

EUROPEAN & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Date: 1 July 2004

Time: 09:00 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 27 May. This paper provides an update.

First Minister's International Activities

1-3 June. Visit to Finland. I visited Finland following an invitation from the Finnish Ambassador, who visited Wales last September. My visit focussed primarily on Health, Sport and Fitness including meetings with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Affairs to discuss policies for promoting health. Whilst in Finland, I also took the opportunity to meet with management at UPM-Kymmene paper mill which owns Wales' largest newsprint mill in Shotton. I also visited a technology centre which provides supported accommodation for high-tech start up companies. The visit highlighted many areas of best practice which Wales could learn from and which I intend to discuss further with my Ministerial colleagues.

3-5 June. Visit by the Marshal of Silesia (Poland). The Marshal of Silesia, Michael Czarski, equivalent of First Minister for that Polish province, visited the Assembly and met with officials from a number of different units and departments, including Social Justice and Regeneration, Sustainable Development Unit, Welsh European Funding Office, Health as well as the Welsh Development Agency and Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust. I met him in Cathays Park and also hosted a dinner in his honour at the Hilton Hotel, Cardiff. The objective was to re-affirm the willingness on the part of Wales and Silesia to co-operate following the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between

Wales and Silesia in October 2002. The Marshal was pleased with the visit and took an active interest in all of the meetings. Initial feedback is extremely positive and officials are exploring opportunities to strengthen and develop the relationship to the mutual benefit of both parties.

15 June. Meeting with Graham Fry Ambassador designate, Japan. Graham Fry is the British Ambassador Designate to Japan - he is replacing Sir Stephen Gommersal. He visited Wales as part of his Regional Induction tour before taking up his appointment in mid-July. Jointly arranged with the WDA, Mr Fry was keen to meet key Japanese investors and visit their sites which he felt would be useful to him when he takes up his post . He was also interested to learn of the particularly strong, long standing links between Wales and Japan, the current situation and possibilities for future development.

Other Issues

Joint Ministerial Committee (Europe) (JMC(E))

- **27 May 2004**

I was not able to attend JMC(E) due to prior commitments. However, an official attended. The meeting was fairly short with discussion focusing on Sugar Reform and the Working Time Directive.

The Commission is considering a White Paper on reform of the current EU sugar regime. Legislative proposals are expected before Christmas. Ministers discussed a possible UK approach to reform. The key objective was balancing the interests of domestic producers with those of developing countries as well taking into account the wider WTO and development policy context. Ministers agreed that the current regime was unsustainable. Sugar reform was long overdue.

Working Time Directive (WTD)

The Foreign Secretary gave an update on the latest state of play on the WTD. The Commission had now issued its second stage consultation paper for social partners (ETUC – trades union, UNICE – employers, and ECPE – public sector). The Commission had included an option to retain the individual opt-out and set out how SiMAP/ Jaeger would be addressed. The Social Partners have 6 weeks to respond with comments and a decision on whether to negotiate on the options within the document. If they decide to negotiate, the process can take up to nine months. If they cannot agree or there is no negotiation, the Commission will issue a legislative proposal that goes jointly to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

- 23 June 2004 – An official attended from the Welsh Assembly Government. Items on the agenda include Better Engagement with the European Parliament, Regional State Aid, Presentation of Policy and the Working Time Directive.

Euro Ministers Meeting – 1 July. I will be attending the Euro ministers meeting later today. We will be discussing the latest position with regard to Euro Preparations in the UK. I will report the outcome at the next Committee.

European Parliament Elections – 10-13 June

The Welsh turnout was remarkably good at 41.4%, higher than two of the English regions who had all postal pilots, the North-East and North-West who had 40.8% turnout below the East Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside at 43.4% and 42.9%. Indications are that there has been a record low turnout of about 45.3% for the whole of the EU. In all,

about 155 million people of some 350 million eligible voters in the 25 member states cast their ballots, making it one of the biggest democratic exercises in the world. Lowest turnout occurred in the eight central and eastern European countries that joined the EU on 1 May. This is unusual since after the previous enlargement, new members showed greater enthusiasm about European polls than voters in existing member states. Two of the newest and smallest EU members, however, produced the highest turnouts – Malta 82% and Cyprus 71.2%. Lowest turnout was Slovakia with fewer than 17%. In the UK, 39% of voters went to the polls.

Presidency of the EU

Members may wish to note the Netherlands Presidency begins 1 July until 31 December 2004.

