



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

Europe Matters

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Introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the eleventh issue of Europe Matters, our monthly update on the work of the National Assembly for Wales on European issues.

I write this as we come to the end of a two-day fact finding visit to Brussels, which has included a series of meetings with senior Commission officials, the UK Government, Eluned Morgan MEP and other key players, aimed at informing the work of the Committee during 2009. In particular we focused on the Inquiry into the Future of Cohesion Policy and the European response to the financial and economic crisis. These issues are the centre of attention, as Wales and the rest of Europe face some major challenges.



Committee members with Dirk Ahner, Director General of DG Regional Policy

Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner, has agreed to give evidence to the Committee's Inquiry into the Future of Cohesion Policy, and we are aiming to schedule this for our meeting on 23 March, which is still to be confirmed. We also met with Graham Meadows, the former Director General of DG Regional Policy and currently special adviser to European Commissioner Vladimir Spidla and the Chinese Government on regional policy, and will be taking evidence from him during the Inquiry.

On 20 January First Minister Rhodri Morgan gave an update to the Committee on the response of the Welsh Assembly Government to the financial and economic crisis, within the framework of the European Economic Recovery Plan proposals submitted by the Commission in November. A further update is scheduled for 10 March and this issue is also being looked at by the Enterprise and Learning Committee, in their new Inquiry.

On 3 February, the Committee took evidence for its Inquiry into Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare, from Bernard Merkel, Head of the unit in DG Health and Consumer Affairs in the European Commission. On 24 February and for our two meetings in March we will take evidence from a range of healthcare organisations in Wales, with a view to finalising the evidence for this inquiry before Easter.

The Sustainability Committee will shortly begin a new Inquiry looking at the impact of flooding in Wales, which will draw upon the experiences of other parts of Europe. The Rural Development Sub-Committee and Culture and Communities Committee have taken first evidence in their new Inquiries, respectively Production and Promotion of Welsh Food, and Welsh Arts in the World Stage.

This is a busy agenda and I think demonstrates the engagement of the Assembly with wider European developments, which has particular resonance as we face challenging social and economic circumstances, which require more than ever a cohesive and joint approach at the European and global level.

Finally, we received tragic news this week with the sudden passing of Jan Winkler, the Czech Ambassador to the UK, just days after he visited Cardiff to speak to the Committee. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

Sandy Mewies
Chair of the European and External Affairs Committee



Forthcoming EU business in the Assembly's Committees

European and External Affairs Committee

- **Inquiry into Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare:** on 24 February the Committee will take evidence from NHS Wales, the Welsh NHS Confederation, the Welsh Assembly Government and the British Medical Association – Welsh Council, and on 10 March and 23 March further sessions are planned with the healthcare professions and patients' representatives.
- **Economic and Financial Crisis:** on 10 March the First Minister will give a further update to the Committee on this issue.
- **Inquiry into Future of EU Cohesion Policy:** European Commissioner Danuta Hübner is planned to give evidence on 23 March, although this is subject to confirmation.
- **European Commission Wales:** on 24 February Andy Klom, Head of the European Commission Office in Wales will give an update on EU activities across Wales.

Enterprise and Learning Committee

- **Inquiry on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the international economic downturn:** the Committee is planning to take evidence from the Federation of Small Businesses and Venture Capital Wales on 26 February; from the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils in Wales on 5 March; and from the Wales Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and a number of eminent economic academics on 12 March.

Sustainability Committee

- **Inquiry into flooding in Wales:** this inquiry will start shortly and will look at the effects of flooding on individuals and communities and responses to flooding incidents by key stakeholders including local authorities, the emergency services and insurance companies. As well as taking evidence from the UK, the Committee will be visiting various European locations to take evidence of good practice in flood management.

Rural Development Sub-Committee

- **Inquiry into the Production and Promotion of Welsh Food:** the Committee proposes to take evidence from the European Commission as part of this inquiry; however, the Committee's agenda for 5 March and 26 March meetings is still under preparation.

