

PWYLLGOR MATERION EWROPEAIDD

Date : 9 March, 2000

Venue: Committee Room 1

Time: 9.30-12.30

Title: International Relations And The Profile Of Wales

Purpose

1. To provide background on Wales' international partnerships and to report on activities in hand to raise the profile and influence of Wales overseas

Timing

2. This paper is for information only and is therefore not time constrained.

The International Relations Unit

3. The International Relations Unit was established in May last year to provide a focal point for international matters within the executive of the National Assembly and to take forward one of the Cabinet's priorities to "develop the profile of Wales in Europe and internationally". In addition, it is responsible for maintaining and developing Wales' international partnerships. To help it fulfil its responsibilities, the Unit has established a Co-ordinating Group representing the key public sector organisations with international interests or involved in international activities – the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board, the Arts Council of Wales, the British Council (Wales), the Welsh Local Government Association and the Wales European Centre.

International Links

4. Since 1990 Wales has been developing links with regions in Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan. We have links with the "Four-Motor" regions of Baden-Wurttemberg (Germany), Catalunya (Spain), Lombardy (Italy), and Rhone-Alpes (France); with Oita (Japan), New South Wales (Australia) and Ontario (Canada). All are supported by formal agreements – Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) - except Oita and Rhone Alpes.

Wales' Relations with the Four Motors Region of Europe

5. An early underlying objective in these relationships was to give some extra edge to our economic development work - inward investment and overseas trade. This was to complement the work of the WDA in attracting inward investment and the then Welsh Office's activity in increasing trade opportunities for Welsh companies. The agreements sought to encourage business joint ventures, and co-operation in research and development projects; but they also specify collaboration in a range of other areas such as health care, social services, education, the environment, cultural issues etc. A copy of the MOU with Baden-Wurttemberg is at Annex 1. The MOU with Lombardy and Catalunya are similar.

6. When these relationships were originally developed there was a fair amount of activity but this dwindled in the mid 90s due to a combination of factors, including pressures on resources, for what can be very labour intensive work and other, higher priorities. Over the last 18 months, greater efforts have been made to re-establish the links with the individual Four Motor regions and to maintain Wales' profile within the Group. The MOU tend to be expressed in general terms and with hindsight, are considered to be over-ambitious in terms of what can realistically be achieved. We have taken the view that the MOU should be reviewed with the objective of focusing them more realistically on areas which are likely to offer more benefit to both Wales and the relevant partner region. Our intention is to try to work more closely with the Four Motors as a Group in those areas of activity in which all five regions have an interest, and work on a bilateral basis with individual Regions in those areas of interest and benefit to Wales and the other region e.g. on language issues with Catalunya.

The Current Position with the Four Motors

Baden-Wurttemberg

7. The formal link with Baden-Wurttemberg has been maintained through a joint working group arrangements. A meeting held in September 1998 agreed a further programme of collaborative activity. We are currently in the process of establishing a new mechanism for reviewing progress against the work programme. The programme includes co-operation across a range of areas e.g. in the field of education through such activities as partnership between schools and student exchanges, co-operation in the performing arts industry, exchange of experienced and knowledge in the fields of social housing, health promotion, sustainable development, and transport policy. It has also been agreed to consider which of the activities should continue to be pursued on a bilateral, as opposed to Four Motors Group basis.

8. Rhodri Morgan represented the National Assembly at a European Conference on Federalism and Regionalism in Europe hosted by the President of Baden-Wurttemberg in Stuttgart in May last year, and Wales participated in an associated Festival of the Regions in the city.

Catalunya

9. Reciprocal visits by officials have secured agreement with the Catalan Regional Government to review the MOU with a view to re-focusing our joint activities on areas where we can realistically expect to achieve results. We and the Government in Catalunya are currently undertaking a stocktake of activities to identify areas of mutual benefit. We hope shortly to be in a position to consider a revised MOU. The Secretary of State and the First Secretary have been invited to visit Catalunya and other devolved regions in Spain to discuss issues of common interest. This would enable us to progress our relationship with Catalunya as one of the Four Motor Regions, with whom we have a great deal of common interest.

