



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Pwyllgor y Cynulliad Cyfan
The Committee of the Whole Assembly**

**Dydd Iau, 31 Ionawr 2008
Thursday, 31 January 2008**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 3.39 p.m. gyda'r Dirprwy Lywydd (Rosemary Butler) yn y Gadair.

The meeting began at 3.39 p.m. with the Deputy Presiding Officer (Rosemary Butler) in the Chair.

**Cyflwyniad gan y Dirprwy Lywydd
Introduction by the Deputy Presiding Officer**

[1] **The Deputy Presiding Officer (Rosemary Butler):** Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order. On behalf of the Members of the National Assembly for Wales, it is my great pleasure to welcome Commissioner Margot Wallström here this afternoon. Margot, as you know, is the vice-president of the European Commission and we are pleased that she has come to see our beautiful building, with which she is very impressed.

[2] Commissioner, we are really pleased that you responded to the First Minister's invitation to visit Wales and that you have managed to fit in to your programme the opportunity to engage in debate with Members of the Assembly. As you are all aware, this is not the first time that the commissioner has participated in Assembly proceedings. As the Chair of the Committee on European and External Affairs just reminded her, in January last year the commissioner contributed to a meeting of that committee via a video link with Brussels. In that meeting, she made a presentation to the committee on her area of responsibility in the commission, which is the European Union's inter-institutional relations and communication strategy.

[3] Commissioner, we share your real enthusiasm for the use of innovative technology, particularly to increase participation and engagement in the democratic process. We look forward to reading your reflections on this visit on your internet blog. We have some very enthusiastic bloggers with us this afternoon, so perhaps you will have internet conversations.

[4] This meeting, in the Chamber this afternoon, is a Committee of the Whole Assembly and it is the first time that we have had such a meeting. I am delighted to ask you to address us on this unique occasion.

3.41 p.m.

**Datganiad gan Margot Wallström, Is-lywydd y Comisiwn Ewropeaidd
(Cysylltiadau Sefydliadol a Strategaeth Cyfathrebu)
Statement by Margot Wallström, Vice-president of the European Commission
(Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy)**

[5] **The Vice-president of the European Commission (Ms Wallström):** Thank you very much. Good afternoon. I wish that I could have addressed you in Welsh, but I am afraid that one-and-a-half days are not enough to really learn, but I do have the highest respect for your beautiful language. Thank you for the invitation to come to meet you; thank you for coming and for giving me the opportunity to see you here in the flesh. We met virtually a year ago and I think that meeting you directly, and in this beautiful building, has advantages. Of course, when I travel, I ask to be able to go to the national parliaments and, in this case, to come to your Assembly. It gives me and the commission a great deal. Thanks to modern democracy and information technology, we can meet both virtually and in the flesh.

[6] This Assembly seems intriguingly modern, both in terms of its beautiful physical design and its function and political content. I know of a place or two that could learn from that. This building also embodies openness, transparency and accessibility and your work on promoting democracy internationally is invaluable. Not least, you are unique among all EU

nations in having a binding legal duty to pursue sustainable development in all that you do. That is another good example. I think that you might guess that sustainability is very close to my heart. You will understand how much it means to me and how much I believe that it means to our common future. It is also an example for others to follow. I heard from students that I have met that sustainable development is a live concept; it is something that young people especially are definitely interested in.

[7] To me, this is also much of what European co-operation and the EU is about: learning from each other and sharing with each other. It should not only be about money, decision-making procedures and bureaucracy, or business opportunities; it should also be about democracy and equality, giving everyone an opportunity and creating a level playing field. I believe that we have come quite far on this on our European continent, but there is no reason for complacency. On the contrary, we should and must re-conquer democracy at all times. I think that the new Lisbon treaty or reform treaty is a very good example of that. Democracy is not something static. The world around us constantly changes and we have to change with it. In the past 50 years, the European Union has grown from six to 27 member states and it goes without saying that that puts new demands on all of us, on the EU institutions, the member states' Governments, on the regions and on the citizens. The political issues have changed as well. We focus on things that were unknown 50 years ago.

