the PHARE funded Twinning programme. The programme, which took place from 15-19 April, aimed to provide advice to Romania's Ministry for Development and Prognosis (the executive body of the National Council for Regional Development) on capacity building for operational programme management and partnership development with regard to future needs under Objective 1 of the EU Structural Funds.

Wales Trade International Missions

22. **10-15 March.** Seven Welsh companies took part in a Trade Mission to the Czech Republic. The trade mission focused on the Heritage sector and several important contacts were made with the business community and official organisations in Prague, Brno and Olomouc. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales met the delegates at a reception hosted by the British Ambassador to the Czech Republic.
23. **16-18 April** - Sector-specific trade mission to Hanover, Germany. Wales Trade International took a group of four Wales based companies to the Hanover Engineering International Trade Fair. The trade fair enabled the companies to meet existing customers, seek new customers, research the competition and meet suppliers in one location.

Other European Visits

24. **24-26 March.** Eleanor Burnham AM, John Griffiths AM, Dai Lloyd AM, David Melding AM and Peter Kellam (Official) represented the National Assembly when for the first time the National Assembly sent a full delegation to the British Irish Inter Parliamentary Body held in Dublin. New Full Members attending for the first time were Eleanor Burnham and David Melding. The BIIPB is a backbench inter-parliamentary body that involves delegations from the UK Parliament, the Dail Eirann, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly plus the Legislative Assemblies of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The Plenary session included debates on the Good Friday agreement; the joint Irish/Scottish bid to host the 2008 European Football Championships; **and the Future of Europe**. The Irish Foreign Affairs Minister addressed the Body and answered questions.
25. **26 March.** Jane Hutt AM attended a meeting in Finland to discuss various health issues. Cardiac health was the main subject discussed and in particular the Finish success in reducing their previously exceptionally high level of heart disease.

26. **26-28 March** . *Sue Essex AM visited Finland: 26-28 March*. Helsinki is rated as one of the most sustainable cities on Earth with residents enjoying a very high quality of life. Through visits within the city and meetings with Finnish Environment Ministry and Helsinki Planning Department the Minister explored how the Finns achieved this and whether the National Assembly can achieve similar outcomes here through the direction and integration of key policies and programmes. There was a visit to housing developments in areas around Helsinki in particular to a new ecological housing programme. Also to the Helsinki energy centre. The visit was extremely successful reinforcing the point that there is much to be learned from other nations facing similar challenges. The intention is to maintain (and build further) on the links with Finland.

Compliance

27. The Committee is established under Standing Order 15. Section 33 of the Government of Wales Act (which has been delegated to the First Minister) provides for the Assembly to consider and make appropriate representations about any matter affecting Wales. The Assembly Compliance Office has been consulted and is content with the compliance aspects.

Financial Implications

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

European and External Affairs Division

May 2002