

## EUROPEAN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Date:	25 March 2004
Time:	09:00 am
Venue:	Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly for Wales
Title:	EU Co-ordination

### Purpose

1. To outline the co-ordination of European Union (EU) related issues in the Welsh Assembly Government.

### Summary

2. The overall aim is to work effectively alongside the UK Government to ensure that it takes into account the interests of Wales when formulating its EU negotiating strategy. In pursuit of that goal we prioritise and engage in the areas of greatest concern within the resources available.

- European and External Affairs Division (EEAD) takes the lead in co-ordinating the Assembly Government's approach to the EU. EEAD manages policy development, project management and trade promotion.
- Other policy Departments lead on EU issues which relate to their policy remits.
- The First Minister leads on EU and international activities and individual Ministers take the lead on specific issues according to their portfolios.

# Action

3. Members are invited to note the arrangements.

# Background

4. Although relations with the EU are reserved to the UK Government, many of the powers that have been devolved contain a substantial EU component and impact on everyday business. This is particularly the case for Regional Policy, Agriculture and the Environment. As a consequence, the Assembly became a direct stakeholder in EU policy developments and is responsible for the transposition of EC Directives that fall within its remit.

5. Furthermore, EU policies and decisions that are reserved to the UK Government can also have major consequences for Wales, and the Assembly Government is often well placed to advise on the impact of EU policy in Wales. It therefore attaches importance to ensuring that relevant EU decisions and policies reflect the interests of Wales.

6. There are three main strands to this EU related work; internally within the Assembly Government, more widely within the UK and directly with EU institutions.

## Working within the Assembly Government

7. EEAD is the division with responsibility for co-ordination of European and international issues. The Division's aim is to ensure that Welsh interests are taken into account both at the UK and European level and to ensure that Wales benefits from the opportunities arising from the UK's membership of the EU.

8. While EEAD deals with a broad range of EU policy issues it is for each Division to lead on their individual policy areas. Mainstreaming EU business within Assembly policy divisions is a key objective and EEAD supports this process through, for example, the European Networking Group. This is an official level group that inter alia, aims to increase awareness of EU issues and sources of information, provide a forum for discussion and consider the opportunities to influence EU policy making. Similarly, the First Minister is responsible for the relationship with Europe generally while individual Ministers take the lead for policies falling within their portfolios.

9. EEAD acts as the primary contact point for EU related documents received from the European

Commission; Cabinet Office; Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and other Government Departments. The Division receives a voluminous and diverse range of communications, such as telegrams from diplomatic representatives, Official Journals of the EC etc. These are distributed quickly to the appropriate EU departmental contacts in other divisions for further consideration and action.

10. EEAD also monitors the transposition of EU directives by liaising with policy divisions and the Office of the Counsel General to ensure that legislation to which the UK has agreed is implemented properly and on time. The degree of the responsibility for transposition varies depending on the particular measures being implemented.

#### Working with the UK

11. EEAD acts as the principal general point of contact on European matters in all dealings with the UK Government. Regular contact by all policy divisions with opposite numbers in Whitehall across all policy areas is essential to facilitate this process.

13. The relationship between the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government on EU issues is governed by the Concordat on co-ordination of European Union policy issues. This specifies three objectives:

- To provide full involvement of Ministers and officials in policy formulation, negotiation and implementation of devolved issues;
- To ensure that UK can negotiate effectively with other Member States, the Commission and the European Parliament, in pursuit of a single UK policy line which reflects the diversity of the UK, but with the flexibility that fast-moving negotiations require; and
- To ensure EU obligations are implemented with consistency. For example reporting on the progress of the transposition of European Directives and encouraging policy divisions to complete the Welsh legislation on time.

14. The Assembly Government has a standing invitation to attend weekly meetings chaired by the European Secretariat of the Cabinet Office to cohere European policy across the UK. Officials attend when there are agenda items of interest.

15. At Ministerial level, the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe (JMC(E)) that has recently merged with the Ministerial Group on European Co-operation (MINECOR) brings Devolved Administration First Ministers together with Departmental Ministers to cohere policy at a Ministerial level. The Foreign Secretary chairs JMC(E). Normally, JMC(E) meets around four times a year, usually during the run-up to European Council summits. It can meet more often when business demands.

16. The Welsh Assembly Government is a member of the UK Presidency co-ordinators network charged

with preparations for the 2005 presidency. We are also members of an ad hoc group set up to consider British Activities to mark this year's centenary of the "Entente Cordiale".

## Working with Brussels

17. The Welsh Assembly Government's EU Office in Brussels opened in 2000 and was recently strengthened from the autumn of 2003. It represents Welsh EU interests in Brussels and aims to ensure the European Commission is aware of Welsh interests and concerns. The office works closely with the UK Permanent Representation to the EU and its officials are granted diplomatic status. This facilitates effective working in the Brussels environment and reflects the close co-operation among officials from different parts of the UK. Desk officers attend selected Council working groups as part of the UK team and prepare the way for Ministers to attend Council meetings on a similar basis.

18. The EU office provides day-to-day intelligence and analysis of EU policies as well as contributing to the shaping of the Assembly Government's longer term strategic thinking about Europe. The office provides on the spot advice to Ministers and officials in Brussels and is generally open to sharing information and perspectives with all-comers from Wales who are interested in EU affairs.

19. Brussels is a convenient meeting point for representatives from a large number of European regions and the office plays a key role in developing and maintaining these relationships. Although the prime focus of the office is on policy, it also has responsibility for maintaining the overall profile of Wales in Brussels and undertakes selective promotional material.

## Financial Implications

20. There are no financial implications directly attributable to this paper.

## Contact Point

Russell Pope EEAD Ext 5618.