

# European & External Affairs Committee

## EUR(2) 03-06 (p.2)

**Date:** 6 April 2006

**Time:** 09.00 – 12.00

**Venue:** National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

**Title:** Minister's Report

### Purpose

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

### Recommendation

2. That members note the content of the report.

### Background

3. The Committee last met on 9 March 2006. This paper provides an update.

### First Minister's International Activities

- **29 March 2006 Visit of His Excellency Staffan Carllson, Swedish Ambassador to the UK**

I met His Excellency Staffan Carllson, the Swedish Ambassador to the UK, who was in Cardiff to meet representatives of companies with Swedish links.

- **29 March 2006 Visit by London based international journalists**

I met a group of international journalists who are based in London, and who were visiting Cardiff to see the new Assembly building, the Millennium Centre and the Cardiff Bay barrage.

### Other Issues

Spring European Council: Brussels 23-24 March - as with most Presidencies in the first half of the year, the Austrians wish to focus the Spring Council on the EU's Lisbon agenda and any substantive discussion on the future of the Constitutional Treaty looks likely, as was originally planned, to be left to the June Council. This was discussed at JMCE on the 13<sup>th</sup> March. I was unable to attend but was represented by Des Clifford. I will provide an oral report on the council to members on the 6th April.

## European News

A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy - the European Commission launched the Green Paper on 8 March which was welcomed by the UK Government. The Green paper focuses on 6 priority areas:

- External Policy - A joint external energy policy, including more effective dialogue with 3rd world countries and promoting a wider European energy market
- Competitiveness and the internal energy market - Completing the internal EU electricity and gas markets, including increasing interconnection
- Diversification of the energy mix - Encouraging diverse and sustainable energy sources
- Sustainable Development - Improving energy efficiency
- Innovation and Technology - Encouraging innovation in research and technology, and
- Solidarity - Community measures to enhance security of supply.

The Green Paper makes it clear that global demand for energy is increasing while supply remains tight. The UK Government considers that we need to: diversify sources of our energy; develop a properly integrated infrastructure and a genuinely open energy market; ensure a coherent and operational approach to the EU's relationship with major energy suppliers, for example Russia and OPEC; and put energy efficiency and clean technologies at the heart of our agenda.

The European Commission was mandated to take this issue forward following a UK Presidency initiative at the Hampton Court Heads of Government Informal last October.

Energy policy is likely to be one of the priority issues for the forthcoming European Spring Council on 23/24 March.

Gender inequality - gender inequality in the EU will be tackled by 21 specific activities over the next five years, according to a new gender equality roadmap published by the European Commission. The 'roadmap for equality between men and women 2006-10' aims to tackle the pay gap between men and women, support better work/life balance, eliminate violence and trafficking, support gender budgeting and promote gender equality both within and outside the EU. Proposed activities include: helping set up a new €50 million (£34m) European institute for gender equality in 2007; reviewing all existing EU gender equality law; increasing awareness of gender inequality; ensuring gender equality is considered in all policies and pressing for better statistics.

France to pay €57m penalty for failure to comply with fishery rules - France will have to make a penalty payment of €57,761,250 (£39.3m) for every 6-month period from July 2005 for failing to fully comply with a 2005 European Court of Justice ruling, the European Commission has announced. The July 2005 Court case goes back to a ruling on 11 June 1991, which found that France had failed to enforce obligations related to measures designed to protect undersized fish (below the legal minimum size), especially hake, and, where infringements were detected, the absence of deterrent sanctions. On the basis of an assessment of the situation in France on 12 January 2006, the Commission concluded that France has made progress, but could not yet be regarded as having fully complied with the Court judgment. The penalty payment comes on top of a lump sum of €20 million (£13.6m), imposed under the same Court ruling and already paid by France, for failure to comply with the 1991 Court ruling.