[8] We probably had other words for globalisation as it was already going on, but there are new challenges such as climate change and the lack of energy, the ageing population, and, of course, rapid technological developments. All of those put new demands on politicians, like you and me, but it also puts new demands on citizens. Everyone should take the opportunity to make their voices heard. It is the citizens' priorities that should set the political agenda for the EU. We need to debate and discuss together what initiatives and decisions the EU should take. Only then can we achieve good, sustainable political results.

[9] The Lisbon treaty is a good example of how the EU needs to change in line with the world around it. The new treaty enables the EU to adapt to an enlarged union and allows the possibility of welcoming more new members. It also provides a number of concrete improvements. For example, it clarifies the citizen's rights, it provides more openness and transparency, it gives more of a say to the national parliaments and more power to the directly elected European Parliament. However, it also makes it easier to take decisions, which is not always easy with 27 member states around the table, it gives us a more efficient foreign policy, and it puts more focus on our common fight against climate change. The Lisbon treaty is a success for everyone who is working for a more open and democratic union. It improves the possibilities for citizens and organisations to take an active part in the democratic process; for example, through the citizens' initiative. This is just one example of the tools for democracy that we will now get and which we so badly need. The Lisbon treaty is now awaiting ratification in EU member states. There have been discussions on whether or not to hold referenda. As a representative of the commission, I do not have any views on that; it is up to each and every member state to decide on the ratification procedure. We consider ratification through the national Parliament or a referendum equally democratically legitimate. It is up to member states to choose how they want to ratify.

[10] One thing that member states, EU institutions, and individual politicians all have in common is that we need to explain the treaty and we need to debate and discuss it with citizens. What is even more important is the need to discuss the concrete political content, the questions and the problems to be solved. We need to deliver concrete political results and do it in the way that citizens expect from a modern, open, and democratic union. With these new structures for democratic influence, we can forge ahead—away from the old top-down approach and towards a bottom-up approach. It is only by standing on the solid ground of knowledge that you can form radical and rational opinions, and take a stand. That is a necessary condition for a functioning and stable democracy. As the American politician

Alexander Hamilton said 200 years ago, 'Those who stand for nothing fall for anything'.

[11] What do we stand for as Europeans? Is there a European way or a European model? I believe that there is, and that that model is apparent when we discuss our solutions to new challenges. We undoubtedly share common ground on many of the questions in Europe, such as globalisation, our ageing populations, climate change and energy use, and the question of EU enlargement. I would like to say a few brief words on some of these challenges.

[12] On globalisation, there is, of course, tough competition from China and India. Europe needs strong economic growth that can generate new and better jobs. The Lisbon strategy is now beginning to bear fruit, because growth and employment levels are rising across the EU. However, we must keep up our efforts. Investing in research and technological developments continues to be one of the biggest challenges. It currently makes up less than 2 per cent of our collective GDP, compared with around 3 per in the United States. We also need to invest in education and training to give Europeans the skills that they need for tomorrow's high-tech jobs.

3.50 p.m.

[13] On the ageing population, as you know, at present, for every retired person, there are four people of working age; in just 40 years' time, there will be only two potential workers to every pensioner, which is a kind of time bomb. However, we should not deplore the fact that people are ageing, that we are getting older and that we live long and healthy lives—this is an achievement, and a big success of our modern societies in Europe. Therefore, we should not pity ourselves for that. However, at the same time, it means a real challenge when we have too few young people and people of working age to support that.

[14] Therefore, we must also reform our social security systems. I know from my own political experience how painful that can be. However, we have to make them sustainable, and this is also solidarity with future generations. We have to encourage skilled immigration, but integrate immigrants into our societies. Again, this is about social inclusion, and this issue was also raised by many of the students that I talked to: 'What do societies do to help us to integrate better?'.

[15] You are fully aware, I guess, of our decision the other week to cut 20 per cent in carbon dioxide emissions by 2020, and to increase that figure to 30 per cent if other major economies also play their part. We also decided to have these reductions come from energy savings and more investment in renewable energies, which are to cover 20 per cent of our energy needs by 2020, compared with only 7 per cent today. Therefore, the European Union needs a common energy plan, how to secure supplies, and how to be able to speak with one single voice to Russia or North Africa.

