

Russell George MS – Political Networking event in Riga, Latvia, November 4th 2022

Purpose of visit

The visit was to provide an opportunity to network with a cross-party delegation of parliamentarians from other nations and discuss parliamentary practices, and discuss electoral reform, scrutiny arrangements, and issues in regard to supporting Ukraine refugees. The event included for a focus to meet with political and faith leaders, in particular from the Nordic-Baltic countries with the geo-political risks of the region in mind, to strengthen common commitments to peace in Europe and beyond. The networking event took place via a series of presentations, organised discussions, and informal meetings.

Meeting with Northern European parliamentarians

The event facilitated representation from Wales and the Senedd at an international gathering of parliamentarians from Northern Europe. The main networking event included various speakers, including Princess Maragaretha of Liechtenstein who outlined her public role, her journey to faith, and the Princess went on to discuss the importance of a county's heritage. The event allowed for breakout sessions and meetings.

Several meetings were held with Northern European parliamentarians and regional government representatives that provided a platform for sharing policy ideas and exploring new ways to promote engagement between the Senedd and faith communities and leaders. Attendance and participation at the event allowed for the promotion and awareness of Wales and the Senedd to those present.

Meetings included:

Meeting with Members of the Latvian Parliament: Met with Latvian parliament members, Janis Grasberg, Ramona Petravica, Ainars Slesers and Richard Slesers. Discussion on policy ideas, sharing policy ideas and exploring new ways to promote engagement between the Senedd and faith communities and leaders. The politicians also outlined the challenges that Latvia faces as a country bordering Russia and with its relative proximity to Ukraine, especially at a time of aggression. It was further helpful to hear first-hand the cultural and historical significance of the region in the current context and how the impact of the war in Ukraine is affecting citizens in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Meeting with Antero Laukkanen from the Finnish Parliament (main speaker): Discussion on workings of Parliamentary workings and the work of Parliamentary committees. Mr Laukkanen shared his experience both as a politician in the Finnish Parliament with his particular interest in social justice.

Meeting with Ukrainian refugees: This formed part of a presentation to parliamentarians about the present situation in Ukrainian and support needed to help refugees from the region. There was further discussion and conversations regarding the role Wales had in supporting those fleeing the war in Ukraine and the support Governments are able to provide those individuals seeking refuge. There was further discussion regarding how Montgomeryshire constituents had supported Ukrainian refugees and I discussed specific examples of issues raised with myself that I had raised with Welsh ministers.