

Darren Millar MS - Visit to Brussels

6th – 7th December 2022

Purpose of Visit

I was invited to attend and contribute to a series of events in Brussels on the 6th and 7th December 2023.

The visit provided opportunities for interactions with other European parliamentarians and regional government representatives and provided a platform for discussing parliamentary practices, sharing policy ideas and exploring new ways to promote engagement between the Senedd and faith communities and leaders.

Luncheon and Roundtable on Faith in Economic Development

On 6th December I participated in a roundtable discussion and luncheon at Chateaux de Rixensart which was hosted by Prince Charles-Louis de Merode. The event included faith leaders, European business leaders, NGOs, Government officials and politicians from 12 nations, including Ukraine.

I was able to promote the excellent engagement in Wales between the Senedd and faith communities and the work of the Welsh Government's Faith Communities Forum in helping to shape policy development.

Private meeting with Ukrainian Delegation

While at Chateaux de Rixensart I held a private meeting with a delegation from Ukraine. This provided me with an opportunity to share some personal reflections on my visit to Ukraine earlier in the year and to inform the gathering of the cross-party support of the people of Wales and the Senedd for Ukraine.

The delegation spoke of its appreciation for the support of the Welsh Parliament and both the Welsh and UK Governments. They also expressed the importance of faith-based NGOs in responding to the conflict, including those based in the UK.

Event at Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts

A dinner was held at the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts on the evening of the 6th December during which a number of speakers shared faith perspectives on challenges facing the European continent.

The speakers included Prince Nicholas von Liechtenstein, Dritan Abazović, Prime Minister of Montenegro, and faith leaders from both Russia and Ukraine who are working for peace and reconciliation between the two nations.

The event provided an opportunity for networking with Members of the European and national parliaments, other elected representatives, senior officials, business, third sector and faith leaders.

European Prayer Breakfast

The European Prayer Breakfast was held in the European Parliament on the morning of the 7th December. The event marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the breakfast and was hosted by Peter van Dalen MEP.

The keynote speech was given by Mircea Geoană, the Deputy Secretary General of NATO, who spoke of the need to have faith in victory against the Russian aggression in Ukraine. I had a short discussion with Mr Geoană after the breakfast given my role in chairing an ongoing British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly inquiry into European Defence and Security Cooperation Post-Brexit.

The event also included contributions from international guests representing Ukraine, Latvia, Finland and the Netherlands.

During the Breakfast I delivered a short speech extending greetings from the organising committee of the St David's Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast at the Senedd as well as sharing a little about the Christian heritage of Wales and the history of Pisgah Chapel in Loughor.

I presented Peter van Dalen MEP with a Bible from Pisgah which had been relayed from Wales to national prayer breakfasts across the continent before arriving in Brussels for the anniversary event – this was warmly received.

After the event I met with various delegations to discuss:

- the persecution of Christian minorities
- the role of faith in the public square
- faith engagement with parliaments and governments
- the role of faith in bringing peace and reconciliation between nations

Conclusion

The short visit to Brussels included a full programme but was very worthwhile. It provided me with an opportunity to promote Wales and the Senedd at a number of prestigious events as well as giving an interesting insight into how different nations engage faith communities in policy development and peace initiatives.

I very much hope to have the opportunity to engage in similar events in the future.