

Darren Millar MS - Visit to Tallinn

14th – 16th November 2024

Purpose of Visit

To join parliamentarians from across Europe participating in the 3rd Annual Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast at the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) and associated events in Tallinn, and to promote awareness of Wales and the Senedd amongst those attending.

Working Dinner

On the eve of the breakfast I attended a networking dinner with parliamentarians and other representatives from the Nordic-Baltic nations, and other nations across the European continent.

As a parliamentarian from Wales I was asked to say a few words. In doing so I extended greetings and explained a little about Wales and the Senedd.

Over dinner I was able to engage with delegates and parliamentarians from Finland and Estonia to discuss current political situation in their respective nations and compare these to those in Wales.

Meeting with the Speaker of the Riigikogu

Prior to the Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast event I had the opportunity to meet with Lauri Hussar MP, the Speaker of the Riigikogu. We exchanged information on the respective parliamentary procedures and electoral systems in Wales and Estonia, and discussed the Senedd reform agenda.

The Speaker explained that the Riigikogu is made up of 101 seats and its representatives are elected by open list proportional representation in twelve multi-member constituencies with between 5 and 16 seats each, depending on their population. Each political party must also secure at least 5% of the vote in a constituency to secure a seat. There are no plans for changes to the electoral system, which always requires coalitions to form the necessary majority to govern.

We also discussed relationships between national, regional and local government in Estonia and how these compare with Wales.

Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast

I was invited to be one of the speakers in the prayer breakfast. This gave me the opportunity to share about Wales and its history, and explain how the Senedd and Welsh Government support faith communities in Wales and their positive engagement with them.

During the event I was also able to make a presentation to the Estonian parliamentarians hosting the breakfast on behalf of the St David's Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast for Wales. This included lovespoons and a commemorative coin.

Some of those attending the event had visited Wales to attend the St David's Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast events and, following my contribution, others expressed an interest in engaging with the Senedd in the future.

Agriculture Discussion

I participated in a collective discussion on agriculture and forestry policy with parliamentarians from Estonia, Sweden and Finland. This allowed me to share about the importance of farming to Wales, and to outline the national debate on both the Welsh Government's Sustainable Farming Scheme and proposals from the UK Government to make changes to Inheritance Tax.

I was struck between the similar challenges faced by the agricultural sector in our respective nations, particularly in terms of balancing environmental factors with food production, and the range of policy responses being deployed.

Meeting with the Chair of the Riigikogu Finance Committee

During the visit I also met with the Chair of the Finance Committee in the Riigikogu, Annely Akkermann. We discussed current financial priorities and challenges, and compared and contrasted budget scrutiny processes in Wales and Estonia. The meeting was extremely informative.

Conclusion

It was an honour to be invited to represent Wales, and to speak and participate in the 3rd Nordic-Baltic Prayer Breakfast.

My participation in the event enabled me to promote Wales, the Senedd, and the work of both the Welsh Parliament and Government in engaging with, and supporting, our faith communities.

The meetings with the Speaker of the Riigikogu and the Chair of the Finance Committee were enlightening and gave food for thought about how Senedd parliamentary and budget processes can improve.

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