Look Back: EU related topics in the Assembly's Committees

European and External Affairs Committee

- **Czech Presidency priorities:** on 3 February the Czech Ambassador to the UK, Mr Jan Winkler, presented the priorities of the Czech Government during their six-month Presidency of the EU.
- **Inquiry into Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare:** this Inquiry was launched on 3 February when Bernard Merkel, Head of Unit in DG Health and Consumers, gave evidence to the Committee on the European Commission's perspective.
- **Update from First Minister:** the First Minister attended the 20 January meeting and presented an update on the European Economic Recovery Plan, and Welsh Assembly Government's European priorities for 2009.
- **Committee of the Regions:** Christine Chapman gave an update on the work of the Welsh representatives on the Committee of the Regions since the summer, including the meeting of the UK delegation in London on 12 January; plans for a seminar in the autumn in Wales; and the report by Councillor Bob Bright, the Welsh Local Government Association's full member, on the planned Universal Public Services Directive.
- **Inquiry into Subsidiarity:** the report for this Inquiry was agreed in private session on 3 February and will be published shortly.

Enterprise and Learning Committee

- **Inquiry on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the international economic downturn:** the Committee agreed in January to carry out an Inquiry in this area, with the Deputy First Minister presenting an update to the Committee on 12 February on the steps taken since October to respond to the crisis situation.

Sustainability Committee

- **Inquiry into carbon reduction in Wales:** the Committee has completed taking evidence on its final two topics, land use and planning, for its long term inquiry into carbon reduction in Wales. The inquiry looks at how Wales can meet its national and international carbon reduction targets. The final report of the inquiry is due to be published in May 2009.

Rural Development Sub-Committee

- **Inquiry into the Review of Axis 2 of the Wales Rural Development Plan 2007 - 2013:** the report was published on Monday, 2 February 2009 and is available on the National Assembly for Wales' web-site [here](#).
- **Inquiry into the Production and Promotion of Welsh Food:** the Committee held a public meeting in Theatr Brycheiniog in Brecon on 5 February, and issued a call (which closed on 13 February) for submission of written evidence from experts and people with an interest in this subject area.

Communities and Culture Committee

- **Inquiry into Welsh Arts on the World Stage:** on 15 January the Committee took evidence from the Minister for Heritage, Alun Ffred Jones, from the National Museum of Wales, and from BBC Cymru Wales. On 12 February the Committee held an evidence session with a range of artists and academics from across Wales, including NoFitState Circus, Volcano Theatre, The Makers Guild in Wales, Steffan Caddick, Peter Finnemore, Glyndŵr University and the University of Wales, Newport.

External activities of Members on Assembly business

- **European & External Affairs Committee Brussels visit, 10-12 February:** the Committee met with Welsh MEP Eluned Morgan, Kim Darroch (UK Permanent Representative to the EU), Dirk Ahner (Director General of DG Regional Policy), Nikolaus van der Pas (Director General of DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities), Graham Meadows (former Director General of DG Regio and special Adviser to European Commissioner Vladimir Spidla), John Bensted-Smith (DG Agriculture & Rural Development), Chris Allan (DG Enterprise & Industry), and Eleni Marianou (Director of South West UK Brussels Office).
- **Committee of the Regions:** Christine Chapman will attend the next meeting of the Economic and Social Affairs Commission on 19 February. Christine presented a report on the activities of the Welsh members of the Committee of the Regions to the European & External Affairs Committee's meeting on 3 February. This included an update from the UK delegation meeting of 12 January, where the Welsh delegation held a pre-meeting to discuss future working, including support for Welsh rapporteurships in the CoR, such as the report by Councillor Bob Bright, the Welsh Local Government Association's full member on the CoR, on the future Directive on Universal Public Services, which was adopted at the Plenary session on 13 February.
- **Wales Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association:** held their annual general meeting on 10 February to re-elect the chair, Janet Ryder AM, branch executive (Alun Cairns, Jeff Cuthbert, Mike German OBE and Janet Ryder), and Secretary (Claire Clancy, Chief Executive of the National Assembly for Wales). On 10 March there will be an event in the Senedd to celebrate Commonwealth Day, and a range of other activities are planned over the coming months.
- **IABP-Moloava:** a cross-party group of Assembly Members visited Moldova during the mid-term recess (15-20 February), as part of a project aimed at facilitating the two-way integration and cooperation of MPs and executives at the national and sub-national levels, Mike German OBE, Bethan Jenkins and Nick Ramsay visited legislatures in Chisinau, the capital city of Moldova and Comrat, the capital of the autonomous region of Gagauzia. The initiative was organised through the International Association of Business and Parliament – Moldova, in cooperation with the Industry & National Assembly for Wales Association (I-NAW)

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