UK Presidency of the European Union

The United Kingdom will hold the Presidency of the European Union during the second half of 2005.

Given that Jane Davidson reported to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee recently that we have been successful in our bid to host a youth event during the UK Presidency.

This event will bring together young people, youth workers and policy makers from all over the European Union of 25 to discuss key issues on the European youth agenda like participation, information and volunteering. The aim will be to inform decision-making in the field and promote European co-operation and exchange.

It will present an opportunity to promote the excellent work happening here in Wales, and help further raise our awareness of, and involvement in, the European youth agenda, in which the Education Minister has previously led the UK delegation at the European Council of Ministers.

I am also pleased to note DCMS and UKREP have agreed that one of our officials will be chairing the Cultural Affairs Committee.

We want to contribute towards the achievement of the UK Government's objective of holding a successful Presidency. We have nominated an official to co-ordinate our involvement; she and her team are working closely with Whitehall to maximise the potential benefits to Wales of the Presidency.

Rhodri Morgan AM

First Minister

EEAC 1 July 2004 - Ministers Report Annex 1

| Date | Assembly Minister/ Official/ Division | Event | Objectives | Outcomes |
|---------------|--|---|---|--|
| 25th May 2004 | <p>Karen Sinclair, Business Minister</p> <p>Reg Kilpatrick Head of Financial Planning Division</p> <p>Keith Bush, Legislative Counsel, Office of the Counsel General</p> <p>WLGA</p> <p>Cardiff University's Law School - Wales</p> <p>Legislation on Line & Professor David Miers Deputy Head</p> | <p>Visit of Mr John Katende</p> <p>Attorney General & Minister of Justice & Strategic Planning</p> <p>Kingdom of Buganda Government</p> <p>Uganda</p> | <p>The issue of devolution is likely to be key in Uganda's political development, including in the run-up to multi-party elections in 2006 and Buganda's role in establishing devolution will be crucial.</p> | <p>This visit exposed a leading member of the Buganda Kingdom Government to the processes of devolution in the UK.</p> |

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| 1st – 3rd June 2004 | First Minister | Visit to Finland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To focus on how Finland has tackled Health, Sport and Fitness issues through community involvement. ● Forestry, particularly in relation to the UPM-Kymmene plant at Shotton in North Wales. ● ICT – looking at how IT usage has been encouraged in young people which has led to a lot of Incubator/ Technium type companies being established as spin-off businesses | Best practice seen first hand. Finland is seen as an exemplar in these fields on a global level. Many approaches may be suitable for Wales. |
| 15th June | First Minister | Meeting with Graham Fry Ambassador designate, Japan | Visiting Wales as part of his regional induction prior to taking up post in Japan. | Discussed issues relevant to Wales prior to Mr Fry taking up post in Japan. |
| 1st – 2nd June 2004 | Minister for the Environment, Planning and Countryside | Bonn International Renewables Conference | Represent nrg4SD (Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development) as co-Chair at the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue (MSD) on 01/06 and Chairing and giving a speech on the network at the nrg4SD event 02/06. | Both objectives successfully completed and very well received. Nrg4SD also contributed to the policy outcomes of the conference by stressing the need for regional governments to be engaged in the debate. |
| 2nd June 2004 | Bob Macey, Head EPD Wales Trade International WDA Marion Davies, EPD | Hon Musikari Kombo MP, Minister for Regional Development, Kenya | Delegation interested in regional development strategies and agencies | |

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| 3rd –5th June 2004 | First Minister | Visit by the Marshal of Silesia | Meeting with Marshal of Silesia to reaffirm the willingness to reaffirm co-operation and to discuss possible areas of co-operation flowing from the MOU signed in October 2002. | Objectives met. The visit was positive. Both parties re-affirmed their commitment to future collaboration and the discussions explored a number of areas that will provide a sound basis for developing and strengthening the relationship |
| 8th June 2004 | Jane Hutt | Meeting with Slovenian delegation | Meeting with Slovenian delegation of health sector experts to brief on health/ public health in Wales. | |
| 28th-30th June 2004 | Senior Officials to be determined Wales Trade International WDA | Consul General designate, Changqing, China | UK tour for briefings prior to taking up Post in China | |
| 1st July 2004 | Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning Lynsey May LLD3 | EARLALL Board Meeting Brussels, Belgium | Strengthening links with fellow EARLALL regions. Taking forward the work of the EARLALL network. Strengthening EARLALL's links with the European Commission to increase the status of the Association. Determining the agenda of the next EARLALL General Assembly (September 2004). | |