

EUROPEAN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Date: 29 April 2004

Time: 09:30 am

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4, National Assembly for Wales

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. Members to note the content of the report.

Background

3. The Committee last met on 25th March. This paper provides an update.

First Minister's International Activities

- 30th & 31st March. Visit of Estonian Ambassador, Her Excellency Ms Kaja Tael. This visit followed on from the visit I made to Estonia (and Latvia) in September 2003 with the WTI trade mission. The Estonians were interested in discussing co-operation in the academic and cultural sectors, particularly in the field of protecting and promoting minority languages. The visitors also expressed an interest in trade issues, the management of structural funds, National Parks and the regeneration of former mining areas.
- 31st March. Visit of Mr David Johnson, Deputy Head of Mission, US Embassy. David Johnson has been recently appointed and visited Wales to introduce himself and gain an understanding of devolution issues. We discussed the benefits of devolution to Wales and current Welsh Assembly Government policy initiatives.

Other Issues

- White Paper on Europe. On 22 April the Government published a White Paper on Europe. The document is intended to inform Members of Parliament, the public and the media of European Union issues to be addressed

in the coming year and the Government's position on these issues. This is the first version and the Government intends to publish a similar White Paper annually. I have had sight of the document and believe it is useful and informative. The document is available from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Website.

- JMC(E) 27th April. I was unable to attend due to the clash with First Minister's Questions. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented at official level. The Working Time Directive and the Presentation of European Policy were the agenda items.
- Euro Roundtable. 19th April. The Rt Hon Paul Boateng MP Chief Secretary of the Treasury visited Wales to discuss issues surrounding UK membership of the European Single Currency with members of the business community. The visit is part of a nationwide tour and Mr Boateng has already held similar discussions in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Wales Euro Preparations Committee (WEPC). At the last European and External Affairs Committee meeting members asked me to update them on the work of WEPC. The WEPC has met on three occasions since it was formed by the Secretary of State for Wales in July 2003. The last meeting took place on 8th March 2004. It consists of representatives from the main economic sectors of the Welsh economy and includes organisations such as the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses, Consumer Council, Farmers Unions, Wales Tourist Board and Welsh language Board. The Welsh Assembly Government is represented by the Finance Minister the Permanent Secretary and myself.
- To date WEPC has agreed a Welsh language policy in the event of a changeover and identified a number of Welsh groups which may require particular attention in terms of communication needs. These include vulnerable groups such as the blind, geographically isolated citizens in rural areas and consumers. HMT Treasury have acknowledged the concerns of WEPC and will address these concerns in the national changeover plan. One member of the Committee has been invited to join a Treasury Working Group on consumer issues. A brief report on the activities of the Committee was published in the "Seventh Report on Euro Preparations, November 2003".
- As part of its activities WEPC has reviewed a number of HM Treasury publications and fed back comments to HM Treasury for incorporation into future publications. Reviews have included "The Third Outline National Changeover Plan", "Euro Compatibility: A Managers Guide" and the "Integrated Communications Plan". Feedback so far has been positive. A further report on WEPC activities will be printed in the HM Treasury Spring 2004 Report on Euro Preparations.
- The Secretary of State has requested an update on Welsh Assembly Government planning specifically. European and External Affairs Divisions has the lead in this area and officials have been working with HM Treasury to produce a high level plan designed to ensure that the principle issues involved in a changeover have been considered and any potential "show stoppers" identified. At this stage we believe that the Welsh Assembly Government can accomplish a changeover within the timetable set by HM Treasury. The Welsh Assembly Government changeover plan is due to be completed and reviewed by autumn.
- The euro presently impacts on the Welsh Assembly Government, for example, CADW will be accepting the euro at all sites from Easter 2004 and CAPM will be able to pay grants in euros from early 2005 after a new IT system is introduced. In conjunction with these general activities we have a small pilot programme to look at IT compatibility.
- The Welsh Assembly Government officials are engaged with central planning groups. These are the Treasury's Euro Co-ordinators Group, Communications Group and IT Group. I attend meeting of Ministers with Euro

responsibilities at HM treasury on a regular basis.

- A more detailed report and presentation on Welsh Assembly Government euro changeover preparations can be produced if Committee members require.
- The Chancellor in his budget speech on 17th of March stated that the Government would not make a decision on membership of the Single Currency this year. He also stated that the decision whether or not to re-evaluate the five tests would be reviewed annually. This means that given the timetable, while it is possible that the euro may be introduced by 6 April 2008 the most likely "earliest" date is 6 April 2009. In this case the 36-month changeover period would not begin until July 2006. This is of course subject to meeting the five economic tests and a positive referendum result.

