

# European & External Affairs Committee

## EUR(2) 05-06 (p.3)

**Date: 22 June 2006**

**Venue: Committee Room 3, Senedd, Cardiff Bay**

**Title: Paper to note: coverage of EU issues in Welsh newspapers**

### Purpose

1. As a result of recent discussions, this Committee would like to consider how European issues are communicated to the people of Wales. At the last meeting Members requested a paper from MRCS showing how EU messages are presented in Welsh newspapers.

### Summary

2. The UK Office of the European Commission monitors the UK press coverage of EU issues and lists inaccurate or distorted reports on its website, together with the corrective letters sent to newspaper editors.

3. The Commission Office in Wales records coverage of European issues in the Western Mail, the South Wales Echo, the Daily Post, the South Wales Argus and Wales on Sunday, and also sends corrective letters to editors as necessary (an example is at Annex B). The Members' Research Service has analysed this coverage from 1 January to 17 May 2006.

4. From a total of 289 EU news items during this period:

- 19% (55 items) focused on the development of bird flu across the EU;
- 13% (36 items) were about specific projects supported by the Structural Funds or agricultural funding schemes;
- 9% (27 items) concentrated on the EU's external relations;
- 8 items were about post-2006 Structural Funds, 2 of which focused on match funding;
- 1 article discussed the impact of the Services Directive;
- 1 article covered the issue of state aid to Airbus.

5. On the whole, reporting of EU issues was reasonably factually accurate, and positive where appropriate, with only 2 or 3 articles criticising the EU directly.

6. However there was no coverage of the following issues which have been widely discussed at EU level

during this time:

- Consultations on the Regional Aid map;
- The Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas;
- Progress with the Communication Strategy (Plan 'D');
- Subsidiarity;
- Discussions in the Committee of the Regions;
- The National Strategic Reference Framework;
- WTO trade rounds.

7. Section 1 of Annex A lists examples of EU news stories in the Welsh press between January and May 2006 and includes extracts from the articles. Section 2 gives examples of items which could have been misleading.

8. In 2005, BBC Governors commissioned a review of the BBC's coverage of the EU, which stated at that time that "the BBC's coverage of EU news needs to be improved and to be made more demonstrably impartial". The independent review and the Governors' response can be found here. The BBC press release following the review can be seen here.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to note this paper.

**Sandy Mewies**  
**Committee Chair**

## **A Coverage of EU issues in Welsh newspapers**

### **A1 Examples of EU news stories**

'EU funds offer huge reduction in university course costs for poorest areas' (Western Mail Business, 05.04.06, p9)

"The latest initiative follows the launch of a programme by which women in Objective One areas can study free-of-charge for an MSc in Entrepreneurship. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), if Welsh women were as entrepreneurial as men, 28,000 new businesses would have been launched last year.

"This means that an eligible applicant would pay just £1,032 for the MBA course, £855 for the MSc in Human Resource Management and MSc in Marketing."

'European aid to put firms online: Companies to get broadband internet access' (Daily Post, 24.02.06, p23)

"The business parks are Ty Mawr at Holyhead, Llandudno Junction, Parc Caer Seion in Conwy, St Asaph Business Park including the OpTIC Technium, North Wales Business Park, Deeside Industrial Park, Hawarden Industrial Park, Warren Hall at Broughton, St David's Park in Ewloe, Bangor's Parc Menai including the CAST Technium, Victoria Dock in Caernarfon, Parc Bryn Cegin at Bangor, Wrexham Industrial Estate and Wrexham Technology Park.

"Andy Klom, Head of the European Commission Office in Wales, said: "It brings Wales further into the field of the knowledge economy, a key element in the regeneration of Wales.""

'EU tourism project to take people off the beaten track' (Daily Post, 03.01.06, p19)

"MORE than 70 Denbighshire tourism businesses have joined a £1.3m EU project to improve visitors' experience of the county.

"Representatives from businesses signed up to the Cantata scheme at the launch held at Rhyl Pavilion and began the process of suggesting new ways for visitors to enjoy their visit to the county.

"The three-year programme will capitalise on the growing trend among tourists to head off the beaten track, seek out quieter rural and coastal locations and learn about different cultures and local customs."

'More goodies' (Daily Post, 28.02.06, p13)

"THE value of duty-free goods EU travellers can bring back from abroad will virtually triple under European Commission proposals unveiled yesterday. The existing financial limit of 175 euros (about £120) on the value of goods will rise to 500 euros (£350) for air travellers."