[16] Finally, I will mention the enlargement of the European Union. I believe that all the fears about EU enlargement have proved unfounded; the new member states have booming economies and they form very much a driving force in the European economies. This is thanks to the economic reforms that these countries undertook before joining the EU, which were also painful at the time, but which are now paying big dividends. EU enlargement also consolidates democracy—the rule of law and respect for human rights—in the candidate countries, which is good for the whole of Europe. This same logic, ultimately, justifies enlarging the union further to include, I hope, Turkey and the Balkan countries. They have a young and growing population and a huge potential for economic growth.

[17] Therefore, we are trying to contribute to real public debate on Europe and its future. We have launched the so-called Plan-D for democracy, dialogue and debate, and we hope that we will see more of the fora such as the ones that we experienced today. I know that different

topics were also discussed at public hall meetings held around Wales. I wish to thank the Welsh Assembly Government and Cardiff University, which organised meetings for me today. We have to do more via television and radio, we have to be present on the internet, and we have to be there in face-to-face meetings. We must use all of these modern communication tools if we are to listen better, explain better and be able to go local.

[18] The commission cannot do it alone, and should not do it from Brussels—that will not work. We have to communicate Europe in partnership; we need the help of all of the players and partners. This is not about selling the European Union or about getting people on board; it is about putting people in the driving seat of the EU. A political project such as the European Union can only work if the people are actively involved in setting the agenda. We will have better results and better policies if we can consult better and if we can engage citizens more effectively.

[19] The future of the EU lies in—and I believe that this is the European way—delivering prosperity while protecting the environment and preserving social justice and inclusiveness. It means embracing globalisation within a framework of solidarity and sustainable development that ensures the security of Europe’s citizens, including future generations, and it must be about listening to the citizens and empowering them, through information and debate, to set the agenda.

[20] Thank you very much for listening. I do not know whether I dare quote this poem. I do not dare to say it in Welsh but, in English, it says something like:

[21] ‘Among our ancient mountains and from our lovely vales, Oh! Let the prayer re-echo, God bless the’—

[22] Assembly for—

[23] ‘Wales.’

[24] Thank you very much. [*Applause.*]

[25] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you for that stimulating address, commissioner. The commissioner has kindly agreed to take questions. We have until 4.30 p.m.. Therefore, I open the floor for questions. I would like short questions—and I will not mention yesterday—so that we can get as many in as we can. I call first the Chair of the Committee on European and External Affairs, Sandy Mewies.

[26] **Sandy Mewies:** Commissioner, I have already said how nice it is to meet you face to face rather than just seeing you on a video screen. You have touched on what we need to do in the future. I hope that we will be making far more contact with the commission, using tools such as video as well as meeting face to face, and with other parts of mainland Europe, so that we can emphasise our similarities and our shared interests rather than, as some people do, seek to look for differences.

[27] Among the many interesting responsibilities that you have is that of chair of the Council of Women World Leaders ministerial initiative; you followed US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright in that role. In our Committee on European and External Affairs, when there is a new presidency, we invite someone along from that country and we ask them, ‘What are your objectives and aspirations? What do you hope to achieve during your time?’. Therefore, I would like to ask you what your aims, objectives and aspirations are while you hold the chair of the Council of Women World Leaders ministerial initiative.

[28] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You asked that in two minutes, I believe.

[29] **Ms Wallström:** This is not part of my portfolio but it is something that I have been asked to do. It can bring good experience into the commission and into the European Union because it gives me access to this fantastic network of women world leaders. It started as an initiative for the 15 women who were then Prime Ministers and Presidents and that number has grown to being close to 40 today, and there are around 600 women Ministers. The whole idea is to provide a network for women to share best practice and experience and so that they have somebody there to support them and who understands. It is also there to influence the international agenda and to give women a voice. We met in New York to discuss the security agenda and it was very clear that women would, in most cases, have a rather different view on what security is today and for the future. In many African countries, for example, women would put much more emphasis on education and on the soft issues but are often not even consulted in the negotiations or in the different peace projects. So, for example, in Somalia, women formed the so-called sixth clan, because there are five clans that are invited to negotiate peace, but women's voices are not heard, which often means that children are not represented either. So, there is definitely a need to listen to women as groups, even if we have come much further in Europe. It is a network to influence the political agenda and it supports women. I hope that it can also bring something to Europe, for example, in terms of having negotiators who are women, because we send envoys and so on but too few women are in this role, and they would be able to reach out and to have a somewhat different, but not necessarily better, way of working.

