



Cynulliad National
Cenedlaethol Assembly for
Cymru Wales

Europe Matters

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Introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the tenth issue of Europe Matters, our monthly update on the work of the National Assembly for Wales on European issues. It's been a while since the last issue, due to staffing changes in our EU Office, and I'm pleased to say that we now have Gregg Jones in post in Brussels.

The timing of the relaunch of Europe Matters is deliberate: as we start the new year we look ahead to the priorities of the European & External Affairs Committee for 2009, which will be a year of transition in Brussels given the European Parliament elections in June and the appointment of a new Commission towards the end of 2009.

This gives us an opportunity to reflect on a number of key strategic issues that will be addressed by the EU Institutions in 2010-2011, including the debate over the future of Cohesion Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy, the Lisbon Agenda and more broadly speaking the overall EU Budget. As well as the above issues we will also be looking at the EU response to the economic and financial crisis, the potential impact proposals for a Cross Border Patients Rights Directive, what the Climate Change package will mean in Wales, and monitoring the implementation of European legislation and programmes in Wales.

We will also continue to look more broadly at the National Assembly for Wales' European and International Relations, including its engagement with bodies such as the British Irish Inter Parliamentary Body, the Committee of the Regions, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Conference of Presidents of the Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CALRE).

To conclude this new edition, we have included a short re-cap on the European work of the Committees during 2008, and visits from distinguished VIPs to the Senedd, which included Vice President of the European Commission, Margot Wallström, in January.

I would also like to highlight the historic occasion in Brussels when Nerys Evans, one of the Assembly's two representatives on the Committee of the Regions, became the first person to officially use Welsh at its Plenary Session in November.

Sandy Mewies

Chair of the European and External Affairs Committee

Forthcoming EU business in the Assembly's Committees

European and External Affairs Committee

20 January

- **First Minister, Rhodri Morgan:** presentation of 2009 priorities of Welsh Assembly Government and response to European Economic Recovery Plan.
- **Chair of All Wales Monitoring Committee, Jeff Cuthbert:** update on progress in implementing the new structural funds programmes.
- **Other business:** agreeing the Committee's Work Programme for 2009, agreeing scoping papers for Inquiries into Future Cohesion Policy and Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare Directive.

3 February

- **Czech Ambassador to the UK, Mr Jan Winkler:** presentation of priorities of Czech Presidency of the European Union.
- **Inquiry into Patients' Rights in Cross-Border Healthcare:** evidence from Mr Bernard Merkel, Head of Unit, DG SANCO, European Commission.
- **Subsidiarity Inquiry:** discussion and adoption of the Report and Recommendations from this Inquiry carried out during 2008.

10 - 12 February

- **Committee visit to Brussels:** meetings with Welsh MEPs, Kim Darroch, UK Permanent Representative to the EU, Dirk Ahner Director General of DG Regional Policy, and officials from other Commission Directorate Generals.

24 February

- *Business to be confirmed:* for latest information refer to the Committee's website at <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees.htm>.

Items related to the EU agenda:

Enterprise and Learning Committee

- **Inquiry into the Welsh Economy:** planned to start from 5 February, this may include a review of the impact of European Structural Funds programmes.

Sustainability Committee

- **Inquiry into flooding in Wales:** the Committee will decide on 22 January whether to go ahead with this inquiry, following the recent launch of a public consultation into flooding in Wales by Jane Davidson, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing. The Committee had planned to take evidence on good practice in coastal, riparian and ground water flood alleviation measures in Europe.

Rural Development Sub-Committee

- **Inquiry into the Production and Promotion of Welsh Food:** began 15 January with scene setting by Prof. Terry Marsden of Cardiff University, followed by a round-table discussion of the issues with representatives of the agri-food industry in Wales.

Look Back: EU related topics in the Assembly's Committees during 2008

European and External Affairs Committee

- **Inquiry into role of the European Investment Bank:** the Committee took oral evidence from the European Investment Bank, European Commission, Deputy First Minister, Finance Wales and the Wales European Funding Office. The draft report was discussed in October.

- **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Health Check:** the Committee took evidence from Klaus-Dieter Borchardt, Deputy Head of Cabinet to European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, the Welsh Minister for Agriculture, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Farmers' Union Wales and the National Farmers Union Cymru. The report was adopted in October.
- **Subsidiarity Inquiry:** the Committee took evidence from Gerhard Stahl, the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions, East of England MEP Andrew Duff, and the School of European Studies and Law School at Cardiff University. The Committee report is due for consideration on 3 February.

Enterprise and Learning Committee

- **Inquiry into the economic contribution of Higher Education in Wales:** the Committee took evidence from the European Commission's representation to Wales, and from the Bologna Process Coordinator for Wales who is based at Swansea University, as part of this inquiry. An interim report is due to be published in January.

Equality of Opportunities Committee

- **Inquiry into issues affecting migrant workers in Wales:** report published in November 2008, following evidence sessions with the Polish Embassy, Chairman of the Lithuanian Community in Wales, Honorary Consul for the Slovak Republic Representation in Wales and the Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Wales.

Sustainability Committee

- **Inquiry into carbon reduction:** included a fact-finding visit by the Committee to look at examples of best practice in Germany and Austria in sustainable planning, energy micro generation and district biomass heating.
- **Petition calling for a ban on plastic bags:** included fact-finding visit by the Committee to Ireland to look at the impact of the Plastic Bag Shopping Levy introduced in Ireland in 2002.

Rural Development Sub-Committee

- **Inquiry into Axis 2 of the Wales Rural Development Plan:** the Committee undertook a short inquiry into the future of agri-environment measures under the Rural Development Plan, which is part-financed by European funding.

Independent Review Panel on AM Pay and Allowances

- Received written evidence from the Basque Parliament on their pay and award scheme for members.

Planned visits of international VIPs to the National Assembly for Wales

February 2009

- **Czech Ambassador, Mr Jan Winkler** to European and External Affairs Committee meeting on 3 February.

Visits of international VIPs to the National Assembly for Wales during 2008:

January 2008

- **Vice President of the European Commission, Margot Wallström** addressed the Assembly during a three-day visit to Wales.
- **Reinhard Wiemer, Political Counsellor to the UK Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany** visited the Assembly to discuss devolution in Wales with Members.

February 2008

- **His Excellency Mr Iztok Mirošič, Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia**, gave evidence to the European & External Affairs Committee on the Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency and participated in a lunch meeting with Assembly Members.

June 2008

- **John Smith Fellowship Programme visitor Mr Armen Amirkhanyan**, a parliamentary candidate in Georgia and Member of the Board of the Javakheti Citizens' Forum, an organisation that assists in the integration of ethnic minorities in Georgia.

July 2008

- **Members of the Standing Committee of the Parliament of Baden-Württemberg** met with members of the European & External Affairs Committee and Enterprise & Learning Committee.

October 2008

- **President of the Republic of Estonia, Mr Toomas Hendrik Ilves**, addressed Members of the Assembly during a visit to celebrate the Wales Estonia cultural exchange programme.

November 2008

- **President of the Basque Country, Mme Izaskun Bilbao Barandica**, met Members of the Assembly during a visit to Wales.

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