Lombardy

10. Contact with the regional government has been re-established. There has been no activity of note since the MOU was signed in 1994 except for the establishment of the WDA office in Milan to encourage inward investment, which has been quite successful. We hope to pursue further the basis of the future relationship with Lombardy following the Regional Government elections later this year (The British Council in Milan is keen to work with us to raise the profile of Wales in Milan, and we are considering the possibility of a range of events to be held in late Autumn 2000 – see also paragraph 25 below).

Rhone-Alpes

11. Historically, for a number of reasons, there has not been any formal agreement with Rhone Alpes, and little by way of joint activity or collaboration. Discussions have been held at official level over the past 9 months and agreement in principle secured to developing a more formal partnership between the Assembly and the regional government in Rhone-Alpes providing specific areas of mutual interest and benefit can be identified. We expect to pursue this further during a Wales Week being planned for Lyon in May 2000, associated with a trade mission being led by Rhodri Morgan.

Working with the Four Motors Collectively

12. Wales is already working alongside and in partnership with the Four Motor Regions collectively in a number of areas and we are already involved in a number of established Four Motor Committees, such as the Committee for Higher Education and Research (CHER), the Interregional Working Group on Nature Conservation, Internetworking the Communication Systems of the Regional Administrations Working Group. Wales has recently been invited to become a member of the Four Motor Economic Development Group which is expected to lead to collaboration in a number of projects in the economic development field – work has already started on an ecommerce project (the Euro Ecom project); and we have joined the associated Quality Working Group.

Other Regional Links

Ontario

13. A Memorandum of Understanding with Ontario was signed in October 1992 and stems from its associate membership of the Four Motors. In recent years Ontario has had virtually no contact of any substance with the Group due to budgetary constraints . The link with Wales has been largely dormant. We will keep under review the potential benefit from re-establishing the link.

Oita Prefecture

14. Wales' oldest regional partnership, since 1988 although there is no formal agreement. The link has been maintained though the level of activity is not great, the most significant activity being the exchange of business people between the two regions in 1990, 1995 and 1998.

New South Wales

15. In place since the original MOU was signed in June 1995, which outlines a range of potential areas for co-operation. The MOU was reaffirmed in October 1998 when Peter Hain led a trade mission to Australia. The relationship with New South Wales has developed well in a number of areas particularly in education, science & technology, and the arts. A delegation comprising educationalists, academics and arts industry representatives from Wales visited NSW in November last year.

Future relationships

16. Devolution and the establishment of the National Assembly has generated increased interest in Wales, and there have been tentative approaches from a number of regions in Europe about developing links with Wales, though none have yet progressed to discussions about formal agreements.

17. The establishment of formal agreements does impose additional burdens on limited resources and requires a high level of commitment from across the range of the Assembly's functions if they are to be more than a series of formal documents. We should therefore consider carefully the benefits to be obtained from entering into new agreements and, if necessary, be prepared to be selective in the partnerships we choose to pursue.

Raising the profile of Wales

18. There have been a number of sectoral-based surveys by bodies such as the WDA and WTB but no general survey of the image of Wales. The evidence that is available suggests, and the general consensus is that Wales does not enjoy a high profile overseas, and certainly much less than Scotland and Ireland. It is also the case that the image of Wales, particularly overseas, is often distorted, or out of date. A considerable amount of work on developing a corporate approach was undertaken by the Branding Wales group involving a number of private and public sector bodies. The issue was debated in plenary in the Assembly on 15 December, during which the Assembly agreed the composite motion replicated at Annex 2. Consideration is now being given to addressing the action identified in the motion, including

the summit of key agencies responsible for promoting Wales proposed by the then First Secretary. A number of measures are already being implemented:

Database of Welsh international activities and interests

19. There is no comprehensive record of Welsh activities and interests overseas. We are developing a computerised database within the International Relations Unit to log all such information, which will be made available to all bodies with responsibility for promoting the image of Wales.