4.00 p.m.

[30] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that you will find that this Assembly proves that, because, as we have so many women, we work in a different way.

[31] I call Mike German, the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats?

[32] **Michael German:** You are very welcome here today, commissioner; it is good to see you in person, as has been alluded to, rather than on a video screen, which can sometimes be some distance away from reality.

[33] The reality in Wales is that the body politic of Wales—the political parties—is probably the most supportive of the concept of the European Union in the whole of the United Kingdom, yet behind us we have a very sceptical public that is cynical about the European Union. What advice would you give to the political parties present here today about how best we can do our work to ensure that the European Union and the concept of being European is attractive to the population that we serve? Perhaps you would like to reflect on whether, for example, the development work that is done by the European Union, which is reflected in the National Assembly through the Africa initiative taken by our Government, and the twinning with other countries, which is done through our committees, might be a good way of helping people to understand that working together creates a better objective.

[34] **Ms Wallström:** That sounds like a question that I could have asked for beforehand. This is absolutely crucial, and I have thought a lot about it because behind our increased contacts with national parliaments lies the idea that we have to anchor what we do in the national democratic traditions and within the political parties in each and every member state. You play an important role from that point of view, but it also means that you have to take it one step further, because, if I count the number of issues that are discussed at the local council level, for example in my own home country Sweden, half or maybe 60 per cent of them would have some kind of link to the European level or even have its origin in a EU directive. How is this explained to the local politicians in the different political parties or how is it explained to citizens? This is what we have to look for now.

[35] We need to clarify why a directive at the European level is needed and what exactly that link looks like, because, for example, if you take a decision on establishing a waste water treatment plant, you will have to follow EU directives. We need to clarify why it is necessary to have those European rules and what that interdependence looks like today. However, we still have not found the methods of doing that in a proper way. Most local politicians do not know what this link looks like or what the bearing is on what goes on at the European level. So, we have to develop together a method of doing this and of explaining it in plain language and not in the jargon of Brussels or other institutions.

[36] This will also need a lot of good leadership. That means that political leaders at all levels must have courage enough to say, 'I defend what we do at the European level. I believe in the whole idea of a European project and European co-operation; it has its flaws and its shortcomings, and we make mistakes and not everything is perfect, but I stand up for Europe, the European Union and the whole idea of what we are doing'. Therefore, it also needs advocacy. I often see the European Union as an orphan, and, as they say, success has many mothers, but failure is an orphan. If there is something to criticise, no-one will take responsibility or defend a decision that is taken. So, we need to develop that leadership. There then needs to be a public political debate, in a European public space, with positive media reporting. In the UK, the media have been reporting very negatively for a long time. There has been a drip-drip effect, and, in the end, people will be occupied by the negative stories, many of which are not at all true and have no substance. This will have an effect in the end. I come from a very EU-sceptic country, so I know about the problems and challenges, but we have different media reporting, which is more about the substance of stories.

[37] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next questions will come from a Conservative Assembly Member, William Graham.

[38] **William Graham:** I welcome you, madam vice-president. In alluding to previous questions, there was an article in *The Times* a week last Saturday in which you identified yet again a glass ceiling for women, which, hopefully, the Assembly has been able to break through. In my party, we had to change the rules to encourage women to get to the top, although having had a female Conservative Prime Minister was a wonderful example. Can you expand on that? Can you also give us an idea of how regional or national parliaments are able to influence the European Commission at the earliest opportunity? Mr Klom is very helpful to our committee in this respect, as were his predecessors. It is now a matter of communication to ensure that our influence is felt at the earliest possible opportunity so that it is of the greatest benefit to the people of Wales.

