

# European & External Affairs Committee

## EUR2 04-05 (p2)

Date: 12 May 2005

Time: 9.00 - 12.30

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Title: UK Presidency of the European Council 2005

### Purpose

This paper is to update the Committee on preparations for the UK Presidency of the Council of the European Union (the "UK Presidency") made since the last report to EEAC (October 2005).

### Summary

The Welsh Assembly Government is contributing to the development of the policy agenda and to the arrangement of a number of events taking place in Wales during the Presidency. There will be two informal Ministerial Councils held in Wales. In developing the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to the Presidency, I have been mindful of three key issues: the policy agenda, where relevant to our devolved responsibilities; the potential to showcase Welsh products and achievement during Presidency events; and the impact upon local communities of the high-profile events taking place in Wales.

### Background

This is an important year for UK in external leadership terms: the UK holds Presidency of the G8 for the year and the Presidency of the EU for the second half of the year. This may be last UK Presidency as we know them under the current, rotating system. The Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office share responsibility for ensuring that the Presidency objectives are met at a strategic level.

There will be no formal Council meetings in the UK during the Presidency, and events taking place in Wales will not be on the scale of the 1998 summit. Nonetheless, I view the Presidency as a key opportunity to affirm Wales as a "world nation", in particular by doing what we can to help make events being located here successful.

### Preparing for the Presidency

As all foreign policy issues are reserved, relations with the European Union are the responsibility of the Parliament and Government of the United Kingdom, as Member State. However, the UK Government

involves the Devolved Administrations as directly and fully as possible in decision making on EU matters which touch on devolved areas (including non-devolved matters which impact on devolved areas and non-devolved matters which will have a distinctive impact of importance to the Devolved territories). Representatives from the Devolved Administrations attend all relevant meetings and are consulted on all policy issues. The Cabinet Office chairs a Presidency Co-ordinators group, which consists of a representative from each Whitehall Department and the Devolved Administrations. This serves as a forum for problem solving and sharing best practice at official level. Within the Assembly, we have a Presidency co-ordinator, who liaises closely with Whitehall Departments and whose team have established a network of officials involved in the various events taking place in Wales.

Most officials involved in the Presidency are attending Presidency training courses, which we have helped to deliver.

## **Policy Agenda**

The overall agenda for 2005, from which we will choose our Presidency priorities, has been agreed between the Commission, Luxembourg and the UK, and is reflected in the UK-Luxembourg work programme and the Commission's 2005 legislative programme. The Multi-annual Strategic Programme also sets out a high-level agenda for the coming year which the Commission has reflected in its planning.

Last Autumn, the Welsh Assembly Government was consulted about the setting of the policy priorities for 2005. Luxembourg and the UK have prepared a joint programme setting out these priorities. The Luxembourg-UK Programme is in the public domain.

The European Parliament plays a key role as co-legislator. The Parliament will be a crucial partner in delivering the EU agenda during our Presidency and the UK and Welsh Assembly Government recognise the importance of engagement with MEPs.

Some possible policy themes for the Presidency are listed below:

## **SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN EUROPE...**

Regulatory reform

The Services Directive

Financial Services Action Plan

Environment and sustainable development , incl. REACH

CAP reform - sugar

...

## **AND GLOBALLY**

Doha Development Agenda

Africa

Development

Climate Change

EU/US

Security and Stability

JHA (including Counter Terrorism)

ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy)

Turkey

Another issue that may be taken forward into the UK Presidency is the future financing negotiations, which decide on the EU's budget and how it is spent, and the associated structural funds negotiations. These will continue into the Presidency if agreement is not reached during the Luxembourg Presidency by the end of June.

During the UK Presidency a Welsh Assembly Official, Nia Lewis from the EU office in Brussels office, will chair a Council working group, the Cultural Affairs Committee, as a result an agreement between the Welsh Assembly, UKRep and DCMS.

## **Events in Wales**

Twelve informal European Council meetings will be held in the UK. These provide an opportunity for Ministers to discuss key issues without drawing conclusions. A number of conferences and other events will also be held. Of the 12 Council meetings, two will be held in Wales – a Competitiveness and Innovation meeting in Cardiff (the final title of this meeting has yet to be confirmed); and a Foreign Ministers' "Gymnich" in Newport.

## **What about the impact on local communities of these events?**

The conference organisers will consult with the local community and police thoroughly, in order to minimise any disruption. Hosting a European event usually brings economic benefits to local businesses.

Security: all informal Council meetings are being assessed for the degree of security risk. Police are expected to bid for extra funding to HO where need is anticipated – in Wales, the police forces concerned, and the Minister for Local Government, are aware of this.

Sponsorship, Gifts, Welsh food and drink. I have asked my officials to give full support to the UK Government teams responsible for Ministerial events in seeking ways to showcase Welsh produce and achievement. We are involving the Wales Food Directorate and technology teams at the WDA, and have facilitated a presentation to FCO officials of Welsh crafts. We have discussed with Cardiff City Council how they might link the Presidency events here to the broader "Cardiff 2005" programme of events. The WDA have discussed with us and the DTI the scope to have a small exhibition of Welsh technological achievement.

Other Events in Wales. A full list of events that have been notified to the Presidency Co-ordination unit is attached at Annex A.

How will the public be kept informed of the EU Presidency?

A key information tool will be the Presidency website ([www.eu2005.gov.uk](http://www.eu2005.gov.uk)). The website will go on-line shortly before the start of the Presidency.

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**Annex A**

Welsh Assembly Government: EU Presidency Events in Wales

**1 July - 31 December 2005**

Date of event	Event Title	Location	Lead policy area/Department
10-12 July 2005	DTI Competitiveness Informal	Cardiff City Hall	Department of Trade and Industry; for Welsh Assembly Government:  European & External Affairs Division

6-8 July 2005	The Second Annual Conference of the European Cultural Tourism Network	Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff	Economic Policy Division, Welsh Assembly Government
1-2 September 2005	Meeting of Foreign Ministers-'Gymnich'	Celtic Manor Resort, Newport	FCO; for Welsh Assembly Government:  European & External Affairs Division
24 – 28 October 2005	UK Presidency Youth event - Promoting the Participation of Young People in Local Life	Cardiff City Hall	Department of Training and Education – Youth & Pupil Participation Division, Welsh Assembly Government.  Brussels Office, Welsh Assembly Government.
29-30 November 2005	'Valorisation' event	Llandudno (tbc)	DfES - Life Long Learning Division Welsh Assembly Government
October 2005 (tbc)	EFQM Forum  (involvement of Commissioner Kroes has been suggested).	Cardiff	Communications Directorate; Economic Policy Division 3, Welsh Assembly Government
23 -25 Nov 2005 (tbc)	"Moving to higher employment: challenges and solutions" event	Cardiff City Hall	Department of Work & Pensions.  Department of Training and Education – Training Skills & Careers Policy Division, Welsh Assembly Government
30 Nov - 2 Dec 2005	IMPEL Plenary	Cardiff	DEFRA- Environment Division, Welsh Assembly Government
15 -16 December 2005 (tbc. Provisional dates)	High Level Health Committee Meeting	Cardiff	Office of the Chief Medical Officer, Public Health Strategy Division, Welsh Assembly Government.
30 Set - 2 Oct (tbc)	European Disability Forum	Cardiff	Equal Opportunities Unit, Welsh Assembly Government