Communications/marketing package

20. The International Relations Unit and the Communications Directorate of the Assembly are developing a package of promotional/marketing material about Wales. The look, tone and style of this project will position Wales as a vibrant, outward-looking and ambitious country. It will reflect Wales' rich history and culture but, at the same time, will seek to overcome a number of outdated and industrial images that have become associated with it. It will show what Wales, as an emerging democracy, has to offer the modern world. The promotional material will present Wales as a premier location in which to invest, manufacture, live, study and build a professional and personal life, in keeping with the objective identified in the Better Wales document. The target audience will be influencers and decision makers abroad, including politicians, government officials, industrialists, chief executive officers, inward investors, VIPs and senior journalists; also, ex-patriate Welsh people, members of Welsh societies overseas and UK influencers such as senior journalists with an interest in Wales and the evolving of a different constitutional pattern in the UK and Wales' unique place in it.

21. There will be three initial products: an interactive CD Rom, an information pack for journalists and a high quality hard bound book. They will be highly synergistic. They will be used as stand-alone items, in various mixes, or together – all promoting the same message to different audiences. The core editorial content can then be rolled out for other uses, such as exhibition material, powerpoint presentations, videos and general promotional items. The promotional items have been chosen to reflect the best of both traditional print formats and cutting edge technology – and will in themselves act as positioning tools.

22. This is a leading-edge project, which aims to build relationships with key members of the target audience through online communication. Users of the CD will be invited to register online for more information, which will enable us to provide targeted and up-to-date material that is relevant to each sector, and to each individual, track usage and carefully tailor content to user demands. The CD Rom will be produced using the latest broadcast technology, with high resolution images, audio and video clips. It will interact through the internet to provide a seamless join for users, allowing us effectively to expand and update the content of the CD Rom at any time. It will link to a website and provide a controllable gateway to other online resources such as websites of other public sector bodies such as WDA and WTB. We will also be able to monitor use of the CD Rom, and evaluate whether we are satisfying information needs. This will go a considerable way to meet the 'website' element of the

plenary motion agreed on 15 December.

23. The promotional material will be distributed widely – Embassies, Consulates, British Council offices overseas, Welsh societies and also by agencies such as WDA and WTB. The package is expected to be available by the end of April.

Overseas events/activities

24. We have already taken steps to use the programme of trade missions to raise the profile of Wales by putting on displays about Wales and maximising publicity locally, and the missions to South Africa and the Gulf in the latter part of 1999 were particularly successful in that regard. We are putting together poster exhibitions for use by British Council offices, British Consulates and Welsh Societies overseas.

25. We are drawing up a schedule of overseas events to examine possible participation by Wales. The Co-ordinating Group will be considering which ones will provide the greatest scope to raise the profile of Wales and the extent to which they will contribute to realising the objectives of the Group members. These include a "Wales Week" in Rhone-Alpes in May; a Welsh event in Milan in October/November this year in collaboration with the British Council office there; participation in a "Wales in California" event in September 2001, being organised by the Welsh Society there. We are looking to develop a tailored exhibition/display which could be used at such events. Support has recently been provided for a Welsh Festival of Culture and Education in Brunei at the end of last year and for the Wales in Brussels 2000 events at the beginning of March

Welsh societies

26. There is a world-wide network of Welsh societies which could provide a valuable resource in promoting Wales. We will be looking to develop contact with individual societies, and the production of regular newsletters.

The way forward

27. We believe there is scope for further collaboration between bodies with an interest in promoting Wales, particularly in the public sector, to develop a more coherent and co-ordinated strategy and action plan, within available resources, to raise the profile of Wales. We believe the measures outlined above, and the ongoing work of the Co-ordinating Group (with some private sector involvement as appropriate), provide a sound platform for taking that forward.

Compliance

28. International Relations activity is undertaken under the powers of Sections 40 and 85 of the Government of Wales Act in conjunction with Sections 7 and 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982. The relevant powers have been delegated to the First Secretary. Relevant powers have also been

delegated to officials. There are no issues of regularity or propriety.

Contact point

International Relations Unit.