[39] **Ms Wallström:** I said in an interview that I had discovered, after some time, that it is not a sticky floor or a glass ceiling—it is only a thick layer of men. [*Laughter.*] That makes it more manageable. Commissioner Barroso asked member state Governments to nominate a man and a woman for a job, so that he could put together a better balanced commission. When you ask for a female and a male nomination, you must also look at the practical things that will encourage or help women to take on a political task, to become a parliamentarian or to take on a political job. If you have a culture where meetings are held at a time when women would normally go to pick up children from the day care centre or take care of such things, you will never get women to accept jobs in this environment. So, there are a number of practical and ideological things that you must do in order to change attitudes and to consider women as being as able and capable as men. The encouragement of a debate on equality is very important.

[40] On the point about having an influence on the EU agenda and coming in with your views and positions, timing is crucial; when is the right moment to give your position on a particular proposal? This will be the big challenge under the new treaty, because national parliaments will be given a yellow-card provision so that they can stop a procedure. The fact

that you must mobilise enough to reach the threshold means that timing will be crucial. For example, if you were to look at the annual work programme to identify what will come up, and have a yearly debate about the agenda to identify the proposals that will be presented, you will see that it will not be possible practicably to engage with all the regional parliaments and assemblies, because that would immediately double the number of interlocutors for the commission. We will have to go to the national parliaments, but, in turn, they will have to set up some kind of structure to listen to the devolved assemblies. So, this is also an issue for national parliaments. Earlier engagement in the year, perhaps through a yearly debate that involves looking at the work programme, would at least lead to better planning.

4.10 p.m.

[41] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you for your interesting and useful comments this afternoon. I am a member of the Committee on European and External Affairs, and one of the Assembly's two representatives on the European Committee of the Regions, and I want to ask you about the Committee of the Regions specifically. How do you and the commission see that committee working effectively? How would you like to see it develop in the future?

[42] **Ms Wallström:** To go back to the previous question, that is exactly where I see an important role for the Committee of the Regions. It will have to look at what demands to put on national Governments to ensure that the regions have enough influence in this new system in which national Parliaments have more of a say. The commission has the highest respect for the Committee of the Regions. For both the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee, it is all a matter of prioritisation, because they have to choose more carefully which issues to act upon, and then they must have an impact to have some influence over decision-making. Sometimes, they try to grab hold of too much, and to take too broad an approach, so it should be organised in a more lively way, and it should stick to its priorities on certain issues. That will help, and the new treaty will give the committee a reason to look at that. Most of the exciting developments happen in the regions. That is where you have to find new solutions to problems. Much more political weight is given to the regions today, as well as for the future.

[43] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Welcome, vice-president. I enjoyed your contribution a little while ago, and I have listened very carefully to the questions and answers that have followed. I will start by agreeing with you. You mentioned the Lisbon agenda on skills and research and development, and the importance of ensuring that we in Europe are able to compete with dynamic yet cut-throat economies of countries such as China and India. I have a particular interest in that matter, because I am the chair of the project monitoring committee with responsibility for European structural funds in Wales. I look forward to the roll-out of the convergence and competitiveness programme. If delivered correctly, as I am sure it will be, it will make a massive difference to the skill levels and the quality of employment opportunities for people in Wales, as indeed the Objective 1 programme has done, up to now.

[44] My question is linked to the issues that Mike German raised a few minutes ago. Despite the investment up to now and over the remaining six years or so, it is difficult to get people to understand the involvement and contribution of the European Union in and to their normal lives—in this case, in jobs, employment and skills terms. How do we tackle that issue? We have a sceptical and, at times, hostile media, which tend to ridicule and find fault with particular projects and hardly ever praise the benefits of others. Could we tackle that by concentrating more on education, particularly at primary and secondary school level, to ensure that the next generation understands the issue of European co-operation, and the benefits that it will bring?

[45] **Ms Wallström:** Many important issues were rolled into that one question. It asked about the Lisbon strategy, and how effective we can be with that strategy. As you know, the

commission tried to focus on fewer priorities under the Lisbon strategy, to place the light on small and medium-sized enterprises, and to look at energy, lifelong learning, and a few other issues, to ensure that we did not try to cover everything. In the end, there is no priority but to get Europe going in a number of crucial areas. That is starting to bear fruit and to deliver results now, but we still have to continue to invest, particularly in research and development, and on education, and developing skills for young people.

