

COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS EUR-02-02(p.1)

Date	20 March 2002
Time	9.30am
Venue	Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly Building
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 European and External Affairs Committee last met on Wednesday 13th February 2002. Developments since that time are listed below.

Council of the European Union

4. Sue Essex AM, Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs, Culture and Environment, attended the Environment Council meeting with the UK delegation in Brussels on 4 March. The main issue discussed was the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and it was decided the EU would ratify the agreement shortly. In the margins of the Council the Minister met M. J-P Verstringe, acting Director-General of the Environment Directorate and discussed issues of environmental concern to Wales and the current Commissions thinking on the Governance proposals. Ms Essex also had discussions with the Wales European Centre on progress with sustainable development.

Ministerial Visits

Visit of Basque Minister for Education

5. Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Life-long Learning, hosted a delegation from the Basque country (Department of Education) to Wales on 13th and 14th February 2002. The

delegation was headed by Anjeles Iztueta Azkeu, Basque Minister for Education. The purpose of the visit was to share their experiences on the provision of early years education in the Basque country and to learn more about the Welsh Education system (in particular the linguistic problems encountered). They were also interested in vocational education, lifelong learning and pupil/teacher exchanges. The delegation also met Jenny Randerson AM, Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language.

6. During their visit, the delegation visited Fairoak Nursery School, Tongwynlais

Primary School and Ysgol Gyfun Llanharri. They also met ACCAC, Estyn, the

Welsh Language Board, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, Wales Pre-School

Playgroups Association and the National Childminding Association.

7. Arrangements are in hand for Jane Davidson AM to visit the Basque region

during the last week of May. She has also agreed to speak at a conference entitled, "Challenges of Education for the next decade in the European Union" that the delegation has organised in San Sebastian on 5th/6th July. Jenny Randerson AM is also visiting the Basque region on 9-12 April.

Lorient Festival 2002 (The Year of Wales)

8. Jenny Randerson AM attended the official launch of the Lorient

Festival 2002 (The Year of Wales) on 15th March 2002 at the Stade de France

in Paris. During her visit to Paris, she also met with her counterparts from the

French Ministries of Sport and Culture, and hosted a lunchtime reception at

the British Council for journalists and prominent Welsh people based in Paris.

European Events

Wales Week

9. Wales European Centre (WEC) organised their third annual "Wales Week" in

Brussels commencing on 25th February 2002. A number of cultural and

artistic events were held during the week.

10. As part of this week I attended a WEC reception at the European Parliament in Brussels on Wednesday 27th February, I myself, and the week's patron, Vice-President of the European Commission, Neil Kinnock spoke. Cardiff's bid to become the "European City of Culture in 2008" was launched in Brussels during the week..
11. Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Rural Affairs, attended a lunch at the British Ambassador's Residence in Brussels on Friday 1st March. The dinner was hosted by the UK Ambassador to Belgium and aimed to promote Welsh meat during "Wales Week". The dinner was also attended by Commissioner Neil Kinnock and other influential figures.

Annual Wales European Information Network Conference

12. The Wales European Information Network held their third annual conference

Entitled, "Communicating Europe" in Margam Park on Friday 22nd February 2002. Guest speakers included Eluned Morgan MEP, Rt Hon Peter Hain MP (Minister for Europe), Jonathan Faull, (Director General Press and Communication Spokesman at the European Commission) and Des Clifford (Welsh Assembly). The aim of the conference was to improve information and communication about the European Union in Wales.

Wales Forum on European Affairs

13. The Wales Forum on European Affairs was held in Llandudno on 15 February. The Forum was organised in conjunction with the WLGA and discussed the White Paper on European Governance. Jerome Vignon, the Head of the European Commission's Governance team attended and commented that the way the Assembly was debating the issue and including civic society in Wales was unique across the Union. Organisations represented included: WLGA; Wales Council for Voluntary Action; Cardiff University; ELWA; Wales TUC and BBC Wales. Some very important views were expressed at the Forum which will feed into the final response to the Commission at the end of March. This issue will be discussed further at Item 3.

St Patrick's Day Reception

14. I attended a St Patrick's Day reception in Brunel House, Cardiff, on 19 March which was hosted by the Consulate General of Ireland.