Belarus Elections – President Alexander Lukashenko has been declared the overwhelming winner of the presidential election in Belarus with 82.6% of the vote according to official results. The main opposition candidate, Alexandr Milinkevich, called for a re-run and there were street protests after claims of vote rigging. European election monitors have described the result as flawed and said that it failed to meet international standards. The European Parliament has called for sanctions against the Belarusian Government and the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the European Union has confirmed that it would discuss taking restrictive measures against the Belarusian Government.

## **Update on WAG Secondees to European Institutions**

The Welsh Assembly Government is presently supporting a number of members of staff on secondment to European Institutions:

Steve Davies is a Seconded National Expert (SNE) in DG TRADE, European Commission. He is part of the Doha Trade Round negotiating team. His specific brief is to negotiate with other WTO members a coherent, predictable framework to underpin the relationship between WTO rules and multilateral environmental agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Convention on Biodiversity; and to negotiate a list of environmental goods and technologies to benefit from trade liberalisation as part of the Round.

Abigail Howells is an SNE in the Climate Change Unit, DG ENVIRONMENT, European Commission. Abigail has responsibility for Impacts and Adaptation to Climate Change, as well as for Climate Change and Maritime Issues. She is responsible for the European Climate Change Program's workgroup on Impacts and Adaptation; an ambitious programme to identify measures to be taken at local/regional/community level to assist member states plan and adapt to the unavoidable effects of climate change. Reports from the workgroup's meetings will contribute towards a Green Paper on Adaptation to be published end of 2006.

Nick Batey is an SNE in the e-Inclusion Unit, DG Information Society and Media, European Commission. E-Inclusion is one of the three pillars in the EC's "i2010 - a European Information Society for growth and employment". The e-Inclusion Unit is working with Member States to agree new

European Policy, identifying and sharing good practice and sponsoring essential research and development. This requires extensive collaboration with other DGs, and a wide range of stakeholders in industry, civil society and academia. A key milestone this year is a Ministerial Conference to be held in Riga, Latvia, as an official Presidency event under the Austrian Presidency. This will bring together Ministers from all Member States, together with 500 senior delegates from industry, government and society, and help shape future European Policy through the release of a Ministerial Declaration.

Gwyn Lewis is an SNE in Secretariat-General, European Commission dealing with relations with the European Parliament, the European Ombudsman, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the National Parliaments. Gwyn is specifically responsible for producing a summary report of the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade and sub-Committee on Security and Defence for the College. Within 36 hours of the end of a committee meeting he produces a report summarising the political dialogue between Members and highlights any Commission intervention. The Committee will also often hear from external experts and the President in Office for the Council, whose interventions will also be summarised in the report. In addition to producing the summary reports, there is a coordination aspect to the role, making certain that Commission representatives are present for their designated Committee items.

Peredur John began a secondment to the European Parliament Section, UK Representation to the EU (UKRep) in Brussels in February 2006. His role includes managing the UK Government's relationship with UK MEPs and UK members of the Committee of the Regions; reporting on European Parliament (EP) plenary sessions and Committee meetings; overseeing key co-decided legislative dossiers active in the EP; advising UKRep and Whitehall Departments on EP handling strategies; co-ordinating the UK's handling of EP questions (written and oral); co-ordinating visits to the EP by Ministers and senior officials; and negotiating for the UK in the General Affairs Group in Council.

Nicola Bresner (seconded from WEFO) began a Structural Traineeship on the 1st March 2006 at DG Regio, European Commission, working in the United Kingdom and Latvia Unit. Her brief is to work with desk officers in the UK team to provide the Commission's response to England's strategic framework for its 2007-2013 European Structural Fund Programmes at a national and regional level ensuring that the development of the programmes are in line with the Community Strategic Guidelines, the Lisbon Agenda, the UK's National Reform Programme and Regional Development Strategies.