[46] You are right about the investment. The First Minister mentioned Airbus as an example of a project that would not have been successful without co-operation across Europe, and across borders. At the same time, it has such a huge impact on Wales, and it means so much for Wales. We probably have to translate that investment into the things that affect people's everyday lives. The question is how to do that, because no-one can master the whole spectrum of things that the European Union is involved in. We are trying to communicate in 23 official languages; it is a political body that has a very complex set-up, which deals with everything from fighting famine in Africa to counting codfish in the Baltic sea. Communication is always difficult to measure. How do we check whether we have been successful in that way? The way to do it is to look at the things that are close to people's hearts and that affect their everyday lives. You must get into the substance. To discuss only institutions is not interesting for most citizens. Therefore, we need to look at issues such as how we help farmers, how to clean up the environment, how people are helped to move, work or travel freely throughout Europe, or what Europe means for our jobs and economic development. We must look for concrete examples.

[47] Young people in particular ask what we do in the rest of the world, and what our role is in development, for example. It is right to ask that, and we try to help to develop educational material. The process must start in schools; it must be part of curricula. As I see it, it is the right of citizens; it is the right of young students to know what goes on in the European Union, what it is and what it does. It is not propaganda. That would never work, but you must provide the basic information to enable people to form their own opinions. That is where it must start, and we can help to provide that material.

[48] **Jenny Randerson:** Thank you for your speech, commissioner. I believe that you took the opportunity earlier today to meet pupils from Cardiff High School, which is in my constituency, to learn about the excellence of the environmental education there. I hope that you were impressed. What more could or should be done to enable greater involvement and representation in the formal processes of the EU, and in the less formal processes that are still part of its structure? We regard ourselves as a national assembly, but we realise that we are a regional assembly from the perspective of EU structures. However, in that context, we are anxious to maximise our participation in EU procedures, to ensure that our voice is heard and that we put our point of view generally on European matters. How might further developments in the EU structure enable us better to do that?

[49] **Ms Wallström:** It will help if, when making proposals, the commission in particular consults in a more effective way. That means that we must figure out how to reach out at the local level through consultations. So far, that has been for the already well informed and the Brussels crowd, because they know how to lobby and exercise influence. However, the question is how we take that to farmers or fishermen in Wales, or, for example, those who are interested in environmental legislation. How can we get the issues on the table so that they can be discussed and debated? How can we get feedback to the commission? That is why we say that we must go local; we must use our regional offices and ensure that we have such debates.

4.20 p.m.

[50] That has already happened in Wales. I understand that they have been discussing the

health check of the common agricultural policy and they have been discussing other issues at local town hall meetings. That type of consultation is important and it has to feed into a process that becomes more democratic. We also have to use the internet, as we did with REACH, the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals legislation. We got 7,000 responses to that, and we have to use all of these tools in parallel. However, we must anchor it better at the local level. Without that input, we will continue to be seen as being distant.

[51] I was very impressed by the students. I was not sure whether I was at a university because they were so knowledgeable and interested. The most clever questions always come from the young—and excuse me for saying that to you. [*Laughter.*] They want to know, and are interested in following up these issues. They were fantastic. So, that is part of the answer. The Committee of the Regions will have to look at how to design the subsidiarity test, as a follow-up to the new treaty, and at how it will involve and engage you in that so that you can come in early enough to influence our decisions and process.

[52] **Mohammad Asghar:** I enjoyed your speech. I would add that behind the success of every man, there is always a woman and behind a failure of a man, there are a lot of women.

[53] The united states of Europe, which you call the European Union, are not using the full strength of their power in terms of world peace. Some states are behind another superpower and are making different rules, causing different feeling in different parts of the world. How can the European Union play on its real strength, as a union of the 27 strongest and most developed nations, in the arena of world peace? How can you play your part in that? I would be very grateful to hear your response. That can be done only by Europe.

[54] **Ms Wallström:** I should also say that behind every successful man stands a surprised woman—[*Laughter.*] I am joking, and we should be serious, because that was a very good and serious question.

