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EU Office

Europe Matters

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Cynulliad
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National
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Wales



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Introduction



Dame Rosemary Butler AM
Presiding Officer

I am delighted to introduce the 33rd issue of Europe Matters, our update on the work of the National Assembly for Wales on European issues.

Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee, chaired by Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM is undertaking a very important inquiry looking at the UK Government's EU Reform agenda and the engagement of Devolved Administrations and Legislatures in this process and the potential impact on our competences. During their visit to Brussels in October they met senior officials from the European Commission and Council who are directly engaged in the negotiations, as well as a number of MEPs including two of the four Welsh MEPs.

As a former Committee of the Regions member and committed European I very much hope the British people vote to remain in the EU. It is important that people understand what they are voting on, so I am pleased to see progress in the ESRC funded UK in a Changing EU, the Welsh launch for which took place in October at Cardiff University with Minister for Finance and Government Business Jane Hutt AM. A series of seminars is planned in the first half of the year a number of which will be hosted at the Pierhead.

Enterprise and Business Committee is due to report on its inquiry into the Potential of the Maritime Economy, which has a strong EU dimension, notably through the work of Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM as CoR rapporteur. Rhodri Glyn's report on Developing the Potential of Ocean Energy was adopted at plenary in October, the fourth occasion where he has presented his opinions in Welsh in Brussels. Mick Antoniw AM also presented his second CoR opinion at his final plenary in December as he steps down from this role to be replaced by Joyce Watson AM.

We've hosted a number of VIP visits to the Assembly in recent weeks, including visits by the Hungarian and Austrian Ambassadors. In October I was delighted to lead an Assembly delegation, including Commissioners Sandy Mewies AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, to Argentina as part of the programme to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Welsh settlement in "Y Wladfa", Patagonia.

In late November I was pleased to visit Malta where Joyce Watson AM and I attended the inaugural meeting of the Commonwealth Women's Forum as part of Malta's hosting of the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

EU related topics in the Assembly's Committees

Environment and Sustainability Committee

In light of the volume of Welsh legislation that will occupy the Committee's time until the election the Committee has adopted a new approach to its European work. It will track and seek to influence EU proposals of interest to the Committee through written consultation and informal engagement with stakeholders. Any issues identified for Wales will be pursued through written communication with the EU institutions and Welsh Government. A list of the Committee's EU priorities can be found on the European Affairs page of the Committee's website.

The Committee has continued to monitor and track the EU dossiers and policies of greatest interest to it and has scrutinised Welsh Government Ministers on: implementation of the CAP; the proposed EU regulation on organic farming, GMO feed and food proposals; implementation of the CFP and marine spatial planning.

The Committee considered the Commission's Work Programme for 2016 and an update on its EU work at its meeting on 10 December 2015.

Enterprise and Business Committee

- **Inquiry into Employment opportunities for people over 50:** The report was published in July. On 7 October the Committee held a scrutiny session with the Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology and her officials on the Welsh Government's response to the report.
- **EU scrutiny session:** On 23 September the Committee had an update from the EU Funding Ambassadors, and held a scrutiny session with the Minister for Finance and Government Business on EU Funding Programmes.
- **Maritime Economy:** the Committee is undertaking an inquiry looking at the potential of the maritime economy to Wales, including the development of Ocean Energy. This inquiry is also considering the opportunities to Wales from the "Juncker Investment Plan" and other potential sources of finance. The Committee held an information session with officials from DG Maritime Affairs in March, The Committee also held evidence sessions in north Wales in July with Welsh ports, Menai Science Park and Bangor University. The Committee also gathered background information during its visit to Brussels/Luxembourg. In September the Committee took evidence from Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM on his own-initiative opinion to the Committee of the Regions, ***Developing the Potential of Ocean Energy***. On 15 October the Committee took evidence from local councils, energy developers, Swansea University and the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport.
- **Follow up sessions on Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+:** On 21 October the Committee took evidence from Further and Higher Education, the British Council, and the Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology.
- On 25 November the Committee heard from Professor Julie Williams CBE, Chief Scientific Officer for Wales about the progress made on promoting STEM related research and activity in schools. The Committee also looked at how European funding has supported this work

Health and Social Care Committee

- **Public Health (Wales) Bill:** The Bill includes proposals to restrict the use of e-cigarettes in public places (in line with the smoking ban). As part of its scrutiny of these proposals, the Committee has considered the role of the EU Tobacco Products Directive (TPD), and how this might contribute to improving the quality and safety of e-cigarette products, and limiting their appeal to children and non-smokers. The TPD is expected to be implemented in Member States in 2016. The Health and Social Care Committee reported on the Public Health (Wales) Bill by 27 November 2015.

Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee

- **Report on Subsidiarity:** The monitoring report on subsidiarity issues relevant to Wales coming out of draft EU legislative proposals, covering the period June to August, was noted at the meeting on 16 September.
- **EU referendum:** At its meeting on 15 June, the Committee considered correspondence from the Electoral Commission inviting comments on the proposed wording of the referendum question included in the European Union Referendum Bill, which was introduced in the House of Commons on Thursday 28 May. The Committee wrote to the Electoral Commission with its views on the referendum question on 16 June.
- **Proposal for European Regulation on Genetically Modified Organisms:** On 22 June the committee agreed to write to the Welsh Government to ask whether it expects to take decisions on the use of genetically modified food and feed in Wales under the proposed EU Directive. The Welsh Government responded to the Committee on 23 September.
- **Inquiry on the UK Government's EU Reform agenda:** This short inquiry is looking at the potential impact of the UK Government's EU reform on devolved competences in Wales, and how the UK Government has involved the Devolved Administrations and Legislatures in this process. The Committee visited Brussels in October 2015 for a series of meetings with MEPs, including Derek Vaughan and Nathan Gill, and leading officials, including Jonathan Faull Head of the European Commission's Task Force on the UK's EU referendum. Members of the CLA Committee gave evidence to the House of Lords EU Select Committee at the Assembly on 19 October 2015. The Committee is likely to undertake further work on this in the new year.
- **EC-UK Forum:** Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM was not able to attend the Belfast meeting of the EC-UK Forum on 27 November because of the Committee's work on the draft Wales Bill. The EC-UK Forum is a biannual meeting bringing together the Chairs of the European (and equivalent) Committees of the Lords, Commons, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly and National Assembly for Wales.

Plenary business with dedicated sessions on European issues

- 13 October: the Minister for Finance and Government Business gave a Statement, followed by a debate, on Progress of the EU Funding Programmes
- 14 October: Andrew RT Davies AM asked an Urgent Question on the All-Wales European Programme Monitoring Committee.

Note: in addition to the above European issues feature in Ministerial Statements and in questions to Ministers on a regular basis.

External activities of Members on Assembly business

- 12 October: David Melding AM Chair, Alun Davies AM and William Powell AM visited Brussels as part of the inquiry by the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee into the UK Government's EU Reform Agenda.
- 12-13 October: Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM attended CoR plenary in Brussels and presented in Welsh his report on Developing the Potential of Ocean Energy, which was adopted with cross-party support.
- 12-13 October: Mick Antoniw AM attended the plenary session of the CoR in Brussels.
- 22 October: The Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM attended the CALRE General Assembly meeting which was held in Milan and gave an update of the Gender Equality Working Group which she had Chaired during 2015.
- 27 October - 5 November: The Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM, accompanied by Assembly Commissioners Sandy Mewies AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM, lead a visit to Argentina. The visit, the Assembly's first to South America, focused on a programme of meetings with the Welsh communities in Chubut as part of the 150th anniversary of the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia.
- 16 - 17 November: Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM, William Powell AM, Joyce Watson AM, Lindsay Whittle AM and John Griffiths AM attended the 51st British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary in Cheltenham (UK). The Plenary Conference discussed the European Union in Ireland and Britain with an address by the UK Minister for Europe, David Lidington MP.
- 22 - 24 November: The Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM and CPA Wales Branch Chair Joyce Watson AM attended the inaugural Women's Forum as part of the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting hosted by Malta.
- 2-3 December: Mick Antoniw AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM attended the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.

International and other VIPs visiting the Senedd

- 24 September: Luxemburg Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Patrick Engelberg visited the Assembly to outline Luxemburg’s priorities during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
- 6 October – Georgian Parliament, Mr David Usupashvili Speaker Parliament of Georgia visited the Assembly and met the Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM.
- 11 November: the Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler hosted a lecture by Professor Sir Deian Hopkin “Keir Hardie: A Centenary Reflection” as part of the series of events to commemorate the centenary since the First World War.
- 18 November: A delegation from the Deutscher Bundestag, British Parliamentary Friendship Group visited the Assembly and met with the Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM and Members of the Constitutional Legislative Affairs Committee.
- 25 November – Hungarian Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Peter Szabadhegy visited the Assembly and met the Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM.
- 9 December – Austrian Ambassador, His Excellency Dr Martin Eichinger visited the Assembly and met the Presiding Officer, Dame Rosemary Butler AM.

International Events and Conferences at the Senedd

- 8 July: The Assembly held a special Memorial Service, jointly hosted by the Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM and First Minister Carwyn Jones AM at the Senedd to mark the 20th Anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide.

Links

- **National Assembly for Wales homepage**
- **Assembly Business Notice**
- **Committee pages**
- **Research Service pages**

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