Rhodri Morgan AM
First Minister

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Date	Assembly Minister/ Official/ Division	Event	Objectives	Outcomes
15th March 2004	Minister for Environment, Planning & Countryside	Visit to Ireland	To view the management of Bovine TB in Badgers and the ongoing research programme.	The Irish experience will be evaluated and where appropriate incorporated into Welsh Assembly Government policy.
30 th & 31 st March 2004	First Minister, Christine Gwyther AM	Visit of HE Ms Kaja Tael, Estonian Ambassador	<p>The purpose of the visit was to explore possible areas for future co-operation between Wales and Estonia and follows on from the visit made to Estonia (and Latvia) in September 2003 with the WTI trade mission.</p> <p>The Ambassador met representatives from the WDA as well as Welsh Assembly Government officials from European and External Affairs (including WTI), Welsh European Funding Office and Culture Division.</p>	Successful visit. Useful discussions held and areas for future bilateral co-operation now being considered in more detail. The Ambassador expressed satisfaction with the visit and that it had been

				extremely worthwhile.
31 st March 2004	First Minister	Visit of David Johnson, Deputy Head of Mission US Embassy	<p>David Johnson has recently been appointed to this post. He wished to make appropriate contacts and to understand the workings and policies of the Assembly Government.</p> <p>Howard Perlow, Minister/Counsellor Political Affairs and Greg Gardner Welsh Liaison Officer accompanied Mr Johnson.</p>	Established contact with this senior American official and laid the ground for future contact and co-operation.
1 st April 2004	Minister for Health and Social Services	Visit from representatives of the Malaysian Ministry for Health.	This was a fact-finding trip to the UK focusing on UK telehealth implementation. The trip provided the visitors with an opportunity to interact with various sectors of the Department for Health and NHS.	Positive reaction from visitors who were appreciative of the help extended by Welsh Assembly Government Ministers and officials.
4 th to 6 th April 2004	Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services	Visit to European Commission Brussels	Visited the offices of the UK Permanent Representation to the EU (UKRep) to explore UK positions on structural funds reform and the EU budget for the period 2007-2013. The Finance Minister also called on the European Commission to bring to their attention the WAG's work on spatial planning and sustainable development.	The UKRep visit provided useful information on UK negotiating positions. Calls on the Commission illuminated possible linkages between cohesion policy and spatial planning and may result in the WAG's attending EU presidency sponsored spatial planning seminars.
7 th April	Minister for Education and Life Long Learning	Visit to Baden Wurttemberg	<p>Met with Secretary of State Helmut Rau, Minister for Youth and Education and Sport to discuss the German approach to education and educational links with Wales. The visit included a tour of the Baden Wurttemberg Academy for teacher training.</p> <p>Met with Professor Her Peter Frankenburg regarding an invitation the Minister has received to attend a conference of the Four Motor Regions on 3rd May.</p>	Outcomes not known at present.

7 th & 8 th April 2004	Minister for Economic Development and Transport	Visit to Irish Government	To discuss Irish-Welsh electricity interconnectivity, Broadband role out, Irish/Welsh economic co-operation and transport links, particularly the southern corridor and ferry services.	Outcomes not known at present.
14 th & 15 th April 2004	David Pritchard	David Campbell Environment Minister, New South Wales	Visit had an economic development focus. Appointments include Cardiff Bay regeneration, Rhondda Heritage Park etc.	Mr Campbell expressed satisfaction with the visit and stated it had been worthwhile. The visit was an opportunity for the Welsh Assembly Government to strengthen its links with the New South Wales administration.
19 th to 21 st April 2004	Minister for Health and Social Services	Visit to the Netherlands	The visit focused on health care insurance, elderly care and patient involvement. The visit offered the opportunity to assess the success and consider the issues affecting the Dutch healthcare system, in particular the healthcare for their ageing population.	Outcomes not known at present.
20 th & 21 st April 2004	Margaret Dineen European and External Affairs.	Visit to Wales by Ojars Kalnins, Director, Institute of Latvia	The Latvian Institute is a non-profit making body that is charged with promoting Latvia. Mr Kalnins met representatives from the WDA and WTB as well as officials from EEAD. The purpose of the visit was to explore the way in which Wales is promoting itself and is one of the possible areas that will be included in any agreement that we sign with the Latvians.	Will help to build upon the developing relationship between Wales and Latvia.