

EUROPEAN AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE EUR-02-02(p.5)

Date: 20 March 2002

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly Building.

Title: European Regions with Legislative Powers

The following Member States of the European Union have some kind of directly elected regional government system: UK, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

The group called the "Regions with Legislative Powers" draws its participants from regions where there exists a directly elected chamber of government, below the State level, *that has power to legislate or to take significant executive decisions*. The key factor is having a direct electoral mandate. The organisation excludes regional arrangements that are not based on directly elected chambers (some countries have regional councils comprised of political appointees: these are excluded from RWLP).

The RWLP group is a loose affair. There is no formal procedure for joining and its membership has emerged naturally over the last couple of years.

Wales fits comfortably into the group. On a crude analysis of powers the Assembly would probably feature in the top half behind the German and Belgian regions, Scotland, Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia, but ahead of the other Spanish regions, the Italians, Austrians and Swedes.

"Subsidiarity" is the principle that decisions should be taken at the level of government closest to the people affected by them. The word gained currency in English around the time of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The Committee of the Regions was set up to give institutional expression to the concept amid talk of a "Europe of the Regions". By the end of the 90's this optimism had dimmed and some of the stronger regions felt the EU machinery did not offer them proper engagement. The Regions With Legislative Powers group grew out of this malaise.

An initial scoping meeting was hosted by the Flanders government in Brussels in September 2000. The First Minister attended. The first properly constituted Regions with Legislative Powers annual conference was held in Barcelona in November 2000. The First Minister attended. Wales has been associated with the RWLP from day one.

A small group of seven regions – self-selecting – produced the Flanders declaration in May 2001. This group became the de facto steering group of the RWLP. As a result of lobbying in Brussels, the Assembly joined the steering group in July 2001 in time to influence the shape of the second annual

RWLP conference in Liege in November 2001.

First Minister was, at the last minute, unable to attend the Liege conference through illness but he was represented at official level and his contribution was entered onto the official record. The papers associated with the Liege conference, including the FM's remarks, were tabled for the Committee's meeting in Brussels on 5 December 2001.

The third RWLP conference will be in Tuscany in November 2002 under the chair of Minister-President Claudio Martini (who, incidentally, is a Committee of the Regions delegate to the Future of Europe Convention). Wales is on the steering group that will prepare the agenda and a draft declaration for the conference. This will most likely take the form of a contribution to the Future of Europe debate.

European and External Affairs Division March 2002