'Oppose this tax for the health of our children' (Western Mail comment, 18.05.06, p11)

"The announcement today that a new EU tax could soon be levied on children's shoes will provoke outrage in parents right across Wales. Their concern is understandable. Parents have a basic responsibility to care for and look after their children. For many this may mean making financial sacrifices, but it's something most do gladly, and without thought.

"To increase their financial burden, however, would not only make their task more difficult, but would impact on the future health of Wales' youngest generation. And that is inexcusable.

"Children's feet grow quickly and at this vital age, when bones are growing and bodies developing, wearing well-fitting shoes is vital. Wear the wrong shoes and you could feel the effects for the rest of your life.

"But this is what a price hike could lead to, especially for less well-off families."

## **A2 Misleading headlines**

‘Is the EU about to extinguish our light ales?’ (Western Mail, 30.03.06, p5)

"Campaigners fear the European Union is about to pass a law which would abolish the use of the name 'light ale' - in case people think it's a diet drink. The health claims regulation first appeared before the European Parliament 10 months ago and has returned for its second reading. It is intended to regulate nutritional claims made on food labels. Products could only be labelled 'light' if they are genuinely low in calories.

"Light ale would fall foul of the proposals even though its name is indicative of its light colouring, rather than its calorific content. It would be especially strange for customers in Wales where generations of drinkers have ordered their beer by virtue of its dark or light colour."

This article was followed a few days later by a letter from MEPs Eluned Morgan and Glenys Kinnock:

"Sir - Your article, Is the EU about to extinguish our light ales? (March 30), is misinformed and incorrect. The EU is not set to abolish use of the name 'light ale'. In fact, the health claims regulations to which the article refers completely exclude traditional 'light ale' as it is a description of colour, not a health or nutritional claim.

"This is yet another unfounded scare story peddled by Eurosceptics to overshadow positive EU measures to protect consumers and ensure they are better informed about the food and drink they buy."

‘Bid to save pint’ (Daily Post, 30.01.06, p11)

"A CAMPAIGN to stop pints of milk being phased out was launched by the British Retail Consortium today.

"The group says proposed EU legislation could see the pint disappear in favour of half litres and litres.

It is calling on MPs to back its calls for rules allowing food packaging variations among EU member states to remain unchanged."

The proposal to deregulate package sizes came from the Commission and was immediately amended by the European Parliament in order to exclude milk, pre-packed bread, spreadable fats and tea. British Conservative MEP Malcolm Harbour noted "a certain amount of entirely misleading controversy" in the British press on this proposal, especially "about the loss of the traditional British pint".

'Landmark bill will make trading easy' (Daily Post, 15.02.06, p21)

"BARRIERS which face Welsh companies wishing to expand their operations into the European Union may be removed this week as MEPs vote on a landmark bill.

"At present, plumbers, electricians, hairdressers, consultants and thousands of others are restricted from offering services in other EU countries by the need to comply with the different legislation in each country. Drafted as part of a drive to increase the EU's competitiveness, the services directive plans to complete the European internal market by allowing the free exchange of service providers.

"In Wales, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are likely to be the main beneficiaries of the directive as such companies form over 90% of service providers. The directive, which is voted on by MEPs this Thursday, will offer them the opportunity to expand abroad without the need to overcome red tape."

The Services Directive will not allow the "free exchange of service providers". While it will not allow Member States to restrict service provision on "social policy and consumer protection" grounds, they will still be able to restrict provision on public policy, public security, public health and environmental protection grounds. It will also not completely remove the need to deal with red tape.

## **B Letter to newspaper editor from Commission Office in Wales**

EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Office in Wales  
Cardiff, 28 November  
D(2005) 20049

Rob Irvine  
Editor  
Daily Post  
PO Box 202  
Vale Road  
Llandudno Junction  
Conwy LL31 9ZD

Dear Sir,

I refer to Sue Jones' letter 'Up the pole', published in the Daily Post on 28 November.

There are no European Commission proposals to ban British ships from flying the red ensign.

The Commission has proposed a package of measures to ensure that international safety standards are upheld by EU ships sailing under their flags and that all member states have maritime administrations to monitor the problems posed by "dustbin ships".

In particular, one of the measures is aimed at ensuring EU member states verify the application of international rules on the ships sailing under their flag, i.e. their national flags. The only European flag mentioned in the proposal refers to EU national flags; in the case of the UK, the red ensign.

Those who would like further information on the Commission's proposals can visit the website at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/>.

Yours faithfully,

**Andy Klom**  
**Head of the EC Office in Wales**