Caerwyn Williams recently returned from a secondment as a Structural Trainee (October-February) to Lisbon Strategy and eEurope Unit, DG Information Society and Media, European Commission. His main duties involved briefing and drafting speeches for the Director General and Commissioner Reding on the i2010 Initiative. He conducted research into member states' National Reform Programmes to see how these incorporate ICT and Broadband prepared reports on how well the Member States were adhering to the Commission's objectives on ICT and Broadband development. 'i2010 - A European Information Society for growth and employment' is the Commission's strategy to encourage the development of the digital economy, regulatory instruments, research and partnerships.

Notes:

Structural Trainees are recruited twice a year for five months each time. The UK has 14 Structural Trainee places administered by Cabinet Office. The Structural Trainee Programme refers to what was previously known as the Stagiaire Scheme. The term structural trainee was introduced to differentiate between public entry to the scheme via the Blue Book (mostly graduates) and those entering from member states' civil service.

Seconded National Experts can be recruited from a minimum of six months to a maximum of four years. Candidates must have at least 3 years experience in a relevant post and have a working knowledge of 2 Official EU languages.

Rhodri Morgan AM  
First Minister

EEAC First Minister's Report

| Date          | Assembly Minister/ Official/ Division          | Event  | Objectives   | Outcomes  |
|---------------|--|--|--|---|
| 15 March 2006 | Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport | Commonwealth Games, Melbourne                                      | Represent the Welsh Assembly Government at the Commonwealth Games                  |   |
| 16 March 2006 | Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning   | Meeting with Latvian Teachers and Education experts visiting Wales | To develop experience and information of the bi-lingual education system in Wales. | Strengthened the relationship between Wales and Latvia; facilitate contact between Welsh and Latvian educationalists and institutions; enhance Wales’ international profile and contribute to wider UK foreign policy objectives. |
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| 17 March 2006 | Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning     | EARLALL (General Assembly, Granada                          | The Minister attended the EARLALL General Assembly, in her capacity as Vice President of the Association. Membership of EARLALL provides a valuable opportunity for European regions to work together on strategies and programmes for lifelong learning. Wales has contributed two papers, one updating members on key EU policy developments, and one on key lifelong learning developments within Wales. | The Minister's attendance and status at these meetings further cements relationships with the other EARLALL regions and provides an opportunity for raising the profile of Wales within Europe. Through membership of EARLALL we are also undertaking work on a number of collaborative projects with EARLALL partner regions. The Association works to influence the Commission on important policy issues and highlight the important role that regional governments have to play within European policy. |
| 27 March 2006 | Minister for Environment, Planning & Countryside | Visit to a municipal waste incinerator<br><br>AEB Amsterdam | To acquaint the Minister with the operation of a waste incineration plant and the community and other issues surrounding it.  | to enable him to take such matters into account in the implementation of the Wales waste strategy, particularly in view of the need to divert waste from landfill disposal.   |
| 29 March 2006 | First Minister                                   | Visit of the Swedish Ambassador                             | His Excellency Staffan Carllson, Swedish Ambassador to the UK, is visiting Cardiff, to meet representatives of companies with Swedish links.  | An opportunity to discuss cultural and business links with Sweden.  |

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| 29 March 2006 | First Minister                                     | Visit by a group of London based international journalists                               | The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is bringing a group of international journalists to Cardiff to visit the new Assembly building, Millennium Centre and Cardiff Bay barrage. The group is also meeting the First Minister. | A courtesy call to raise Wales' profile overseas.   |
| 31 March 06   | Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside | Visit by the Minister for Fisheries, Ghana   | The Minister wishes to look at aquaculture in Wales. This will involve visiting a fish food farm and Swansea University.   | A courtesy call   |
| 3 April 2006  | Minister for Environment, Planning & Countryside   | Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development Steering Committee, Brussels | To represent Wales as Chair of nrg4SD Europe and prepare for the General Assembly the following day which will vote on the adoption of the Minority Language and Sustainable Development policy paper tabled by Wales.       | Approval of the policy paper at the Steering Committee and contribution to decisions about the future of the Network programme. |