Enlargement Issues

Enlargement Working Group

15. The Enlargement Working Group met for the second time on Wednesday 16th January 2002, the

outcomes of this meeting were discussed at the last Committee in February. Since then, an information paper has been presented to the Economic Development Committee on 6th March highlighting these outcomes.

16. The next meeting of the Group is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 15th May 2002.

Czech Republic

17. 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 Embassy is being planned. The football

match is scheduled to take place on the afternoon of the 27th March – details

are to be confirmed.

18. His Excellency Pavel Seifter, Ambassador for the Czech Republic, will be

attending the national match at the Millennium Stadium. This will be the

Ambassador's third visit to Wales within a year – his aim being to develop

links between Wales and the Czech Republic.

Slovenian visit

19. Initiated and sponsored by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, a cross-party group

of six Slovenian MPs visited the National Assembly as part of a week's study

tour of the UK. The visit included a tour of the Assembly, and lunch with

members. A specific request of their programme was to look at the UK

experience of dealing with Foot & Mouth. This was facilitated by a meeting

with DEFRA's Chief Veterinary Officer for South Wales that also incorporated

a visit to a previously infected farm.

External Events/Visits

St David's Day visit to New York

20. On 26th February 2002 I attended a reception in Regent's Park, London, which was hosted by William Farish, Ambassador for the United States of America. We also met the following day, at the United States Embassy in London, to discuss a number of issues on the Welsh-American relationship..
21. From 1-3 March I visited New York for a series of events to mark St David's Day and promote Wales for tourism, trade, inward investment, higher education, film and cultural purposes. While there I announced the setting up of a modest number of Wales International multi-purpose centres which will, in time, provide a focus for business services and be a visible Assembly Government-led Welsh presence in a number of key locations across the globe. The first of these will be in New York and we expect to open it in September.

Namibian Parliamentary Delegation

22. A delegation from the Parliament of Namibia visited the Assembly from 6-8 March. The delegation consisted of, amongst others, the Hon. Kandi Nehova, Chairman of the National Council who is also the current President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), and his wife Mrs Shaduka Nehova. The aim of the visit was for the Namibian delegation to gain an insight into the workings of the Assembly and meet representatives from the CPA Branch Executive, as Namibia will be hosting the 2002 CPA Conference.
23. I met the delegation on Wednesday 6th March and also attended a dinner held in honour of the CPA in the Park Thistle Hotel, Cardiff the same evening.

Canada-UK Inter-Parliamentary Association

24. At the request of, and sponsored by, the FCO, a twelve-strong delegation from both houses of the Canadian Parliament visited the Assembly on 14th February as part of a visit to the UK that also included time in Westminster and Edinburgh. The visit to the Assembly included a lunch with the Presiding Officer and a tour of the Assembly that included meetings with officials from the Record of Proceedings and Translation Services.

Parliament of the Kingdom of Lesotho

25. Three Senators and one official visited the Assembly over a period of three days as part of a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association / Presiding Office bilateral visit. The visit included meetings with Members and officials, the CPA Executive Committee, representatives from Dolen Cymru, the Honorary Consul for Lesotho and the Minister for Health and Social Services. The visit built upon previous links made through the CPA. Lesotho is due to hold elections for its National Assembly this May. The elections will increase representation from 80 to 120 Members and for the first time, include 40 Members elected on a PR basis. This visit provided the delegation to make a comparative study in preparation for a period of change.

Ontario Provincial Parliament

26. This visit was made at the request of the Ontario Parliament. The visit to the Assembly was part of a wider study tour of the UK by seven MPPs and one official of their Legislation Committee. This was essentially a benchmarking visit to compare and contrast procedures in support of a review of house services. The visit included an inter-active session with the Legislation Committee, both sides gaining an insight into each others working methods.

Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR)

27. As First Minister, I was recently approached by the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) about a forthcoming UK Members Meeting. I invited the UK members group to hold their next meeting in Cardiff. However, arrangements have been made to hold this meeting in the Isle of White but though I hope we might see the group in Wales for a future meeting. Officials are exploring further how we can make the most of our membership of this potentially influential European network: I will report to a future meeting of the committee on this.

Compliance

28. 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

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

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