[55] During my eight years in the European Commission, I have seen our international relations, international agenda and our interaction with other parts of the world move up the political agenda, together with security issues. However, these have become part of our weekly deliberations, and we report back on what we are doing in different parts of the world. Expectations of the EU playing an active role on the global scene are very high. That is because we are the biggest trader. We are the biggest donor, and we interact with the African Union, and we administer many different programmes and organisations. We are devoted to multilateralism and to working with the United Nations.

[56] The new treaty will help us to speak with one voice, because at least there will be some co-ordination for someone like me who has two hats to wear: one as the vice-president of the commission; and the other as a high representative for foreign and security policy in the council. We also have a president who can act to co-ordinate the council and the 27 member states, and ensure that we have an external service that is also better co-ordinated. However, traditionally, member states want to keep control over that, given their different national interests. I think that this is an organisational step forward that will help us to become stronger. Our strength is also to show that social and economic integration, and not just military power, works best to preserve and maintain peace, and that this way of working will also help democracy and prosperity internationally.

[57] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final question is from Eleanor Burnham, who is a Liberal Democrat Member.

[58] **Eleanor Burnham:** Good afternoon, and croeso. I enjoyed your speech, because it had a refreshing female touch. I have always felt very European. I have multilingual

children—one lives and works in Bucharest and the other lives and works in Portugal, so, as a result, I have a huge interest in what goes on in those two countries.

[59] I am the spokesperson on children and young people's matters for my party, and I am very interested in your views on the challenge of increasing the democratic integration of youth and the possibility of lowering the voting age. I believe that it should be lowered to 16 years of age, but, as you eloquently stated, there should be focus on the education process, so that young people can be fully aware of what is going on, not just in Europe, but in terms of democracy generally.

[60] **Ms Wallström:** Traditionally, in this area, member states and their Governments would have most responsibility for everyday activities and the approach that is taken. At a European level, we can support and help what goes on and place an emphasis on the fact that these are real problems that we must tackle. Perhaps we should exchange examples and best practices on this. This is very much in the hands of member states, and there is very little harmonising of rules at the EU level. However, this goes to the heart of what it means to be European, as it involves showing solidarity and accepting the cultural diversity that we see around us in Europe. It will become more of a challenge, because there are very big differences today between member states and rich diversity. So, it will take a lot of tolerance, patience and good ideas about how to do it.

[61] I have high hopes for young people. They realise that this is the reality and they feel increasingly that borders are not the most important thing. They travel, study and fall in love in other countries, and this will hopefully help to bridge the differences. As I have already said, I recommend a booklet by Amos Oz called *How to Cure a Fanatic*. He says that the real problem is fanaticisms and extremism, and not war between religions and so on. The cure is to be found within us; we have many of the remedies in our own hands. We must contribute in our daily lives, and that is what we also have to tell young people.

[62] I do not have a good answer to your question, because there is no single programme at EU level for this. This is very much in the hands of national Governments. We can help by providing support and pointing to it as a problem. I also wanted to say that I did not mean to be disrespectful to the men here earlier; we also need men who are feminists.

[63] **Mick Bates:** We are used to it. [*Laughter.*]

[64] **Ms Wallström:** I did not mean to offend anyone.

[65] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Do not worry about it [*Laughter.*] Does anyone else have a burning question that they wish to ask? No. Thank you; it has been very illuminating. On the point that you made about young people, they say that the future of a nation is its young people, and, if that is true, Wales has a very bright future. We also talked about the importance of sending out a good news message from Brussels to the citizens. I congratulate Andy Klom on what he has been doing in his town-hall meetings across Wales; it is innovative and challenging. If that is carried on across Europe, I think that the message will begin to get out.

[66] Europe and Brussels are where the policies and decisions are made, and it is very good for us to see the human face of the politicians, because we, at the regional, and, as Jenny said, national Government level, have to deliver on what is decided there. So, it is very important that we have this communication. The Committee of the Regions is a very important body and I am really pleased that, with the new proposals, the European Commission has to consult the Committee of the Regions before it goes forward.

[67] Thank you for coming. We have all enjoyed it enormously. The Members have been

so well behaved; you have no idea, commissioner. [*Laughter.*]

[68] **Ms Wallström:** Thank you.

[69] **The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is the end of business for today. [*Applause.*]

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 4.30 p.m.
The meeting ended at 4.30 p.m.